



Alfred Leete

Alfred Ambrose Chew Leete was born in the small farming village of Thorpe Achurch, Northamptonshire. His parents, John and Harriet Leete, wanted a better life for their children, so chose Weston-super-Mare for its good air and health-giving properties. They bought two hotels in Madeira Road near the seafront: *Sutherland House* and *Addington House*.

Alfred attended Kingsholme School in Arundell Road (now a block of flats), one of many private schools in the town. From here he went to Weston Grammar School and then onto The School of Science and Art in Lower Church Road. This ornate building designed by Hans Price is now part of Weston College.

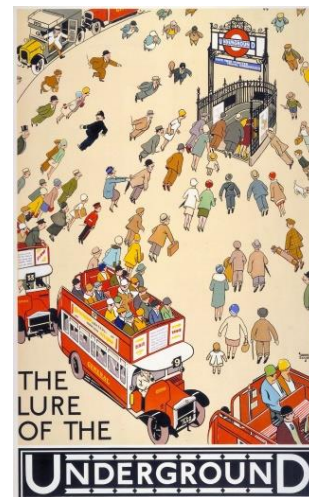
He then had an apprenticeship with a firm of Bristol architects, but was bored with the work. However, it did give him an opening to sell drawings to the *Bristol Magpie*, which set him on track to sell work to Fleet Street newspapers.



The former School of Science and Art © Fraser Darke

Alfred started earning money as an artist on the *Daily Graphic* aged only 16. However, this was not a sufficient income at this time, so he made extra money by working as a furniture designer. These early cartoons and designs were noticed by *Punch Magazine* and other journals, and he was soon in high demand in London. He became a regular illustrator for the *Tatler*, as well as contributing cartoons to humorous magazines such as *Punch*.

Alongside his magazine work, Leete also drew sketches advertising various local events and businesses in Weston. These included men's clothes shop *Cecil Walker*, which is still trading today. In the 1910s he began drawing posters advertising products such as *Bovril*, *Guinness* and *Rowntrees Chocolate*. This was in a time before television and internet advertising, so striking posters were a good way for businesses to get their messages across.



A poster advertising the London Underground © London Transport Museum

These posters were seen by a large audience on the London Underground, and so his fame grew. He also drew posters to promote using the underground as a quicker, cleaner mode of transport.

His domestic life at this time was fairly traditional – he married Edith Webb, in Weston in 1909 and they had two children. Betty, their first child, sadly died but John, born in 1915, followed his father to also become an artist.

One front cover which Alfred drew for *The London Opinion* was destined to change his fortunes. He created the picture in a single day, and it was published on 5 September 1914. It showed Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, pointing a finger and looking directly at the reader, saying underneath 'Your Country Needs You'.

This soon came to the notice of the War Office, the parliamentary recruiting officer changing the wording slightly:



The iconic 1914 Kitchener recruiting poster

The poster had a great impact, and encouraged many men to sign up and fight for their country. This famous image has been adapted many times. It was used by the USA when entering the First World War in 1917, with Uncle Sam as the character. It was also used during the Second World War, and more recently in various advertising campaigns.

Alfred Leete didn't ignore the call to fight for his country. He joined the army and fought alongside many other famous artists, sculptors and musicians in the aptly named 'Artists Regiment'.

He also wrote and illustrated two satirical cartoons which probably helped to keep public morale high. *Schmidt the Spy* was a German spy who kept getting things terribly wrong, while *Bosch the Soldier* depicted an incompetent German soldier.



The Artists' Rifles (Leete is second from the right in the second row)
© courtesy of Weston Library

After the war Leete remained in London. He moved in circles his farming parents couldn't have imagined – mixing with ex-soldier artist friends, and going to various fashionable clubs for artists and musicians. In 1928 he became the president of 'The Sketch Club'. He also continued to produce successful advertising posters (still no television or internet!) and hand-drawn Christmas cards, which must have been highly prized.

In 1933, during a holiday to Italy, Leete was taken ill. He returned to London, where he died. However, he hadn't forgotten his love of Weston-super-Mare and had asked to be buried in his 'home' town.



Alfred Leete's blue plaque © Weston Town Council

Alfred Leete's grave can be seen in Milton Road Cemetery, next to that of his parents. It is elaborately decorated with distinctive lettering, particularly the formation of the letter 'T'. In 2018 Weston Town Council unveiled a blue plaque on his former home in Madeira Road, honouring his contribution to history.

