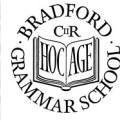


ARTHUR KENNETH BLOOMER



1st July 1916

1895-1916 Age 21

Private 2070, 1st-6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (Territorial Force)

Arthur Kenneth Bloomer, Ken to his family, was the youngest of five children of George C. Bloomer and Gertrude Browning, born in June 1895. Although his father was an iron merchant from the industrial West Midlands, George took a B.A. degree at London University and became a school master who served twenty-one years at Bradford Grammar until ill-health forced his retirement in 1912. He had a cheery good nature, a keen sense of humour and he was an entertaining speaker. His specialist subjects were woodwork and the artistic handicrafts.

Ken entered Bradford Grammar in 1906 when he was eleven years old. He passed through the Classical Forms, although he had to repeat his Fifth Form year. In his final year in Sixth Classical he gained two distinctions in his Higher Certificates, and early in 1914 he won a Hastings Scholarship to Queen's College, Oxford to study Classics. He was also a sportsman, a runner and a rugby player who was elected Captain of the XV in his final year. He scored nine tries in two very one-sided wins over Woodhouse Grove. Furthermore, he was a member of Horton (later Bradford) Rugby Club. In his final term his role in a performance of Sheridan's 'Critic' was praised as *'a delightful combination of earnest fatuity and ingenious simplicity.'*

Ken was due to go up to Oxford in October 1914 when the outbreak of war intervened. He at once joined the Bradford Grammar School Company ('C' Company) of the Territorials, the 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment. His experiences in the army are illuminated by the letters which he sent to his father in Worthing, and which his family have preserved. They reveal that Ken desperately wished to be an officer, although he resented the privileges brought by rank. Despite his father's lobbying, the battalion commander Colonel Wade, himself an Old Bradfordian, did not see him as officer material. Ken constantly asked his father for food parcels and for cigarettes. His battalion was part of the 49th West Riding Division, which went to Belgium in March 1915 and spent the second half of the year in the Ypres Salient. He described graphically the conditions in flooded trenches and the German gas attack of December, although he avoided this as he was on leave at



the time. Another letter relates his glee at being appointed to brew beer for the keeper of an *estaminet* (bar) behind the Somme front in the Spring of 1916. Naturally, he enjoyed the fruits of his labours.

On 1st July 1916 the 49th Division was allotted a supporting role in the 'Great Attack' and so missed the slaughter of 07.30 a.m. As they moved forward into support positions, the casualties they passed made it clear all was not well with the assault. In the afternoon the 6th Battalion received orders to attack the fortified village of Thiepval, a diversion to relieve pressure on the Ulster Division. They would have no artillery support. 'C' and 'D' Companies advanced across an open slope in full view of the German machine-gunners. A survivor described how *'Men sprang to the parapet, and were at once in the zone where machine gun bullets swept like rain. Here and there a man dropped back into the trench. Others fell in swathes on the parapet. A few struggled further ... the furthest would hardly make more than a few dozen paces. Again and again men climbed to the parapet and added their bodies to the pile.'* Ken's platoon commander, himself an Old Bradfordian, wrote to George Bloomer that Ken *'was absolutely one of the best fellows and a good soldier ... your son got shot through the heart so death would be instantaneous.'* He went into action with his great friends Hylbert Allum and Avon Moore, both of whom also died. The three friends were buried side by side, although later re-burial separated Ken from his pals.



Acknowledgements:

The photo of Ken Bloomer was given to me many years ago by an Old Bradfordian whose father had been his school-friend. The information about his family was researched using Ancestry.com. Details of Ken's school career came from The Bradfordian and the Annual Class Lists (from the School Archives). Permission to quote from his letters was kindly given by Martin Shaw, who transcribed them. The events of 1st July are related in Capt. E.V. Tempest, *History of the Sixth Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment. Vol I—1/6th Battalion*, (Bradford, 1921), p.95, and Martin Mace and John Greehan, *Slaughter on the Somme 1 July 1916. The Complete War Diaries of the British Army's Worst Day*, (Barnsley, 2013), p.195-9, 233. My thanks go to Tricia Platts of the Bradford World War One Group for sharing her copy of the letters with me, and her research on Allum and Moore. Bloomer features in the Yorkshire Rugby Football Union *Commemoration Book 1914-19 and Official Handbook. Season 1919-20*. The anonymous annotator(s) of two photos showed interest in Bloomer and his school fellows—one shows Horton/Bradford and Baildon rugby players in camp at Strensall in October 1914; the other shows the cast of the production of Sheridan's 'Critic'. Both are annotated with the names of those who died.



The three friends Avon Moore, Hylbert Allum and Ken Bloomer (in the army he was known as 'Jim') were originally buried together, as described in a letter to Allum's father from Frank Fairbank. The bodies were exhumed and re-buried, Moore and Allum in Connaught Cemetery, Bloomer a mile away in Lonsdale Cemetery. (The photo on the left courtesy of Tricia Platts, that on the right was taken by the author.)

Compiled and researched by Nick Hooper, June 2016
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