DONALD PACKETT

1894-1916 Age 21

Corporal 16/609 16th (Service) Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (1st Bradford 'Pals').

Donald was the youngest son of Henry Packett and Martha Maria Sewell. He was born at Cullingworth on 13th July 1894. His father Henry was from Liverpool, the son of a Wesleyan Minister. He was an accountant and cashier to a Bradford worsted manufacturer; Maria was from Bradford and the daughter of a silversmith. They married in 1873 and over their long marriage they had eleven children, ten of whom survived. Donald's eldest sister Charlotte was twenty years older than him. For many years the family resided at Southfield Square in Manningham, conveniently situated for Donald to attend Bradford Grammar School from the years 1903 to 1910. He started in the Junior School on Manor Row when he was nine, and he remained at the School until he was seventeen. Throughout his school years he was good at Art, and he also generally did well in History and in Physics. When he left school he went into Bradford's textile industry, as four of his brothers had. Donald was apprenticed to Messrs. William Collins & Son, wool merchants of Vincent Street, 'to learn the wool trade'. The only exception among his brothers was Sydney, who was an insurance inspector, and the insurance brokers he established Bradford remains in business today.

When war broke out Donald, still an apprentice wool merchant, responded to the Lord Mayor's call in September to form a battalion of 'Pals' from Bradford and enlisted at the Mechanics Institute in the city centre. Of his older brothers, Edgar had been in the Territorials since 1908 and although he was married and 32, he volunteered for overseas service. Norman, who was six years his senior, joined the Royal Navy. Another brother, Charles, would later be conscripted. Following a year of training, the 'Pals' finally went abroad in December 1915, to Egypt rather than the anticipated France. Donald had been promoted to the non-commissioned rank of Corporal with responsibility for part of a platoon, a section of men. They were transferred to France the following March and arrived in the Somme area in April where preparations were being made for the 'Big Push' planned for the summer.

The infantry attack on the German front was delayed by poor weather and was postponed for two days. The 1st 'Pals' entered the communication trenches near Euston Road Cemetery, Colincamps, on the evening of 30th June. It took them until around 3 a.m. to make their way through narrow communication trenches to their assembly positions. Once there, they waited. As they were the second wave, at Zero hour (7.30 a.m.) they would leave their trench and move up over open ground to reach the British front line trench, cross it and pass through the gaps prepared in their barbed wire into no man's land. They had already suffered serious losses from shell-fire and from machine-guns in Serre village and the salient in the German lines known as the Quadri-lateral (Serre Road No. 2 Cemetery now covers its site). They could advance no further than this and were forced to take cover in shell craters until dusk many hours later. Packett was among those killed. The bodies of the dead remained unburied until May 1917 when the battlefield was cleared after the Germans fell back. Although many could no longer be identified, witnessed by the number of unknown West Yorkshire burials around his grave, Donald's could.

Sydney Packett named his son after Donald, and he attended B.G.S. Charles Packett was killed at the Somme in 1918.

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