

CHARLES MATTHEW- MAN



15th July 1916

1889-1916 Age 26

Private 2297 1st-6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (Territorial Force).

Charlie Matthewman was born in Bramley, Leeds, on 18th October 1889. He was the eldest son of William Alfred Matthewman and Emily Dyson, both from Bradford. He had an elder sister, two brothers and a younger sister. The family occupied the same house in Frizinghall for more than thirty years from around 1890. William Matthewman worked for his father Charles, a yarn agent in Bradford, and continued the business after his death in 1900. In 1912 the premises of Charles Matthewman & Son Co. Ltd., yarn agents, were at 24 Charles Street in the centre of Bradford.

All three Matthewman boys attended Bradford Grammar School in the first decade of the twentieth century. Charlie started in Fourth Form Modern in 1903, around his fourteenth birthday, and was three years at the school. His education was intended to equip him for the commercial life of the city, and he was an able student. His best subjects were History, modern languages, Maths and Chemistry. When he left school he worked as a shipping clerk for a woollen merchant, where his elder sister Edith and youngest brother Frank were also employed. Charlie's continued interest in foreign languages is shown by his *'enthusiastic membership'* of the Bradford United Foreign Circles, of which he was honorary librarian.

As a younger man William Matthewman served in the Bradford volunteers for thirteen years, and both his eldest son Charlie and youngest son Frank were in the ranks of 'H' Company of the Bradford Territorials, which had a strong B.G.S. character. They went to the Western Front with the battalion in April 1915, and both survived the arduous time it spent in the Ypres Salient in the second half of the year. Furthermore, they took part in the 6th Battalion's suicidal attack on the fortified village of Thiepval on the afternoon of 1st July at the start of the Somme offensive.

The brothers' luck would run out, however, later in that month. Charlie was one of the 'C' Company bombers, specialists in the use of grenades. From 8th July, the 1st-6th Battalion



were holding the Leipzig Salient, the only part of the German defences at Thiepval which were gained on 1st July and a position of great strategic importance. Their orders were to hold it *'at all costs.'* Before dawn on 15th July the enemy made a determined attack against the British positions. His brother Frank wrote to his parents describing what happened: *'To me is given the painful task of informing you of the death of my most affectionate brother ... Charlie was always looked upon as one of the most reliable and fearless bombers in the Company. On Friday night last the Huns resorted to their fiendish device of liquid fire ... Probably Charlie would be killed during their terrible affair.'* The battalion bombers suffered heavily in helping to break up this attack. In a letter to the Bradford Daily Telegraph, a witness described how one of them climbed onto the parapet to hurl grenades at the enemy, while another who was shot as he withdrew the safety pin made sure he threw his device before he collapsed. The assault was beaten off by 8 a.m., but the battalion lost heavily, four officers and fifty other ranks killed and wounded.

Frank's letter does not say whether his brother's body was recovered. It is quite possible that it was buried and the location was later lost as this area continued to be bitterly fought over for more than two months.

He is commemorated on the Memorial to the Missing at Thiepval.



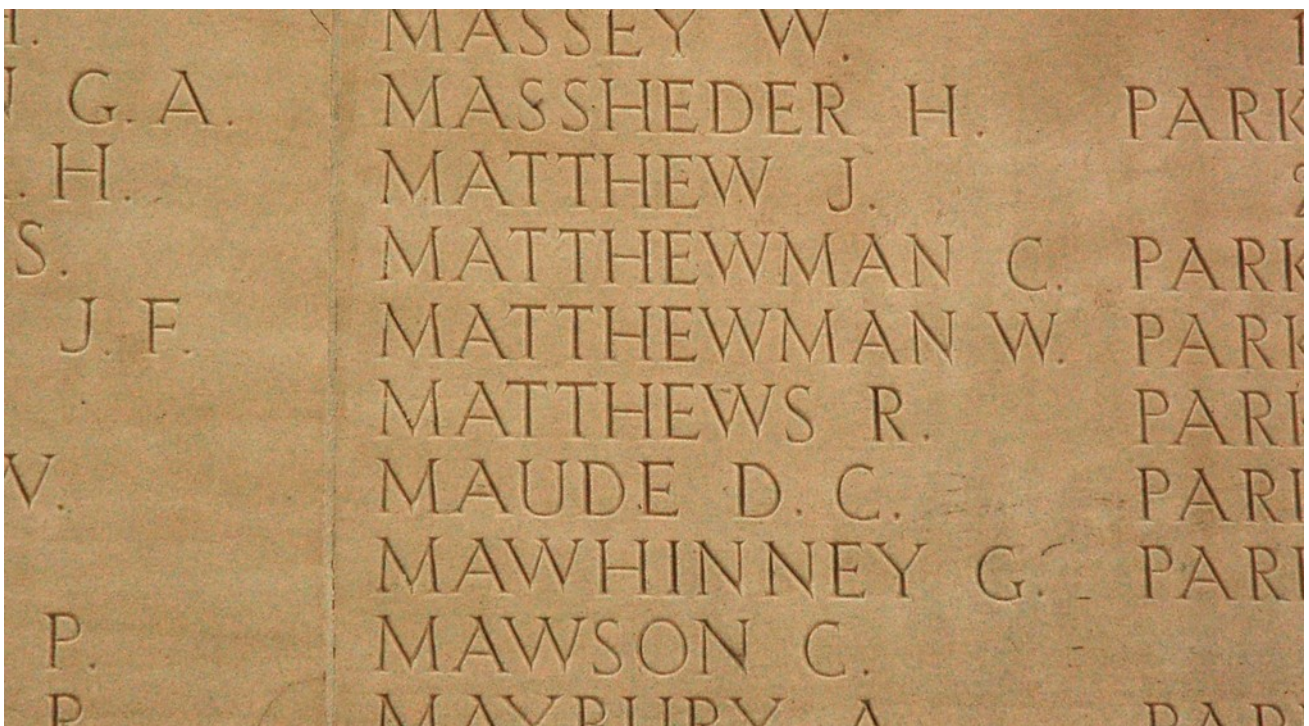


Acknowledgements:

The photo of Charlie Matthewman is from the O.B.A. Roll of Honour. The Matthewman family was researched using Ancestry.com. Additional information came from the B.G.S. Yearbooks from the School Archives, with thanks. I have not found any record of the Matthewman brothers as sportsmen in The Bradfordian. Frank's letter was published in the Bradford Daily Telegraph on 21st July, the day of his death. C.S.M. F.H. Banks' letter describing the same action was published on 29th July, and there is another account of it in Capt. E.V. Tempest, *History of the Sixth Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, Vol. I—1/6th Battalion* (Bradford, 1921), pp. 105-8.

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

The photos below taken by the author. W. Matthewman does not seem to have been related—the distribution of this name is strongly skewed to Yorkshire.



Left: The Thiepval Memorial viewed looking north from within the German lines. Right; the commanding view looking south from the Leipzig Salient.