

Rifleman Albert John Smith[©]

Regimental number: S/33682

1st Rifle Brigade, 4th Division

born: 1887–died: 22 April 1918

Private Albert John Smith was born in 1887 in Stafford, Staffordshire, the son of Albert Sr. and Mary (née Tarlington) Smith. Both parents were born in Stafford—Albert Sr. in about 1840 and Mary the following year.¹ They married on 31 July 1870 in Marston, St Leonard, Staffordshire² and would have nine children:³

- Arthur (born in 1871)⁴
- Agnes (born in 1873)⁵
- Ada Minnie (born in 1877)⁶
- Lilian Polly (born in 1879)⁷
- Lizzie (born in 1881)⁸
- Julia (born in 1883)⁹
- Albert John (born in 1887)¹⁰
- Bertram (born in 1889)¹¹
- Gertrude (born in 1892)¹²

Three children died before 1911, according to that year's census.¹³ Arthur died in 1899¹⁴ and Lizzie in 1910,¹⁵ but it was not possible to confirm a third death.

Just after their marriage, Albert Sr. and Mary were living with Mary's parents, William and Mary Tarlington, at 29 Castle Street in Stafford;¹⁶ Albert Sr. was a house painter. Ten years later he and Mary had moved to 2 South Street, still in Stafford.¹⁷ In 1891, the family had grown and their eight children were living at home. Three were now in the workplace: Arthur was a labourer, Agnes, a domestic servant and Ada, a boot fitter.¹⁸ Their last child, Gertrude, was born the following year.

In 1901, the family was at the same address, but only five of the children were living at home. Julia had joined her sister as a boot fitter.¹⁹ Also living on South Street were Albert Sr. and Mary's daughter-in-law, Ellen Smith, and her two children, Albert (age 2) and Arthur H. (age 10 months). Ellen had married the eldest Smith son, Arthur, in 1896 in Stafford;²⁰ it is likely that Arthur died in Stafford on 4 November 1899.²¹

In 1911, the family is shown in the census as living at 3 South Street—next door to their previous address.²² Albert Sr. was now a master house painter and Bertram had become a mechanic. A granddaughter, Elizabeth Hodgkins (age 11 months), was also living with the family. Elizabeth's mother was Lizzie Smith, who had married Edward John Hodgkins (known as John) in 1902. They had four children—three sons and a daughter²³—before Lizzie died in 1910.²⁴ While their daughter was living with her grandparents, John, a railway engine stoker, and their three sons were living as boarders in the home of Alfred Allsop at 8 Railway Street, Stafford. Two years later, John remarried, wedding Frances Bailey in 1913.²⁵

Albert was not living with his parents in 1911; he had founded his own family and was living with his wife's mother, Henrietta Sanders, at 74 Victoria Road in Longton, Stoke-on-Trent.²⁶ Albert had married Minnie Sanders (born on 8 December 1886)²⁷ in 1909²⁸ and, by 1911 they had two children:

- Gertrude (born on 19 September 1909)²⁹
- Albert John (born in 1911 but sadly died before the end of the year)³⁰

They had three more children before Albert enlisted:

- Julia (born on 13 February 1912)
- Bertram (born on 7 September 1914)
- Dorothy Mary (born on 20 October 1915)³¹

Their last child, Albert John, was born on 22 January 1918, just months before Albert died.³²

In December 1913, Albert had the sad task of cutting down the body of a neighbour who had committed suicide.³³ John Frederick Todd, 74 years of age and living at 1 South Street, died on 2 December. He had been in poor health and, while his wife was out for a short period, he hanged himself from a hook in the ceiling of his lobby. Mrs. Todd called Albert to assist. The inquest, held a few days later, pronounced a verdict of “suicide while temporarily insane”—probably caused by his illness. The inquest foreman expressed sympathy to the widow and described them as a “Darby and Joan” couple—a proverbial phrase for a loving, old-fashioned and virtuous married couple, content to share a quiet life of mutual devotion.³⁴ Perhaps John Todd was not as content as others thought.

In December 1916,³⁵ Albert enlisted in Stafford as a rifleman in the 1st Battalion of the Rifle Brigade.³⁶ Before enlisting he was working with his father as a house painter. It appears that he did not go to France until the beginning of 1918—just four months before his death.³⁷

In April 1918, his battalion was stationed in Lannoy, near Roubaix, in northern France.³⁸ The day before he was injured, there was intermittent shelling of bridges throughout the day as his battalion, with others, prepared for an attack the following morning. At 5 a.m. on 22 April, the battalion’s artillery put down a heavy barrage and the infantry advanced. Initially, the enemy’s response was not as intense as expected, but it increased during the day. It is likely that Albert was injured by that response. He was probably one of 100 other ranks (non-officers) injured during the month.

He was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 22 April with shrapnel wounds to his abdomen and right arm. He died the same day and was buried the following day in Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 1, Row D, Grave No. 18) with the Canadian chaplain Robert K. Lambert presiding.³⁹

The Pernes British Military Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when No. 1 and No. 4 CCCS came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.⁴⁰ On 22 April, 110 soldiers were admitted to No. 1 CCCS and, in the whole month of April, there were 46 deaths at this CCCS.⁴¹



LATE RIFLEMAN SMITH.

Mr. and Mrs. A. Smith, of South-street, Stafford, have received official intimation that their son, Rifleman Albert John Smith, of the Rifle Brigade, died of wounds received in action in France on April 22. The deceased, who was 31 years of age, leaves a wife and five children. Before the war he was working for his father as a house-painter. He joined the Army in December, 1916, and had been in France about four months.

Announcement of death of Rifleman Smith

Source: *British Newspapers, Findmypast*

The chaplain sent a note to a friend, identified only as “Ted,” living at 72 Marston Road, Stafford.⁴² This was probably Edward Cox (born in Staffordshire in 1833), a goods foreman for the Great Northern Railway and Albert’s brother-in-law.⁴³ Albert’s sister Julia had married Edward Cox at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Stafford in 1912.⁴⁴

Albert was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).⁴⁵ He is also remembered on the cenotaph war memorial dedicated to the men of Meir and Longton.⁴⁶

After the war, Albert’s wife and children were living at 12 North Castle Road in Stafford.⁴⁷ Two years after the end of the war, Minnie remarried, wedding Joseph Bryan in Stoke-on-Trent.⁴⁸ In 1939, Minnie, by then widowed for a second time, was living at 13 Colclough Road, Meir in Stoke-on-Trent. Two of Albert’s children were living with her.⁴⁹ Minnie probably died in 1966, still in Stoke-on-Trent.⁵⁰

Little is known about his children after the war. **Gertrude** married Frank Amson, an oven worker in a pottery, in 1933⁵¹ and, in 1939, they were living at 90 Station Road in Stoke-on-Trent, with one son, Ronald.⁵²

Little information can be provided about Albert’s siblings—Smith is a common name and it is difficult to connect any information found to Albert’s family. The exception is Arthur, Albert’s eldest brother.

Arthur married Ellen Pell in 1896 in Stafford.⁵³ In 1901, Ellen and her two sons were living with Arthur’s parents.⁵⁴ Ellen was a widow—Arthur had probably died on 4 November 1899.⁵⁵ Their two sons were born in Eastbourne, Sussex: Albert in 1899⁵⁶ and Arthur in about June 1900.⁵⁷

In 1921, Albert’s father was still living at 3 South Street with his granddaughter, Elizabeth.⁵⁸ Elizabeth’s brother Alfred was with their father and his new wife, Frances, in Staffordshire.⁵⁹

Albert’s father died in 1925,⁶⁰ having outlived Albert’s mother Mary, who died on 21 April 1919, at the age of 69. Her death was announced in the *Staffordshire Newsletter* a few days later.⁶¹ She died one year less a day after her son Albert. Two years later, the family put a memorial announcement in the same newspaper acknowledging Mary’s death and that of her son, Albert:

Sadly we miss them and try not to grieve,
A little while longer and we too must leave;
To meet them we love on that beautiful shore
Where parting is unknown and life’s evermore.⁶²

© 2023 BIFHSGO

¹ “1891 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 24 August 2023), entry for Albert Smith, Registration district: Stafford, Sub-registration district: Stafford, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 17, Piece: 2138, Folio: 69

² “Staffordshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754–1900,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 21 August 2023), entry for Mary Tarlington, Page number: 08

-
- ³ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 August 2023), entry for Mary Smith, Registration district: Stafford, Registration district number: 461, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 27, Piece: 16360
- ⁴ "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 24 August 2023), entry for Smith, Henry, Registration district: Stafford, Volume: 06B, Page: 20. It is assumed that this is the birth record for Arthur. There were no other records for a Smith, son of Tarlington (misspelled in this record as Tartlington), in that time period. Arthur's marriage in 1896 is recorded as Arthur Henry.
- ⁵ "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 24 August 2023), entry for Smith, Agnes, Registration district: Stafford, Volume: 06B, Page: 27
- ⁶ "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 24 August 2023), entry for Smith, Ada Miniie, Registration district: Stafford, Volume: 06B, Page: 9
- ⁷ "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 24 August 2023), entry for Smith, Lilian Polly, Registration district: Stafford, Volume: 06B, Page: 19
- ⁸ "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 24 August 2023), entry for Smith, Lizzie, Registration district: Stafford, Volume: 06B, Page: 1. Lizzie was also known later in life as Elizabeth.
- ⁹ "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 24 August 2023), entry for Smith, Julia, Registration district: Stafford, Volume: 06B, Page: 4
- ¹⁰ "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 24 August 2023), entry for Smith, Albert John, Registration district: Stafford, Volume: 06B, Page: 17
- ¹¹ "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 24 August 2023), entry for Smith, Bertram, Registration district: Stafford, Volume: 06B, Page: 1
- ¹² "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 24 August 2023), entry for Smith, Gertrude, Registration district: Stafford, Volume: 06B, Page :18
- ¹³ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry*, entry for Mary Smith
- ¹⁴ "Staffordshire, England, Church of England Birth, Marriage and Death Indexes, 1837–2017," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 24 August 2023), entry for Arthur Smith
- ¹⁵ "England & Wales Deaths 1837–2007," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 16 September 2023), entry for Elizabeth Hodgkins, District: Stafford, County: Staffordshire, Volume: 6B, Page: 5
- ¹⁶ "1871 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 August 2023), entry for Albert Smith, Registration district: Stafford, Sub-registration district: Castle Church, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 9, Household schedule number: 133, Piece: 2819, Folio: 160, Page: 28
- ¹⁷ "1881 England, Wales & Scotland Census," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 22 August 2023), entry for Albert E Smith, Registration district: Stafford, Sub-registration district: Stafford, Archive reference: RG11, Piece: 2688, Folio: 13, Page: 18
- ¹⁸ "1891 England Census," *Ancestry*, entry for Albert Smith. Ada's occupation is difficult to decipher. However, in 1901, she was a boot fitter, so this is likely to be her occupation in 1891.
- ¹⁹ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 11 January 2023), entry for Albert Smith, Registration district: Stafford, Sub-registration district: Stafford, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 14, Piece: 2570, Folio: 86, Page: 17, Household schedule number: 111
- ²⁰ "England & Wales Marriages 1837–2005," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 13 September 2023), entry for Arthur Henry Smith, District: Stafford, County: Staffordshire, Volume: 6B, Page: 42
- ²¹ "Staffordshire, England, Church of England Birth, Marriage and Death Indexes, 1837-2017," *Ancestry*, entry for Arthur Smith
- ²² "1911 England Census," *Ancestry*, entry for Mary Smith
- ²³ "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 16 September 2023), entry for Hodgkins, Alfred Bertram, Registration district: Stafford, Volume: 06B, Page: 8; "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 16 September 2023), entry for Hodgkins, William John, Registration district: Stafford, Volume: 06B, Page: 6; "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed

-
- 16 September 2023), entry for Hodgkins, Edwin, Registration district: Stafford, Volume: 06B, Page: 20 and "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 16 September 2023), entry for Hodgkins, Elizabeth Mary, Registration district: Stafford, Volume: 06B, Page: 8
- ²⁴ "England & Wales Deaths 1837–2007," *Findmypast*, entry for Elizabeth Hodgkins
- ²⁵ "England & Wales Marriages 1837–2005," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 13 September 2023), entry for Edward J Hodgkins, District: Stafford, County: Staffordshire, Volume: 6B, Page: 3
- ²⁶ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 21 August 2023), entry for Albert John Smith, Registration district: Stafford, Registration district number: 361, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 18, Piece: 16605
- ²⁷ "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 15 September 2023), entry for Albert J. Smith, Line number: 7, Sub-schedule Number: 7, Enumeration district: Onot, Borough: Stoke-On-Trent, Registration district: 360/5
- ²⁸ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 November 2023), entry for Albert John Smith, Registration district: Edmonton, Inferred county: Middlesex, Volume: 6b, Page: 353
- ²⁹ "UK, World War I Pension Ledgers and Index Cards, 1914–1923," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 August 2023), entry for Albert J Smith
- ³⁰ "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 24 August 2023), entry for Smith, Lizzie, Registration district: Stoke-upon-Trent, Volume 06B, Page 273; "Staffordshire, England, Church of England Birth, Marriage and Death Indexes, 1837–2017," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 September 2023), entry for Albert John Smith
- ³¹ "UK, World War I Pension Ledgers and Index Cards, 1914–1923," *Ancestry*, entry for Albert J Smith
- ³² "1939 Register," *Findmypast*, entry for Minnie Bryan
- ³³ "British newspapers," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 14 September 2023), entry for Albert Smith, *Staffordshire Newsletter*, 6 December 1913
- ³⁴ "Darby and Joan," *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darby_and_Joan: accessed 28 August 2023)
- ³⁵ "British newspapers," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 22 August 2023), entry for Albert Smith, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 11 May 1918
- ³⁶ "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 21 August 2023), entry for Albert John Smith
- ³⁷ "British newspapers," *Findmypast*, entry for Albert Smith, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 11 May 1918
- ³⁸ "1 Battalion, Rifle Brigade War Diaries," *The National Archives* (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/: accessed 27 August 2023), Date: 1914 Nov–1916 Jan, Reference: WO 95/1497
- ³⁹ "Search Name Index," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 4 July 2022), entry for Smith A. J.
- ⁴⁰ "Pernes British Military Cemetery" *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/11600/PERNES%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>: accessed 13 January 2015)
- ⁴¹ "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/>: accessed 15 December 2014)
- ⁴² "Search Name Index," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa*, entry for Smith A. J.
- ⁴³ "1921 Census of England & Wales," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 13 September 2023), entry for Edward Cox, Registration district: Stafford, Registration district number: 357, Sub-district: Stafford, Sub-district number: 1, Enumeration district number: 21, Archive series: RG 15, Piece number: 12502, Schedule number: 114, District reference: RD 357 RS 1 ED 21, 22
- ⁴⁴ "Staffordshire, England, Church of England Birth, Marriage and Death Indexes, 1837–2017," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 September 2023), entry for Julia Smith
- ⁴⁵ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 15 September 2023), entry for Albert J Smith

-
- ⁴⁶ “Men Of Meir and Longton Cenotaph War Memorial,” *Roll of Honour* (<http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Staffordshire/Longton.html>: accessed 15 September 2023), entry for Albert John Smith
- ⁴⁷ “UK, World War I Pension Ledgers and Index Cards, 1914–1923,” *Ancestry*, entry for Albert J Smith
- ⁴⁸ “England & Wales Marriages 1837–2005,” *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 13 September 2023), entry for Minnie Smith, District: Stoke upon Trent, County: Staffordshire, Volume: 6b, Page: 608
- ⁴⁹ “1939 Register,” *Findmypast*, entry for Minnie Bryan
- ⁵⁰ “England & Wales Deaths 1837–2007,” *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 29 January 2023), entry for James Leach, District: Stoke on Trent, County: Staffordshire, Volume: 9B, Page: 443
- ⁵¹ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916–2005,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 September 2023), entry for Gertrude Smith, Registration district: Stoke upon Trent, Inferred county: Staffordshire, Volume: 6b, Page: 527
- ⁵² “1939 England and Wales Register,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 14 June 2023), entry for Gertrude Amson, Line number: 5, Schedule number: 17, Sub-schedule number: 2, Enumeration district: Onov, Registration district: 360/5
- ⁵³ “England & Wales Marriages 1837–2005,” *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 13 September 2023), entry for Arthur Henry Smith, District: Stafford, County: Staffordshire, Volume: 6B, Page: 42
- ⁵⁴ “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry*, entry for Mary Smith
- ⁵⁵ “Staffordshire, England, Church of England Birth, Marriage and Death Indexes, 1837–2017,” *Ancestry*, entry for Arthur Smith
- ⁵⁶ “GRO online index (birth),” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 24 August 2023), entry for Smith, Albert, Registration district: Eastbourne, Volume: 02B, Page: 86
- ⁵⁷ “GRO online index (birth),” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 24 August 2023), entry for Smith, Arthur Harry, Registration district: Eastbourne, Volume: 02B, Page: 89; “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry*, entry for Mary Smith
- ⁵⁸ “1921 Census of England & Wales,” *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 13 September 2023), entry for Elizabeth Mary Hodgkins, Registration district: Stafford, Registration district number: 357, Sub-district: Stafford, Sub-district number: 1, Enumeration district number: 31, Archive series: RG 15, Piece number: 12509, Schedule number: 126, District reference: RD 357 RS 1 ED 31
- ⁵⁹ “1921 Census of England & Wales,” *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 13 September 2023), entry for Edward John Hodgkins, Registration district: Stafford, Registration district number: 357, Sub-district: Stafford, Sub-district number: 1, Enumeration district number: 31, Archive series: RG 15, Piece number: 12509, Schedule number: 81, District reference: RD 357 RS 1 ED 31
- ⁶⁰ “England & Wales Government Probate Death Index 1858–2019,” *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 20 September 2023), entry for Albert Smith
- ⁶¹ “British newspapers,” *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 22 August 2023), entry for Albert Smith, *Staffordshire Newsletter*, 23 April 1921
- ⁶² “British newspapers,” *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 22 August 2023), entry for Albert Smith, *Staffordshire Newsletter*, 26 April 1919