

ARTHUR ALDERSON FRANCE



7th October 1916

1862-1916 Age 54

Second Lieutenant Royal Engineers.

Arthur France was the oldest Old Bradfordian to die in the First World War, having falsified his age in order to be accepted. He was born in Bradford on 3rd July 1862. He was the second son of Charles France, an architect originally from Wakefield, and Anna Maria Alderson, from Holbeck, Leeds. Eventually Anna bore twelve children, of whom ten were boys. Charles France went into partnership with Eli Milnes, and their firm was one of the largest practices in Bradford. They were responsible for many warehouses, particularly in Little Germany, mills and commercial and public buildings. Arthur France attended Bradford Grammar School for seven years in the 1870s, before he became an apprentice to his father, and then in 1888 a full partner in the business.

Throughout this time the France family lived in Horsforth. In 1892 Arthur married Margaret Elizabeth Daniel, daughter of an engineer also of Horsforth, and he set up his own household at Mount Royal. Three children were born, of whom Norah and Philip survived. By 1901 Arthur and his family had moved to Burley-in-Wharfedale, and ten years later they inhabited a secluded property on Hag Farm Road. Although the census for 1911 listed him as 'Valuer (civil service)', he also continued his partnership in Milnes and France. In 1913, at the age of fifty, Arthur took the decision to emigrate to Calgary in Alberta, Canada, where he set up in business as an architect and estate agent. He took with him his wife, their daughter Norah and son Philip. The latter worked as a ticket clerk for the Canadian Pacific Railway, and Norah soon married Henry Heselton, another English immigrant who worked with her brother.

When war began Arthur was already on his way to England, via New York. He enlisted in February 1915, after he had returned to Calgary. In order to do so he gave his birth year as 1877 and his age as 38 years, when he was in fact 52. He was accepted and passed fit. It is noteworthy that his hair colour was given as 'brownish grey', so perhaps he had not really taken in the authorities! In his attestation he



said that he had no military experience, although the 1916 Canadian census stated that he did, and he served in the Boer War in some capacity. Whatever the truth, he disembarked in France at the end of March, only a few weeks after enlisting.

At the start of 1916 France was serving as a private soldier in the Canadian Army Medical Corps. His posting was the 2nd Canadian General Hospital located at the sea-side resort of Le Treport. Presumably he had yet to see any action, and perhaps this posting was a concession to his age. Nevertheless, he applied for a commission in the Imperial Army and on 30th March 1916 he was discharged from the Canadian Expeditionary force and became a Second Lieutenant in the Royal Engineers.

It is not at present known which unit of the Royal Engineers Arthur was posted to. In October 1916 he was present at the Somme front. The Royal Engineer Field Companies attached to each division were engaged in constructing the infrastructure an army the size of a new city needed, and in work preparatory for the general attack planned for the 7th October. On that day France died of wounds at one of the Field Ambulances located at the village of Carnoy, where he was buried. Arthur's name is on the Roll of Honour in St. Mary's Church and the village war memorial in Burley-in-Wharfedale. His only son Philip enlisted at the end of August 1916. He survived the war.



Acknowledgements:

The photo is taken from the O.B.A Roll of Honour with thanks. A brief biography of France was included in De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour, 1914-1919. This, and most of the documents used in this biography, were accessed through Ancestry.com.

France's Canadian Service Record, and that for his son, have yet to be digitized, and I have yet to access his Officer File at the National Archives (WO 339/49992). Their Attestation Forms are available through Ancestry and the Canadian Archives. The B.G.S. records for his school years are not available in the School Archives—according to The Bradfordian (December 1916) he was at the School 1884-1891, which is clearly an error. He was 18 in 1880, which places his school years in the 1870s. The Medal Award Roll, together with the London Gazette (<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29426/supplement/121/data.pdf> 3-1-1916, accessed 3-10-2016) add to his service history. For the firm of Milnes and France, <http://www.bradfordtimeline.co.uk/arch.htm> accessed 3-10-2016. The Times 4th November 1916 reported his death and carried a tribute from 'the Colonel of his battalion.' A trawl through the War Diaries of the Royal Engineer's Field Companies 83, 84, 93, 228 and 237, which were in the right area of the Somme front on 7th October has not turned up a reference to his death. His cause of death is given as both 'Died of wounds' (Soldiers Died in the Great War) and 'Killed in action' (Probate).

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper October 2016 (Nhooper1956@googlemail.com).



The Parish Roll of Honour, St. Mary's Burley-in-Wharefdale (taken by the author).