

WALTER LANNING BRADFIELD



5th December 1916

1892-1916 Age 24

Private 15/54, 15th (Service) Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, Leeds 'Pals'.

Walter Bradfield was born in Leicester on 4th June 1892, the second of three surviving children of the Reverend William Bradfield and Annie Mary Lanning. William was the fifth child of a farmer who lived in Hampshire. He trained in Theology at Tenby, and in 1888 he married Annie, the daughter of an ironmonger from Wiltshire. As a Wesleyan Minister, he regularly moved around the country between postings. Walter's first secondary school was The Leys, Cambridge, which he attended as a day-boy from the age of eleven. He was described as a gifted scholar, and he was a Lance-Corporal in the school Cadet Corps. About 1907, his father moved to Ilkley to become Warden of the Wesley Deaconess Institute on Queen's Road, and chairman of the Halifax and Bradford Wesleyan District. Walter started at Bradford Grammar School in the Classical Remove form, in which he spent two years, and a further two in Sixth Classical. He attended meetings of the Debating Society, and spoke on several occasions. In 1911 he passed Higher Certificates in four subjects, and he won an exhibition in History at Jesus College, Oxford. While at Oxford he served in the University Officers Training Corps. He graduated B.A. in Modern History (Second Class) in July 1914. What employment he took up, if any, is not known.

Not long after he returned to Ilkley, war broke out. Recruiting for the Leeds 'Pals' commenced at 9 a.m. on 3rd September at Leeds Town Hall. The local press advertised that only non-manual workers aged 19-35 should apply. By 8th September, over 1,200 men had enlisted. Walter Bradfield's number was 15/54, which indicates that he was one of these first volunteers. Affairs moved quickly for the Leeds 'Pals', and on 25th September the main body set off by train for Colsterdale, near Masham, where their training would commence. As a university man who had Officers Training Corps experience, it is surprising that Bradfield did not apply for a commission, and that he was not made an N.C.O. Whether by choice or for some other reason, he remained a private soldier. When the Leeds 'Pals' were sent to Egypt in December 1915, Bradfield was kept back with the reserves in Britain. He was sent to join the battalion in April 1916 after they had transferred to France in preparation for the Somme offensive.



On 1st July 1916, the Leeds 'Pals' formed the first wave of 93 Brigade's advance towards the fortified village of Serre. At 7.20 and 7.25 a.m. they left the front-line trench to wait for Zero hour in no man's land. They came under a storm of hostile fire as the British bombardment had lifted from the German front at 7.20 a.m., allowing the Germans to man their parapet. Their losses that day are stated to be 539 out of 750 attacking, of whom 230 were killed. If Walter was with them when they went 'over the lid', as it was called in the battalion, then he was a lucky man to have survived unscathed. However, it is possible that he was part of the 'ten per cent detail', the men kept back to form the nucleus around whom the battalion would be re-constituted in the event of heavy losses.

In mid-July the surviving Leeds 'Pals' were moved north for the battalion to be rebuilt, and they did not return to the Somme until mid-October, when they were stationed at Hebuterne. They were called upon to provide working parties, and spent spells of several days at a time in the trenches. It was during one of these that Walter was killed by a German shell. His commanding officer wrote:- 'He was a good man and a brave soldier, a conscientious man and one we can ill afford to lose. We mourn him as a good, true comrade.' His body was taken for burial to the cemetery at Couin. His name is also on the family memorial at Nab Wood Cemetery.



Acknowledgements:

Bradfield's photo is courtesy of the O.B.A. Roll of Honour. I researched his family using the records available on Ancestry.com. His career at B.G.S. is from the Annual Reports for 1908-1912, and from The Bradfordian for March 1909 and 1910, and November 1911. There is information about Bradfield's life and death at <<http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Cambridgeshire/CambridgeLeysSchoolWW1.html>> , <<http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/war/colleges/jesus.html>>, and <<http://ilkleyinwartime.com/reports-first-world-war/>>, accessed 8-11-2016. For the Leeds 'Pals' I used L. Milner, *Leeds Pals* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 1991) - his casualty figures (at 163-4) differ from those quoted here from R. Prior and T. Wilson, *The Somme* (Yale, 2005), 75. Bradfield's death was reported in the Bradford Daily Telegraph on 14th December 1916. Because he was kept in Britain, Walter did not qualify for the 1915 Star, unlike the Leeds 'Pals' who went to Egypt in December 1915. His brother James, who was a trainee farmer in Hampshire in 1911, does not appear to have served.

This biography was compiled and composed by Nick Hooper, November 2016 (Nhooper1956@googlemail.com). The names of three Old Bradfordians can be seen on the Jesus College War Memorial: Bradfield (top left panel), Hanby (lower left), and Huby (bottom centre). (Photo from the Jesus memorial site cited above).

