

# ALFRED BRIGHTRICK SPENCE



1st July 1916

1893-1916 Age 21

**Sergeant 16/823, 16th (Service) Battalion  
West Yorkshire Regiment, 1st Bradford  
'Pals'.**

Alfred Spence was the youngest son of John Sutcliffe Spence and Harriet Sands, who lived in Heaton. Although this was a desirable suburb of Bradford, boasting many fine houses belonging to Bradford's professional elite, the Spences were of much humbler status. John was born in Heaton, where his father was a quarryman in the nearby stone quarries. He found work as an assistant over-looker at a silk spinning mill, probably Lister's, and then became a cotton and silk dyer. When he married Harriet in 1886, she had only recently moved to Bradford from Worcestershire, where her father was a gardener.

Alfred was their third son born in the summer of 1893. He was educated at the nearby St. Barnabas' School, where he must have been an outstanding pupil for when he was twelve he won a three years' scholarship to Bradford Grammar School. At this time the fee for B.G.S. was 16 guineas a year, with an additional guinea for books. He started in Form Third Modern Lower, finishing his first year 21st out of 30. In the following year he struggled academically, and he left in 1907 before the completion of his scholarship. At the age of fourteen, Alfred then found employment in the warehouse of Lister's Mill in the velvet department. Since 1906 he had been part of the Heaton Company of the Church Lads' Brigade, a quasi-military organisation which was part of the Church of England. His leadership qualities were demonstrated by his promotion to the rank of staff-sergeant, and he was still a member in 1914 when war broke out.

In mid- or late September 1914, Spence went into the centre of Bradford to enlist in the Bradford Battalion being raised by the Lord Mayor. Living in Heaton was convenient for training in Lister Park and at the ice-rink on Manningham Lane. Again, his leadership qualities were recognized by his promotion to sergeant. In 1915, when the 1st 'Pals'



were in camp at Ripon, Spence was transferred to the machine-gun section which operated the two Maxim guns. Later in 1915, following the formation of a separate Machine Gun Corps, Spence remained with the 'Pals' and was not transferred to 93 Brigade's new machine-gun company. The heavy machine-guns were replaced by four of the lighter Lewis Guns, for one of which Spence may have been responsible. At the end of December that year Spence went to Egypt, and afterwards he moved with the battalion to France.

Spence was with the 16th Battalion on the morning of 1st July 1916 when at 7.30 a.m. they climbed out of their assembly trench about one hundred yards behind the British front line. They were the second wave of the 93 Brigade's advance towards the fortified village of Serre, and they had already suffered heavily from machine-gun fire from their flank and from shell-fire by the time they reached the British line. Spence may have been one of those who was killed in no man's land, for his body was either not recovered or could no longer be identified when the battlefield was cleared in May 1917. His name is one of the tens of thousands recorded on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing. He is also remembered on St. Barnabas Church, Heaton, war memorial.



### **Acknowledgements:**

Spence's photo is courtesy of the O.B.A. Roll of Honour. The family records were researched using Ancestry.com. The Bradford Weekly Telegraph printed a short biography on 28th July 1916 (accessed at Bradford Local Studies Library) - thanks to Tricia Platts for sharing this. Spence's school record is from the B.G.S. Annual Reports for 1906 and 1907. For scholarships, anon., Bradford Grammar School Past and Present, (1912), 16. For the Machine Gun Corps, <<http://www.1914-1918.net/mgc.htm>> accessed 2-11-2016.

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