

Private George Watson Page

George's great grandfather, James (born 1797), was an auctioneer's clerk/accountant from Swaffham, Norfolk. The 1841 census records James living with his wife Elizabeth and six children in Oak Street, Fakenham, sixteen miles away from where he was born.

By 1851 only the youngest two children, Richard (born in 1832) and Elizabeth (born 1837) were living at home.ⁱ Richard, then aged eighteen had become a stone mason.

By 1861, his parents now deceased, Richard relocated to Birmingham, where he obtained work as a coach painter. His sister Elizabeth, a dress maker, boarded with him in Clifton Road, Balsall Heath.

Richard married Emily Lockett at St George's Church, Hockley, Birmingham on 16th October 1865.ⁱⁱ When it was built, there were so few houses near Great Hampton Row and Tower Street, that the church was nicknamed 'St George's in the Fields'. It was the nearest church to their residential address at the time, Court 12, Great Hampton Row.ⁱⁱⁱ

St George's was a Commissioners' church, also known as a Waterloo church and Million Act church. They were Anglican churches built with money voted by Parliament as a result of the Church Building Acts of 1818 and 1824. The church was demolished in 1961 and is now the site of St George's Park.

Richard and Emily had eight children: Catherine Elizabeth (born 1866), Louisa Emma (born 1868), Alfred Richard (born 1870), Arthur James (born 1872), Emily Mary (born 1874), Harry William (born 1876), Albert Edward (born 1880), and Herbert John (born 1882).

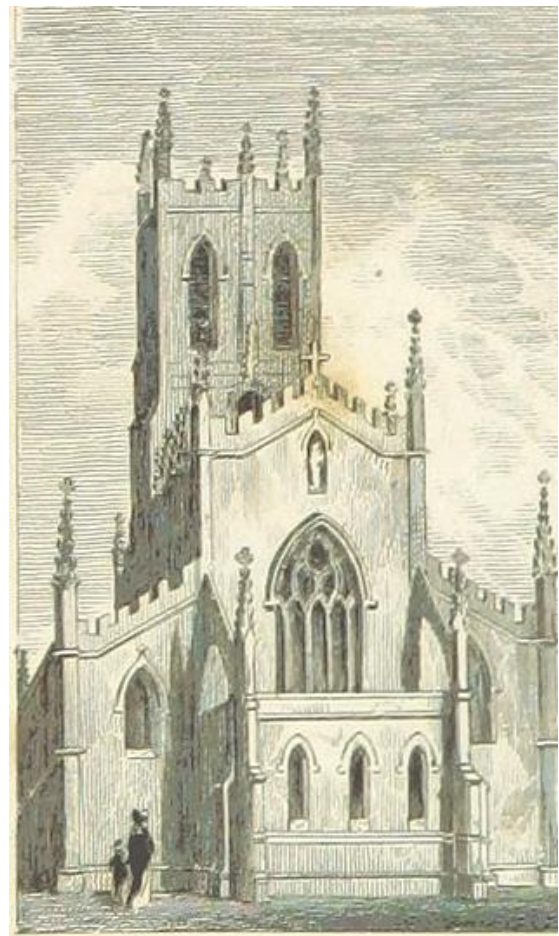


Figure 1: St George's church, Hockley



Figure 2: St Mark's church was built on King Edward's Road, Ladywood by the Birmingham Church Building Society. It was consecrated 29th July 1841. The church was closed in 1947 and demolished.

Interestingly, the first five children were baptised together on 13th September 1874 at St Mark's Church, Ladywood. The Baptismal Register records that Richard was a 'coach builder' and lived at 193 King Edward's Road, Ladywood, although the 1871 census records the family at No 194.

In the 1881 census the family had moved to 79 Garbett Street, Ladywood. Richard died, aged fifty one, in early 1884.

By 1891, Emily had moved the family to 159 George Street West, Winson Green. Her daughter, Louisa and three of her sons by now were in employment. Also lodging with her was her brother, William Lockett, and nephew Benjamin Steely.

Emily's eldest son, Alfred, was a brass founder's clerk.^{iv} In the autumn of 1895 he married Annie Emma, daughter of George Watson, a gilt jeweller from Ladywood. The first known address for Alfred and Annie was 59 City Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham. The couple had five children: Richard Alfred, George Watson, Ida Constance, Lawrence Edward and Winifred Eileen born in 1896, 1899, 1901, 1904 and 1905 respectively.

George, the second eldest son, was born on 2nd April 1899 and baptised on 26th April at St Cuthbert's church, Winson Green, a church that was started in 1863 as a mission from All Saints' church, Hockley.^v The address for Alfred and his family on the Baptismal Register was 11, Bellefield Avenue, Winson Green.

The 1901 census records the family at 59 City Road, Edgbaston, opposite Summerfield Park. By this time Alfred had become the proprietor of the brass foundry as the census describes him as an 'employer.'

Around 1906, the family moved to 'Sunnyside', 59 Woodfield Road, Kings Heath Birmingham.^{vi} George attended Moseley National School at the start of 1907 where he continued his primary education for the next three years. In January 1910, he transferred to King Edward VI Grammar School Camp Hill, at that time located in Stratford Road, Birmingham.

In 1911 the Page family still lived in Woodfield Road. The census gave a little more detail as to the product produced by Alfred's brass foundry describing him as a 'cabinet handles' manufacturer.

Around 1914,^{vii} Alfred and his family moved to 'Rotherwood', 21 Chantry Road, Moseley, Birmingham. Alfred remained there until his death on 15th April 1916. He left his estate of £7,470 7s 9d to Annie, worth £730,848 in today's money.^{viii} Two years later the family were documented as living at 'The Nook', Taylor Road, Kings Heath.^{ix}

George left school at the end of the autumn term in 1914 and went to work for the General Electric Company Ltd at the company's Head Office in Queen Victoria Street, London.^x The outbreak of World War I transformed GEC into a major player in the electrical industry. It was heavily involved in the war effort, producing radios, signal lamps, and the arc-lamp carbons used in searchlights.

Little is known about when and where George enlisted as a Private, No 45664, in 15th (Service) Battalion Hampshire Regiment (part of 122nd Infantry Brigade of the 41st Division). He was not eligible to serve abroad until he was nineteen years old in April of 1918. If this is the date he joined his regiment abroad, George would have found himself in billets at Poperinghe, Belgium being inspected by General Sir H C Plumer and General Sir S T B Lawford before the battalion was marched to the Passchendaele Sector around Ypres at La Clytte.^{xi}

At 7am on 29th April 1918, the Germans launched what was to be their last attack on Ypres. It failed. Exhausted, the German's abandoned any further plans to take the Ypres salient. They had destroyed Ypres, but could not enter the ruined city.

George died of wounds on the 31st July 1918, aged nineteen. Nothing is known about the circumstances of his death. He is not mentioned in the casualty list for June 1918 and apart from one officer named as wounded, the 53 'other ranks' also wounded remain anonymous for the month of July. There is mention

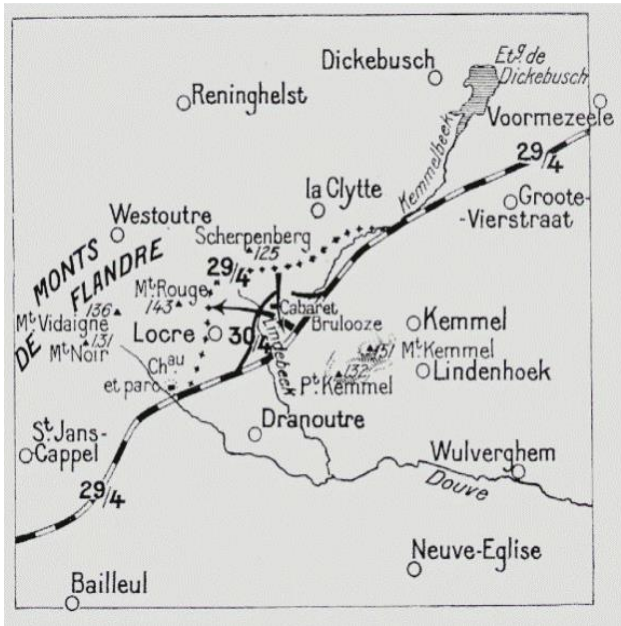


Figure 3: In April 1918 the Germans launched what was to be their final attack on the Allies to take Ypres. La Clytte and Kimmelbeek are shown on the map

in the regimental war diary for 17th July of 'four of patrol wounded but all carried back to our lines.' There are also reports of casualties on 23rd during the course of a raid on the enemy front line at Kimmelbeek. The war diary records that the 'objective was gained but flanks were held up by MG fire ... Our casualties 2 killed, 4 wounded.' Whether George was injured in one of these two raids we will never know.^{xii}

George is buried at Esquelbecq Military Cemetery, France near the Belgium boarder. The cemetery was opened in April 1918 and was the site of a casualty clearing station during

the early stages of the German offensive in Flanders. His grave inscription is: 'the sunshine of his smile is always with us to help us journey on.'

George is also commemorated at St Mary's Church, Moseley and is also named on the Roll of Honour for King Edward VI Grammar School Camp Hill and Birmingham's Hall of Memory.

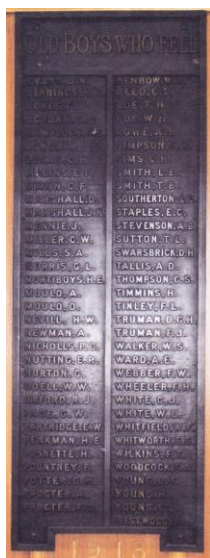


Figure 4:
(Left) King Edward VI Grammar School Roll of Honour
(Middle) George's head stone at Esquelbecq Military Cemetery
(Right) St Mary's Church, Moseley WW1 memorial

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Endnotes

- i Norfolk, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1915
- ii Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937
- iii William Dargue – A History of Birmingham Places and Place Names from A to Y
<https://billdargue.jimdo.com/placenames-gazetteer-a-to-y/places-h/hockley/>
- iv 1891 census
- v King Edward School records for Camp Hill
Birmingham, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813-1912. There is an error in the transcription of the records. The baptism date should be April and not March.
- vi KES records show that George was in attendance at Moseley National School three years prior to entry to Camp Hill in January 1910. Kelly's Register for 1908 record Alfred living in Woodfield Road.
- vii Kelly's Directory for 1913 lists Alfred living at Woodfield Road
- viii Probate records for 1916
- ix Commonwealth War Graves Commission
- x Roll of Honour of the General Electric Co Ltd, Birmingham City Battalions Roll of Honour 1920. Midlands Historical Data, p 271
- xi National archives, War Diary 15th Hampshire Regiment, March 1918-March 1919, Ref WO 95/2634/6, pp 13,14
- xii See xi, pp 29,30

Illustrations

- Figure 1 A History of Birmingham Churches, William Dargue
<https://ahistoryofbirminghamchurches.jimdo.com/birmingham-st-martin-in-the-bull-ring/st-george-hockley/>
- Figure 2 St Mark's Church: Photograph courtesy of Andrew Maxam from Beilby, Knott & Beilby 1830.
<http://www.oldladywood.co.uk/stmarkschurch.htm>
- Figure 3 Map of Ypres Sector in April 1918
The Last German Attack (April 29 1918) Michelin Illustrated Guides to the Battlefields (1914—1918): Ypres and the Battles of Ypres, p 43
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/36213/36213-h/36213-h.htm>
- Figure 4 Find a Grave
<https://www.findagrave/memorial/56442816>