

ROBERT RYCROFT



11th October 1918

1898-1918 Aged 20

**Second Lieutenant 3rd (Special Reserve)
Battalion Duke of Wellington's West Riding
Regiment, attached 1/6th Battalion (T.F.).**

Robert was the son of Thomas Rycroft, a Master Butcher, and his wife Clara Emma Watson. They met in Tong and married in the early months of 1881. By 1891 Thomas had a butcher's shop on Sticker Lane in Laisterdyke where he remained until his retirement some time around 1914. Thomas and Clara had eight children over a period of twenty years, all of whom survived childhood. Robert was their seventh and the second son, born on 29th June 1898. In the 1911 Census the family were living above two small neighbouring properties: Thomas with his wife and three daughters were above the butcher's shop, while the eldest daughter ran a milliners' shop and lived with her brothers William and Robert. The latter went to the Bradford Grammar School in 1909 when he was eleven, no doubt on a scholarship, and he remained there until July 1913. In his final year he was in the Remove Science and Mathematical Form, where he came near the top in German, French and Latin. After leaving school he worked as a textile designer.

Robert was enrolled for General Service on 24th May 1916 shortly before he was eighteen, then assigned to the reserve until he was called up the following February. He was posted to the 3rd Battalion West Riding Regiment and served at North Shields as part of the Tyne Garrison for nine months. At the end of July 1917 he was promoted to Lance Corporal, only one step above a private but a test of whether he was suitable to be an officer. He did well and in August he applied for officer training. He was finally ordered to join 21st Officer Cadet Battalion at Fleet in Hampshire in 4th January 1918. The report on Robert from the Officer Commanding the Cadet Battalion survives in Robert's file. He was described as 'probably the best Cadet in the platoon', and in the section on 'Power of Command and Leadership' it was stated he 'can command and hold men. With more experience he will make an extraordinarily good platoon commander.' Finally, he was described as 'An excellent type. Very keen and



a fine sportsman. Has worked very hard.' On 19th June 1918 he became a Second Lieutenant and what was known as a 'temporary gentleman.'

Robert returned to 3rd West Riding at North Shields in early July before he was posted to the regiment's 1/6th Battalion in Belgium during August. He became a platoon commander in 'A' Company of a battalion which was at full strength. It was moved from the Ypres Salient south to the Arras area and spent September in training and practice attacks. Following the fall of Cambrai to the Canadians in early October, 49th West Riding Division took part in the continuation of the advance. The British forces were now through the Hindenburg Line, Germany's last organised line of defence. On 11th October 1-6/West Riding was the support battalion in 147th Brigade's attack on high ground north-east of Cambrai. The initial attack seized the objective, then faced a powerful German counter-attack supported by tanks. The War Diary records: 'The Battalion ... was soon in the front line. Lewis Gun fire was opened on the tanks, which turned about and went back, but not before the battalion had suffered very heavy casualties.' The line was held, but Rycroft was one of three officers killed. He was buried in Wellington Cemetery, Rieux, along with twenty-two men from his battalion.

Old Bradfordians—'We will remember them'



Acknowledgements:

Rycroft'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. His years at B.G.S. are recorded in the Annual Reports for 1910 to 1913. Thomas and Clara retired to 36 St. Mary's Road, off Sticker Lane close to the site of their butcher's shop (now demolished).

Rycroft's Officer Personal Record is T.N.A. WO 339/122896 and is more than usually informative. In 1918 he stood 5' 11", weighed 159lbs and his chest measurement was 34 1/2-38". The War Diary for 1/6th Battalion West Riding Regiment (147th Brigade, 49th Division) is T.N.A. Piece 2801/1-4, consulted through Ancestry.com. He is first named on folio 566 (summary for August). For 3rd Battalion West Riding Regiment, <<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-british-infantry-regiments-of-1914-1918/duke-of-wellingtons-west-riding-regiment/>>.

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