

FRANCIS PERCIVAL NOWELL



2nd July 1916

1894-1916 Age 22

Second Lieutenant (T), 18th Service Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, 2nd Bradford 'Pals'.

Francis Percival Nowell was born in Eccleshill, Bradford, in spring 1894. His parents were David Oldham Nowell and Elizabeth Ann Kenworthy. His mother's father was a grocer and tea merchant from Wakefield. David was a grandson of Joseph Nowell of Dewsbury, a member of a remarkable family of civil engineers responsible for many tunnels and bridges on canal and railway projects in the early decades of the nineteenth century. His father opened the quarries at Idle which supplied the paving stones for the streets of west London. David's elder brother Herbert continued the family business, while David himself was an engineer, and then became a patent agent. Following his marriage to Elizabeth, they lived at Eccleshill, and then Shipley. They had three children, James, Francis and Mary. James was at Bradford Grammar for a single year, whereas Francis attended for seven years, from the ages of ten to seventeen. His record was very mixed. He twice had to repeat a year, yet he was capable of winning the form prize in July 1910. When he left school, it was to take up a position in the 'wool trade'.

With the outbreak of war in 1914, both brothers enlisted in the Bradford Battalion which became the First Pals— James, also in the wool trade, volunteered on 22nd September, and perhaps Francis accompanied him. Shortly after this their father died in December. The two brothers' military careers were very contrasting. James remained a private soldier, service number 16/584. His file survives and reveals he damaged his knee in Egypt at the end of 1915. He had continuous problems with it, but also a poor disciplinary record, and he was eventually transferred to the Labour Corps and discharged in 1919. In May 1916, he was transferred to hospital suffering from a hernia. This probably saved his life, since he was absent for the battle of the Somme.



Francis (surely he was known as Frank?) does not have a service number in the First Pals, and he was one of nine other ranks transferred to the 18th Battalion, the Second Pals, where he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant on 26th February 1915. Several of these were Old Bradfordians, including Rhodes Akam and Frank Watson, both of whom died on 1st July.

On that day, Francis Nowell led his platoon into action at 08.40 a.m. from Landguard and Dunmow trenches, well behind the front line. After a hundred yards they entered a zone swept by machine-gun bullets and artillery fire. Very few men made it beyond the British barbed wire into no man's land. Nowell was wounded and evacuated by field ambulance to Couin, where he died of his wounds on the following day. He was single, aged 22.



Acknowledgements:

Nowell is buried in grave I.C.20. The photo is from the O.B.A. Roll of Honour. The family history was constructed from the records on Ancestry.com. For the Nowells role in building Britain's transport system, see <http://www.macclesfieldcanal.org.uk/history/nowells.htm>. For Nowell in the Second Pals, see David Raw, Bradford Pals (Barnsley, 2008), pp. 67-8, 105-6, 186-8, and <http://bradfordpals1914-1918.co.uk/16-bn-info-surnames-n>. The London Gazette gives the date for Nowell's commission. He is in the photo of 18th Battalion's officers taken in December (Raw, p.105).

Compiled and composed by Nick Hooper, July 2016 (Nhooper1956@googlemail.com).