

# JOHN MALCOLM ROOME



27th May 1918

1899-1918 Aged 19



## Private 41957, 'A' Company 2nd Platoon, 7th (Service) Battalion Leicestershire Regiment.

When John Roome was born between April and June 1899 his parents Arthur and Emily, formerly Baker, lived at 74 White Abbey Road in Manningham. This address was also the premises for the firm of painters and decorators which his grandfather, also named John, had established. In time Arthur took on the company and by 1911 he had moved his wife and three children to a larger house on Manningham Lane. This would also have been more convenient for John, who was the eldest of three surviving children and their only son, to attend the Bradford Grammar School. He started there in 1910 when he was eleven and at the end of his first year he won the form prize for History and Geography. Over five years he progressed through the Classical forms, leaving in 1915 after he had completed the Remove. He was a member of the newly-formed School O.T.C., but at sixteen he was too young to serve in the forces. His military records do not survive so it is not known what he did after leaving school.

John became liable for military service in 1917. At the age of eighteen years and one month he would have been conscripted. He reported for duty in Bradford and was assigned to 261st Graduated Battalion of the Training Reserve at Ipswich for fourteen weeks of basic training. At the end of this process he will have become 'fit, strong and trained to undertake a variety of specialist roles'. The next stage of his training was to move to a Graduated Battalion where he would sharpen his skills until, when he reached nineteen, he would be eligible to be sent overseas. John's nineteenth birthday coincided with the great crisis of the war for the British, the stunning successes of the German Spring Offensive commencing on 21st March 1918. At the enormous Base Camp of Etaples near Boulogne he received his final battle training and was assigned to a unit, the 7th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment (110th Brigade, 21st Division). This division had

been mauled badly during the German attack at the end of March, and again in April near Ypres. Its losses were replenished with new recruits from Britain and it was one of five divisions forming IX Corps which were sent at the end of April to recuperate under French command in a quiet sector on the River Aisne in the Champagne region.

Unbeknown to the Allies this was the front chosen by the Germans for the third attack of the Spring Offensive, which would be the most devastating to date. It commenced on 27th May with a devastating bombardment from 3 to 5 a.m., followed by an assault by intensively trained storm troopers. The three companies of 7/Leicester in the front line were cut off and ceased to exist as fighting units. Roome's fate was unknown—he was classified as missing, and his father made two enquiries through the Red Cross to ascertain whether he had been taken prisoner. The response in both July and December was negative, and John was eventually classified 'presumed dead'. He has no known grave and his name is one of those on the Soissons Memorial to the Missing.



### **Acknowledgements:**

Roome's photo is from the School memorial book courtesy of the O.B.A. and B.G.S. The family was researched using Ancestry.com. His years at B.G.S. were recorded in the Annual Reports for 1910-1915. The quotation is from Tim Lynch, *They Did Not Grow Old. Teenage Conscripts on the Western Front, 1918*, (Spellmount, Stroud, 2013), 92. For the training conscripts were given, see chapters 7 and 8. For 261st Battalion, <http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/training-reserve/>

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