

Alfred William Smith



My great grandfather Alfred William Smith was born on 15 November 1884 in Dengie Essex. He was the son of William and Clara (nee Wilsher).

There is some discrepancy about his Christian name on his baptism record, as his parents could not agree on it and he was baptised as Arthur. Legally he was registered as Alfred and this is the name he used. Just to add to the confusion, my great grandmother always called him Joe. To his grandchildren and great grandchildren he was grandad Miff.

The family moved to Grays and on 12th August 1902 he was apprenticed to John Peartree, of 'The Company of Watermen and Lightermen of the River Thames'.

He married Frances Rebecca Saxby at the Parish Church in Margate on 3rd May 1906. Their first two children Alfred and Elsie were both born in Kent, but by 1911 the family were living at 131 High Street, Grays.



Frances Rebecca Smith
(nee Saxby)

A second son Arthur was born in Grays but sadly died at home aged 2 on 5th March 1913. Cause of death was measles and pneumonia.

Two more daughters were born, Rosina in 1915 and Gladys (Billie) in 1922.

Alfred enlisted on 19th October 1915 in the Royal Engineers, Regimental No. 135430. He was aged 31 and left Frances at home caring for their three young children. He saw action in France and was promoted firstly to a corporal and then in 1917 to a sergeant. Postcards which he sent from France still survive.

Happily he came through the war unscathed and was demobbed in April 1919. He returned to the Thames as a waterman and worked on barges until he retired.

Alfred died in Tilbury Hospital on 16th September 1955, and Frances later died in Orsett Hospital on 25th May 1973.

They are buried together in the Churchyard of St. Peter and St. Paul, High Street, Grays.

Story provided by Alfred's great granddaughter, Pam Purkiss.



The postcards Alfred sent from France during WWI.



Alfred in his later years