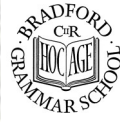


CHARLES HIRST



3rd September 1916

1894-1916 Age 22

Captain, 1st-4th Battalion Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment (Territorial Force).

Charles Hirst was the eldest son of Robert Hirst and Sarah Jane nee Scott, born in 1894 and the third of seven surviving children. His parents were both from Cleckheaton and they married in 1886. Robert's father Charles was a partner in a business manufacturing wire in the town, which employed two men and four boys in 1871. He became sole owner and expanded into new premises at Exchange Mills, Moorend. When he retired in 1900, he left the firm of Charles Hirst & Co. in the hands of his sons Robert and Herbert. At his death in 1911, the elder Charles was a millionaire by today's values.

In 1904, in his eleventh year, Robert's son Charles started at B.G.S. in form 1st Upper. He was a clever boy, and at the end of that year won the prize for Maths. With a career in industry lying before him, Charles was on the modern side of the school. His second year was by contrast very poor and he came near the bottom of his form. His results improved and when he left at the end of 1909 or early 1910, approaching his sixteenth birthday, he was near the top of his form in Maths, Physics, English and German. He joined his father's business to learn the trade of wire-drawing, in which he was joined by his younger brothers John and Robert.

In 1912, aged eighteen, Charles joined the 4th Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment, the local Territorial Force battalion whose 'E' Company recruited in Cleckheaton. He was commissioned as Second Lieutenant in 1913 around his nineteenth birthday, a sign of his great qualities, and shortly after war broke out he was promoted to Lieutenant. The battalion had just departed for their annual summer camp in 1914 when war was declared and was mobilized for coastal defence. It proceeded to France on 14th April 1915 with the 49th West Riding Division. Hirst was the Battalion Transport Officer. In November he was given temporary command of 'D' Company and the rank of Captain. Subsequently he was put in command of 'B' Company.



Hirst survived a torrid five months in the Ypres Salient in the second half of 1915, following which the 49th division moved south towards the Somme front. His battalion was spared the carnage of the 1st July 1916. On the afternoon of 2nd September they moved into the trenches near Thiepval in preparation for an attack at 05.10 the following morning. This was part of the general assault labelled the 'Battle of Guillemont'. Hirst's 'B' Company spear-headed 4th Battalion's advance. They succeeded in taking their objective, the German front line, however Captain Hirst was killed in no man's land. By midday the battalion had lost all its gains and half its strength, and in the evening it was withdrawn from the line.

Hirst's body was perforce left where he fell. He is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing, in the Hirst Memorial Window in Whitechapel Church and on several other war memorials in Cleckheaton. He was unmarried.



Acknowledgements:

This photo of Hirst is from the O.B.A. Roll of Honour, with thanks. I acknowledge the use of Charlie Turpin's biography of Hirst at <http://branches.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/spenborough/branch-information/spenborough-roll-of-honour/world-war-one-1914-18-officers> which includes an alternative photo. I researched the family using Ancestry.com. Hirst's school record is taken from the Annual Class Lists published by B.G.S., with thanks to the School Archives. For the family business, see <http://www.spensorboroughguardian.co.uk/news/nostalgia/guardian-readers-help-write-history-1-6455058>. Charles senior left effects to the value of £13,000.

For Charles Hirst's successive promotions: <http://www.google.co.uk/?ion=1&espv=2#q=Charles+Hirst+London+Gazette>; <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/Lhttps://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/28719/page/3518/data.pdf>; <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29459/supplement/1333/data.pdf>.

This biography was compiled and composed by Nick Hooper, August 2016 (Nhooper1956@googlemail.com).



The Hirst Window, Whitechapel Church, Cleckheaton , <http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/resources/images/5384440/?type=responsive-gallery>