

# JOHN BRAYSHAW



3rd May 1917

1882-1917 Aged 34

## Private 41283 18th (Service) Battalion West Yorkshire, 2nd Bradford Pals.

John was one of five Old Bradfordians who died on 3rd May 1917, three of whom served with the 2nd Bradford Pals. However, it is difficult to be certain about his exact identity. If the identification with John Brayshaw who was born in Bradford on 14th May 1882 is correct, his parents were Richard and Elizabeth, formerly Page, both of Bradford. They were a working class family, and Richard worked as a grocer's assistant, a woolwasher and a window cleaner at different times until his death in 1903. John was the eldest of their six children, of whom two died in infancy. There was a 'J. Brayshaw' at Bradford Grammar School from September 1895 until July 1900—the John identified above would have been aged 13 to 18. His best subjects were Geography, English, History and Maths. He must have attended on a scholarship from the City of West Riding authorities, again if the identification is correct.

After leaving school this John worked as a French polisher. In 1911 he remained single, living with his mother, younger brother Lewis and a boarder, all of them in a three-roomed house. He was thirty-two when war broke out, but he did not volunteer for service. His brother Lewis, who married in 1913, enlisted under the Group Scheme in December 1915, whereas John waited to be conscripted the following March. The brothers were posted to two local regiments, John to the 6th West Yorkshire and Lewis to the 1/7th Battalion West Riding. Once the Somme started the need for replacements was so great that men were no longer posted to their 'home' battalion, or even regiment. John was probably despatched to the 18th Battalion, the 2nd Bradford Pals, with one of the many drafts of replacements who were routed through 33rd Infantry Base Depot at Etaples. In October 1916 alone the battalion received 252 men. While most were from Yorkshire, the Bradford character of the Pals was gradually being weakened.

In Bradford the Third Battle of the Scarpe which commenced on Thursday 3rd May 1917 is practically



forgotten, although three of the four Bradford battalions were engaged and suffered severe losses. The 2nd Bradford Pals had more men killed than at the start of the Somme on 1st July 1916, and lost a total of 284 killed, wounded and prisoners. The attack was planned for daylight, but a late change moved it to 3.45am when it would be pitch dark. The attackers were spotted by the light of the setting moon, and a German plane observed the white tapes marking the jumping off positions. As a result, the attackers came under severe artillery and machine gun fire as they crawled into no man's land. Although the British creeping barrage was described as 'Simply magnificent' when it opened at 3.44am, within thirty seconds the Germans opened an extremely heavy counter-barrage and the advancing waves were further depleted by machine-gun fire. Darkness, mist, smoke and clouds of dust caused the attackers to lose their bearings, and although the lightly-held first line was taken with relative ease, German prisoners turned on their captors when they realised how depleted the Pals were. German counter-attacks threatened to overrun the British starting positions, and at one stage the 18th Battalion were reduced to little more than fifty men and the head-quarters. It was mid-afternoon before the position was stabilized. The circumstances of the British defeat meant that the bodies of many of the fallen were not recovered for burial, Brayshaw's among them. His name is on the Arras Memorial in France.



### **Acknowledgements:**

The photo of the Arras Memorial was taken by the author. J Brayshaw's school years come from the BGS Annual Reports 1895-1900. The lists of 'Old Boys with the King's Forces' published in *The Bradfordians* do not refer to him, nor was his death recorded, but he was included in the first list of those on the War Memorial (1919). There is only one 'J. Brayshaw' recorded by the CWGC—the name John was hand-written into the Register, and is confirmed in *Soldiers Who Died in the Great War* and the Register of Soldiers' Effects. I can only find one John Brayshaw in Bradford whose age makes him a suitable candidate, although he seems a little old for the forms he was in. The Bradford Roll of Honour (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/bradfordww1/9342815984/in/album-72157634776696882/>) records a John Brayshaw of 16 Cartmell Street (the same address as the 1911 Census), enlisted March 1916, served with 6th West Yorkshire. It gives December 1917 as the date of death—no John Brayshaw was killed in December, but this could be when his death was confirmed.

For the Group Scheme, see <http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/soldiers/a-soldiers-life-1914-1918/enlisting-into-the-army/the-group-scheme-derby-scheme/> accessed 21-4-2017.

This identification is not certain and further information may change it.

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