

# THOMAS HUMPHRIES



1st July 1916

1896-1916 Age 19

## Second Lieutenant, 15th (Service) Battalion Leeds 'Pals'.

Tom Humphries was born on 15th November 1896. His father Edward Walter Humphries was a partner in the Bradford printing business of Percy Lund, Humphries & Co. Originally from Wootton Bassett in Wiltshire, Edward married Elizabeth Beresford in 1888 in Norwich, where he worked for the large printing and book-binding business of Jarrolds. Percy Lund, the owner of a Bradford printing firm, wrote to invite him to become joint managing director in order to reinvigorate the company's activities. The invitation was a success for both men.

Edward and Elizabeth already had a daughter and son, Ruth and Eric, when they moved to Bradford. Tom and a sister Dora were born after the move. Tom started at Bradford Grammar School's junior department in 1905, a few weeks before his ninth birthday. His annual results suggest he did not, on the whole, take to the school. His best placing was sixteen out of thirty, but in his final year (1910-11) he was bottom of a class of thirty-one, although it is to be suspected that he knew he was to move. He was sent to St. George's, Harpenden in Hertfordshire, a co-educational boarding school run on Christian principles. It had been re-located from Keswick in the Lake District as recently as 1907. Tom was nearly fifteen when he changed schools, and he later became a prefect. However, he was not yet eighteen when the war began so his education was interrupted. Although he was under age, in October 1914 he enlisted as private 2824 in 'C' Company (the 'Old Boys' company) of the Bradford Territorials, the 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment. Eric, who was two years older, was a lance-corporal in the same battalion, making it possible that they joined up together. They were soon parted, however; Eric was selected for a commission in March 1915 and returned to the 6/West Yorkshire as a Second Lieutenant in 1916; Tom accompanied his battalion to France in mid-April, serving at the front until he was discharged for officer training in late November 1915. At the end of January he was posted to the Leeds 'Pals', the 15/West Yorkshire, joining them in France in June 1916. He would be with them for only three weeks.



The Leeds 'Pals' part in the 'Great Advance', as the Bradford newspapers described it, was to lead 93 Brigade's attack, with the 1st and 2nd Bradford 'Pals' following behind. They left their billets in Bus-les-Artois at 6.00 p.m. on 30th June to make their way to the front line, which they reached early the next morning. The night was cold and the men had no greatcoats with them. Two of the Leeds 'Pals' four companies were to take position in no man's land in two waves at 07.20 and 07.25 a.m. to await Zero hour at 07.30 a.m. However, a serious flaw in the planning meant that the British bombardment lifted from the German front line at 07.20, which allowed the German defenders to man their parapet with impunity and to open fire. When the survivors of the leading waves got to their feet, they were swept away by the storm of fire, as were the two following companies. Thirteen of 15th battalion's officers were killed, including the England footballer Evelyn Lintott and the cricketer Major Booth; the remaining eleven were wounded (of whom two later died). Tom Humphries' body was not identifiable when no man's land could finally be cleared in 1917, and his name is on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing.

His brother Eric was awarded the Military Cross for bravery in 1917. He went on to become managing director of Lund Humphries following his father's suicide, and he later received an O.B.E.



### **Acknowledgements:**

This photo of Tom Humphries is courtesy of the O.B.A. Roll of Honour. The family history was researched using Ancestry.com. For the history of Lund Humphries, see <[https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0996/9954/files/LH\\_History\\_booklet\\_final\\_for\\_website.pdf](https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0996/9954/files/LH_History_booklet_final_for_website.pdf)> and <<https://sites.google.com/site/leedsandbradfordstudios/home/percy-lund>>, accessed 30-10-2016.

For Tom's years at B.G.S I consulted the Annual Reports for 1905-1911. There is material about him at St. George's, Harpenden at <<https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/sh-stgeorges-herts-sch-uk/media/downloads/Final%20PPT.pdf>> accessed 20-10-2016, however there are difficulties in using the information as it is presented.

For the Leeds Pals, I consulted <<http://www.leeds-pals.com/soldiers/thomas-humphries>> accessed 30-10-2016, and Laurie Milner, Leeds Pals (Pen & Sword Books, Barnsley, 1991), 135-168. Tom Humphries was not listed among the officers killed, missing and wounded published by the Yorkshire Evening Post for Monday, 10th July, nor in subsequent lists published on July 12-15th, 24th, 27th, 31st, August 2nd-3rd.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission gives Tom's age as 20—in fact, his twentieth birthday would have fallen in November 1916 and he was still 19 when he died. Something of his personality is conveyed in his photo.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper in June and October 2016 (Nhooper1956@googlemail.com).