

**Alfred John Watts** was born in Lavendon in about 1890. His parents were Isaac Watts from Lavendon and Emily Ester Smith from Marsworth in Buckinghamshire. Isaac was a Shoe Rivetter and Emily was a Tailoress who would have met Alfred's father when she was staying in Lavendon as a niece to John Philby, a police constable living in Olney Road. Isaac and Emily initially lived in the High Street, probably in the Horseshoe Yard Cottages.

Alfred had a sister Laura, two years younger than him, and also two older brothers Ernest and Herbert Smith, both Shoe Riveters. All were born in Lavendon. In 1911 Laura was a 'School Monitress' working for the County Council and Alfred, age 21, was working as a 'Milkman on Farm'.

Alfred's father, Isaac, was part of a large family: Isaac had 11 other brothers and sisters, one of whom had died before 1911. Alfred's large number of Aunts and Uncles included Joseph James Watts and Richard Watts who was the youngest Uncle and indeed some two years younger than Alfred himself. Both Joseph and Richard died serving their country before Alfred also lost his life. For Alfred's Grandparents, Charles and Elizabeth Watts, the three deaths in the family must have been a very cruel blow.

In February 1916, Alfred enlisted at Bletchley with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. By this time his Uncle Joseph had already been killed in March 1915 to the north-west of Ypres. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the OBLI had been among the first units to arrive in France in August 1914 as part of the British Expeditionary Force. By 1915 it had already seen fierce fighting at Mons, Ypres and in the Battle of Festubert where it lost almost 400 men. It appears that Alfred had joined the Battalion in time to take part in the Battle of the Somme in July 1916. Alfred was also likely to be in the company of another Lavendon soldier, Charles Green, during this period.

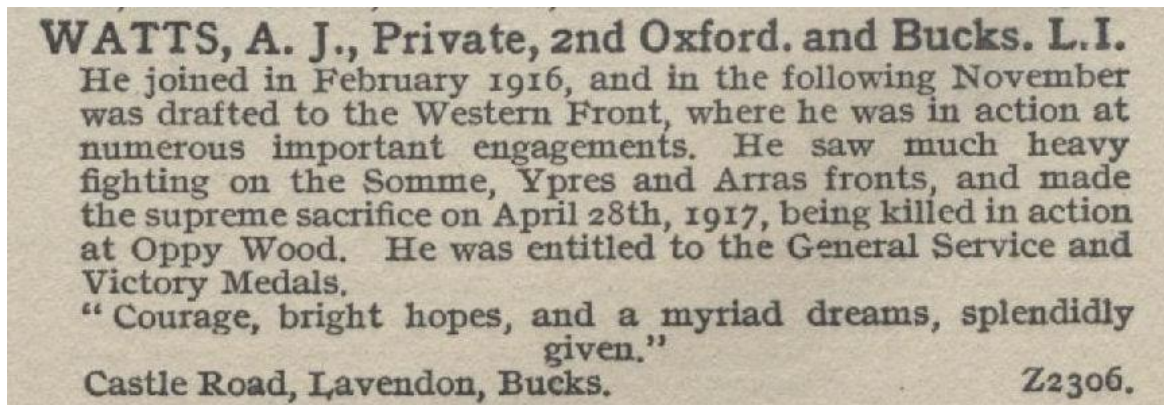
In March 1917 the Battalion moved away from the Somme and participated in the Arras Offensive. From 11 April it was involved in the Battle of Arras and on 28-29 April it had a leading role in protecting the right flank of the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> Division during the Battle of Arleux. This was critical to the capture of the village of Arleux, however the Battalion sustained over 200 casualties in the process. It must be assumed that it was during this attack on the Arleux-Oppy Line that Alfred was 'Killed in Action' on 28th April. The National Roll indicates that Alfred died at Oppy Wood adjoining Oppy village, a short distance to the south of Arleux and some miles to the north-west of Arras.

This was the same battle in which his likely friend Charles Green, also from Lavendon, died 3 days later on 1 May from wounds received fighting with the same Battalion. Alfred was entitled to the Victory and British medals for his service to the country. Alfred is remembered at the Arras Memorial which commemorates almost 35,000 Commonwealth servicemen who died in the Arras sector between the spring of 1916 and 7 August 1918. The National Roll shows Alfred's residence at the time of death as being Castle Road where, according to Alfred's Will, his mother Emily lived; this may also be the address of his grandparents, Charles and Elizabeth, who lived in Castle Road for most of their marriage.

**ATTACK ON THE ARLEUX-OPPY LINE - Extracts from 5th Infantry Brigade Orders.**

"**DRESS.**—Fighting order without greatcoats. Waterproof sheets will be carried, as well as the following :--

- (a) Two No. 5 Mills bombs per man.
- (b) 120 rounds A.S.A. per man, except signallers, bombers, rifle-bombers, scouts, runners, Vickers and Lewis-gunners, who will carry 50 rounds.
- (c) One day's ration per man.
- (d) By every other man one flare.
- (e) Two sandbags per man.
- (f) Wire-cutters and breakers as available. (Wire-cutters should be attached to the man by a cord.)"



**Above:** The Arras Memorial which commemorates almost 35,000 Commonwealth servicemen.

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WILL.

In the event of my death I give the whole of my property and effects to my mother Mrs Emily Watts  
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INFORMAL WILL.

W.O. No.: E 426034/1  
 Record No. 241/478635  
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DOMICILE, English

The enclosed document dated 20th November, 1916 and signed Alfred John Watts

Alfred John Watts  
 22810 Private  
 appears to have been written or executed by the person or executed by the person Regt 2nd Batt Ox & Bucks Inf Regd in the margin while he was "in actual military service" within the meaning of the Wills Act, 1837, and has been recognised by the War Department as constituting a valid will.

WAR OFFICE.

28-7-17

Killed in Action (in France)

Date of Death

for the Assistant Financial Secretary.

Date Aug 15/1917