

# GEORGE MITCHELL SUTCLIFFE



**21st October 1917**

**1889-1917 Age 28**

## **Second Lieutenant 237th Siege Battery Royal Garrison Artillery.**

George Sutcliffe was the only surviving child of John Sutcliffe, a coal merchant who lived in Greetland near Halifax, and his wife Sarah. They married in 1883, but it was not until 1887 that their first child Samuel was born, followed by George on 15th September 1889. Both boys were given their mother's maiden name Mitchell. Tragedy struck the family when Samuel died in 1894 aged seven. When George was thirteen in 1902 he went to Bradford Grammar School for two years in Forms Fourth and Fifth Modern. His best subject was German, in which he came close to the top of his class. His daily journey to Bradford must have been a tiresome one, by tram and/or train. He left in July 1904 and went on to train as an architect. From June 1913 he was on the professional staff of the Inland Revenue in Halifax as an architect and surveyor.

George was still a single man aged 26 when he volunteered in early November 1915, enlisting in the artillery with service number 16407. His Medical Inspection shows he was tall for the era at 5 feet 11 1/2 inches. It was likely his knowledge of surveying which made him suitable for the Royal Garrison Artillery. He rapidly gained promotion to Bombardier, then to Corporal. He went to France with 103rd Siege Battery on 29th May 1916. This battery operated two of the largest calibre British heavy guns, 12-inch railway mounted howitzers, and throughout the Battle of the Somme it served at Gommecourt. Sutcliffe obviously impressed his superiors for in mid-November he was sent home on leave prior to joining an Officer Training Battalion at Trowbridge in mid-December. He received his commission in March 1917. Perhaps it was around this time that he began to call himself Mitchell in preference to George. He proceeded to France to join the recently arrived 237th Siege Battery, armed with four 6-inch howitzers pulled by Four-Wheel-Drive vehicles. He returned home in April to marry Constance Rothera who was from Hebden Bridge,



near Greetland. They set up home in a small terraced house on John Street, where Constance would remain until she remarried in 1930. There were no children of this marriage.

In September Sutcliffe was hospitalized at 8th General Hospital with Diarrhoea. On his recovery he went to a camp near Elverdinge, between Ypres and Poperinge. Throughout the Third Battle of Ypres German air raids posed a severe problem in the British rear area. On 21st October Sutcliffe was part of a group which was hit by a German bomb. One of them wrote home: 'a bomb dropped right alongside me ... I got off lightest. One was killed, and the other three [officers] including myself wounded, and all about the legs. But here is the worst point of it: we were in a rest camp on the way to some quiet part of the line!! Isn't that the irony of fate. Of course nobody heard the bomb coming - it pitched with a tremendous flash and crash - my legs gave way and I rolled over into a pool of blood. Then came the horrible part. Everyone round was hit and nobody could help each other. We lay there for about ten minutes. One I see has died of wounds. I knew he was pretty badly hit.' This was Sutcliffe who died of his wounds the same day, and he was buried in Gwalia Cemetery in a row with the other officer and two Gunners killed in the same incident. On his gravestone his age is given inaccurately as 27—Sutcliffe was 28 in September 1917.



### Acknowledgements:

Sutcliffe's photo is from the School Memorial Book, courtesy of B.G.S. and the O.B.A. The Sutcliffe and Rothera families were researched using Ancestry.com. George's school record is taken from the B.G.S. Annual Reports for 1903 and 1904. The main source for his service is his Officer Personal Record, The National Archives WO339-75939. His death was reported in the Yorkshire Evening Post and the Yorkshire Post, Saturday 27th October 1917, under the name Mitchell Sutcliffe (researched using findmypast.co.uk). The account of his death comes from a thread on the Great War Forum (<<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/topic/180771-237th-siege-bty-rga/>>, accessed 17-10-2017), as does the information relating to his burial. His grave is pictured at <<https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=pv&GRid=11404873&Pipi=2485165>>.

I learned about the Halifax tram network from <<http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~calderdalecompanion/mmr1400.html>>; about 103rd Siege Battery from <<http://www.wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/allied/view.php?uid=208829>>; about its weapons from <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BL\\_12-inch\\_railway\\_howitzer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BL_12-inch_railway_howitzer)>; and about 237th Siege Battery from <<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-royal-artillery-in-the-first-world-war/the-siege-batteries-of-the-royal-garrison-artillery/>> and <<http://www.wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/allied/rgartillery.php?pid=9623>>, all sites accessed 17-10-2017.

This biography was researched and written by Nick Hooper in October 2017. For further information, contact on [Nhooper1956@googlemail.com](mailto:Nhooper1956@googlemail.com). Versions of it will be posted on the wartime memories project and IWM Lives of the Great War. For all Old Bradfordians who died in the war, <http://www.bradfordgrammar.com/former-pupils/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>.