

ERNEST PARKIN WILTON



5th November 1918

1891-1918 Aged 27

Lieutenant, Army Service Corps Motor Transport, formerly Royal Flying Corps.

Ernest was in uniform for all but the last six days of the war, yet never saw active service. His parents were Ernest Wilton, from Crossgates, Leeds, and Jane Ann Parkin originally from Gateshead. Ernest was illegitimate, the grandson of a coal miner, and he worked as a pit boy, a warehouseman and as a stationer's assistant before he moved to Huddersfield and became a coal merchant. He married Jane, a housekeeper in York in 1888. The younger Ernest was their only child, born in Harehills, Leeds in July 1891. He went to Fartown Grammar School in Huddersfield and then to the Bradford Grammar School in 1904 when he was thirteen. He was in Third Classical Upper for two years, then in Fourth Classical. In most subjects he came near the bottom in his last year, although he was third in Art. He left in 1907 around his sixteenth birthday and worked with his father selling coal at Gledholt. Shortly before he was seventeen he joined the newly-formed Territorial Force, serving with the 5th Battalion Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment. In spite of his youth he was promoted rapidly and from 1911 to 1913 he was a Sergeant Instructor for Musketry.

When the war began Ernest was in summer camp with his battalion and was mobilized at once. He was promoted to Company Sergeant-Major, but it appears he did not sign the Imperial Service Obligation to serve overseas and when the battalion went to France in April 1915 he remained at the depot training the reserve 2nd-5th Battalion. He was later transferred to 26th Provisional Battalion in Lincolnshire consisting of men who had not agreed to serve overseas and men of lower medical categories. By the later part of 1915 Ernest had changed his mind about serving at the front. He made two applications for officer training, specifying that he wished to serve in the artillery or infantry. The second was strongly endorsed by his C.O. and on 6th March 1916 Ernest was ordered to join 9th Officer Cadet Battalion in Scotland. He was commissioned in the Royal Flying Corps in July 1916, served with 7th Wing in Norfolk and he qualified as a pilot on 2nd October. However, shortly after this he was involved in a plane crash at



Thetford and suffered 'concussion of the brain'. The *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* reported later that he was confined to hospital for nine weeks as a consequence. However, this accident was not the sole cause of his hospitalization. In his officer file are records detailing his treatment for syphilis commencing in September 1916, and it was not until February 1917 that he was discharged.

The accident rendered Ernest unfit to serve as a pilot. He was transferred to the Army Service Corps Motor Transport section at Grove Park in London and promoted to Lieutenant. He continued to complain of pain in the right side of his head, of difficulty in sleeping and of bad memory. This meant that he was unfit for service overseas so he was appointed to the staff of the A.S.C. Cadet School at Lee. In March 1918 he made his only visit to France, a fifteen day inspection tour accompanying Brigadier-General Byrne. In October he was recommended for promotion to Captain, but he went down with influenza and died of double pneumonia in hospital at Woolwich on 5th November. His body was brought to Edgerton Cemetery, Huddersfield where he was buried with military honours on 9th November. General Byrne wrote that he was 'the best stamp officers could be, conscientious and a hard worker, and he will be a great loss.' The pall bearers were N.C.O.s from the West Riding Regiment while the R.A.F. and A.S.C. sent large floral badges as tributes.

Old Bradfordians—'We will remember them'



Acknowledgements:

Wilton'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 and findmypast.co.uk. His B.G.S. years are recorded in the Annual Reports for 1905-6 to 1907-8.

The entry for him in the CWGC Register is somewhat economical when it states he '... died of pneumonia following accident while flying ...'. His Royal Aero Club Aviators' Certificate and album entry can be found on Ancestry.co.uk. His Officer Personal Record is T.N.A. WO339/55585 and is the source for the military and medical history related here. It was supplemented with entries from *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* for Friday 8.11.1918 and Tuesday 12.11.1918.

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