

# Alfred George Smith: A Case Study



[Photo from the Smith Family Collection]

## By John Smith

Alfred George Smith  
**26<sup>th</sup> June 1898 – 10<sup>th</sup> August 1918**

Alfred George Smith was born at number 20 Market Street in central Worthing, his father Jesse was a fly driver very similar to today's taxi driver, and his mother Elizabeth stayed at home to look after the family. Members of the Smith family lived in number 20 until it was demolished in the 70's to make way for the Guildbourne Centre. Even in the 1970's it still had gas lighting and no mains electricity.

Jesse had briefly flirted with the services having signed on in the Army in October 1876 and joined the 2 Battalion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Fusilier Regiment but after 121 days his mother paid the sum of £20 to purchase his discharge obviously believing her son deserved better as the Army was not considered as a career suitable for a young man at the time.



Jesse Smith later in life with his cab on Worthing Seafront  
(Photo from the Smith Family Collection)



Market Street circa 1950 looking east, No 20 is the second house of the row of terraced properties on the right.

(Photo from the Smith Family Collection)

Alf as he was known came into a family of 3 brothers (Arthur, John & Frank) and 3 sisters (Annie, Hetty & Mary), Frank was to die aged 6 in 1901 and Arthur died aged 30 in 1909, a forth brother Fred was born in 1902.

From an early age Alf learnt Christian values as both his mother and father were regular attenders at Christ Church in Grafton Road, and each night before the evening meal their father would read a passage from the bible and say grace before proceeding with the meal.

When old enough Alf went to school at Christ Church boy's school which has long since disappeared and it was as no surprise that when he reached the right age he joined the choir at Christ Church something his younger brother Fred did some years later. Alf must have had quite an interest in the church as he also joined the Church Lads brigade and rose to be one of its officers.



Alf in his Boys Brigade Uniform  
 (Photo from the Smith Family Collection)

On leaving school Alf got a job at the local newspaper 'The Worthing Gazette' and worked there until called up in May 1917. After training he was posted to Palestine to serve with the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion The Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment) but as the war in that theatre came to a close the 10<sup>th</sup> battalion was sent to France in May 1918 from here it seems likely that due to losses from the German spring offensive that Alf along with others were transferred to other battalions to fill the gaps, and in Alf's case he found himself serving with the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion the Buffs a battalion which had been serving in France since 1915 and had taken part in many of the major actions of the war.

Unfortunately Alf's service record was lost when the records office in London was hit by bombs during the Blitz in 1940 so his exact service cannot be verified.

In his last letter home dated the 7<sup>th</sup> August 1918 he wrote.

*My dear mum and dad*

*I received dad's letter telling me about the parcel eight days ago just before we went into the line and I got your parcel today.*

*Everything was quite sound and in good condition thank you very much in deed, the chocs went down good and so did the biscuits.*

*Well dears I am sorry to report that I have broken the pipe you sent me.*

*Will you send me another one please and if you think a case is best to prevent breakage all the better.*

*I guess you have heard about the pushes and how the Yanks gave it him and no error, I think Fritz is very grogy.*

*We have had some rain just latterly but it is very fine this morning. I hope it keeps so in the trenches as it gets a choice state oh yes although it is not so bad where we are.*

*It is very strange when all the rain is going on to hear the birds slinging.*

*Give my love to all, and now I think that is all. God bless and keep you all and soon may I see you in God's good time.*

*Au revoir*

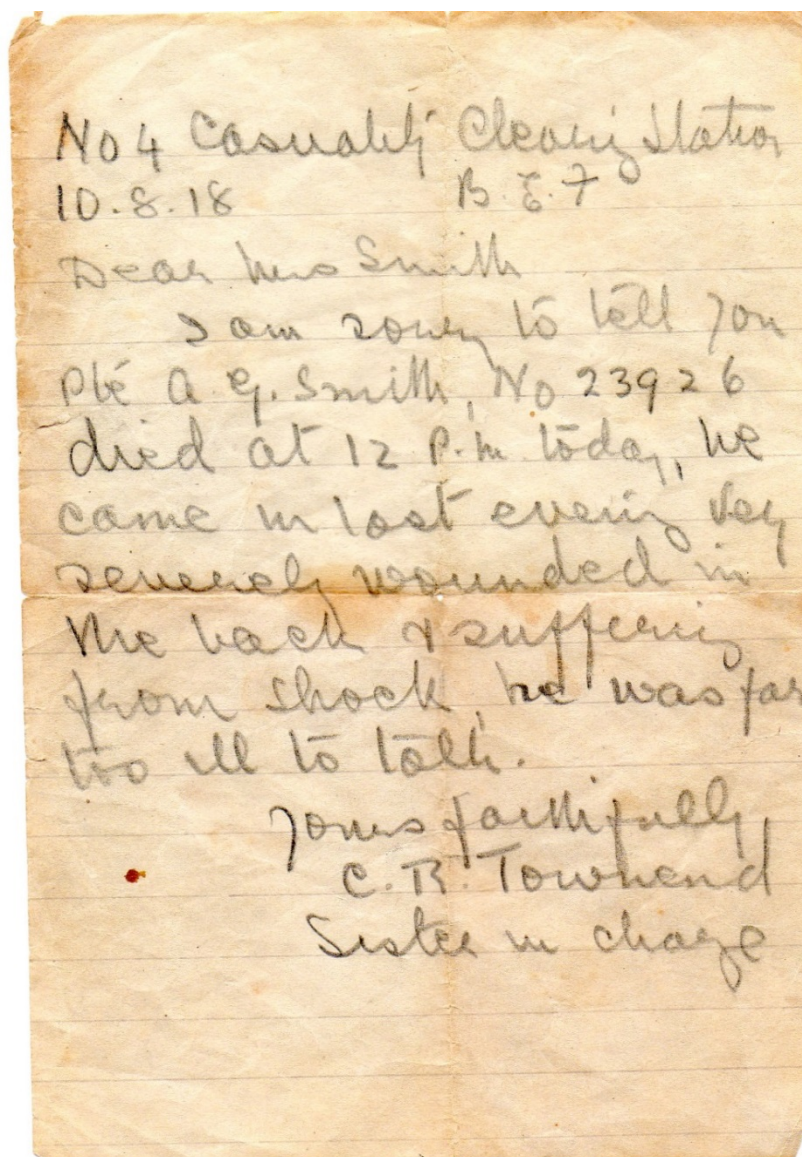
*Your loving son Alfred (21 kisses)*



*PS I have not heard from Adie for a fortnight. Alf*

So it would seem that he was hale and hearty and enjoying as life best he could.

This letter must have arrived just a few days before the letter below which was written by the Sister at the casualty clearing station telling of Alf's passing.



No 4 Casualty Clearing Station  
10.8.18 B.E.7  
Dear Mrs Smith  
I am sorry to tell you  
Plé A. E. Smith, No 23926  
died at 12 P.M. today, he  
came in last evening, very  
severely wounded in  
the back & suffering  
from shock he was far  
too ill to talk.  
Yours faithfully,  
C. B. Townend  
Sister in charge

Letter written by Sister Townend to Alf's Mother notifying her of her son's death  
(From the Smith Family Collection)

Sister Townend was a member of the Queen Alexandra Imperial Nursing Service and appointed a Staff Nurse in 1907 and had been mentioned in dispatches in May 1917 when she was a Staff Nurse (Assistant Matron). It would seem that Alf's Brigade was involved in one of the battles that raged around Amiens in August 1918.

The war diary of the 6<sup>th</sup> battalion shows that they were involved in action around Moriancourt which is some 30 km east of Amiens and that it was taking casualties.

7<sup>th</sup> August 1918 – 2 Other ranks wounded by gas shells

8<sup>th</sup> August 1918 – 24 Other ranks injured when an attack was cancelled but difficulties were experienced as they returned to their trenches from no mans land in daylight.

9<sup>th</sup> August 1918 – 168 other ranks killed and wounded in an attack on Moriancourt

This last entry seems to be where Alf received his fatal wound as a letter from the sister in charge of the 4<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station states.

(Information supplied by M. Mills Archivist of the Buffs Association).

Alf is buried in France at Pernois British Military Cemetery which is situated some 16 Km south west of Doullens approximately 30 Km from Amiens. The Cemetery was opened towards the end of April 1918 to deal with the deaths in No.4 Casualty Clearing Station resulting from the German advance it was closed in August 1918 and Alf rests with 8 other comrades from his battalion.



Pernois British Military Cemetery  
(Photo Courtesy of the [Commonwealth War Graves Commission](http://www.commonwealthwargraves.com))

Alf is remembered in Worthing on the memorial outside of the old St Pauls Church Chapel Road and was on a brass plate in Christ Church Boys School dedicated to those members of school who fell in the 'War to end all Wars' which disappeared when the school closed. The plate was later recovered from a scrap yard by Garry Anscomb in 2004.