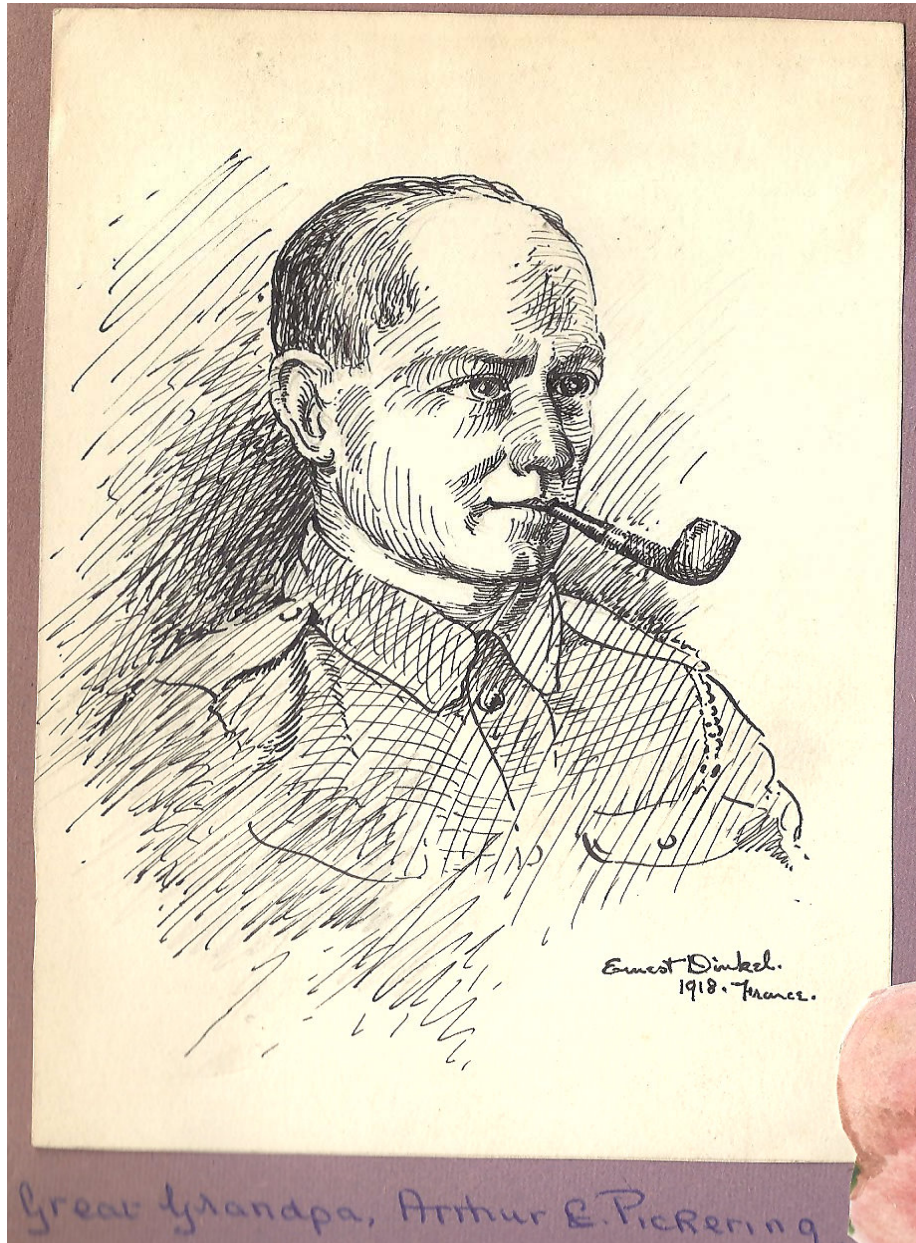


Arthur Edwin Pickering



Drawing of Arthur Edwin Pickering by the artist Ernest Dinkel. The two men served together in the 5th Railway Survey Section. Arthur Pickering sent the drawing to his daughter on her fifth birthday in March 1918

By Jaqui Ball

Summary

Arthur Edwin Pickering served for three and a half years in the Royal Field Artillery and Royal Engineers. An architectural draughtsman by profession he was also a talented artist who sent a number of beautiful drawings home from the Front to his young daughter, Eileen, enclosed in envelopes hand-made from the graph paper which no doubt was used daily by the railway surveyors. He died, aged 43, on 19 November 1918, a victim of the Spanish Influenza epidemic and is buried in the Auberchicourt British Cemetery, Nord, France. This is his story.

Introduction

Arthur Edwin Pickering's name is one of more than eighty engraved on the First World War Memorial in St Andrew's Church, West Tarring, Worthing. His grandson, Roger Sutton, responded to an article I wrote for the parish magazine, explaining the background to the Great War Project and asking for any information about the men commemorated on the memorial. He, in turn, put me in touch with his sister, Jane Johnson, who was the custodian of a scrapbook of mementoes put together by her mother, Eileen.

Background



Annette Rolls and John Turney Pickering (from Family Papers)

Arthur Edwin Pickering was born on 2 June 1875, the son of John Turney Pickering, an accountant, and Annette Rolls. At the time of his birth, the family was living at 9, St Pauls Terrace, Brockley Road, New Cross, London.

He had three brothers – John (Jack), Percy and Henry (Harry) – and sisters Mabel and Elsie. The Pickerings were reputed to be a "jolly family who liked the good things in life." They entertained a good deal, hosting musical evenings at which Annette played the piano and whist drives. Both John and Percy were very musical – Percy became an actor and appeared in the West End, while

John ran a small orchestra in his spare time. It was at one of these evenings, a bridge party, that Arthur was to meet his future wife. Arthur's artistic talents lay in a different direction and he became a draughtsman, working for a Jewish firm of Architects of Broad Street, City of London EC2



Florence Amy Gerrett (second left) Photograph from Family Papers

On 27 June 1908, at St Mark's Church, South Norwood, Arthur married Florence Amy Gerrett, daughter of Charles Gerrett and his wife Louisa Elizabeth Gerrett (nee Hale.) Charles was an importer of millinery and drapery and a fancy warehouseman and at the time of her marriage, Florence was living at 7, Cavendish Street. Educated at home, Florence, who was born on 3 December 1877, recalled how, as a child, she and her brother and sisters were taken by their nurse to St James's Park and given milk straight from the cow.

Before the war, the Pickering family lived in Anerley, South Norwood, a town dominated by the massive Crystal Palace building which had been moved from its original Hyde Park setting. It was at Crystal Palace that John M East put on a spectacle to massed audiences of 25,000 people. The spectacle depicted an invasion by a Zeppelin disgorging parachutists with a spy on the ground signalling to invaders (obviously German, but not named) accompanied by bomb bursts and the screams of children under attack in a simulated village. The climax of the spectacle came when British soldiers came to the rescue of the local population. With this background of propaganda in mind, one can imagine that, when a real Zeppelin appeared bombarding South London early in the war, volunteers like Arthur would flock to sign up to serve in the campaign.

Arthur and Florence's daughter, Eileen, was born on 18 March 1913 at 32 Lincoln Road, South Norwood, Lambeth, London. A son Arthur was born after the war on June 6 1919.

Detail

Arthur Pickering signed up on 29th May 1915 at the age of 39, joining the 173 (East Ham) Brigade. At the time, many thousands of soldiers were being wiped out and these local brigades were hastily put together as replacements. Until 2 July 1916, according to his Service Record, he was based at Home, being sent to France with the British Expeditionary Force on 3 July 1916.

By July 1916, he was "somewhere in France", serving in the 11th Division of the Ammunition Company of the Royal Field Artillery. His wife and daughter had moved to Worthing to stay with Florence's mother, Louisa, in Valencia Road to escape the aerial bombing in South London. Louisa Gerrett held an "At Home Day" once a week when she would sit in state to receive visitors. This weekly event soon became a working party, with everyone knitting socks and balaclava helmets for the Red Cross. Half way



Arthur Edwin Pickering
(photograph from Family Papers)

through the proceedings, Eileen would be brought in by the maid and paraded in front of the visitors, something she hated.

In April 1917 Florence was informed that Arthur had been wounded on 23 April. The notification went to the family's previous address so she had to write explaining the move to Worthing. Her letter is included in her husband's Service Record but there are no details about the nature of Arthur's injury. In a further communication, Florence provides more details of Arthur's deployment, explaining that he had been attached to No 1 Surrey Company, based at the Transportation of Troops Depot in Boulogne, but that, at the time of receiving his injury, he had been attached to A Sub Section, C Battery of the 79th Brigade RFA.



Quai du Bessin, Boulogne-sur-Mer (post card from Family Papers)

By June that year, Arthur was in Boulogne-sur-Mer, one of three important base ports for the British Army. The coast between the town of Montreuil and the Port of Calais was an immense logistics zone of army camps, munitions depots and hospitals, for the

most part supplied with men and equipment through the port of Boulogne.

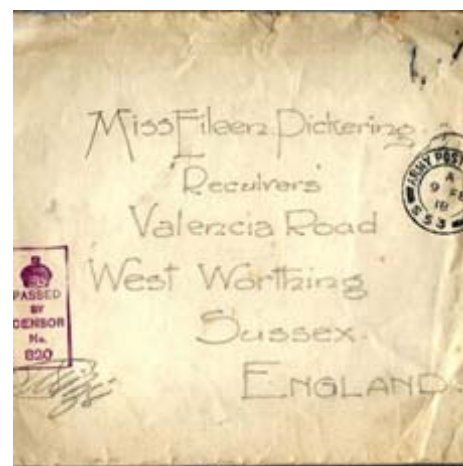


Postcard from Boulogne-sur-Mer, June 1917 (from Family Papers)

The affectionate message on the back of the postcard is typical of the letters, cards and poems with which Arthur kept in touch with his family at home, and particularly his beloved "Jimmy" as he called Eileen. As well as letters and postcards there were drawings, some funny, all touching.



This amusing depiction of a sleeping child was sent to Eileen on February 9 1918 inside a hand-made envelope fashioned from the graph paper used every day by railway surveyors.



Hand made envelope fashioned from graph paper (from Family Papers)

Drawing sent to his daughter in February 1918 (from Family Papers)

Once recovered from his injury, Arthur joined the 5th Railway Survey and Reconnaissance Section (a Canadian unit) of the Royal Engineers in June 1917. On joining the Corps he was tested in the Section's workshops and proved himself "Proficient" as a Draughtsman (architectural.) The Service Record notes that the testing took place "In the Field." On the 29 June 1917 he was promoted to Acting Corporal.

The war of 1914-1918 relied on engineering. Without engineers there would have been no supply to the armies, because the Royal Engineers (REs) maintained the railways, roads, water supply, bridges and transport. REs also operated the railways and inland waterways. There would have been no communications, because the RE's maintained the telephones, wireless and other signaling equipment. There would have been little cover for the infantry and no positions for the artillery, because the REs designed and built the front-line fortifications. It fell to the technically skilled REs to develop responses to chemical and underground warfare. And finally, without the REs the infantry and artillery would have soon been powerless, as they maintained the guns and other weapons. Little wonder that the Royal Engineers grew into a large and complex organisation.



**5th Railway Survey section at work
 (photograph supplied by Philip Dinkel)**

Territorial Force. By the same date in 1917, it had grown to a total manpower of 295,668. In other words, it was twelve times bigger than the peacetime establishment.¹

Although aircraft developed fast during the war, the mass supply of men, munitions, rations, forage and equipment depended heavily on the railways so the service of men like Arthur was invaluable to the war effort.

The photograph on the left shows the somewhat bizarre conditions in which Arthur and the men of the 5th Railway Survey team worked at the Front – their “office” was an old railway carriage.

On 1 January 1918, Arthur was tested again and proved himself to be “Superior.” His Service Record shows that he was tested on Profiles (Very Superior); Plans (Very Superior), Points and Crossings, Yards (Superior), Structures (Skilled), Earthwork Quality (Skilled) and Mathematics (Skilled.)

The photograph (left) shows the men of Arthur Pickering’s section, the 5th Railway Survey and Reconnaissance Section, at work. The figure on the left is a friend of Arthur’s, the artist Ernest Dinkel, and it is possible that Arthur himself is also one of the group pictured.

On 1 August 1914, RE consisted of 1,056 officers and 10,394 men of the regular army and Special Reserve, plus another 513 and 13,127 respectively serving with the RE of the



**Railway carriage in which engineers of
 5th Railway Survey section worked
 (photograph supplied by Philip Dinkel)**

On 12 March 1918 Arthur sent the following letter and picture to his little daughter to mark her fifth birthday. He wrote:

My own dear little Jimmy,

Very many happy returns of your birthday and I do hope I shall be home next year to celebrate the occasion.

I enclose two drawings, one is a portrait of your daddy drawn by Ernest Dinkel and the other one I drew and please let me know if you recognise it dear.

It gets rather cold in our tent at night time but we make a good fire and then take it in turns to get up and light the fire in the morning.

I do hope you will enjoy your birthday. I shall be thinking of you all day dear and hope it will be a lovely day.

It will be nice for you at Easter, Uncle Charlie and all of them coming to Worthing and if it is fine I expect they will come down on the beach with you.

Again wishing you very many happy returns of your birthday and hoping you will be able to choose something you like with the money I am sending to dear Mother.

Best love and lots of x x x x x from your Daddy



Drawing of his daughter to mark her fifth birthday, March 1918 (from Family Papers)

The drawing of Arthur Pickering (see Title Page) was by a well-known artist of the time, Ernest Dinkel.

At Christmas 1918, approximately a month after Arthur's death, Ernest Dinkel sent a small drawing entitled "The Adoration of the Magi" to Eileen, signed by him with the addition "France, 1918" which is with the war letters in the family's possession. A very different brightly coloured painting entitled "The Magi" painted by him in 1982 was the subject of The Tate Christmas card design in 2010.

It was while he was serving with the Railway Survey and Reconnaissance Section that Arthur contracted the Spanish Influenza /pneumonia. He died

on 19 November 1918, eight days after the signing of the Armistice and is buried in the Auberchicourt British Cemetery, Nord, France (Plot I B 19.)



Auberchicourt British Cemetery, Nord, France (photograph from [Wikipedia](#))

Florence was sent Arthur's British War and Victory medals on 5 November 1924.

Conclusion

After the war, the family doctor determined that the Worthing climate did not suit Eileen and the family moved to Brighton, to live first at 184, Freshfield Road, then at 6 Friar Crescent. Florence died on 3 January 1967, aged 89, leaving a sum of £10,081.²

Eileen attended Kingscliffe School and Haydon Lodge, where she was Head Girl. On leaving school, she went to Clark's Commercial College before becoming a Cashier at Hannington's Department Store. She married George Frederick Hainsworth Sutton on 29 July 1939 at St Luke's Church, Queen's Park, Brighton. They had two children, Roger Malcolm (born 1942) and Jane Frances (born 1944.) The family moved to Worthing in 1945 when George was appointed Inspector for West Sussex by the Royal Insurance Company. Eileen died at Melrose Lodge, Worthing on 22 December 2008, aged 95.



Arthur's children, Eileen and Arthur (Photograph from Family Papers)

Arthur's death had a profound effect on Eileen and her younger brother who was born after the war and never knew his father. Indeed, as a result, he refused to serve in the Second World War but nevertheless served on the Home Front in testing circumstances with distinction and bravery.

Arthur's memory is kept alive through the scrapbook of memories lovingly collected by his daughter, Eileen, and faithfully kept for posterity by his grand-daughter, Jane. It is that scrapbook which has informed this case study.

Original records

“Through the Eyes of a Child” by Eileen Sutton (nee Pickering)

Family Papers

Bibliography

Images of Fear: How Horror Stories Helped Shape Modern Culture (1818-1918) by Martin Tropp

Websites

National Archives: Service Record of Arthur Edwin Pickering

Wikipedia Auberchicourt British Cemetery ([Wikipedia](#))

Acknowledgements

With thanks to Arthur Edwin Pickering’s grandchildren, Roger Sutton and Jane Johnson who provided background information and invaluable access to family papers, including drawings which Arthur Edwin Pickering sent home from the Front to his young daughter.

Thanks are also due to Philip Dinkel, son of Ernest Dinkel, who has given permission for the reproduction of the two photographs of the 5th Railway Survey Team.

End Notes

¹ The Long, Long Trail: The British Army in the Great War: information on Royal Engineers on page 6 www.1914-1918.net/cre.htm

² Family History Research carried out by Roger Sutton, grandson of Arthur and Florence Pickering