

# CHARLES RHODES



9th May 1915

1897-1915

## Gunner 26302, 135th Battery Royal Field Artillery.

The photograph of Charles Rhodes shows a very youthful figure in the uniform of the Royal Artillery. He enlisted in Bradford, and he must have been a volunteer in the early days of the war. His unit, the 135th Battery, was part of the Regular Army and crossed to France in late August 1914 as part of 32 Brigade Royal Field Artillery, attached to 4th Division. It was heavily engaged in the battles of 1914 from Le Cateau onwards. Rhodes landed in France on 2nd March 1915, which indicates that he was a recruit who had to pass through his basic training at Woolwich. Two months later he was dead. The battery was stationed near Ploegsteert Wood, south of Ypres in support of the infantry of 4th Division. They were equipped with six 18-pounder field guns. These were horse-drawn, hence Rhodes's uniform in the photo of riding breeches, bandolier and crop. These guns had a range of 6,500 yards so they were stationed close behind the front. At this stage they fired mainly air-bursting shrapnel shells intended as anti-personnel weapons.

From the War Diary it appears the front in this area was fairly quiet during March and April. The battery's main actions were short bombardments of German positions in support of the infantry—the British were critically short of shells at this time—and scattering German working parties who were observed behind the lines. After a spell in rest near Armentieres, in France, the battery moved north to Wieltje, where the Second Battle of Ypres was raging. The 9th May was the first day in support of the defenders of "Shell Trap Farm". Rhodes was reported "killed in action". The badge on his lower left sleeve in the photo is the skill-at-arms badge of a signaler, indicating that he helped direct fire on enemy targets, and this may explain how he met his death.



In his Speech Day address on 27th July 1915, Chairman of Governors Mr Harry Behrens named Rhodes as one of the nine old boys of the school who had died up to that time. Little more is known of Rhodes. His father, Charles Arthur Rhodes, was a Bradford wool merchant. Charles Rhodes had married Lily MacIvor on 31st December 1914. She was a shop assistant, the daughter of a Scottish photographer who worked in Leeds and Bradford. They both gave their ages as 22 on their marriage certificate—yet if Charles is to be identified with Charlie Rhodes, son of Charles Arthur Rhodes, "Stuff merchant", of 5 Valley View Grove, Undercliffe in the 1911 Census, then he was only 14 in that year and lied about his age both to volunteer and to marry.

The area where he fell was heavily fought over in 1915 and 1917 and the location of his burial was lost, so his name was recorded among the "missing" on the Menin Gate at Ypres.

Old Bradfordians—'We will remember them'



### **Acknowledgements:**

It has proven difficult to track down Charles Rhodes with exactitude. I have not been able to trace the family in the 1901 Census, nor Maclvor's (or McIver) in 1911. The Bradfordian provides no details of his age and school years. The Medal Index card supplied the date he went to France, the Register of Effects led me to his marriage to Lily, who was identified by their marriage certificate. The 32 Brigade RFA War Diary provides the background to his death. He seems to have died intestate for I can find no record in the Probate Register. His Army records have not survived. I hope that more information may emerge. Shell Trap Farm was a moated farm which was later renamed Mousetrap (apparently for morale purposes). It was captured by the Germans at the end of May following a gas attack.

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