

ALFRED CECIL EDWARDS



25th July 1917

1879-1917 Aged 37

Captain R.A.M.C., M.C., Mentioned in Despatches, attached 4th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

Albert Cecil Edwards, known as Cecil, was the second son and fifth child of Reverend Charles Edwards and his wife Anna Maria, daughter of Henry Skelton, gentleman landowner of Field Head House, Thorer near Leeds. Charles Edwards was a Londoner who, after graduating from Cambridge was ordained at Ripon Cathedral in 1860. From then onwards he remained in the Ripon Diocese, first as Vicar at Christ Church, Leeds Road, Bradford, and then at Bingley Parish Church. He died in 1892 aged 55 leaving a widow and eight children. The brothers Harold and Cecil both attended Bradford Grammar School. By 1889 Harold was an undergraduate at Cambridge, and he was to emigrate to Canada where he died in 1909. Cecil was there from 1888 until 1902; then he went to a school at Kirkby Lonsdale; finally he qualified as a doctor at Liverpool College in 1908. He joined the staff of the South Dispensary as assistant surgeon and then became anaesthetist and Senior Resident Medical Officer at Liverpool's Northern Hospital. In 1915 the Medical Register gives his 'home' address as Park Road, Bingley, where two of his unmarried sisters still resided. In fact he had left the hospital to become Medical Officer on a cruise liner of the White Star Line, and it was from there that he was commissioned into the R.A.M.C. in December 1914.

Cecil was one of the R.A.M.C. staff under the Director of Medical Services of 49th (West Riding) Division, attached to 4th Battalion K.O.Y.L.I.. He crossed to France on 29 May 1915 and the Bradford Weekly Telegraph reported that he had been wounded in December 1915. This occurred during a large-scale gas attack by the Germans on the division's front near Ypres and for his part in dealing with the casualties he was mentioned in despatches. The London Gazette announced on 3rd June 1916 the award of the Military Cross.



In July 1917 Cecil's unit moved with 49th Division from the area around Laventie to Nieuport (Nieuwpoort), near the Belgian coast. The R.A.M.C. occupied dressing stations around the coastal town of Coxyde Bains (Koksijde Bad), between Dunkirk and Ostend. The bulk of the Divisional troops took up position on 19th July nearer to Nieuport. Three days later the R.A.M.C. War Diary recorded: '10pm Gas attack with new gas on Nieuport. Chief symptoms acute powerful conjunctivitis and vomiting. Cpts. Edwards, Meakin and Dow and Cpts. Starck, Matthews and Twigg (1/3 West Riding Field Ambulance) gassed and sent down to base. 51 R.A.M.C. personnel gassed, about 2000 cases passed through Advanced Dressing Station.' Most of the R.A.M.C. officers and men who were affected suffered as a result of the slow absorption of Mustard Gas through the clothing of gassed cases in the Regimental Aid Posts and Advanced Dressing Station. Cecil Edwards was taken to hospital in Le Tréport on the coast but died from the effects of gas on 25th July. He was buried in nearby Mont Huon Military Cemetery. He is remembered on war memorials at Liverpool University and Masonic Lodge and on the Bootle Civic and Christ Church Memorials. Cecil is also recorded on the memorial in All Saints Parish Church, Bingley.



Acknowledgements:

Researched by Nick Hooper and Tricia Platts, composed by Tricia Platts, July 2017. Edwards' photo is from the school memorial book, with thanks to the O.B.A. and B.G.S. Family details and references in the London Gazette come from Ancestry.co.uk.

The account of his death (right) is from the Yorkshire Evening Post of 3 August 1917, accessed from findmypast.co.uk. The Bradford Weekly Telegraph of 10 August 1917 also carried a brief report. On the same day the Bootle Weekly Times reported:

“Brother of Bootle Vicar’s Widow: Dr Cecil Edwards, RAMC, who has been killed in action, was a brother of the late Mrs Wynne Williams, widow of the Rev A. Wynne Williams MA, Vicar of Christ Church, Bootle.”

The photograph of Alfred Cecil Edwards' headstone at Mont Huon Military Cemetery, Le Tréport, is by Nick Hooper.

The War Diary of the Assistant Director of Medical Services 49th Division is available at:

https://www.ancestry.co.uk/interactive/60779/43849_2778_0-00554?pid=694161&backurl=http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc=3DHrL719%26_phstart%3DsuccessSource%26usePUBJs%3Dtrue%26indiv%3D1%26db%3DUKWarDiariesWWI%26gss%3Dangs-d%26new%3D1%26rank%3D1%26msydm%3D7%26msydy%3D1917%26gskw%3D49th%2520Division%26MSAV%3D1%26MSV%3D0%26uidh%3D342%26pcat%3D39%26fh%3D5%26h%3D694161%26recoff%3D%26ml_rpos%3D6&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=HrL719%26_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true#?imageld=43849_2778_0-00001

WEST YORKSHIRE LOSSES BY GAS POISONING.

OFFICERS AND MEN IN THE CASUALTY LISTS.

Captain Alfred Cecil EDWARDS, R.A.M.C., second son of the late Rev. Canon Edwards, formerly Vicar of Bingley, and previously Vicar of Holy Trinity, Bradford, has died in hospital from the effects of a gas shell. He was 37 years of age, was educated at the Bradford Grammar School, and at a school at Kirkby Lonsdale, and subsequently obtained his medical degree at Liverpool College. When war broke out he was a doctor on one of the White Star Company's boats, and he volunteered for active service.

