

JOSEPH SYKES PEARSON



7th November 1918

1892-1918 Aged 26

Lieutenant (Acting Captain), Croix de Guerre, Mention in Despatches, Army Service Corps attached Royal Garrison Artillery.

Joseph was a member of the family of Pearson Brothers Ltd., woollen manufacturers, which had mills at Slaithwaite and Golcar in the Colne valley west of Huddersfield. He was born on 22nd January 1892, in Golcar to Henry Edward Pearson and Clara Sykes, who had married in 1887. Her father was another Golcar woollen manufacturer. Joseph was the second of their four children and their eldest son. He went to the Bradford Grammar School in 1904, when he was twelve, for three full years and most of a fourth. He was on the Classical side of the school and he shone in Latin, Greek, French, History and Art. He left Bradford in May 1908 and went to board at Rossall School in Lancashire until the following April. He then joined the family company and within two years he was managing one of the woollen mills. His father died in 1914 at the early age of 48, leaving an estate valued in 2018 values at nearly £2 million.

In his short time at Rossall Joseph had been in the O.T.C., and a few months after he returned home he joined the Golcar Company of the 7th Battalion Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment, the 'Colne Valley Territorials'. He was commissioned as Second Lieutenant in February 1910 and was clearly a very competent officer. By 1914 he had been promoted to Captain and at the outbreak of war he was the Adjutant, the C.O.s administrative assistant. However, it is likely that he did not sign the obligation to serve overseas for he is found as the adjutant of the 2nd-7th reserve battalion until the end of 1916, with the temporary rank of Major. His battalion spent the winter 1915-16 manning the Tyne defences around Newcastle and was then stationed on Salisbury Plain. In December 1916 he went on a course with the Army Service Corps Mechanical Transport, then was posted to a heavy artillery battery of the R.G.A. Meanwhile his battalion departed for France in mid-January 1917. Why he made this transfer is not known, although it meant that he moved from a unit that was likely soon to see



service in the trenches to one that did not serve in the front line. He also reverted to his rank of Lieutenant. In October 1917 he returned home on leave and requested an extension on 'private affairs' - in fact this was his marriage on the 11th to Elsie Marion, the daughter of Councillor James Woolven a Huddersfield wine and spirit merchant. Five days later Joseph returned to France.

The Army Service Corps has been described as 'the unsung heroes of the British Army in the Great War.' Although they were not combat troops its personnel supplied munitions and food to the front which involved driving along congested roads into the forward area under enemy observation and fire. As officer in the mechanical transport of 45th Heavy Artillery Group Pearson's company drove the vehicles which hauled the guns and delivered ammunition to their firing positions. In May 1917 he was promoted to Acting Captain. On more than one occasion Pearson distinguished himself. He was awarded the Croix de Guerre for 'good work with the French forces in April and May, 1917'. For his actions during the German Spring Offensive in 1918, when the A.S.C.s lorries had to run risks to save the guns and keep them firing during the retreat, he won a mention in Sir Douglas Haig's despatch of 27th May. In October 1918 Pearson was home on leave, but when he returned to France he fell ill with influenza and was admitted to 30th General Hospital, Calais, where he died on 7th November. His mother sought permission to return his body for burial but this was denied. His widow Elsie remained unmarried until her death in 1955.

Old Bradfordians—'We will remember them'



Acknowledgements:

There is no photo of Pearson in the School memorial book. Rossal School does not appear to have commemorated its First World War dead yet. The family was researched using Ancestry.co.uk. His years at B.G.S. are recorded in the Annual Reports for 1905 to 1907-8. He is not recorded in that for 1908-9. His time at Rossall comes from his application for a commission in his Officer Record. There are several references to Pearson's military service in newspapers accessed through findmypast.co.uk, notably *Leeds Mercury* 12.4.15 (his sister's marriage to a fellow officer) and 25.5.17 (Croix de Guerre, membership of Golcar Conservative Club, involvement with parish church), *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* 13.6.1918 (Croix de Guerre and Mention in Despatches), *Leeds Mercury* 11.11.18 (death, leave). The source for his wartime military career is his Officer Personal Record, T.N.A. WO374/53080.

Before his death he was attached to 'P Siege Artillery Park' in France. I have not been able to identify this unit or its location. For the Army Service Corps, <<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-army-service-corps-in-the-first-world-war/>> accessed 6.11.2018; also, Michael Young, *Army Service Corps 1902-1918*, (2nd ed. Partizan Press, Nottingham; 2012), 110-13, which quotes the experiences of 604 Company A.S.C., part of 'P Corps Siege Park (and presumably identical to 'P Siege Artillery Park').

The photo was taken by the author. 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/>>.