

Grubb, GA

The Grubb family were long-standing residents in the Parish of St Michael's. At the census in 1891, they lived at 8 Barnsbury Terrace, now demolished, and was formerly situated west of Windmill Road, north of Chiswick High Road. Herbert J Grubb, a 49 year-old furniture packer, and his wife Jane had 8 children: the eldest, Elizabeth, at aged 18, was the only daughter – Herbert E at 16, was the eldest son, a carpenter's apprentice, with William (12), John (8), Joseph (6), Ernest (4). George Arthur was the next youngest, born in 1889, with Albert a baby at 3 months old. A further son, Walter, had been born in 1896. In all, Jane Grubb had borne 12 children, of which three had died in infancy.

By 1911, with the parents were just Elizabeth, unmarried and working as a domestic cook, and three sons remaining at home at Barnsbury Terrace. All had clerical jobs – George Arthur, now aged 22 worked with Chiswick District Council.

It seems that George had volunteered early in the War. At the time of his attestation he would have become First Officer with the local council. He joined the 2/10 Battalion, Middlesex Regiment as Private No. 2419. His first active service overseas was in the Balkan theatre from August 1915, and he served in Gallipoli initially. The Chiswick Times reported that he had written to his friends at the Chiswick Working Men's Club:

"At present we are in huge uncovered dug-outs on the top of cliffs with a sheer drop to the Sea. There are cold north winds with rain and how we manage to live through it I don't know. Many fall sick and are sent away to hospital. We are much worse off than cave dwellers ... the only cover we have is a waterproof groundsheet around our shoulders and we sleep on the ground and wake to find our blankets wet through ..."

He earned an 1915 Star, as well as the War and Victory medals. He gained promotion to full Corporal, and his medal card suggests that he may have temporarily acted as Sergeant in his Egyptian campaign.

George would have arrived in Egypt from Gallipoli in early 1916, where the defence of the Suez canal was of great strategic importance. He may have been involved with the actions surrounding the construction of the coastal railway planned to allow better access across the Sinai peninsula to Gaza for the eventual planned advances into Palestine. Action at Rumani in 1916, and the First Battle of Gaza in early 1917 were part of the 54th Division operations.

It was at the Second Battle of Gaza, as with his Chiswick compatriot from the same Middlesex battalion John Lawrie Craig, that George Grubb will have been killed in action. Using several Divisions of infantry, General Sir Archibald Murray hoped to defeat the formidable Ottoman defences on the front line between Gaza and Beersheba, the gateway to Jerusalem and the rest of Palestine. The accompanying map sets out the position. The 54th Division was placed at the centre of the front, at the Ali Muntar Ridge on the southern edge of Gaza where it encountered the most ferocious resistance on 19 May 1917. The General explained: "The nests of machine guns in the broken ground could not be located the narrow doings, holes and fissures with which the locality was seamed. Owing to this, and the extent of the area, the artillery-fire concentrated on it was unable to keep down the enemy's fire". Had he decided to throw in his reserves, it was possible to gain the position, but only with the further loss of 5-6000 men, with only a small force remaining with which to defend the gains. He therefore consolidated the gains that had been made. For the next six months, the situation round Gaza remained unchanged. Substantial reinforcements made the difference in the November.

Cpl. George Grubb was buried at the British Military Cemetery

at Deir al-Balah. His wife, Mabel nee Goodall, had his headstone inscribed: *"The brightest names that earth can boast, just glisten and are gone"*, a quotation from a Victorian hymn by the American poet, William Bryant. They had married in about April 1915. Mabel remarried in 1923 and died in Surrey in 1981.

Deir al-Balah was captured by the British Army following the surrender of Khan Yunis on 28 February 1917. By April an aerodrome and an army camp were established there and Deir al-Balah became a launching point for British forces against Ottoman-held Gaza and Beersheba to the north and northeast, respectively, from then onwards. Of 25 British war cemeteries dating from World War I, Deir al-Balah, built in March 1917 was one of the largest. It continued to be used until March 1918 and contains a total of 724 graves.