

BROOKE WHITLEY



16th March 1918

1886-1918 Age 31

Lance Bombardier 143593, 193rd Siege Battery Royal Garrison Artillery.

Brooke Whitley was born on 6th December 1886 in Bradford's East End. His parents Brook (sic) and Agnes Whitley had fourteen children in total, of whom ten survived, six daughters and four sons. Brooke was the seventh. His father imported eggs, with premises at 15 Sunbridge Road. Following his death at High Royds Asylum, Menston in 1898 his widow and two elder sons Joss and Arnie continued the business of Brook Whitley & Sons. Brooke was baptized with seven of his siblings in 1889 at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Kirkgate. He attended Hanson Grammar School which was located on Barkerend Road, near the family home, then went to Bradford Grammar School in 1899. He was a student on the Modern side for three years. Academically he was an average pupil and left when he was fifteen. By August 1907 he was an apprentice Lithographic artist and joined the Amalgamated Society of Lithographic Artists, Designers, Engravers, and Process Workers. At the end of the following year he married Edith Gaskell Bouchier at Bradford Register Office. Her father was an accountant's clerk who lived near the Whitley family.

In September 1910 Brooke and Edith emigrated to Ontario, Canada, with their first child Edith Dorothy (Dorothy or Dot). Brooke intended to work as a lithographic artist but this fell through. Brooke was reluctant to undertake manual work so Edith, who knew shorthand and typing, set up a school to keep the family until Brooke found work. She was already pregnant with twin sons, although only Jack was born alive and he died at the age of seven months (August 1911) in an outbreak of gastro-enteritis caused by infected formula milk. In 1912 Edith returned to Bradford to have their second daughter Gwynneth Nora (Nora, born 1913). Brooke stayed on as a farm-worker harvesting wheat to raise the money for his passage. However, he was robbed by a companion and it was another year before he rejoined his wife and children. They lived with Edith's parents in Gilstead, then Frizinghall. With the help of his elder brothers Brooke set up as a wool merchant in partnership with a friend named Tommy Barker.



After the war started Brooke made several attempts to enlist but was rejected on account of varicose veins. His younger brother John, who volunteered in Keighley on 2nd September 1914, was discharged as medically unfit after two months. However, as the need for manpower became acute, Brooke was classified as fit for General Service and mobilised in January 1917 aged thirty. He was posted to the Royal Garrison Artillery and served in France with 194th Siege Battery which was equipped with six 6-inch howitzers. In March 1918 the battery was in action near Bapaume, to the south-east of Arras. On 13th March a telegram was sent to Edith reporting that Brooke was 'dangerously ill' at 49th Casualty Clearing Station suffering from 'traumatic pneumonia', followed by another on the 16th reporting his death. He had been run over by a gun carriage (the 6-inch howitzer weighed in at 1.3 tons/nearly 3700kg). Brooke was buried in the cemetery at Achiet-le-Grand adjacent to the hospital where he died.

Edith suffered a further loss with the news that her brother Claude had been killed a week before the war ended. She received a pension of 25 shillings 5 pence for her and her two daughters. Tommy Barker did not honour his promise to see Brooke's family were alright, so Edith learned the 'cello and supported her family by playing in small ensembles. Later she taught herself the saxophone to take advantage of the popularity of jazz music.



Acknowledgements:

Brooke Whitley's photo is from the School memorial book courtesy of the O.B.A. and B.G.S. The family was researched using Ancestry.com. Evidence for Brooke's attendance at Hanson School is from http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/11072159.Trees_are_planted_in_tribute_to_pupils_killed_in_Great_War/. His record at B.G.S. is from the Annual Reports for 1900-1902.

I am very grateful to Rosemary Bowyer who has shared her memories of her mother and grand-father with me. She has posted a moving collection of family photos on Ancestry.com. Her comments on the photos and at <http://www.rootschat.com/forum/index.php?topic=19809.0> are the source for information relating to his service and cause of death. Brooke's Service Record is available on Ancestry. The Bradford Roll of Honour gives his enlistment date as January 1917, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/bradfordww1/11433327025/in/album-72157638791848624/>. For the 6-inch howitzer, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BL_6-inch_26_cwt_howitzer (accessed 15th January 2018).

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper in January 2018. For further information, contact Nhooper1956@googlemail.com, or see <http://www.bradfordgrammar.com/former-pupils/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>.