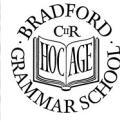


JAMES RHODES AKAM



1st July 1916

1893-1916 Age 23

Lieutenant, 18th Service Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, 2nd Bradford 'Pals', formerly 16/631, 1st Bradford 'Pals'.

Rhodes Akam was born in the opening months of 1893, the only son of Benjamin Akam and Martha Ellen Rotheray. Martha was twelve years younger than her husband and was formerly a dress-maker. They had one other child, an elder daughter named Margaret Elizabeth. Rhodes' grandfather James Ingle Acomb, was a joiner from Otley. He seems to have changed the spelling of the family name to Akam. His elder son John became a millwright and joiner in Bradford, while Benjamin became a timber merchant. They both seem to have had an interest in a business manufacturing packing cases (in 1912, Johnson & Akam Ltd. was located at 52-4 Harris Street, off Leeds Road, Bradford—they are still in business on the same site today).

Rhodes Akam joined the junior department at Bradford Grammar School in 1902, when he was nine. He was on the Modern side, which meant he did not take Latin. Although he was generally a moderate student, he took the Modern Prize for the Second Forms in 1905. In his final year in Sixth Remove Modern, his subjects included book-keeping and short-hand, useful skills for his future business career. He took charge of Red house cricket 2nd XI, and he played rugby on the wing. He left in 1909 when he was 16, apparently without any School Certificates, and he went to work 'learning the timber trade' (1911 census), perhaps with his uncle John. In 1913, when he travelled to the USA with his father, Rhodes was listed as a clerk. The family business was clearly prosperous. For more than twenty years, Benjamin lived at 33, Cecil Avenue, backing onto Horton Park. Just before the First World War he moved to Harrogate, and by the time of his death in 1921, Benjamin lived in an equally imposing house at St. John's Park, Menston.

Rhodes was twenty-one when war broke out. Rather than joining many of his former school-friends in the Bradford Territorials, he enlisted as Private 631 in the 1st Bradford "Pals" Battalion which the Lord Mayor of Bradford formed in September 1914. When a 2nd "Pals" Battalion was formed early the following year,



Rhodes was one of several Old Bradfordians who applied for officers' commissions in the new unit. He was appointed a Second Lieutenant on 14th March, with promotion to Lieutenant on 25th May. He participated in a recruiting event when the Second Battalion defeated the First "Pals" in a rugby match played at Bradford Northern's Birch Lane ground in Bowling, prior to their match against York.

On 1st July 1916, Akam commanded a platoon in "B" Company. When they left their reserve trenches at 08.40 a.m. they had to cross open ground to reach the British front line prior to attacking their objective, the 'Brown Line'. Although they ran forward, the fire from a German machine-gun on their flank caused such severe casualties that few men even reached their own line. However, Akam with a few men from his platoon not only entered no man's land, they also succeeded in finding a gap through the German barbed wire, leaped the German front line and were seen running towards their second line. That was the last that was seen of them and their bodies were never identified. Akam's name was recorded on the Memorial to the Missing at Thiepval. He was twenty-three.

A century later there is a curious footnote to Rhodes Akam's life—his image in uniform stares out from a poster published by the Imperial War Museum.

Old Bradfordians—'We will remember them'



Acknowledgements:

Image: <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205023684>



It was quite straightforward to research Rhodes Akam's family using Ancestry.com. For the family business, an advert states the company was founded 1855 (https://www.flickr.com/photos/bradford_timeline/8443067585). Akam's school career was filled out using the Bradford Grammar School Yearbooks and the Bradfordian, courtesy of the School Archives and the West Yorkshire Local Studies Library. David Raw, *Bradford Pals* (Pen & Sword, 2005) is the source for information on OBs promoted into the Second "Pals" (pp. 67-8), the recruiting rugby match (p. 70) and Akam's action on 1st July (p. 186-8).

Akam's Officer's file is WO338 (<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C1081971>) - I have yet to consult it myself.

His Probate (Ancestry.com) gives his address in Harrogate, whence his father moved shortly before the war. The house name 'Tiverton' is identical to the house at 22 Stavely Road, Nab Wood, Bradford BD18, where another James Akam lived in 1912—it is unclear whether this was James Rhodes, or his nephew James Ingle (Kelly's Directory of Bradford and Suburbs 1912), and was the address given by Benjamin and Rhodes when they visited New York in 1913. John Witten, the maternal grandfather of John and Benjamin Akam was born in Tiverton, Devon, which clearly inspired the naming.

AKAM James Rhodes of Tiverton Rutland-road **Harrogate**
lieutenant 18th battalion West Yorkshire regiment died
on or since 1 July 1916 in France on active service Probate
London 24 May to Benjamin Akam timber merchant.
Effects £213 19s. 3d.

Compiled and composed by Nicholas Hooper June 2016 (Nhooper1956@googlemail.com).