

ROBERT SUTCLIFFE



5th July 1916

1880-1916 Age 36



Lieutenant (Temporary) 16th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, 1st Bradford 'Pals'.

Robert Sutcliffe was born in Bradford on 29th December 1880, the only son, and the second of four children of Thomas Sutcliffe and Eva, whose maiden name was also Sutcliffe. His father's family were from Heptonstall, where his grandfather John was a landowner and 'gentleman'. Thomas went into business in the textile industry as a woollen cloth merchant and then manufacturer, and moved to Idle, where his father-in-law had a cotton spinning mill. Thomas, Eva and their family lived in Cliffe Cottage. Their son Robert was at Bradford Grammar School from 1891 to 1898, from the ages of eleven to eighteen. In 1899 he became the head of the family when his mother died, his father having died in 1894. Robert trained as a solicitor, and he went into business as a partner in the firm Sutcliffe and Trenholme, 3 Booth Street, Bradford. He was also an accomplished golfer. The Bradfordian noted in 1907 that *'Sutcliffe has won a name for himself in Yorkshire as a golfer, having been runner-up for the Yorkshire Championship in 1907.'* He was associated with the Bradford and the Baildon Golf Clubs. He was also active in musical circles, and he was president of the Idle Musical Union for a year.

When the war broke out in 1914, Robert was quick to enlist in September. Initially, he joined the Public Schools' Battalion (16th Middlesex) in London as a private, after he read a newspaper appeal for men. He was at this time nearly thirty-four and considerably older than many volunteers. However, he soon returned to Bradford with a commission in the 1st 'Pals' Battalion (dated 21st October 1914). The following July he was promoted to Lieutenant with command of a company (240 men) and in August his law partnership was dissolved as the likelihood that the battalion would be sent overseas increased. This finally happened in December when both Bradford 'Pals' Battalions were sent abroad, not as anticipated to the Western Front, but to Egypt. It was not until March that they arrived in France, to be sent to the Somme region where the 'Big Push' was being prepared.

Robert wrote his last letter to his elder sister Mary Anne Wragg on 30th June:

'Just a line to say I go "over the lid" tomorrow. My company are in the first line of attack and hope to do great things. We all naturally hope to come through all right, but, of course, one never knows, someone's bound to go under, and it's the only way to end the war. It's a great thing to be in, and I'm glad our division is one of the first to go over.'

Sutcliffe was seriously wounded in the attack at 07.30 a.m. on 1st July and he was evacuated by ambulance, then by hospital train and ship and he was on his way to a hospital in England when he died at sea on 5th July. His body was taken to Yorkshire for burial in the family plot in Heptonstall Slack Baptist Cemetery. The interment was well attended by representatives from organisations in Idle with which he was associated—the Liberal Club, the Musical Union, the Baptist Church and Baildon Golf Club—giving a good indication of the esteem in which he was held. The inscription on the monument concludes with the words *'Fidelis usque ad mortem'*. He is also remembered on the Holy Trinity, Idle, Roll of Honour.



Acknowledgements:

A fairly full picture of Robert Sutcliffe's family can be built up using the records on Ancestry.com. The image of him used overleaf is courtesy of the O.B.A. from the Roll of Honour. There are other images of him in David Raw, *Bradford Pals* (Barnsley, 2008), pp. 46, 56; the information about his enlistment is on p.46. His final letter to his sister is quoted by Malcolm Brown, *Tommy Goes To War* (first published 1991, consulted online) and also Shipley in *World War One* (<http://www.shipleyww1.org.uk/People%20Sutcliffe%20Robert.html>). I have preferred Brown's version, but the Shipley account describes the funeral from the local paper. The references to notices in the London Gazette are <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29290/page/9013/data.pdf> and <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/28991/supplement/10146/data.pdf>.

The photos below are courtesy of Tricia Platts.

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



Lieut. Robert Sutcliffe (Died of Wounds).

