

JOHN GEOFFREY MIDGLEY



7th November 1915

1890-1915 Aged 25

**Corporal 106321 D.C.M., 188th Company
Royal Engineers.**

John Midgley was born in Bradford on 17th June 1890. He was the third of five children born to Samuel and Henrietta (nee Tomlinson) Midgley, and their eldest surviving son. Samuel described himself as a Professor of Music, although his earliest recorded employment at the age of eleven was working underground as a 'hurrier' in a coal mine in Bierley, south Bradford. Henrietta was a vocalist and singing teacher, and together they ran a music school at a large house on Oak Avenue, Manningham, for more than three decades. Their son John attended the Bradford Grammar School from 1900, when he was ten, until 1907. He left no impression in the pages of the Bradfordian, either as a scholar or a sportsman. He studied Chemistry at Bradford Technical College, before he became Works Chemist for J.R. Denison & Sons, dyers, of Bradford, and he was seconded for two months to the Baiers Company in Eberfeld, Germany. He was a good botanist who wrote for local weekly newspapers and delivered lectures. In the term after leaving BGS, Midgley presented to the Photographic Society there *'an exceedingly interesting lecture on "Walks around Bradford" ... demonstrated by lantern slides from his own photographs'*

When war broke out, John was quick to enlist in the Bradford Pals battalion (16th West Yorkshire), and his name was among the 'First Thousand' published by the Bradford Daily Telegraph on 6th November 1914. Following the first use of poisonous chlorine gas by the Germans in April 1915, the War Office decided to follow suit and circulated a letter appealing for men with experience in Chemistry to form special companies of the Royal Engineers. Midgley volunteered, becoming a 'chemical corporal', and he went to France on 27th July 1915 to join 188th Company.

After a period of relative quiet on the Western Front, the French commander Joffre planned a joint Franco-British offensive in Champagne and Artois. The British 1st Army, commanded by General Sir Douglas Haig would deliver the British attack at Loos, an area of slagheaps and mining villages. As the B.E.F. was still desperately short of heavy artillery, and of shells



of all calibres, chlorine gas was used to effect a breakthrough. Midgley's Company was one of two responsible for installing five thousand cylinders in the front line and releasing the gas on 25th September, with mixed results. Sir John French prolonged the attacks through October, and there was a second British gas attack on the 13th. For his actions that day Midgley would be awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. His company commander wrote *'Corpl. Midgley, J.G., carried out his duties with coolness and perfect success, despite an intense bombardment and many serious difficulties ... some of the infantry went over the parapet, were stopped by their own wire, and retired, leaving a wounded Private of the Black Watch in front of the bay where Corpl. Midgley was working. Immediately Corpl. Midgley climbed over the parapet to bring the Highlander into the trench, but was unfortunately hit in the thigh [by a shell splinter] and had to retire.'* A fellow engineer, inspired by this example, rescued the man who was saved from being gassed or left to bleed to death. Midgley was evacuated to Britain to the Red Cross Hospital at Cirencester, Gloucestershire, where he died of his wound on 7th November. His officer wrote that *'it would have been some consolation to his relatives and friends ... to know ... that he gave his life for his friend.'* His body was buried in Scholemoor Cemetery, attended by a guard of honour from the School OTC. He was unmarried.



Acknowledgements:

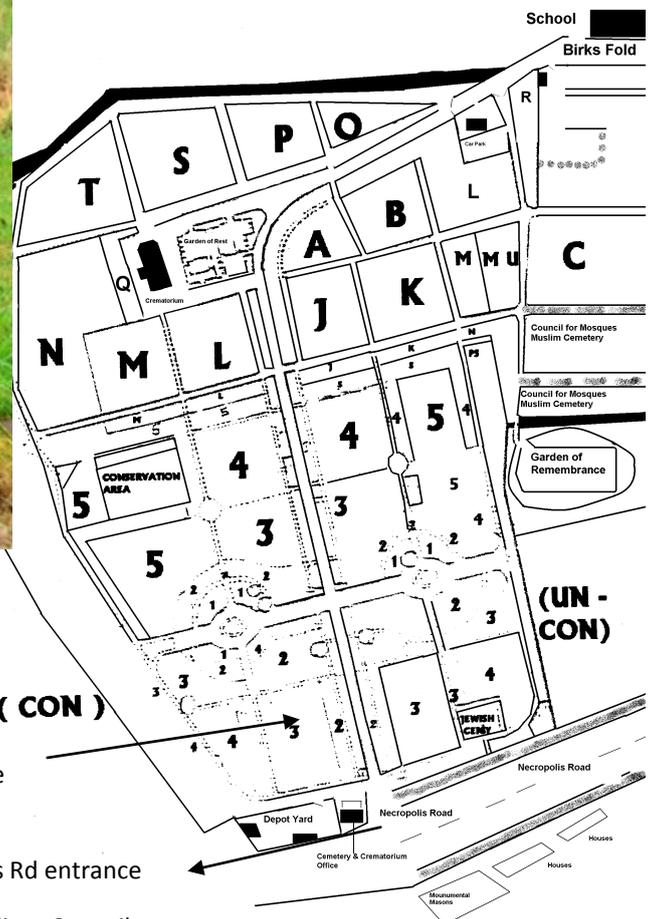
The photo is from the OBA Roll of Honour, with thanks. It is quite straightforward to reconstruct Midgley's family and military career through the records available on Ancestry. De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour provides a detailed account of his life and death. Various sites provide information on the 188th Company Royal Engineers.

Midgley's body was interred in Scholemoor Cemetery in III. C. 614

Researched and composed by Nick Hooper November 2015—for further information about Midgley or the commemoration of Old Bradfordians, contact by email Nhooper1956@googlemail.com, or Twitter @NickHooper13.



Photo © Nick Hooper.



Location of Midgley's grave

Necropolis Rd entrance

Plan Courtesy of Bradford Metropolitan Council