

Alfred Teale

Alfred Teale was born on 16th March 1892 in Tollerton to an unmarried mother; three weeks later the national census records him living with his mother, one year-old brother and his maternal grandparents. Interestingly, it is possible he was unaware of his real parentage as on his army papers he gave his grandparents' names in place of those of his parents. Indeed, by 1901 when his mother had married and moved to Bradford with his two brothers (a third illegitimate son had been born in 1893), Alfred remained living with his widowed grandmother in Alne.

Aged 20, Alfred was still living with his grandmother – now back in Tollerton – and working as a farm labourer at the time of the 1911 census. However, records show that by this time he already had a criminal record; in July 1908 he had been bound over for housebreaking; in July 1909 he was sentenced to three months in jail for stealing a bicycle; and in April 1910 he received a further two month sentence for stealing a bicycle pump.

Unfortunately, his spells in prison obviously did little to encourage him to mend his ways as in February 1913 he was back in court at York Assizes, on the charge that he *'feloniously and burglariously did break and enter the dwelling-house of Charles Joseph Kendall and steal therein a purse and the sum of £7 in money, his money, at Upper Poppleton on the 31st January 1913.'* This time he was sentenced to eight months' hard labour. However, his prison record does record something about him beyond his criminal tendencies; it states he was 5 feet 9 inches with brown hair, and had a good level of education.

There is no record of what Alfred got up to over the year following his release in the autumn of 1913, but he joined up in Alne in November 1914 at one of the recruitment fairs which travelled round from village to village at the time. From here he was transported to Bridlington where he enlisted as a private into the 2nd Battalion, 1st Queen's Own Yorkshire Dragoons. One can't help but wonder if perhaps this was his grandmother's attempt to get him on the straight and narrow.

Unfortunately, whether or not this was the intention, it didn't work. Although his record does not state where he was stationed for the first 18 months, he obviously got some time off as on 1st January 1916 he married Ada Weatherill in the Easingwold area (possibly in Alne) and less than two months later, on 20th February, his son Alfred was born. Obviously keen to see his baby, Alfred absented himself without leave between 19th and 21st February, for which offence he received 28 days detention and forfeited 3 days' pay.

In September of that year, he sailed to Salonika in Greece where he was transferred to 26th Battalion (3rd Public Works Pioneers) Middlesex Regiment, as part of the 27th Division. The Division saw action in the capture of Karajakois (30 September - 2 October 1916), the capture of Yenikoi (3-4 October 1916), the Battle of Turmbiza Farm (17 November and 6-7 December 1916), and the capture of Homondos (and 14 October 1917) in the mountainous, malarial Salonika front around what is now the Greek-Macedonia border, and in which nearly half the men died of disease or hardship within weeks of arriving in the area. In November 1917 the Battalion moved with the Division to Italy but returned to France in March 1918.

Apart from a bout of malaria, Alfred appears to have survived the war unscathed, returning home on 21st April 1919, having elected to re-enlist in the 10th (Prince of Wales Own Royal) Hussars – most probably due to the bounty of up to £50 being offered - worth in the region of £2,500 in today's money.

However, true to form, Alfred failed to join his new regiment in July and went AWOL once again until he was eventually apprehended by the police in Easingwold. However, during the period of his absence, he suffered a tragedy when his baby son died aged only six days old on 20th September; assuming Alfred was the father, baby James would have been extremely premature. A couple of weeks before this sad occurrence, the military authorities received a letter purporting to be from his brother 'W Teale', stating Alfred had died of malaria on 9th September. Unsurprisingly, when the police looked into the situation, they reported to the army they had not only found Alfred alive and well, but he also admitted he had no brother with that initial – he also, rather ingenuously, denied all knowledge of the letter! As a result, in November he was sent under escort to join the Hussars in Ireland. As a result of his absence, Alfred was fined 126 days' pay but, possibly due to his recent bereavement, he does not appear to have been sentenced to any period of detention.

His charge sheet doesn't end there; he once again absented himself from barracks in Canterbury between 20th December 1919, and 20th January, for which he received 28 days detention and forfeited 31 days' pay. The same scenario played out when he was again absent from 25th April to 31st May; he was unable to join his regiment as he was convicted of stealing firewood from a house in Newton-on-Ouse, the village in which his wife was then living, and sentenced to two months hard labour in prison. Upon release, he surrendered himself to the police in York and was once again returned to Canterbury where he was given 28 days detention and forfeited 36 days' pay. Rejoining his unit in Cork, he was detained one more time for absence before being finally discharged after collecting another conviction for theft in September 1920. Unsurprisingly, when his regiment captain was asked for a character reference for him in 1926, he issued the following response: *'Since the above named man joined the regiment he has been either in prison or an absentee so it is impossible for me to give him a good character'*.

So, all in all, Alfred Teale wasn't our most distinguished parishioner (at least not in any positive sense) and possibly his war record, as well as that in civvy street, is best not dwelt upon. Surprisingly though, I have thus far found no record of him in police and court records after 1920, so perhaps a life of regular domesticity with his wife, son and any further children finally made him turn over a new leaf. The only other record I can find of him is that recording his death in the York district in 1967 at the age of 76.