

# WALTER ALEXANDER SCALES



6th January 1918

1893-1918 Age 24

## Captain, 1/6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, attached 49th Division Staff.

Alex Scales was the grandson of Henry Christian Scales, a schoolmaster in Manningham. His son Walter Henry Scales, formerly a commercial traveller, formed the company of Scales and Beckett to ship textile goods abroad in 1882. Five years later he married well to Edith Emily Birkinshaw whose father John was also a 'Foreign Merchant' and manufacturer resident in Ilkley. He was later described as 'one of the most prominent Baptist laymen in Yorkshire' and he retired from business in order to devote himself to the Church. Walter's business prospered, under the name W. H. Scales & Co. Ltd., 'Stuff Merchant', and when he died in 1914 his estate was valued at over £1 million at today's values. Walter Alexander, known as Alex, was their third child and second son, born on 22nd June 1893. The family was completed by a younger sister Catherine who would become the mother of the actress Prunella Scales. The family lived in a large house called 'Verwood' on North Park Road, overlooking Lister Park. Alex and his elder brother Cuthbert both went to Bradford Grammar School. Cuthbert then went to Edinburgh University where he qualified as a Medical Doctor. Alex was at B.G.S. from 1903 to 1909. He was in the Classical form until the end of the Fifth when he left school with two distinctions and five passes at Lower Certificate level. Aged sixteen he went to work for his father as a foreign shipping clerk.

Alex was twenty-one when the war broke out and he enlisted in the 'Bradford Rifles' (6th Battalion West Yorks.) on 4th August or soon after. He served as Private 1592, until in January 1915 he applied for a commission which he received in March. While he was training his battalion went to France with the 49th West Riding Division. He joined them at Ypres in July and took command of a platoon in 'A' Company. He was awarded the Military Cross for his 'gallantry and devotion to duty' during the German Phosgene gas attack of 19th December when in full view of the enemy he helped to rescue six men whose dugout had been blown in. On 1st July 1916 he was wounded during the 6th Battalion attack on



Thiepval—his life was perhaps saved by the fact that 'A' company was in reserve and Captain E.W. Knowles cancelled its attack. How long Scales was out of combat is not known. He probably had home leave to recuperate, and it may have been during this time that he was betrothed to a 'Miss Hepworth'.

Early in 1917 Scales was attached to the regiment's 1st Battalion for two months, which was a quiet time. He rejoined the 6th Battalion in April, and fortunately it was not involved in the British offensives of April-May. In July he was promoted to Lieutenant. He must have impressed his superiors as a brave soldier and an efficient officer. At the end of August he was given the temporary rank of Captain and was attached to the 49th Divisional staff. This spared him from taking part in the battalion's attack in the mud near Passchendaele on 9th October. Scales met his death on 6th January 1918 in mysterious circumstances. He was buried at Doullens in France, 85 miles from where his division was in the line at Ypres. In some records his death is stated as accidental. He was buried in a row with three other men who died on the same day. Two of them were pilots in the Royal Flying Corps, while the third, an infantry Major, is known to have died in a flying accident. It seems possible, even probable, that Scales died in this incident.

Dr. Cuthbert Scales finished the war as a Major and also received the Military Cross for bravery in collecting and treating the wounded under fire in 1918.

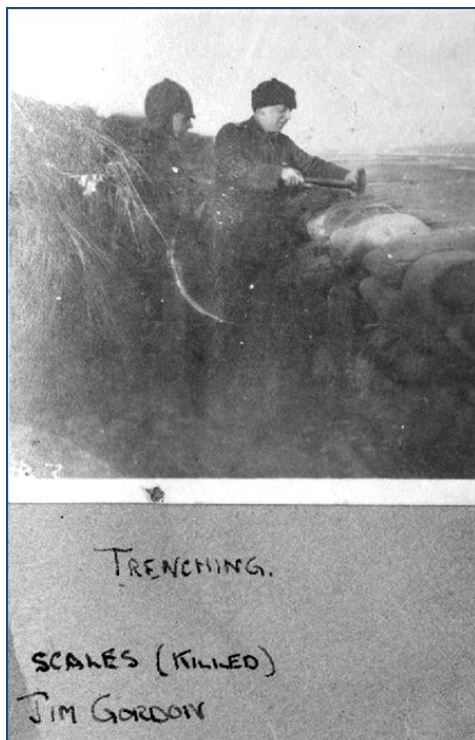


## Acknowledgements:

Alex Scales' photo is from the School memorial book courtesy of the O.B.A. and B.G.S. The family was researched using Ancestry.com. The family were closely connected with the Salem Congregational Chapel, Oak Lane, however there are no records of baptisms or marriages among the West Yorkshire non-conformist records. The Birkinshaws are elusive, apart from the 1871 Census. For W.H. Scales' business activities, *1912 Kelly's Directory to Bradford* and *Grace's Who's Who in Business 1914* (accessed online). The firm had offices in Bradford, Manchester and Bombay. John Richard Birkinshaw's service to the Baptist Church is from his obituary in the *Todmorden and District News* 1st October 1909 (accessed through findmypast.co.uk). Mr. and Mrs. W.H. Scales attended the interment at Nab Wood with their sons Cuthbert and Alex (*Bradford Daily Telegraph* 23rd September 1909). For the value of W.H. Scales' estate of £19,000, see <<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid>>.

Alex's school record is from B.G.S. Annual Reports for 1904-1910. His Officer Personal Record is T.N.A. WO -374-60637. It contains the thanks for sympathy card sent out on behalf of Alex's mother and family and Miss Hepworth, who I take to be his fiancée. The local papers do not help to solve the mystery of Alex's death. The solution presented here was worked out by Tricia Platts of the Bradford WW1 Group, who has generously shared her research with me. He is recorded on the Salem Congregational Church war memorial which is now in St. Andrews Church, Heaton.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper in December 2017. For further information, contact Nhooper1956@googlemail.com, or see <<http://www.bradfordgrammar.com/former-pupils/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>>.



The photo above of the graves of the four officers who died on 6th January was taken by the author. Scales' grave is second from the left.

The photo left was taken during the 1/6th Battalion's training in England, perhaps when they guarded the coast at Redcar in 1914. It was supplied to me by Tricia Platts, and comes from a collection of snapshots taken by a soldier of the battalion.