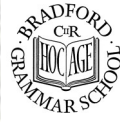


FRANCIS JAMES HANBY



30th June 1916

1887-1916 Age 28

Second Lieutenant 12th Service Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment.

Francis James Hanby was born on 18th July 1887 in South Wales, the first of four children born to James Hanby and Harriet Alicia Godson. James was from Rawcliffe, near Goole in East Yorkshire, where he was brought up by his uncle. By 1871 he was apprenticed to a master plumber in Snaith. Over the next decade, by means which are unknown, James acquired the education to become a Wesleyan Methodist Minister (appointed 1880), and moved to Warwickshire where he married. By 1887 he lived in Hay-on-Wye, where he was an official for the Brecon Wesleyan circuit. This is where Francis was born. The itinerant life of a Methodist minister took the Reverend James Hanby with his family to Worcester, Cheshire, to Bradford in the early 1900s, then Lincoln and finally to Hull.

Francis was a pupil at Bradford Grammar from 1899, when he was twelve, until 1906. In his final year, in Sixth Classical, he passed five Higher Certificates with a distinction in English, and he won a Classical Exhibition to Jesus College, Oxford. He got in on a 'Welsh Exhibition' - Jesus was still the great Welsh college at Oxford, and many of its scholarships were only open to applicants born in the Principality. Francis's academic performance can best be described as solid. In both his 'Mods' and 'Greats' he got a Third. At Oxford he was in the O.T.C. where he received several years military training.

From Oxford, Francis embarked on a career as a school teacher. In 1911 he was one of four resident masters at Willaston College, Nantwich, Cheshire, a small boarding school with 38 boarding pupils aged from eight to nineteen on its register—doubtless there were day pupils too. After war broke out he joined an Officer Training Corps unit as private 2448, from which he was commissioned on 31st March 1915 as a Second Lieutenant in the 12th Royal Sussex Regiment, one of three 'South Downs' battalions which were the southern equivalent of the 'Pals'. Indeed, many men in this battalion were from Eastbourne. They landed in France in early March 1916. In May, the 11th Battalion in the same brigade were joined by the poet Edmund Blunden, whose book



Undertones Of War gives an insight into their experiences around the time of Hanby's death.

Although they were completely raw troops, 116 Brigade of 39th Division were given the task of mounting an attack on the German lines at Richebourg, near Bethune in France, to pinch out the 'Boar's Head' salient and as a diversion on the day before the Battle of the Somme started. The preliminary bombardment warned the Germans to expect an attack—they erected signboards asking 'When are you coming over Tommy?' Nevertheless, the attack commenced at 03.05 a.m. on 30th June. The usual problems ensued: the wire was poorly cut, German machine guns caused havoc in no man's land and the Germans shelled the British positions heavily. The 12th Battalion succeeded in seizing and holding a stretch of the front line for four hours, and the support line for half an hour. However, cut off from reinforcement, the attackers' supplies of grenades and rifle ammunition ran out and they were forced to withdraw in the face of counter-attacks. At 10 a.m. the 12th Battalion was relieved and left the trenches. They had lost 412 men, many of whom were missing. One survivor wrote of this attack, '*truly, this was the day Sussex died.*'

The losses among officers were heavy—five killed in action, seven wounded and five missing. Francis Hanby was one of the latter. His body was never identified and he is remembered on the Loos Memorial to the Missing. He is not on the Willaston village War Memorial. The school where he worked erected a war memorial chapel in 1924. It is not known whether he is commemorated there.



Acknowledgements:

The photo of the Loos Memorial is taken from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website. The Hanby family history was constructed from Ancestry.com. James Hanby's appointment: http://www.mywesleyanmethodists.org.uk/page/wesleyan_methodist_ministers-9. Information about Francis's school days is from the Bradford Grammar School Annual Class Lists. I am very grateful to Dr. Robin Darwall-Smith, Jesus College Archivist, for information regarding Hanby's time at Jesus and the lead to his subsequent career. For the Oxford University O.T.C.:

https://archive.org/stream/oxforduniversity00univuoft/oxforduniversity00univuoft_djvu.txt.

His appointment as Second Lieutenant was announced in the London Gazette for 7th April 1915.

The War Diary for the 12th Battalion is http://interactive.ancestry.co.uk/60779/43112_2582_2-00000?pid=616243&backurl=http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc%3DxBB192%26_phstart%3DsuccessSource%26usePUBJs%3Dtrue%26indiv%3D1%26dbid%3D60779%26_F80088F0%3DP088%26_F80088F0_x%3D1%26gss%3Dangs-d%26pcat%3D39%26fh%3D8%26h%3D616243%26recoff%3D69%26ml_rpos%3D9&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=xBB192&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true#?imageld=43112_2582_2-00001.

For the 'Battle of Boar's Head', Paul Reed's http://www.battlefields1418.com/boars_head.htm is an invaluable resource.



For Willaston School, <http://billpearson.co.uk/willaston-school/>, was useful. The images of the memorial chapel are taken from it.

Compiled and composed by Nick Hooper June 2016 (Nhooper1956@googlemail.com)