

WILLIAM ELLIS SMART



11th October 1918

1894-1918 Aged 23

Second Lieutenant 3rd Battalion (Special Reserve) Yorkshire Regiment, attached 1st-7th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (T.F.).

William Smart and Robert Rycroft fell in the same action and are buried in neighbouring rows. William was born in Peterborough where his father was a schoolmaster. John Edward Smart originated in Seacroft, Leeds where his father was a coal miner and grocer. In 1892 John married Clara Nutter, the daughter of a railway clerk, also from Leeds. They had three children, of whom William was the second and their only son. His younger sister died in 1904. In 1900 the Smart family moved north to Bowling, and later to Undercliffe where John became the headmaster of St. Augustine's Church School. William went to Bradford Grammar School in 1906 when he was eleven, starting in Third Classical Upper. Perhaps his father had nurtured his son's talent for Greek and Latin, and for Maths. In 1913 William was awarded an Open Classical Scholarship to St. Catharine's College, Cambridge. He was not a sportsman at B.G.S., but he was a member of the Debating Society, and he was also a pianist and a singer.

After seven terms at Cambridge William volunteered for the Army at the start of January 1916, weeks before conscription was introduced. He was thus able to choose his regiment, the King's Royal Rifle Corps at Winchester, although he was not posted to the 23rd Battalion as he desired. He was twenty-one. He was rapidly promoted to Lance Corporal, then Sergeant. He went to France on 4th October where he was posted to the Rifle Brigade. He joined the 8th Battalion on 16th October when it was out of the line. Only a month later he went down with a fever which was later diagnosed as paratyphoid. He was sent to hospital on the coast near Boulogne, and then just before Christmas to Southampton. In the few weeks he was in France he had not served in the trenches. William had submitted an application for a commission while in France, however after his discharge from hospital in February 1917 it took him many months to recover his strength. He served in a garrison battalion on the north coast of Kent until he was ordered to join No. 7 Officer Cadet Battalion at Fermoy in Ireland on 7th



September. At the end of January 1918 he became a Second Lieutenant, not as he had requested in a 'Rifle Corps' but in the Yorkshire Regiment, the 'Green Howards'. However, he would not see action with this regiment either for when went to France again in April he was posted to 1/7th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, the '1st Leeds Rifles'.

William's new battalion had been reduced to a skeleton by a week of fighting near Wytschaete during the second German offensive. It spent the next months reorganizing and holding the trenches near Ypres, which during the summer of 1918 was a quiet sector. It did not see serious action until 49th Division relieved Canadian 2nd Division which had participated in the capture of Cambrai. It went into the line on the evening of 10th October, with orders to make an advance of 10,000 yards east of Cambrai the next morning. Smart was a platoon commander in 'C' Company, which was in the support wave. Initially the attack made good progress behind an effective barrage. Three hundred prisoners gave themselves up and 'C' Company took possession of twelve field guns. Then the Germans counter-attacked spear-headed by four light tanks. The 7th West Yorkshires, who had not faced tanks before, recoiled before they rallied and consolidated three thousand yards ahead of the start line. Success came at a heavy cost. 7th Battalion casualties were eleven officers and 400 other ranks. Smart was one of nineteen of the battalion's sixty-three dead who were buried in Wellington Cemetery, Rieux, east of Cambrai.

Old Bradfordians—'We will remember them'



Acknowledgements:

Smart'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 1907 to 1913. *The Bradfordian* March 1913 records his contribution to a debate; November 1913 the award of a Lister Scholarship; the 'Cambridge Letter' March 1914 states 'Of Smart it need only be said that he has a piano and he doth sing.' Kelly's Bradford Directory 1912 records John Smart's headmastership. *The War List of the University of Cambridge 1914-1918*, ed. G.V. Carey (Cambridge, University Press, 1921), gives no detail of William's degree (<<https://archive.org/stream/warlistofunivers00careuoft#page/314/mode/2up>>).

His Officer Personal Record is T.N.A. WO339-102178. The 8th Rifle Brigade War Diary is T.N.A. WO 95/1895/1, that for 1st-7th West Yorkshire is WO 95/2795/1—both were read using Ancestry.com. The latter was supplemented from Everard Wyrall, *The West Yorkshire in the War 1914-1918* (London: John Lane, the Bodley Head, 2 vols. 1920-4), vol. ii, 352-7.

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