

BRYAN MORTIMER STANCOMB



22nd February 1917

1897-1917 Aged 19

Private 41317, 16th (Service) Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, 1st Bradford Pals.

Bryan Stancomb was the first member of the BGS Officer Training Corps, founded in October 1914, to meet his death in the First World War. His parents were Walter Henry Stancomb, from Bristol, and Florence Maud Petty, from London. They seem to have met in Yorkshire, where they married in 1894. In 1911, Walter worked as 'Cashier' to William Lister and Co., at one time the largest silk manufacturer in the world; in the 1881 Census he was a silk spinner's clerk, making it likely that he worked for Lister for over thirty years. Florence studied art in London prior to moving to West Yorkshire. They lived on Farcliffe Road within a short walk of the magnificent Lister's Mill in Manningham. They had two children, Winifred and Bryan.

Bryan started at Bradford Grammar School in Form IV Classical in 1909, aged twelve. He would stay at the school until 1916 when he was nineteen. Although his father died in 1914, the family were well provided for and Bryan was able to remain at school to pursue his goal of a university place. He does not appear to have been a sportsman, although the training for the OTC will have taken up much of his free time from the start of 1915. Lieutenant Wykes, the Officer Commanding, later described him as a 'very popular and efficient member of our contingent, and one who always showed himself keen to do his best.' He was an occasional debater. At the end of 1915 he gained distinctions in two Higher Certificates, and the apex of his school career was when he secured a scholarship at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge. The College described him as 'a Classical Scholar of exceptional promise, with a marked gift of expression.'

Bryan entered Sidney Sussex College in 1916. However he did not matriculate. Whether he was called up or volunteered, and precisely when, is unknown as his records do not survive. His photo shows that he wore spectacles, but this was not sufficient for him to be assigned to a non-combatant role. He will have received twelve weeks' basic training and then further battle training at the 33rd Infantry Base Depot at Etaples in France. He was



posted to the 1st Bradford Pals, possibly joining them with a draft of 150 replacements in early October. In fact the Bradford character of the two Pals battalions was by this time being eroded as men from all over Yorkshire were assigned to them, many of them conscripts.

From October to early January 1917, the 1st and 2nd Pals were in and out of the line at Hebuterne, at the extreme northern end of the Somme front, before enjoying a six week respite out of the line after 6th January. The winter of 1916-17 was the coldest in living memory, and the men in the line suffered acutely. Clinging mud was succeeded by snow and bitter cold which froze the ground solid. Frostbite was a new hazard to add to sickness, colds and influenza. The school magazine reported in April 1917 that Stancomb 'had been on active service for some time and never complained, although he had been unwell all the time he was in the trenches.' Eventually he was sent to No.12 General Hospital in Rouen. The sister-in-charge wrote that he was 'very run down and seedy' and he was suffering from 'a bad poisoned leg.' In the days before antibiotic drugs this was a serious condition, and despite treatment it was impossible to save him. He died on 22nd February 1917, and he was buried in the St. Sever Cemetery Extension in the city's southern suburbs.



Acknowledgements:

The Stancomb family records were researched using Ancestry.com. The probate records Walter Henry Stancomb's effects were valued at £3217—in 2005 values this was around £180, 000 (<<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid>> accessed 14-1-2017). For Lister, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lister_Mills> (accessed 14-1-2017). Bryan's school record is in the Bradford Grammar School Annual Reports for 1909-10 to 1915-1916, and the *Bradfordian* for October, December 1915, March, December 1916 (consulted courtesy of the School archives). For the OTC, see N. Hooper, 'The centenary of the Bradford Grammar School OTC' (2015), placed in the School archives. Lieutenant Wykes' obituary of Stancomb is in the *Bradfordian* vol. xxi no. 127 April 1917, 33. The Sidney Sussex obituary is at <www.sid.cam.ac.uk/aboutus/greatwar/members/atoz/?letter=S> (accessed 29-12-2016). The conditions endured by the Bradford Pals and the arrival of the replacement drafts are described in D. Raw, *Bradford Pals*, (Pen and Sword; Barnsley, 2005), 239-247. A total of 385 Other Ranks joined the 1st Pals during October 1916, mainly Yorkshiremen, but no longer exclusively from Bradford. We know Stancomb was in No. 12 General Hospital from the Register of Soldiers Effects (<http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc=xBB3597&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&gss=angs-c&new=1&rank=1&msT=1&gsfn=Bryan%20Mortimer&gsfn_x=1&gsln=Stancomb&gsln_x=1&cpxt=1&cp=11&MSAV=1&uidh=6n6&pcat=39&h=361963&recoff=3%204%205&dbid=60506&indiv=1&ml_rpos=3>), however I have been unable to locate any record of his admission.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper (Nhooper1956@googlemail.com)