

Harold Frederick Dyke, died 29 March 1918, aged 27

Harold Dyke's family moved around North London as their financial circumstances improved. When they first married his parents lived in a couple of rooms in Florence Road near Finsbury Park. By the 1901 census they were living at 67 Leicester Road in East Finchley. Frederick (born in 1868) was an insurance clerk, and his wife Florence (born 1865) was a housewife: they had a son Harold (aged 10) and a daughter Nora (aged 5). A year later their son Keith was born, and he was baptised by Father Armitstead at All Saints' Church on 2 November 1902. Frederick was promoted to be a managing clerk and as the family continued to prosper they moved out to Hertfordshire; by the 1911 census they were living in a house called St Aldwyns in the Six Hills area of Stevenage, and they had a resident servant (albeit a girl of 16). Harold attended Alleyne's School in Stevenage (now Thomas Alleyne's Academy) and then went to work as an insurance clerk for the Marine Insurance Co where his father was also employed. He seems to have been a keen sportsman, as he was secretary of Stevenage Hockey Club.

Harold joined up on the 3 September 1914, enlisting in 21st Battalion, London Regiment (First Surrey Rifles). The London Regiment was made up of territorial battalions, so Harold was probably a territorial before the war. Despite its name, the 21st battalion had many members from Hertfordshire because at the outbreak of war it was based in St Albans, where it trained men for several months before transferring them to other regiments on active service. After the Military Service Act of 1916 brought the regiment up to full strength it was deployed to France in June 1916.

According to his school's records Harold was serving then, but during his time in France he was admitted to hospital six times with stomach-related disorders. After action at Vimy the battalion was intended to join the Somme offensive in October, but instead it was sent to Greece to join forces on the Macedonian front. Bad weather throughout the winter meant they saw little action, and in June 1917 they were sent to Egypt to join the Palestinian campaign against Turkish forces. They fought their way to Jordan with General Allenby, providing part of the guard of honour when the General entered Jerusalem in December 1917.

At the end of March 1918 the Battalion was located in the Wadi Amman, Syria, and Harold was a corporal in B Company. According to Alleyne's School records:

'Here they were ordered to advance on, and capture, Turkish positions. The assault began at 2.40am and the Battalion soon came under heavy machine gun and rifle fire from Turkish positions to their right. "B" Company were ordered to attack these positions which they did so very successfully. They advanced very quickly and soon found themselves well in front of the Battalion and were able to capture 2 machine guns and 80 Turkish prisoners. The Company were then brought back to a Wadi on the Amman road in order that their commanding officer could determine the situation. The action had cost the Battalion 24 men killed or missing and a further 104 wounded.'

Harold Dyke was one of the 24 men killed in this action, and he is buried in the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Damascus. His death is commemorated on the war memorial at All Saints', perhaps at the request of his parents or perhaps of people who had known the family when they lived in East Finchley some years earlier.

His name is also recorded on the memorial in St Nicholas Church in Stevenage, on Stevenage Old Town War Memorial and on the War Memorial gates of Thomas Alleyne's Academy.

The Dyke family left Stevenage after Harold's death. In 1920 when Mrs Dyke died aged 55 they were living in Hampstead. Mr Dyke died in Hendon in 1943 at the age of 75. Keith emigrated to Fremantle in Western Australia in 1922 to become a farmer and Nora died in Hove in 1979 at the age of 83, having never married.

The War Memorial gates of Thomas Alleyne's Academy

