

IRVIN PRESTON WATERHOUSE



8th November 1916

1895-1916 Age 21

Second Lieutenant 10th (Service) Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment.

Irvin Waterhouse was born in Manningham, Bradford, in early October 1895, the second of three children. His parents were of humble origins. Robert Waterhouse was a drayman's son from Bradford, and his brother and sister were mill hands. Robert was clerk to a wool merchant, who became his manager, and then went into business on his own account. By 1911, he lived in Heaton, and later in Shipley Fields, signs of his prosperity. His wife Anne (or Annie) Wells Preston from Goole in East Yorkshire, was the daughter of a boiler-maker who moved to Bradford. Before she married she was a weaver. Their eldest child John was apprenticed to his father and inherited the family company, which seems to have survived into the late twentieth century.

Irvin started at Bradford Grammar School in 1906 just before his eleventh birthday, and was a pupil there until he was nearly sixteen. He had an aptitude for languages, doing well in Latin, Greek and French, and also Maths. When he left the School in 1911 what he did is not known. It is possible he joined his father and brother in business, however his occupation when he enlisted was vaguely stated as 'motor driver'. When war began Irvin was a few weeks short of nineteen and he was not an early volunteer. He presented himself to the Recruiting Office in Bradford at the start of October 1915, the day before he was twenty. As a qualified driver he was immediately sent to the Motor Transport depot of the Army Service Corps at Grove Park in south-east London. His medical inspection showed him to be a portly young man, over 5' 9" in height, but with a 45 inch chest. On 19th January 1916, once his basic training was complete, Preston was appointed a Second Lieutenant on probation. He was posted to the 10th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, and he landed in France on 20th July 1916.

On the disastrous 1st July, no unit in the British Army suffered heavier losses than the 10/West Yorkshires, 710 officers and men; a week later the battalion comprised 211 men, a fifth of its full strength. When Preston joined them in late July the



battalion was in process of reconstruction with drafts of officers and other ranks. As early as 3rd August the officers visited the scene of their disastrous action a month earlier and the battalion was due to practise how best they ought to have attacked in the light of experience. They undertook a great deal of training—bayonet fighting featured prominently—as well as spells in the front line in a quiet sector at Hebuterne.

In late October the 10/West Yorkshires were sent to the front line north of Lesboeuvs. The Somme battlefield was a featureless landscape of shell craters. October had been wet, the rudimentary trenches were two feet deep in liquid mud and Trench foot was a serious problem. German snipers were active, and it was difficult to move rations to the line. On 8th October, Irvin Waterhouse was leading a ration party to his men at the front when a German sniper shot him. He had just passed the age of twenty-one. In the conditions there was no prospect of recovering his body. His name is on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing.





Acknowledgements:

The main photo is courtesy of the O.B.A. Roll of Honour; the less flattering portrait is © IWM (HU 127100) <<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205390389>>. The family information and military records come from Ancestry.com. Irvin's school record is from the 1907-1911 B.G.S. Annual Reports, when he was in Forms II-V Classical. Unusually, Irvin's Attestation is still available, despite his commission (for which see <<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29453/supplement/1108/data.pdf>> and National Archives WO 339/53261). The family business was at 18 Dale Street, Bradford in 1912 (Kelly's Directory of Bradford and Suburbs 1912, 477, 610). Robert Waterhouse's address at 37 Piccadilly on the Medal Index Card is the neighbouring street—the premises presumably spanned the two. An internet trawl for 'Robert Waterhouse' suggested the company existed until the 1990s.

The circumstances of Waterhouse's death are in the 10/West Yorkshires War Diary (Ancestry.com).

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