

DOUGLAS ARTHUR ELLIOTT



21st March 1918

1894-1918 Age 24

T/1582 Armament Staff Sergeant Army Ordnance Corps, attached 374th Siege Battery Royal Garrison Artillery.

The Elliott family played a part in the development of the printing press industry which made Otley into a thriving industrial town in the second half of the nineteenth century. Douglas' grandfather John was an iron-founder who cast the side-frames for the first 'Wharfedale' printing press. By the dawn of the twentieth century Elliott and Co. were one of seven firms producing versions of the 'Wharfedale', at their Steel Croft Machine Works on Gay Lane. Douglas' father Robert was by this time managing the company. In 1888 he had married Annie Haley, daughter of a card-maker from Cleckheaton. Douglas, their eldest son and the third of six surviving children, was born on 14th January 1894 and was baptized at All Saints Church, Otley. He attended Selbourne School in Otley (with his contemporary Geoffrey Barker O.B.), then went to Bradford Grammar School at the start of 1909 when he reached the age of fifteen. In his only full year, 1909-1910, he made considerable progress; he was awarded the Form Prize for the Fourth Modern upper form and he came first in French. He left in July 1910 and went briefly to Bradford Technical College. By April 1911 he was an apprentice at his father's works, where he later became Assistant Manager. He was also a member of the recently re-established Otley Rugby Union club.

Douglas was twenty when the war began and a single man. As far as is known he did not attempt to volunteer in 1914—Otley's engineers saw their orders for printing presses slump, but they received government contracts to manufacture the specialised lathes required for turning shells and shell cases in munitions factories—and so it is quite likely that he was seen as an essential worker. If so, why this changed is not known, but on 1st August 1917 he enlisted (or was conscripted). Probably on account of his engineering knowledge he served in the Army Ordnance Corps which was responsible for the maintenance and repair of armaments and munitions, with the rank of Armaments Staff Sergeant.



Elliott went to France in February 1918 and was attached to 374th Siege Battery Royal Garrison Artillery as one of two Armament Artificers. This unit operated two railway mounted 12-inch howitzers which had a range of over eight miles. When he joined the battery it was located on a railway line near Villers-Faucon, behind the British lines south-west of Cambrai. At 9.40 a.m. on Thursday 21st March, 70 German divisions attacked the British on a broad front of 50 miles, preceded by a crushing five-hour bombardment which aimed to paralyse the rear areas and artillery positions. The 374th Battery position was deluged with gas and high explosives. The German infantry made rapid progress under the cover of a dense mist and even the heavy artillery positions were in danger of being overrun. As the track behind Elliott's battery had been broken it was impossible to move the guns, so in the evening the decision was taken to destroy them and to retreat. Elliott was killed during the day as were three gunners of 374th Battery. If they were buried, by the British or the Germans, the location was lost as the British fell back and then later in the year the area was fought over again as the Allies advanced. They are among 14,000 British missing from the fighting of March-August 1918 recorded on the Pozieres Memorial.



Acknowledgements:

Douglas' photo is from the School memorial book courtesy of the O.B.A. and B.G.S. The family history was researched using records on Ancestry.com and findmypast.co.uk. For the Otley printing press industry, see Paul Wood, *Otley & The Wharfedale Printing Machine* (Otley Museum, 1985), also at <<http://queanbeyanprintingmuseum.com/Wharfedale.pdf>>. An outline of Douglas' life was published in De Ruvigny Roll of Honour vol.4 (Ancestry). The B.G.S. Annual Reports 1909 and 1910-11 list his school record. The Sheffield Daily Telegraph 21-8-1906 records that he passed the Oxford and Cambridge Local preliminary exam in the First Division while at Selbourne School. For his membership of Otley rugby club, *Yorkshire Rugby Football Union Commemoration Book 1914-1919 and Official Handbook 1919-1920* (1919). For the re-establishment of the Union club in 1907 following the disbanding of Otley's Northern Union (i.e. Rugby League) club, <<http://www.tony-collins.org/>> blog '1895: the aftermath', August 12, 2012 accessed 22-1-2018, where it is stated (in relation to Hull and the East Riding) that the rebuilding of rugby union in Yorkshire following the 1895 split over payments to players owed much to Grammar and public school boys and the sons of 'leading citizens'. Elliott fits into this pattern. Geoffrey Barker was killed in action at Cambrai on 22nd November 1917. Selbourne School was a house on Fern Bank, Cross Green, Otley, next to the modern Otley rugby ground (although this may soon be relocated).

The CWGC records wrongly records Elliott's unit as 3rd/4th Siege Battery R.G.A. The correct unit is given in the *Register of Soldiers' Effects* (National Army Museum, accessed through Ancestry.com). For this and the circumstances of Elliott's death I am indebted to the endlessly informative and fascinating Great War Forum (<<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/topic/240096-3rd4th-siege-bty-royal-garrison-artillery/>> and <<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=74665>> both accessed 21-1-2018—for those who are interested, the latter reproduces a watercolour donated to Winchester College showing the battery under fire on 21st March, painted from the personal narrative of an officer of the battery; a map showing the exact location of the battery on that day; and a photo of a 12-inch railway mounted howitzer in action.

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