

WILLIAM VERNON CROWTHER WATSON



15th October 1917

1896-1917 Age 20

Second Lieutenant 10th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment.

William Watson's father Joseph was born in Lincolnshire in 1850 where his father was a garden labourer. Joseph's route to Yorkshire is an obscure one. By 1891 he was a book-keeper and cashier employed by Benjamin Crowther, in whose house he lived and whose daughter Polly he had married in 1886 although she was fourteen years younger than him. Crowther owned Brighton Mills, Gomersal, where he manufactured chemicals and dyes used in the woollen and worsted trades. In the 1890s Joseph was promoted to joint manager of the business, with Benjamin's son. Joseph and Polly continued to live with Benjamin senior in Swincliffe Villa, Birkenshaw; however, Joseph later became a director at a coal mine while the younger Benjamin Crowther took on the family business.

Joseph and Polly had three children: Annie, Joseph and lastly William, who was born 16th November 1896. Both boys went to Bradford Grammar School, Joseph from 1900 to 1909 and William from 1905 to 1915. William was a clever boy who came first or second in his form for his first three years. When he was promoted straight from Third Classical to Fifth Classical, he suffered something of a setback. However, he went into the Remove to study Science, and at the start of 1915 he won an Open Science Exhibition to St. John's College, Cambridge. He was not to take up this place. He joined the School O.T.C. at its formation in October 1914, and when he left B.G.S. the following July he went to a senior O.T.C. camp with a view to gaining a Commission. Although his commanding officer at school described him as a 'very satisfactory candidate' his eyesight without glasses was below standard, and the fact that he could not ride may also have counted against him. So on 22nd October 1915 he joined the 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, with which his elder brother Joseph had gone to the front as a Second Lieutenant in April. After several months in the reserve battalion, in September 1916 William was accepted for officer



training and he received his commission on 19th December.

Although William had requested that he be posted to the 2/6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, when he was sent to France in January 1917 he was despatched instead to the 10th Battalion. He fought with them during April and May at the Battle of Arras, when his battalion went 'over the top' once as well as driving off unsuccessful counter-attacks by the Germans. In October the 10/West Yorkshire moved into the Ypres sector to take its part in the Third Battle of Ypres. On 13th October it moved into the line north of Poelcapelle. During the next two days spent holding the front it several times came under heavy shellfire, one of these occasions being while the battalion was relieved in the early hours of 15th October. This was when Watson was killed. His body was buried, then later re-buried in Poelcapelle British Cemetery.

His brother Joseph transferred from the infantry to the Royal Engineers, having been a mining student, and survived the war.



Acknowledgements:

The photo is from the School memorial book, with thanks to the O.B.A. and to B.G.S. Most of the information comes from records available on Ancestry.com. For the school careers of J.C and W.V.C. Watson I used the B.G.S. Annual Reports from 1900-1915. William's Officer Personal Record in The National Archives is WO364-72436. The War Diary for the 10/West Yorks was used from <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/interactive/60779/43112_2004_1-00264?pid=609861&backurl=http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc%3DKih1751%26_phstart%3DsuccessSource%26usePUBJs%3Dtrue%26indiv%3D1%26db%3DUKWarDiariesWW1%26gss%3Dangs-d%26new%3D1%26rank%3D1%26msT%3D1%26_F0007CF4%3DWest%2520Yorkshire%26_F00088EF%3D10th%2520Battalion%26MSAV%3D1%26uidh%3D6n6%26pcat%3D39%26fh%3D186%26h%3D609861%26recoff%3D%26fsk%3DBEK58RUIgADtawADJKA-61-%26bsk%3D%26pgoff%3D%26ml_rpos%3D187&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=Kih1751&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true>

William was commemorated on the war memorials at Gomersal Methodist Chapel (picture uploaded <<https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/lifestory/4657123>> by Sarah Jones) and St. John's College, Cambridge. His grave is in Poelcapelle British Cemetery IX.C.5.

I used the British newspapers archive on findmypast.co.uk to research the company of Benjamin Crowther and his long career in local government. I have failed to find any notice of W.V.C. Watson's death.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper in October 2017. For further information contact Nhooper1956@googlemail.com. All biographies are posted on <<http://www.bradfordgrammar.com/former-pupils/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>>.