

HAROLD VIVIAN ATCHISON



26th August 1918

1884-1918 Aged 34

Second Lieutenant, 19th Siege Battery, 76th (Mixed) Brigade Royal Garrison Artillery.

The two Atchison brothers both served with the Royal Artillery and died in the last eighteen months of the war. We have already commemorated the younger brother, Ralph, who was killed in July 1917. Harold was eight years older than Ralph. He was born in Eccleshill on 18th August 1884. His mother Eliza Dorothy Haxby was born at Burnt Yates near Ripley where her father was a master saddler. The family moved to Bradford where in 1878 she married James Ralph Stanley Atchison from Liverpool. He went into partnership with his wife's brother Robert selling worsted textiles. They lived in the village of Idle for most of their married life, apart from a spell in Bowling around 1900. James and Eliza had five children. The eldest, Charles, died in infancy. Harold was the third and their eldest surviving son. His early schooling was in Idle village, and he entered the Bradford Grammar School senior school in September 1898. For three years he was in the modern forms and left in July 1901 just before his seventeenth birthday. His end of year results put him in the upper half of each form. He was especially good at German and also did well in Maths, Chemistry and Physics. After school he worked for his father as a cloth merchant, while his younger brother and sister worked in the company warehouse. In 1910 Harold married Gertrude Smith, also from Eccleshill, where her father manufactured reeds for weaving looms. Harold became a partner in the company of Atchison & Haxby, perhaps when James died at the start of 1914. He also became the father of two daughters, Dorothy and Joan, born in 1912 and 1915 respectively.

At the outbreak of war Ralph Atchison joined the Royal Artillery and went to the front in July 1915. Harold was older and had responsibilities as a husband, a father and an employer so he understandably did not volunteer. He did however join the Bradford City Volunteers, a home defence force. In October 1915 the Director-General of Recruiting Lord Derby brought forward his Group System in an attempt to stimulate voluntary recruitment. Harold attested for service a week before voluntary enlistment closed, was posted to the Reserve and was



called up on 8th May 1916. As a volunteer he was able to choose to serve in the Royal Garrison Artillery. Following gunnery training at Dover he was posted to a coastal battery at Stallingborough near Grimsby, part of the Humber defences. In April 1917, after several months at this isolated station, Harold applied for a commission. In late July, a few days after his brother's death, Harold arrived at the Royal Artillery Cadet School at Trowbridge, Wiltshire. On Christmas Day he was gazetted Second Lieutenant, and two months later he joined 19th Siege Battery near Peronne in France.

For Harold's first month at the front, the six 8" howitzers of his battery carried out vigorous harassing fire of the German rear area in conjunction with aeroplane spotting and sound ranging to disrupt the expected offensive. When the German blow fell on 21st March, 19th Battery had to leave four howitzers behind in the fighting retreat to Amiens; over a period of ten days it suffered 140 casualties including seven officers wounded. The battery was soon equipped with new guns and for three months continued to harass German positions by day and night. In August the British and Dominion forces went onto the offensive. 19th Siege Battery supported the attack which commenced on 8th August (the Battle of Amiens), and a further drive towards Albert which started on 23rd. Atchison was wounded as the battery moved forward on 25th August and died at 37th Field Ambulance the next day. He was buried south of Albert. Gertrude remained a widow until she died in 1965.

Old Bradfordians—'We will remember them'



Acknowledgements:

Harold's photo is from the School memorial book courtesy of the O.B.A. and B.G.S. Ancestry.com was used to research his family. His years at B.G.S. are recorded in the Annual Reports for 1899-1901. His mother died in 1917. His military career is constructed from his Officer Personal Record, T.N.A. WO 339-106891, and 76th (Mixed) Brigade R.G.A. War Diary, T.N.A. WO 95-477-1. The brigade advanced on the evening of 25th August and established its H.Q. near the Sandpit, Meaulte—as this is also the name of the cemetery where Harold was initially buried, I speculate that he was wounded by enemy fire late on that day.

For the Group Scheme, <<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/soldiers/a-soldiers-life-1914-1918/enlisting-into-the-army/the-group-scheme-derby-scheme/>>, for Stallingborough Battery <http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=1429224>, for the 8" howitzer <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BL_8-inch_howitzer_Mk_VI_%E2%80%93_VIII>, all accessed 24.8.2018. Harold was remembered on the Idle War Memorial. His death was reported in *Shipley Times & Express* 6.9.1918.

In 1939, Gertrude lived with her two daughters on Thackley Old Road, next door to her sisters-in-law Florence and Marguerite.

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