

ARTHUR GORDON COHEN



19th December 1915

Aged 22 1892/3-1915

Sergeant 2338 1/6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (Territorial Force).

Arthur Cohen was born in the winter of 1892-3 in the Manningham area of Bradford. His father was Maurice Cohen who was the son of a Jewish Russian immigrant Rosa, who settled in Liverpool where she had five children. Her husband's identity is unknown. Arthur's mother Rebecca Gordon, from Wolverhampton, was also from a Russian immigrant family. Maurice and Rebecca married in Birmingham in 1887, then lived at 18 St Paul's Road, Manningham, for over thirty years. Although the family were Jewish, they do not appear to have been part of either of the two main elements of Bradford's Hebrew community, the German businessmen who settled in the 1820s and 30s were already well-integrated into Bradford's commercial life, and those who fled Russia to escape persecution in the 1880s-90s .

By 1891 Maurice Cohen was in business as an optician, with premises at 11 Darley Street in the centre of Bradford. He may also have made scientific instruments, such as barometers. He had three sons. Marcus, born in 1889, became a partner in his father's business. Gerald, born in 1891, was a mining engineer in 1911, working in the northern Ontario silver rush. He subsequently settled in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where he was joined in 1929 by Marcus with his family and their widowed mother. Marcus would return to England where he died in north London in 1950, while Gerald moved on to California during the Depression, dying in 1980. Arthur was the youngest and the only one known to have attended the Bradford Grammar School, from 1902 until 1908. To judge from his total absence from the pages of The Bradfordian, he was neither a sportsman nor a distinguished scholar. He left when he was fifteen and attended Bradford Technical College to study for the textile industry. When war came in 1914, he soon enlisted (his number suggests this was in September) and joined many of his former school friends in 'C' Company of the 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment. He crossed with them to France on 16th April 1915, with 49th West Riding Division. From July the Division was stationed in the north-eastern part of the Ypres Salient. For much of the autumn



Photo courtesy of Bradford Grammar OBA

there were heavy rains which flooded the trenches. Only regular rotation between the front, support and reserve made the conditions endurable. The Division was promised it would leave the Salient before Christmas. The 6th Battalion entered the trenches for the final time on 15th December. On the 17th there was heavy shelling, in which Laurence Denison suffered a mortal wound, then all was quiet. At 5.15 a.m. on the 19th sentries heard a hissing sound which presaged a German gas assault. Another O.B. related what happened in a letter: '*The gas came over in the early morning in great green clouds. All telephone communications had been cut and so one of my platoon doubled off with the warning. Within three minutes, if that, the artillery had drawn an impassable curtain of fire across their line. Isolated [German] parties managed to struggle out and across but were mown down to a man by machine gun and rifle fire. At no point did they enter our trenches. ... Of those killed I think you will remember Gellert and Cohen. The boys are full of plans for Christmas.*' The Battalion had one hundred casualties, a quarter of those in the line, of whom eighteen were killed. Effective gas masks (the 'Tube' or P.H. Helmet) had recently been issued and the men were alert, so the deaths were caused by shellfire. O.B.s Gellert and Rickards fell in the same attack. Cohen was taken to the dressing station at Essex Farm, but had died and was buried there.

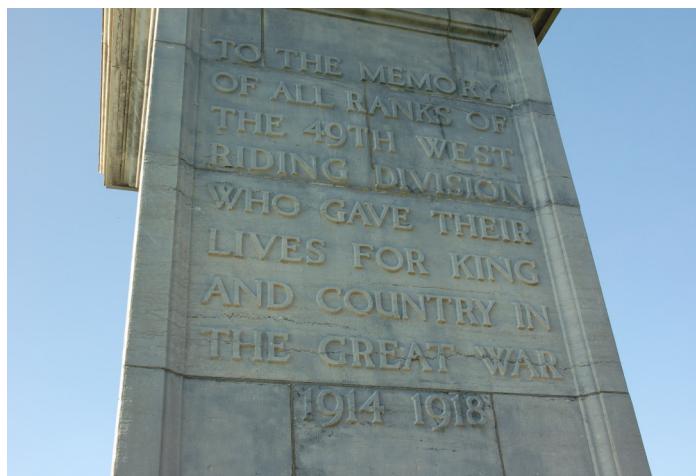


Acknowledgements:

Cohen's family history was reconstructed from documents available on Ancestry.com (census, birth, death and marriage registers, electoral registers, telephone directories, probate records, Canadian passenger lists, WW1 Medal Roll Index Cards, Register of Soldier's Effects). A post-1885 barometer engraved 'MAURICE COHEN & Co. Optician, 34 Iveygate, Bradford' was sold on http://www.scientificcollectables.com/page_barometers.htm. For Bradford's Jewish community, see <http://bradfordjewish.org.uk/a-history-of-jewish-bradford/>. For the circumstances of Cohen's death, see the War Diary of the 1/6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (http://interactive.ancestry.co.uk/60779/43849_2794_2-00271?pid=696564&backurl=http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db%3DUKWarDiariesWWI%26gss%3Dangs-d%26new%3D1%26rank%3D1%26msT%3D1%26msydd%3D18%26msydm%3D12%26msydy%3D1915%26_F0007CF4%3D1%252f6th%2BWest%2BYorkshire%26MSAV%3D0%26uidh%3D6n6%26gl%3D%26gst%3D%26hc%3D50%26fh%3D50%26fsk%3DBEHHYrglgADtawABEVs-61-&usePUB=true#?imageId=43849_2794_2-00271); EV Tempest, *History of the 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment*, 56-7 (provision of gas masks), 63-7 (the events of 15th-19th December); the letters of Arthur Kenneth Bloomer were kindly made available by the family (this excerpt taken from letter 30, page 32 of the transcript).

The photo of Cohen's grave was taken by the author.

Essex Farm Cemetery is at Boesinge, on the road to Dixmuide north of Ypres (Ieper). The cemetery also contains the memorial to the 49th West Riding Division (photo below taken by Robert Page),



The cemetery also contains the concrete Advanced Dressing Station, built in 1916 on the site of the original timber and elephant iron shelters dug into the Canal Bank. It was here that Lt. Col. John McRae composed his poem 'In Flanders Fields'.

Researched and composed by Nick Hooper, October 2015.

