

RICHARD BOWEN ROBERTS



13th January 1918

1880-1918, age 37

Lieutenant 7th (Westmorland and Cumberland Yeomanry) Battalion Border Regiment.

Richard Bowen Roberts was a native speaker of Welsh who had no known connection with Bradford, apart from the two years he studied at B.G.S. He was born at Dolgellau in north-west Wales on 1st August 1880, the youngest of four children of Owen Davis Roberts, a merchant and J.P., and Eliza Jane Williams, the daughter of an Anglesey G.P. In later life he styled himself as Bowen Roberts, but he was also known as Dick. His mother died in 1889, and by 1891 he was a boarding pupil at Dolgellau Grammar School where the headmaster was a Cambridge graduate and a Yorkshireman from Greetland, near Halifax. Could this be the reason that Bowen Roberts attended Bradford Grammar School from the ages of sixteen to eighteen? His record in the Third and Fourth Forms was not a distinguished one academically, but in September 1898 he passed the preliminary examination to study Medicine at Owens College Manchester. Two years later he went to Clare College, Cambridge, from which he graduated B.A. in 1904. In 1906, in Liverpool, Bowen married Jane Gertrude Thomas, the only surviving child of Dr. Lewis Thomas, a G.P. who had lived at Amlwch on Anglesey. They lived at Plas Penrhyn overlooking the Menai Strait, near Llanfairpwllgwyngyll on Anglesey. Bowen was wealthy enough not to need to work for a living. He was honorary secretary for Wales of the Agricultural Co-operative Trading Society and chairman of the Anglesey Industries Association, and he had the time to devote himself to shooting and fishing at which pursuits he was adept, and to collecting eggs. Bowen and Jane Roberts had two sons David and William, the first of whom died in 1913.

War began three days after Roberts' thirty-fourth birthday, and a day later he joined 'D' Company of the Denbighshire Hussars Yeomanry, serving as a trooper and then sergeant until he was commissioned in April 1915. As a Second Lieutenant he served in the Westmorland and Cumberland Yeomanry, both regiments being in the same division. They went to France the summer of 1915 and the four squadrons of the Westmorland and



Cumberland Yeomanry were dispersed to different divisions. As it is not known which squadron Roberts served with, the detail of his service is also unknown. It was later said that the strain of service damaged his heart. In July 1917 his regiment was converted from cavalry to infantry, and in September the officers and men were drafted into the 7th Battalion Border Regiment. Bowen was an officer known for looking out for the welfare of his men who knew him as 'Robbie'.

After training for the attack, the 7/Border moved to the Ypres salient in October. On the 12th they were support battalion in an attack between Langemark and Poelcapelle. After a short spell in rest they returned to the line in late October, then in November provided working and carrying parties behind the front. On the night of 21st November Roberts was in command of a party taking ammunition to a machine-gun company when he slipped on a duck-walk and severely sprained his ankle in a ditch or shell hole. He was sent home on sick leave to recuperate. However, it had been noted on 12th October that he was suffering from epileptic fits, and he died at home from a convulsion on the morning of 13th January 1918. His Major wrote: 'he was always so full of life and so cheerful.' He was buried in Llanedwen churchyard overlooking the Menai Strait and Snowdonia.



Acknowledgements:

R.Bowen Roberts' photo is from the School memorial book courtesy of the O.B.A. and B.G.S. The family was researched using Ancestry.com and findmypast.co.uk. The entry in De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour is the main source for his life. His years at B.G.S. were recorded in the Annual Reports 1897-99. His university education is recorded in *Medical and Dental Student Registers* 1898 and *Cambridge University Alumni, 1261-1900*, both on Ancestry. For his military career, his Officer Personal Record is TNA WO374-58052. The 7th (Westmorland and Cumberland Yeomanry) Battalion Border Regiment War Diary is on Ancestry.com, as is that for 'C' Squadron Westmorland and Cumberland Yeomanry. An inquiry into the nature of Lieutenant Roberts' injury exonerated him of blame for his injury. For the units in which he served, <<http://armyservicenumbers.blogspot.co.uk/2014/06/denbighshire-yeomanry-1908-1914.html>>, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denbighshire_Hussars>, <<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-british-yeomanry-regiments-of-1914-1918/westmorland-and-cumberland-yeomanry/>> all accessed 23-12-2017.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper in December 2017. For further information, contact Nhooper1956@googlemail.com, or see <<http://www.bradfordgrammar.com/former-pupils/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>>. The photos were taken by the author.

