

JOHN EDWARD BERNHARD



1st December 1918

1899-1918 Aged 19

Private 55709 3rd Battalion Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment, Cadet Royal Engineers.

The Bernhard family was of German origin and was testimony to the close commercial ties which existed between Britain and Germany in the decades before the First World War. David Bernhard was a cloth merchant from the Grand Duchy of Schwerin-Mecklenburg in northern Germany. He came to Leeds around 1886, became a naturalized British subject two years later, and moved to Bradford. He worked for the Bradford woollen merchant Charles Semon & Co., becoming a director and one of the three owners of the business. In 1894 he married Ella Hilb, also from Mecklenburg, who was living with her brother-in-law, another German merchant and shipper in Manchester. David and Ella had four sons, all of whom attended the Bradford Grammar School before they went to board at public schools. The family lived in Heaton, on Park Drive. Edward, as he was known, was born in October 1899. He started at B.G.S. in September 1910. At the end of his first year in Second Classical he came twenty-ninth in a class of thirty. His record in Third Classical Lower was an improvement, but in July 1912 he left. It is not known what he did next, until in May 1914 he started at Uppingham School and he was there until April 1918. He played for the rugby XV in 1917 and he was also in the school Officer Training Corps.

The three elder Bernhard brothers served in the British armed forces during the war. Frank served as a Lieutenant with the 2nd-6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, was discharged on medical grounds, and was then conscripted as a private in the Scots Guards. He saw no service overseas. Herbert served in France as a Second Lieutenant with the Royal Field Artillery for the last six months of the war. Edward was conscripted in October 1917 upon reaching the age of eighteen, however it was not until August 1918 that he was called up. At this stage of the war it appeared it would continue until 1919 or into 1920. Edward reported for duty at



Halifax, was sent to join 3rd Battalion West Riding Regiment at North Shields, and on arrival was directed to Newark-on-Trent for a course of instruction at the Royal Engineers Reserve Training Centre, Kelham, to ascertain if he was suitable for officer training.

Edward was admitted to Newark Military Hospital on 24th November 1918 with a high temperature, shivering and slight delirium. Normal flu symptoms progressed into lung complications and he exhibited cyanosis, blue discolouration of the skin caused by low oxygen. By 29th November he was described as 'very ill', and his parents were summoned. They were with him when he died at 6.30 on the evening of 1st December. Death was caused by pneumonia resulting from influenza. He had literally drowned in his own fluids. His body was returned to Bradford where it was cremated at Scholemoor Cemetery. He is remembered on the war memorial there, and also at Uppingham in addition to B.G.S.

Old Bradfordians—'We will remember them'



Acknowledgements:

John Edward Bernhard's photo is from the School memorial book courtesy of the O.B.A. and B.G.S. The family was researched using Ancestry.co.uk His years at B.G.S. are recorded in the Annual Reports for 1911 and 1912. My authority for calling him Edward is the report of his half-sister's wedding in *Leeds Mercury* 27.7.1905, which reports that 'Edward' was one of the train bearers. I have not been able to trace his father's first marriage, nor his mother Ella prior to 1891 when she lived at Withington, Manchester. In 1911 Frank (who Anglicized his name from Frank Hilb to Frank Hill Bernhard) was at Marlborough College, while Herbert Antoine, John Edward and Charles Frederick Bernhard were at home in the care of a German niece, Harriet Selig. Their parents were on a trip to New York at the time. For Edward at Uppingham, see <<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/interactive/34997/00000001?backurl=https%3a%2f%2fsearch.ancestry.co.uk%2fsearch%2fdb.aspx%3fdbid%3d34997%26path%3d&ssrc=&backlabel=ReturnBrowsing#?imageld=00000290>>. His Service Record is available on Ancestry.co.uk and includes a page detailing the progress of his illness. His name is on Cremation Memorial Panel 1 at Scholemoor, <<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/120891211#view-photo=164398921>>.

The family retained their German surname throughout the war. Herbert served as Herbert Anthony Bernhard. Frank did not proceed to France with 2nd-6th West Yorkshire in January 1917 but was discharged in June following treatment for syphilis (Service Record Frank Bernhard). He was conscripted in November, received further treatment, and in 1918 was transferred as a private to a reserve battalion of Guards Machine Gun Regiment. After serving three years as an officer it cannot have been easy for him to serve in the ranks.

The family moved to Croydon after Charles Semon & Co. was sold in 1920. David and his youngest son ran a chain of provincial cinemas. Frank returned to Leeds.

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