

Sapper Arthur Edwin Pickering

Regimental Number: 276149
Railway Construction Company, Royal Engineers

born: about 1876 - died: 19 November 1918

Sapper Arthur Edwin Pickering, born about 1876 in Deptford, London, was the son of John Turner Pickering and his wife, Annette.¹ John was born about 1840 in Newington, Surrey and, in 1891 and his wife, Annette, was born Annette Rolls in about 1843 in Camberwell, Surrey. John and Annette were married on 1 May 1866 at St George Camberwell in Southwark. They had six children: Percy (born about 1868), Mabel (born about 1871),² Henry R. (born about 1873), Elsie Pickering (born about 1874), Arthur E Pickering and John Pickering (born about 1878). John worked most of his life as a banker's clerk or accountant.

In 1891, Arthur was living with the whole family at 70 Tressilian Road, St Paul Deptford, Greenwich, where he was working as an architect's clerk.³ In 1901, only John and Mabel were living with their parents – still at the same address in St Paul Deptford.⁴

Arthur married Florence Amy Gerrett on 27 June 1908 at St Mark's, South Norwood, London.⁵ In 1911, they were living at 23 Lincoln Road, South Norwood and Arthur was working as an architect. They later had at least two children – a daughter, Eileen Florence Louie, born on 18 March 1913 in Croydon⁶ and a son, Albert C., born in the spring of 1919 in Hampshire. Arthur never knew his son, who was born months after his death.

When he enlisted in 1915, Arthur was 39 years old and an architect's assistant.⁷ He enlisted in Shoreditch, London, as a Gunner in the Royal Field Artillery (East Ham Brigade) on 29 May 1915. He and his wife were living at 9A Bourdon Road, Anerley, London. He was 5' 8" tall and had a fair complexion, blue eyes and brown hair.

He served at home until 3 July 1916 when he joined the British Expeditionary Force and left for France. He was wounded on 23 April 1917. At the time he was serving with A. Sub Section, C. Battery of the 79th Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery. About this time his wife moved to Valencia Road, West Worthing in Sussex. In May of that year, he was serving with the No. 1 Survey Company Transportation of Troops Depot, Boulogne.

On 6 June 1917 he transferred to the Royal Engineers and became a Sapper. A few months later, on 25 August 1917, he was appointed Lance Corporal. By June 1918, he was an Acting Corporal and by then had also earned a "Superior" rating as an architectural draughtsman in the Trade and Special Qualifications. He qualified as a draughtsman (railway) and served with the 5th Railway Company (Survey and Reconnaissance Section) of the Royal Engineers.

He was with the Railway Construction Company when he was admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 16 November 1918.⁸ He died there three days later of influenza and was buried the following day at the Auberchicourt British



A E Pickering in Auberchicourt Cemetery
(Source: Author)

Military Cemetery (Grave 19. Row B. Plot 1) with the Canadian chaplain W. O'Neill Fisher presiding. His wife was notified of his death at the address of her brother, Charles Gerrett, 40 Auckland Road, South Norwood, London.

Sixty-seven people (soldiers and civilians) died at the 1st CCCS in November 1918. The work of the Centre had shifted from being primarily surgical to medical, to deal with the influenza pandemic.⁹ Influenza accounted for most deaths at the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station after the Armistice. In spite of the horrific number of soldiers killed in World War I, the influenza pandemic, which affected the whole world and scourged Europe in 1918-1919, killed more people than the war itself.¹⁰

Auberchicourt, a village about 12 kilometres to the east of Douai, was occupied by Commonwealth troops in October 1918.¹¹ The Auberchicourt British Cemetery, which is just west of the village, was set up at the end of October and was used until February 1919 while the 6th, 23rd and 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Stations were located nearby.

Arthur was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).¹²

After the war, Florence was living at 155 Freshfield Road, Brighton, Sussex.¹³ She received the monies owing to him by the army after his death.¹⁴

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¹ "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 7 January 2015), entry for Arthur E. Pickering, Registration district: Greenwich, ED, institution, or vessel: 43, Piece: 502, Folio: 101, Page Number: 54

² "1881 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 April 2015), entry for Arthur E. Pickering, Registration district: Greenwich, Sub-registration district: St Paul Deptford, ED, institution, or vessel: 61, Piece: 713, Folio: 103, Page Number: 48

³ "1891 England Census," entry for Arthur E. Pickering

⁴ 1901 census "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 April 2015), entry for John S. Pickering, Registration district: Greenwich, Sub-registration district: Deptford South, ED, institution, or vessel: 21, Piece: 535, Folio: 129, Page Number: 19, Household schedule number: 98

⁵ "British Army WWI Service Records, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 April 2015), entry for Arthur Edwin Pickering, Regimental Number: RH RFA805407, Form Title: Territorial Force Attestation

⁶ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 2 April 2015), entry for Eileen F L Pickering, Registration district: Croydon, Inferred County: Surrey, Volume: 2a, Page: 598; "British Army WWI Service Records, 1914-1920," entry for Arthur Edwin Pickering

⁷ "British Army WWI Service Records, 1914-1920," entry for Arthur Edwin Pickering. Unless otherwise noted, all information about his military career comes from these service records.

⁸ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Library and Archives Canada, (records accessed 2013 & 2015), Record Group 9, series IIC10, volume 4556, Record number 724

⁹ "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," Library and Archives Canada (http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINND&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G: accessed 15 December 2014)

¹⁰ "The Influenza Pandemic of 1918," (<https://virus.stanford.edu/uda/>: accessed 3 February 2015)

¹¹ "Auberchicourt British Cemetery," Commonwealth War Graves Commission (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/59509/AUBERCHICOURT%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>: accessed 3 February 2015)

¹² "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 April 2015), entry for Arthur E. Pickering

¹³ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," entry for Arthur E. Pickering

¹⁴ "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 30 March 2015), entry for Arthur Edward Pickering