

ST JAMES CHURCH TAUNTON
WORLD WAR 1 MEMORIAL PROJECT

Ernest Hartnell

Name: Ernest Hartnell

Rank: Private

Service Number: 202067

Regiment: Somerset Light Infantry

Battalion/Unit number: 2/4 Battalion

Date/year of Birth: c. 1894

Place of Birth: Taunton

Place of Residence: 29 St James Street, Taunton

Date of Death: 30th July 1918

Place of Death: The Somme

Burial/Memorial: Raperie British Cemetery, Villemontoire

Ernest Hartnell was the eleventh of fifteen (or sixteen) children, born to James and Mary Ann Hartnell. Ernest was baptised in St. James Church on 16th June 1894 with three of his siblings. James was the son of Joseph and Elizabeth Hartnell. James' family had lived initially in Taunton but then had moved to London where James and his younger sister Frances were born. Joseph was a bricklayer in the 1861 census, but died at the early age of 28. Elizabeth returned to Somerset and in 1871 was living at 19 St James Street with her three children and a lodger. It must have been a struggle to survive, Elizabeth is described as a laundress and Alfred and James, aged 12 and 10 also worked in the local silk factory. Elizabeth later remarried and became Elizabeth Harris.

James married Mary Ann and continued to live in the St James Street area at various addresses including Denmark Place and lastly in the 1911 census are at 29 St James Street, a house with 9 rooms. In addition to his seven younger children, his mother and two septuagenarian boarders lived in the household. In 1891 and 1894 James was described as a brewers drayman, but by 1911 he was a coal merchant, with two of his sons working with him.

In the 1911 census Ernest was 17 and working for a local grocer as an errand boy.

When war was declared Ernest's older brother joined the Royal Field Artillery and served out in France from June 1915. Ernest must have joined later as he had no 1914 or 1915 star on his medal card. He enlisted in the Somerset Light Infantry and had two years active service in France before being killed in action on the Somme in July 1918.

The 2/4th Battalion of which he was a part was based in India until September 1917 when they were sent to Egypt and then on 1st June 1918 landed at Marseille en route for the Western Front , where on 30th June they were attached to the 34th Division as a Pioneer Battalion.

Ernest is buried at the Rapiere British Cemetery at Villemontoire, one of nine Somerset Light Infantrymen who died between 29th and 31st July. Villemontoire is connected entirely with the victorious advance of the 15th (Scottish) and 34th Divisions, under French leadership, in the period from the 23rd July to the 2nd August 1918. At this stage we do not know the circumstances of his death.