

JOSEPH WILLIAM ROBERTS



12th July 1916

1895-1916 Age 21

Private 4638, 3rd-6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (Territorial Force).

Joseph William Roberts was born in Cawood, near Selby, his mother Rosa Edwards' home village—she had probably gone home to be with her mother for the delivery. Rosa was the daughter of an agricultural labourer. She went to work as a kitchenmaid at Fulneck School near Pudsey, where she met her husband, also called Joseph William. His family lived in Pudsey where he was a warehouseman for a woollen cloth merchant. After they married the couple set up home in Thornbury, Bradford, where the elder Joseph William Roberts worked as a commercial traveller.

Joseph William junior was born on 29th April 1895, the eldest of five children. When his father died in 1906, his widow was left to bring them up. She worked as a cook from the family home, assisted by her sister. At least two of her three daughters were sent to board at the Commercial Travellers School in Pinner, Middlesex, where more than three hundred children were educated. Joseph attended Bradford Grammar School for six years from 1906, starting when he was eleven. Unlike many new boys at the school who struggled in their first year, Joseph came top of his form in summer 1907, and he continued to do well. In 1910 he was awarded the Modern Languages prize for Fifth Modern Upper, and in his final two years he was in the Science form, although he left without taking any School Certificates.

What he did next is unknown, and when war came Joseph was not an early volunteer, either for the Territorial or the Pals Battalions of the West Yorkshire Regiment. It is possible that he waited until the government began to move towards compulsory service towards the end of 1915. If he attested under the Derby Scheme, then his class will have been mobilized at the end of January 1916. He was posted to the third line Bradford Territorial battalion, which was stationed at Clipstone Camp near Mansfield in Nottinghamshire. This was a Reserve battalion providing reinforcements for the 1st-6th battalion, which was in France, and the 2nd-6th.



Roberts' photo does not suggest a robust constitution, and there is no record in the School magazine that he had been a sportsman. It may be that the training regime of drill, physical exercise, long route marches and trench digging damaged his health. The 'Register of Soldiers' Effects' records that Joseph died in the camp Military Hospital. It may have been possible for his mother to visit him before his death. His body was brought back to Bradford, where it was interred in Undercliffe Cemetery, Plot L.C.430, not far from the family home. Joseph was 21 and single. He never served overseas so was ineligible for the standard British War and Victory Medals.



Acknowledgements:

The photo is courtesy of the O.B.A. Roll of Honour. The records for the Roberts family were researched using Ancestry.com. For his school years I used the Annual Class Lists in the School Archives.

For the Derby Scheme: <http://www.1914-1918.net/derbyscheme.html>; for the 3rd-6th battalion West Yorks: <http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-british-infantry-regiments-of-1914-1918/the-prince-of-wales-own-west-yorkshire-regiment/>. There is a good impression of life at Clipstone Camp to be seen at <http://www.homefrontlegacy.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CLIPSTONE-CAMP-Then-Now1.pdf>.

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Roberts' grave in Undercliffe Cemetery (taken by the author).