

# DOUGLAS BERNARD PRIESTLEY



31st July 1917

1897-1917 Aged 20

## Second Lieutenant 2nd-5th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers.

Douglas Priestley was born on 18th April 1897 at Bishop Monkton, near Ripon, where his father Jonathan was the vicar. His mother, Sarah Mary Roberts from Shipley, died when he was two. He was their only child. In 1905 Jonathan took a new wife, Ethel Stead, the daughter of a schoolmaster who lived in Shipley. He was now the Vicar of Thornton Steward near Bedale in Wensleydale. They went on to have three children, and Ethel was later accused of playing the step-mother's 'traditional role' in relation to Douglas. He attended Bradford Grammar School from 1906 to 1908. Since the School did not have a boarding house, he must have stayed with a relative, perhaps his step-mother's father. He had two years in the Junior School, showing promise in English subjects, History and French. Thereafter he went to Daventry Grammar School, in Northamptonshire, where his uncle Albert was the headmaster. A deep rift seems to have opened between Jonathan and his brother Albert, who later showed great animus to Ethel, while Douglas considered the Warden's Lodge at Daventry to be his home.

When Douglas left school he became a bank clerk. When the war began he was seventeen. He must have been eager for adventure for when he enlisted in July 1915 he gave his age as nineteen, when he was in reality a year younger. He served with the 8th Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment, gaining promotion to Lance Corporal, before he successfully applied for a commission. On 25th February 1916 he commenced the course in an Officer Training Battalion at Cambridge, and he was then posted to his preferred unit, the 22nd Local Reserve Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers which was stationed in north Shropshire. The reasons behind this choice are unknown. From this battalion Douglas was posted to the 2nd/5th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, which had been at the front since May 1915, part of 55th Division.



Douglas Priestley met his death on the first day of the Third Battle of Ypres. The 2/5th went forward at 8 a.m. as part of the second wave, advancing north-east from Wieltje towards St. Julien. Although they shook out into artillery formation, they suffered heavily from machine-gun fire and were estimated to have lost half their strength by the time they reached the Black Line, the first objective, from which they were to advance to the Green Line. Strong German counter-attacks drove them back to the Black Line. Of nineteen officers who went into action, eighteen were out of action by the afternoon. Priestley was one of three who were known to be dead. His body was not recovered for burial and his name is on the Menin Gate in Ypres.

Following his death there was a tussle over his estate. His father had died in 1916 and his step-mother made a claim as his dependent, which was vehemently denied by his uncle. Douglas had nominated as his legatee one Minnie Nicholls, who lived at the Warden's Lodge in Daventry, with whom he had possibly formed an amorous relationship.



### **Acknowledgements:**

For further information, contact the author Nick Hooper (Nhooper1956@googlemail.com). This biography will be up-dated in August.