

# CHARLES FARRAR



2nd March 1917

1893-1917 Age 23

## Private 16/637, DCM, 16th (Service) Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, 1st Bradford Pals.

Charles was one of four brothers who served in the First World War, two of whom died. Their parents were Alfred Farrar, whose father was a farmer and stone merchant from Southowram, and Mary Louisa Wilkinson, daughter of a master silk spinner from Raistrick. Alfred became a quarry owner and stone merchant at Thornton. He married Mary in 1889 and they had seven children—Charles was the second son, born on 23rd September 1893. The family were Methodists, and Charles and his youngest brother Samuel were sent to Ashville College, founded near Harrogate by the United Methodist Free Church. Charles started there in 1904 aged ten. In 1906 he moved to Bradford Grammar School just prior to his thirteenth birthday. His eldest brother William had left BGS that summer to be apprenticed as a dispenser with Boots the Chemist, despite the fact that he came 20th in Chemistry in his final year. Charles did not enjoy great academic success, and after repeating a year in IVth Classical with no improvement he left aged sixteen. He was apprenticed to William Pawson & Son of Halifax, blouse manufacturer, and by 1914 he was a commercial traveller for the firm. His younger brother John went to Grange Road Secondary School and Bradford Technical College, before being apprenticed as a draughtsman to an engineering firm.

When war came in 1914 the Farrar boys were quick to respond. William, now residing in London, enlisted in the RAMC four days after the outbreak and by the end of August was on active service in France. He served for the duration of the war at base hospitals on the coast of France. In September Charles joined the 1st Bradford Pals, while John and Samuel enlisted in the 2nd Pals early in 1915, even though Samuel was barely sixteen. The 1st and 2nd Pals were both part of 93rd Brigade, so the three younger brothers served together in Egypt, and then in France, where all three survived the terrible 1st July attack at Serre. Charles was later awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his actions there, for 'conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty.' Samuel, however, was discharged on 4th July on account of having given a false age when he volunteered. The first brother to die was John, now a machine-gunner, who was killed during a German raid on 27th July, the night the 2nd Pals entered the line near Neuve Chapelle, a quiet sector where they had been sent to recuperate. Thirty-six men were



taken prisoner, among them the professional footballer Dickie Bond.

The 1st Pals returned to the Somme in October 1916. Although they did not take part in another attack, they endured deep mud and then the coldest winter for more than thirty years. In December Charles was hospitalized on an ambulance train with 'Pyrexia', a high fever. Following a six weeks break from the trenches, the battalion returned to the front at Hebuterne in February 1917. The Bradford character of the 1st Pals was diluted by the arrival of large drafts of replacements, many of them conscripts who there was no time to integrate. Charles Farrar was a platoon sergeant in 'A' Company, serving under another former Grammar school boy, Captain Armitage. On 27th February at 06.30 'A' and 'B' Companies attacked Rossignol Wood, which it was thought the Germans had abandoned. As they advanced in the open they crested a ridge and came under heavy machine-gun fire. Armitage was killed instantly, but the second-in-command and four veteran NCOs led their men forward in short rushes from shell hole to shell hole. Farrar led his 4th platoon to the wood's edge where they were pinned down until dark. Several conscripts went over to the Germans. Charles was severely wounded, and although he was extricated and sent to No. 47 Casualty Clearing Station at Varennes, he died there of his wounds. He shares his grave with another soldier who died the next day. His parents placed the same inscription from Psalm 91 on the headstones of both John and Charles: 'I will set him on high because he hath known my name.' Charles is remembered on memorials at both his secondary schools.



### Acknowledgements:

Charles Farrar's photo is from the Old Boys Association Memorial Book, with permission. The family's history was researched using Ancestry.com. There are entries for Charles and John in De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour. Charles's school record is taken from the B.G.S. Annual Reports 1906-1909. I am grateful to Andrew Barker, the Ashville College Archivist, for sending me information from the *Ashvillian* and photos of the college memorials. For William Pawson & Son, <<http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~calderdalecompanion/ph3346.html>>. Charles was listed among the 'First Thousand' published by the Bradford Daily Telegraph, as 'Charles Farrer'. For his admission to hospital, <<https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk/records/7217583/sergeant-c-farrar-west-yorkshire-regiment/>>. The photo of his headstone is from <[http://image2.findagrave.com/photos/2006/329/15989169\\_116456895056.jpeg](http://image2.findagrave.com/photos/2006/329/15989169_116456895056.jpeg)>.

William's Service Record survives. The *Yorkshire Observer* recorded his enlistment in its 14th October 1914 edition. Samuel's discharge is noted on his Medal Index Card, and on the Medal Award Roll under King's Regulations Para. 392 (vi), which was for misstatement of his age. He was born on 10th December 1898 and he died in 1968.

Charles and John are both on the Thornton Methodist Church and Thornton Village war memorials (information from P. D. Lodge's survey of Bradford War Memorials). The photos of the Ashville memorials were kindly provided by Andrew Barker.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper, February 2017

