

JOHN WILLIAM MILLS



1st July 1916

1892-1916 Age 23

Private 16/399 16th Service Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, 1st Bradford 'Pals'.

John William Mills, known as 'Jack', was the only child of John Thomas Mills and Lavinia Louisa Cropsey. His father John came from Londonderry, near Bedale in North Yorkshire. Although he started work as a labourer, he later became an insurance agent and went on to establish his own business in Bradford as a broker supplying insurance. Lavinia was from Herefordshire, the daughter of a dyer and a dealer in second-hand clothes. She trained as a nurse in Bradford, where she met and married John in 1891. They lived in Rand Street, Listerhills where Jack was born the following year. His mother died in 1903, just before he started at Bradford Grammar School when he was eleven. His father did not long remain a widower, and the following year he married Mary Louisa Lang, from Mirfield, and a daughter Nora Elizabeth was born.

Jack was three years at Bradford Grammar in the Junior School, leaving when he was fourteen. In his final year he was twenty-fifth out of thirty-five in his form, Second Modern Upper, and his father may decided he was not suited to the school. He was sent to Pannal Ash College, a boys' boarding school near Harrogate, to complete his education. We encounter him next in 1911, when he was eighteen and working as a clerk for his father. The company of Messrs. J. T. Mills and Son, incorporated insurance brokers, operated from the family home, 27 Mannville Terrace, a nine-room house in Listerhills. When he enlisted in 1914 Jack gave as his occupation 'insurance broker'.

Jack Mills responded to Kitchener's call for recruits by going to the Mechanics Institute in the city centre and joining the Lord Mayor's Battalion, what would become the Bradford 'Pals'. Registration began on Tuesday 7th September, and on the 19th it was suspended, with over 1200 recruits needing to be processed. Jack's service number was 399, and as he satisfied the physical and age requirements his name was duly listed in the Bradford Daily Telegraph's 'First Complete Roll Call'. At first, the new recruits lived at home and trained at the Rollerina skating rink, in Manningham (Lister) Park



and at Belle Vue barracks. It was not until January 1915 that they marched off to Raikes Camp, Skipton.

It would seem that although an educated man, Jack Mills was not considered for a commission or even for promotion to a non-commissioned officer. There are no anecdotes which illuminate his months of training, the time spent in Egypt, and his arrival at the Somme front in spring 1916. Nor do we know anything specific of the circumstances of his death on 1st July 1916. Such was the confusion regarding what had happened to the 1st 'Pals' on that day that his father had to wait four weeks to receive notification that his son was '*officially reported as missing*' (Bradford Daily Telegraph), and his photo was published in the edition of 1st August. In this part of the front it was not possible to clear the battlefield until the following May, by which time it was impossible to identify the bodies of many of the missing. Jack was recorded as 'Presumed dead', and his name was inscribed on the Memorial to the Missing at Thiepval. His father lived on until 1945.



Acknowledgements:

In preparing this biography I have used the World War One Casualties index in Bradford Local Studies Library, the records available through Ancestry.com, and the BGS Year Books courtesy of the School Archives. My thanks go to Lesley Purcell, and to the OBA for permission to use the photo.

I have also used David Raw, *Bradford Pals* (Pen and Sword, 2005). There is limited information about Pannal Ash College on the internet. It became the Police College, and has now been developed for housing. Although it had a CCF prior to WW2, I suspect that had one existed while Jack Mills was a pupil there, he would have been commissioned in 1915-16.

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