

# FRANK BEECH



9th October 1917

1897-1917 Aged 20

## Lance Corporal 18/1096, 1/8th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment.

Frank Beech was born in Hunslet in south Leeds in the summer of 1897, the eldest surviving child of Charles Henry Beech and Harriet Thickett. They both lived in the industrial Holbeck area, where Charles's father worked at an iron foundry and Harriet was a dressmaker. They married in 1894. Charles worked as a local government clerk but he later took employment with a wool merchant. Some time after 1901 the family moved to Baildon where Charles became cashier to a wool merchant. Frank went to Bradford Grammar School for little more than a year in the years 1910-1912, in Form 5th Modern Lower. What he did after school is unknown, but he was later associated with the Rosse Street Baptist Church in Shipley.

When the war started Frank did not immediately enlist, but probably early in 1915 he joined the 2nd Bradford Pals although he was only 17. He went to Egypt at the end of 1915, then served in France. He was present at Serre on 1st July 1916 where he was wounded in the face and shoulder. After recovering from his wounds, Frank did not return to the Pals but was instead posted to the 1/8th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, the 2nd Leeds Rifles. In company with Territorial battalions from Leeds, Bradford and Harrogate, this formed 146th Brigade, 49th West Riding Division. On 21/22nd July the battalion suffered severely from a bombardment near the Belgian coast with a new type of gas shell, known as 'mustard gas'. This put 750 officers and men out of action of whom more than 400 returned to Britain. The 1/8th Battalion had to be rebuilt with more than 700 reinforcements, and it was probably during this process that Beech arrived and was posted to 'A' Company. The battalion not surprisingly was described as 'raw' at the start of September. After three weeks of training and practice attacks, described as 'exceedingly valuable', the battalion was committed to the attack on Passchendaele Ridge planned for 9th October.



The six-mile march to the assembly positions was carried out in near impossible conditions, in pitch darkness and torrential rain, in single file along a narrow duckboard track. The 1/8th Battalion was third to move off and took twelve hours to get into position, the rear company reaching the start line only five minutes before zero hour at 5.20am. It was on the left of the brigade, with Beech's 'A' Company in the second wave. The ground was a quagmire and a swamp-like stream had to be crossed, while the barrage was inadequate. In spite of these 'almost insuperable difficulties' the battalion managed to advance about 300 yards under heavy machine-gun and sniper fire before it had to dig in. Nearly all the officers and NCOs were put out of action, together with three hundred Other Ranks. Of these 46 were killed, among them Frank Beech. His body was not recovered, so his name is on the Memorial to the Missing at Tyne Cot Cemetery, and also on memorials in Baildon and Shipley in addition to B.G.S.



## Acknowledgements:

Frank Beech's photo is from the School Memorial Book with thanks to B.G.S. and the O.B.A. Ancestry.com was used to research the family, and the B.G.S. Annual Report for 1911 for Frank's education. There is a short entry for him at <http://www.theygavetheirtoday.com/baildon.html> (accessed 29th August 2017).

'Soldiers Died in the Great War' gives his unit at the time of his death as 1/8th West Yorkshire, but his number indicates he was originally in the 18th West Yorkshire. The Shipley Telegraph and Express reported his connection with Rosse St. Baptist Church 2nd June 1916, while on 14th July it reported he was wounded. An otherwise unknown 'Annie and John' paid for an in memoriam notice on the anniversary of his death in 1918. His name is on the Baildon Village War Memorial (Nurses Home), the Baildon Soldiers and Sailors Club memorial, the Parish Church of St. John the Evangelist memorial, and the Shipley Rosse St. Baptist Church memorial (P.D. Lodge, Bradford War Memorials).

For the events described in 1917 I used the 1/8th West Yorkshire War Diary [https://www.ancestry.co.uk/interactive/60779/43112\\_2795\\_2-00156?pid=471405&backurl=http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?\\_phsrc%3DKih1599%26\\_phstart%3DsuccessSource%26usePUBJs%3Dtrue%26indiv%3D1%26db%3DUKWarDiariesWW1%26gss%3Dangs-d%26new%3D1%26rank%3D1%26msT%3D1%26\\_F0007CF4%3DWest%2520Yorkshire%2520Regiment%26\\_F00088EF%3D1%26MSAV%3D1%26uidh%3D6n6%26pcat%3D39%26fh%3D4%26h%3D471405%26recoff%3D%26ml\\_rpos%3D5&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&\\_phsrc=Kih1599&\\_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true#?imgeld=43112\\_2795\\_2-00157](https://www.ancestry.co.uk/interactive/60779/43112_2795_2-00156?pid=471405&backurl=http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc%3DKih1599%26_phstart%3DsuccessSource%26usePUBJs%3Dtrue%26indiv%3D1%26db%3DUKWarDiariesWW1%26gss%3Dangs-d%26new%3D1%26rank%3D1%26msT%3D1%26_F0007CF4%3DWest%2520Yorkshire%2520Regiment%26_F00088EF%3D1%26MSAV%3D1%26uidh%3D6n6%26pcat%3D39%26fh%3D4%26h%3D471405%26recoff%3D%26ml_rpos%3D5&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=Kih1599&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true#?imgeld=43112_2795_2-00157), from which the quotations are taken. Also very useful, although concerned with different battalions of 146th Brigade, are Captain E.V. Tempest, History of the Sixth Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment. Volume I—1/6th Battalion (Bradford: Percy Lund Humphries and Co., 1921) and John Sheehan, Harrogate Terriers. The 1/5th (Territorial) Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment in the Great War (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2017).

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper, September 2017. For further information, contact [Nhooper1956@googlemail.com](mailto:Nhooper1956@googlemail.com). Biographies are posted on <http://www.bradfordgrammar.com/former-pupils/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>.