

## Corporal Arthur Archibald Plant

Corporal Arthur Plant, Service Number 2713, served with the 1/8 Royal Warwickshire Regiment.<sup>i</sup> He was one of 19,240 British soldiers killed on the first day of the Battle of the Somme.<sup>ii</sup> He was 26 years old.

Arthur, known as Archie in the family, was the second of seven children born to Annie and Smith Plant at No.1, Coldbath Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham.<sup>iii</sup> His three younger brothers also served with the colours in the Great War. (See right)

The family originated from Hollington, Staffordshire. Arthur's father, Smith Plant, a farmer, married Sarah Ann Yates at St Peter's Church Derby on 15<sup>th</sup> March 1887.<sup>iv</sup> While living in Hollington, Smith served in the Cheadle and Alton troop of the Queen's own Royal Staffordshire Yeomanry for seven years.<sup>v</sup> This involved long drills, and training marches to Lichfield, a week's regimental drill and an inspection each year.<sup>vi</sup> In 1900 Sarah died, aged only 37.<sup>vii</sup> With seven children to look after, the youngest only one year old, Smith moved his family to Birmingham and became a 'jobbing gardener'. In 1902 he remarried. Annie his new wife, a Birmingham born girl, gave birth a year later to Hilda May, Smith's eighth child.<sup>viii</sup>

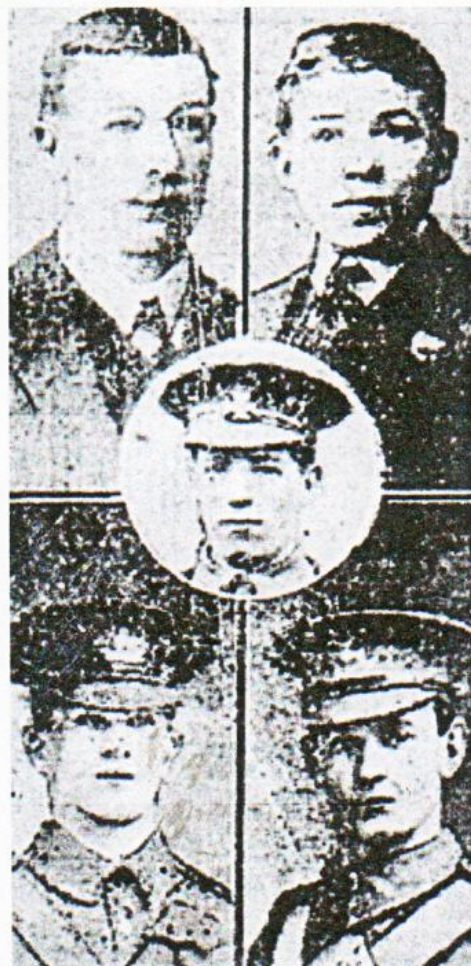
We know little about the early life of the children, but the 1911 census records that Arthur, now aged 20, was a 'butcher's carter' and his younger brothers, Smith, a 'golf groundsman', William, a 'domestic gardener' and George a 'golf caddie'. As Moseley Golf Club is just around the corner from where they lived, it is probable



A tram at the Stoney Lane terminus (Ref xxi)

### A FIGHTING FAMILY

Mr Smith Plant, 1, Coldbath Road, Billesley near Kings Heath, has the proud distinction of having four sons with the colours and on active service. They are:- (5) L.-Cprl. Archibald Plant (2713), 1/8 Warwicks; (4) L.-Corpl. S. Plant



(2721), 1/8 Warwick; (3) Corpl. W. Plant (3358), 7th K.R.R.; (2) Pte. G Plant, 12th Rifle Brigade, who previous to enlisting, was groom to the Hon. Lionel Tennyson, now at the front. The father served in the Cheadle and Alton Troop of the Staffordshire Yeomanry for seven years. Plant at the outbreak of the war offered his services but was over the age limit.

Courtesy of Douglas Smith

that Smith and George worked there.

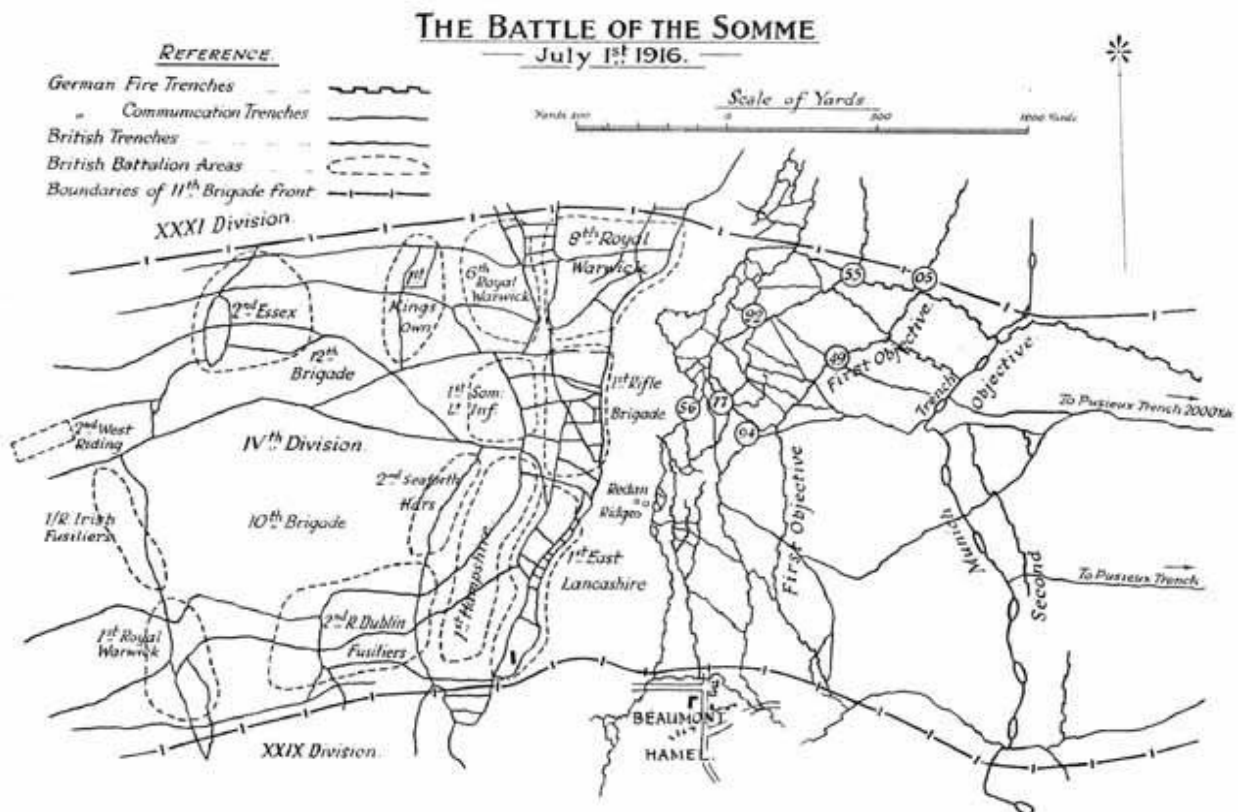
Arthur went on to become a conductor on the Stoney Lane tram route.<sup>ix</sup> The line opened on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1907 with the latest 'electric cars' replacing the old steam trams. The route was a branch line leading off the Stratford Road and running along

Stoney Lane as far as Doris Road.<sup>x</sup>

Arthur and his brother, Smith, were both members of the 1/8 Territorial Battalion of Royal Warwickshire Regiment (1/8 Royal Warwicks).<sup>xi</sup> At the outbreak of war, on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914, the Battalion had just arrived at its annual training camp in Rhyl, when it was ordered home with immediate effect. Arriving back the following day, the Battalion was redirected to Weymouth as part of their brief to guard the South Coast. A few days later, the Battalion was marched to Chelmsford where they remained, waiting for the call for overseas service. During this time the Battalion underwent training to prepare them for active service overseas. This involved, for example, trench digging, drill, musketry and route marches.<sup>xii</sup>

On 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1915, the 1/8 Royal Warwicks travelled by train to Southampton, and sailed for France, arriving at Le Havre early the next morning. Six days later, at Neuve-Eglise, the brothers would have been engaged in three days of trench digging practice, followed by some final training in drill, bayonet fighting and rapid rifle loading techniques, route marches and a day in the trenches of the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Division. By 16<sup>th</sup> April the training was over and the Battalion went into line, taking over from the 1/7 Royal Warwicks at the La Plus Douvre Farm, near Steenbeek, in the Ploegsteert sector.<sup>xiii</sup> On the 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915, the 1/8 Warwicks became part of the 143<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 48<sup>th</sup> South Midland Division in preparation for the 'big push'.

On the 1 July 1916, the opening day of the Battle of the Somme, the 1/6 and 1/8 Royal Warwicks were temporarily attached to the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, which was to attack over an area of ground called the Redan Ridge between the hamlets of Serre and Beaumont Hamel.<sup>xiv</sup>



Map showing the position of the 1/8 Royal Warwickshire Regiment on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. (Ref xxii)

After an intense barrage by the British artillery, followed by the detonation of an immense mine in front of Beaufort Hamel, the 1/8<sup>th</sup> Royal Warwicks were one of the first waves to go over the top at 07.30. The objective of the attack was to capture a German stronghold called the Quadrilateral which lay between the hamlets of Serre and Beaumont Hamel.<sup>xv</sup> The Battalion was about 800 strong with 200 in reserve manning the original trenches in case of a counter attack. The following is an excerpt from an account written in the Birmingham Daily Mail of the action on the day:

‘The 1/8<sup>th</sup> Battalion leapt forward from the front line. Seven minutes later the 1/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion followed them over No Man’s Land. Already the ranks were decimated by shells and machine guns. The 1/6<sup>th</sup> took what was left of the German front and support lines; together the two Battalions reached the third line and the near edge of the Quadrilateral. The Battalions made good their objective and the cutting beyond.’

‘By 11am only one officer of the 1/6<sup>th</sup> was left untouched and a handful of men from both Battalions amongst the heaps of dead and dying. The crossfire from the Germans made it useless to stay and impossible to go forward, their store of bombs exhausted. In the evening the Battalions were ordered to withdraw.’

General Prowse said of the 1/6 and 1/8 Battalions: “I did not before think much of Territorials, but by God, they can fight.”<sup>xvi</sup>

The 1/8<sup>th</sup> Warwicks suffered 588 casualties. One hundred and seventy of the dead were never found. One of these was Corporal Arthur Plant.<sup>xvii</sup> His name appears on the Thiepval Memorial along with nearly 72,000 others. His brother Smith was wounded in the same attack but recovered sufficiently to make it back home to recover in a Hospital in Aldershot. He was discharged from further duties on his recovery.<sup>xviii</sup>



The Thiepval Memorial, France

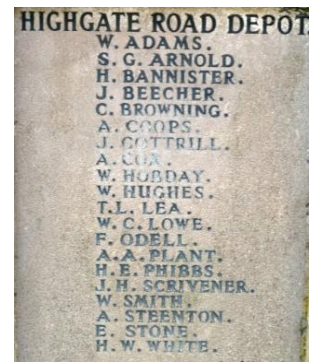


Sgt. W. Plant.  
Sergeant W Plant  
(Ref xxiii)

The two youngest brothers also survived the war. William, went on to become a sergeant in the 7<sup>th</sup> Kings Royal Rifles, but was wounded and discharged from further duties on 8<sup>th</sup> February 1918.<sup>xix</sup> George was a Rifleman in the 12<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade and served out his time until he was demobbed in 1919. Before he joined up, George was the groom to the Honourable Lionel Tennyson,<sup>xx</sup> grandson of Alfred Lord Tennyson. Lionel was known principally as a cricketer who captained Hampshire and England.

Arthur is commemorated at St Mary’s Church, Moseley and the City of Birmingham, Tramways Department memorial, located on the right of the entrance to the Transport Stadium, off Wheelers Lane, Kings Heath. (see

below)



## Written and researched by Edwina Rees, Moseley History Society

### Endnotes

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- i Commonwealth War Graves Commission  
<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/1548501/PLANT,%20ARTHUR>
  - ii Brown, Malcolm. (2001). *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Western Front*. Pan MacMillan. London, p114
  - iii 1891 census for Hollington, Ashbourne, Derby.  
1911 census for 1, Coldbath Road, Billesley, Yardley, Warwickshire
  - iv 1891 census for Hollington, Ashbourne, Derby  
Derbyshire Marriage Index 1538-1910 Transcription
  - v Newspaper cutting courtesy of Doug Smith. The article has been transcribed for easier reading but retaining the original pictures
  - vi Heywood, Thomas Percival. 1889. *Reminiscences, Letters, and Journals of Thomas Percival Heywood, Baronet*. 1899. Reprint. London: Forgotten Books, 2013. 33. Print.  
[http://www.forgottenbooks.com/readbook\\_text/Reminiscences\\_Letters\\_and\\_Journals\\_of\\_Thomas\\_Percival\\_Heywood\\_1000385204/51](http://www.forgottenbooks.com/readbook_text/Reminiscences_Letters_and_Journals_of_Thomas_Percival_Heywood_1000385204/51)
  - vii Derbyshire Registrars Death Index Transcription
  - viii 1901, 1911 census for 1, Coldbath Road, Billesley
  - ix *Birmingham Gazette*, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1916
  - x Hardy, P. L., *A Transport History of Yardley*  
Acocks Green History Society. <http://aghs.jimdo.com/transport-history/hardy-history/>
  - xi See v
  - xii Williams, Robert David. *A Social and Military History of the 1/8 Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment in the Great War*, p 46. <http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/13/1/Williams00MPhil.pdf>
  - xiii See xii, pp 47-8
  - xiv Carter, Terry. 1997. *Birmingham Pals: 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment*. Pen & Sword Books Ltd. Barnsley, p164
  - xv See xii, pp 63-70  
See xiv, pp 164-5
  - xvi See xiv, p 165
  - xvii See xiv, p 165

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- xviii *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1916  
British Army Medal Index card
- xix *Birmingham Gazette*, 10<sup>th</sup> August 1916  
Silver War Badge Roll
- xx See v
- xxi Birmingham Forum. <http://www.birminghamforum.co.uk/index.php?topic=710.88>
- xxii Position of the 8<sup>th</sup> RWR on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916  
[http://www.prescot-rollofhonour.info/casualty-322-John\\_Warbrick.html](http://www.prescot-rollofhonour.info/casualty-322-John_Warbrick.html)
- xxiii See vix