

Arnold Oliver

(1899 – 1918)



Ref: Keary-Easton Family Tree – www.ancestry.co.uk⁽¹⁷⁾

War record

Arnold Oliver was a resident at the National Children's Home in Edgworth in 1911.⁽¹⁾ He enlisted on 9th June 1915 and went into the Manchester Regiment (28003) giving his address as Lower Fold Farm, Heyside, Shaw and occupation as farm labourer.⁽²⁾ When he enlisted he was 5'5" tall, 130 lbs, 36" chest and physically in good condition. He gave his age as 19. In fact he was born on 2 June 1899 and was only just 16.⁽²⁾

In 1915 he gave his next of Kin as Annie Oliver of 7 Perth Street, Heyside, Shaw.⁽²⁾

He was sent to France on 8th November 1915 with the Expeditionary Force and was returned home from Etaples on 31st July 1916 as being underage and transferred to the Home Establishment – Class W Reserve.⁽²⁾

His documents then say he remained at home and was discharged finally on 21st January 1919. On his return to England on 4th September 1916 he gave his address as 79 Littlemoor Lane, Oldham.⁽²⁾

However, he returned to the war and this time went into the 19th Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps (Infantry)(154079),⁽¹⁵⁾ having perhaps transferred from the Lancashire Fusiliers (48588). The cap badge on his photograph, taken in Scarborough, is that of the Lancashire Fusiliers and Soldiers Died in the Great War confirms he was previously in the Lancashire Fusiliers.⁽²¹⁾

Arnold died on 20th September 1918 aged only 19, during the final allied advance.

Underage Soldiers in World War 1

“At the outbreak of war in 1914, the British Army had 700,000 available men. Germany’s wartime army was over 3.7 million. When a campaign for volunteers was launched, thousands answered the call to fight. Among them were 250,000 boys and young men under the age of 19, the legal limit for armed service overseas.

For many, their experience of the war was no different to that of the adults they served alongside. It's estimated that around half of those who fought on the front line were wounded, died or taken prisoner.” <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/zcvdhyc>

In fact as many as 1 in 5 of the underage soldiers were discovered and sent back home, Arnold being one of them. At that time, many people did not have birth certificates, but after the Battle of the Somme (1916), with appalling loss of life, many mothers of underage soldiers sought to have their sons sent home. It appears that the army did have a birth certificate in their possession for Arnold, so did his mother try to get her only son back?⁽²⁾⁽²²⁾ Later in the war, when conscription was introduced, the problem was not so acute and soldiers were generally not sent overseas until they were 19. Arnold’s 19th birthday was only 3 months before he died. The end of the war was only 2 months away.⁽²²⁾

Family History

Arnold was born 2nd June 1899 and baptised at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Openshaw on 25th February 1900. The son of Annie and Edwin Oliver.⁽¹⁸⁾

According to the 1901 Census the family were living at 51 Toxteth Street, Ardwick. The father, Edwin was 59 years of age and worked as an “Iron Planer”. He was born in Dukinfield. There was a 15 year old daughter, Elizabeth, who was Edwin’s daughter from his first marriage.

Annie, the mother was only 40 – 19 years younger than her husband, and had been born in Cheadle, Staffordshire. Arnold was only 1 at the time and was born in Gorton, Manchester. The family obviously moved around quite a lot.⁽¹⁾

How did Arnold come to be in the National Children's Home at Crowthorn? The clue is in the age of his father – 58 years old when Arnold was born. By the time of the 1911 Census, the father has died and Annie is living in Barrow in Furness with her daughter Mary Ellen, aged 8. Arnold is now in the Children's Home. She has taken in two lodgers.

Later in 1911 Annie marries Thomas Bray in Ulverston and finally moves to Shaw, near Oldham.⁽³⁾⁽¹⁵⁾

National Children's Home – Crowthorn, Edgworth

By no means were all the children at Crowthorn orphans – many of them had one parent living, but who was unable to care for them. As the National Children's Homes were based on Non-Conformist Church principles and Arnold's maternal Grand- Father is understood to have been a Non Conformist Minister. Presumably when Arnold needed a placement at a residential school, one was offered at Crowthorn.⁽¹⁷⁾



Postcard courtesy A Forth – publisher unknown

In Memory of

Private

Arnold Oliver

154079, 19th Bn., Machine Gun Corps (Infantry) who died on 20 September 1918 Age 19

Son of Annie Oliver, of 42, Pembroke St., Oldham, and the late Edwin Oliver.

Remembered with Honour

St. Vaast Post Military Cemetery, Richebourg-L'avoüe



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Grave reference: V.D.2.⁽¹⁵⁾

“During the Battle of Festubert in May 1915, British soldiers began burying their fallen comrades in an old orchard near a forward dressing station which was located at the terminus of a trench tramway between the hamlet of Richebourg St. Vaast and La Croix Barbet. The cemetery was used by fighting units serving in the front-line and field ambulances until July 1917 and is the final resting place of over 70 men of the South Downs Pals battalion who were killed at the Battle of Boar’s Head on 30 June 1916. In April and May 1918, the Germans buried 90 of their dead in the south-east end of the cemetery and in September and October 1918, 18 British soldiers killed during the final Allied advance were laid to rest in Plot V.⁽¹⁵⁾ (Arnold was buried in Plot V.D.2.)

“The story is told of Arnold Oliver who gave his life for a friend. The rule “up the line” was that the troops should have a hot breakfast whenever possible. There always had to be one sentry left on guard and, of course, he could not leave his post until someone came to relieve him. They had all had their breakfast and Arnold thought of his chum on guard. He changed places with him and within minutes a shell had dropped killing Arnold instantly.”⁽²³⁾

War gratuities of £8 19s 9d were paid to his sole beneficiary, Annie Bray, his mother in 1919.⁽¹⁹⁾ In August 1922 she acknowledged receipt of his medals.⁽²⁾

Annie eventually died in 1942.⁽³⁾ Arnold’s younger sister, Mary Ellen, went on to marry and have a family. Her descendants still remember Arnold.⁽¹⁷⁾

Arnold was awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal⁽²⁾ and he is commemorated on the war memorial at the Methodist Church on Bolton Road, Edgworth, Lancashire. He is also commemorated in the Roll of Honour at the Oldham War Memorial at St. Mary’s Church, High Street, Oldham.⁽²⁰⁾

Research: Linda Spencer

Standard References: 1, 2, 3, 15 plus:

- 17 Ref: Keary-Eaton Family Tree, www.ancestry.co.uk
- 18 Manchester, Non-conformist baptisms, www.ancestry.co.uk
- 19 Register of Soldiers’ effects, www.ancestry.co.uk
- 20 www.mlfhs.org.uk
- 21 www.ancestry.co.uk – Soldiers died in the Great War
- 22 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/zcvdhyc>
- 23 Edgworth to Crowthorn – The Story of a Lancashire Children’s Home – Anita D Forth