

DONALD ANDERSON EDGAR



30th May 1916

1869-1916 Age 46

Company Quarter Master Sergeant 1780, 4th Battalion South African Infantry.

Donald Anderson Edgar was born in Halifax in 1869, the second of four children of Donald Ramsay Edgar and Ellen Martha Anderson. Both families came from Scotland. Donald senior worked in the textiles industry. Two companies in which he was a partner went into liquidation in 1871 and 1874, while he remained in business as a 'drysalter' dealing in chemicals and manufacturing aniline dyes for Bradford's thriving wool industry. Judging by his last known dwelling at Apperley Bridge, he was well to do. However, his family life was tinged by death. He lost his third son Albert in 1872, then his eldest son Robert in 1877, aged 1 and 9 respectively. His wife Ellen also died in 1873. He then married her elder sister, Elizabeth Brown Anderson, who became mother to the younger Donald and his sister Edith, until she too died in 1882. When Donald attended Bradford Grammar School from 1882 to 1885, from the ages of 13 to 15, he and his sister were motherless. However, in 1885 their father took a third bride, Ellen Constance Tennent Rolfe who was 21 years his junior and the daughter of an artist from Kensington, London. By 1891 they had moved out of the city to Rawdon, and a decade later they lived on the Isle of Wight, where Donald senior died in 1903. In addition to his business interests and three wives, Donald senior also achieved the military rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. This must have been in the West Yorkshire Volunteers.

This third marriage may have been the signal for the children to make their own ways in life. In 1894, when he married, Donald junior was a 'clerk' aged 25, who lived close to the railway in Manningham. His wife Kate Murray was a surveyor's daughter. By 1900 they too had left Bradford for Horsforth. Meanwhile, Donald's younger sister Edith was a governess and nurse in Kent. Before long, however, both decided to emigrate. First to leave was Edith, who went to South Africa in 1901, although the war against the Boers was not yet over. She settled at Butterworth in the Eastern Cape, where she married another British émigré. Donald and Kate followed them to South Africa in 1903. Donald stated that he was Scottish, and his occupation was 'farmer'. Edith left South Africa in 1910 and settled in Australia, where she remained until her death in 1937. She named her son Donald.



When the war began Donald Anderson Edgar was in his mid-forties, and it seems his wife Kate was dead. He served in the South African conquest of German South-West Africa, modern Namibia, in the first half of 1915, and then with the brigade which South Africa sent to fight in Europe. He was in the South African Scottish, the 4th Infantry Regiment, who wore the Atholl Murray tartan and were raised from the Transvaal Scottish and the Cape Town Highlanders. He held the rank of Company Quarter-Master Sergeant, which suggests that he may have had pre-war experience as a volunteer. He embarked on 25th September, and by November the South Africans were at Bordon Camp in Hampshire. They reached the Western Front in April 1916 by a circuitous route, being sent first to Egypt. In France they became part of 9th (Scottish) Division. The 4th Regiment's War Diary for the months of April and May was lost, and so the circumstances of Edgar's death are unknown. On 30th May 1916 he died of wounds and was buried in Nieppe Communal Cemetery, France. His next of kin was his sister Edith Blanche Oldfield, to whom his medals were finally despatched in 1935. At 46 years of age, he was the third oldest Old Bradfordian to die in the war.



Acknowledgements:

Owing to gaps in the records and what is available online, it has been easier to trace Donald Anderson Edgar's father and sister than it has been to reconstruct his life and military service. I have been unable to locate him in the 1891 and 1901 censuses, although it is known that he lived in Bradford and Horsforth respectively. The South African records are not available online, however the South Africa War Graves Project (<http://www.southafricawar Graves.org/search/details.php?id=6427>) has some basic information about him.

The photo of his grave is from <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=pv&GRid=24607675&Pipi=129206367>.

For the South African brigade, see <http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/south-african-forces-british-army/>. The War Diary is available on Ancestry.com, but it only starts on 30th June 1916.

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