

ROBERT BAXANDALL CONSTANTINE



4th March 1919

1894-1919 Aged 24



Captain, 2/6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (T.F.) attached 1st Corps Cyclist Battalion, Army Cyclist Corps.

Robert was born in Jaffna in Sri Lanka (known as Ceylon at the time) on 20th July 1894, where his father Baxendall was a civil servant. Baxendall was the son of Enoch Constantine, manager to a Bradford wool manufacturer, an Old Bradfordian and a Classical Scholar of St. John's College, Cambridge. He entered the Ceylon Civil Service in 1891 and spent much of his life on the island until his retirement in 1935. Robert was the eldest of four children he had with Martha Emsley, the daughter of a Bradford wool manufacturer (was he Enoch's employer?) By the time of the 1901 census Robert had been sent to England to be educated and was in the care of his mother's brother George in Horton. This uncle died in 1903 and it is not known where Robert lived next. He went to the Bradford Grammar School in 1906, and for the next six years he would progress through the Classical forms. In the 1911 census he was listed as a 'guest' at the house of the Reverend Joseph Beanland, vicar of Wilsden, whose son Joseph was in Robert's form. Baxendall Constantine may have spent spells on home leave as he was listed on the Register of Electors for Shipley in 1909-10, and in 1915 at 31 Harrogate Road, Eccleshill, which Robert would give as his home address. However, it seems likely that he grew up seeing little of his parents.

Robert left school in 1912 with Higher Certificate passes in five subjects. In his final year at Bradford Grammar he had played for the First XV at full-back—he was said to be good in defence but was slow in attack and needed more practice in catching the ball—and he scored an aggregate of ten runs in four matches for the First XI. After school he studied Medicine at Leeds University, commencing in October 1912. He joined the University Officer Training Corps, and he was also a member of Baildon R.U.F.C., as were a number of others from the school, including Harold Field. As both served in the Army Cyclists' Corps it is possible they shared an interest in cycling. On 4th August 1914, the day Britain declared war, Robert applied to become an officer. He was unsuccessful for some reason so on the 27th he enlisted in the 6th Battalion West York-

shire Regiment, as had many Old Bradfordians, Field among them. Robert was aged 20, stood 5 feet 6 1/2 inches tall and weighed 142 pounds. He received his commission on 3rd February 1915, in the 2nd-6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, which would remain in England for two years. The next part of Robert's service is ill-documented. Although commissioned into 2nd-6th Battalion he is not in the photos of officers taken in 1916, nor did he go to France with it in January 1917. In March 1915 Robert was seconded to an unknown unit and held the temporary rank of Lieutenant. In November 1916 he was initiated as a freemason into Cowper and Newton Lodge (Olney), then in February 1917 he was posted to the 1st Corps Cyclist Battalion and finally went to France.

Although the Corps Cyclists were trained for combat, Robert's war mostly comprised traffic control, providing guides, burying cables, and in early 1918 labouring on reserve defences. At some point he was promoted to Captain and he briefly stood in for the Adjutant. It was not until the closing weeks of the war that the Corps Cyclists performed their intended role as part of the advance guard when I Corps followed the German retreat. Following the armistice he remained in France until he went home on leave on 18th February. He told his father he intended to sign on for the Army of Occupation in Germany, but while at home he contracted influenza and meningitis. He died with his brother George in attendance, and was buried in Scholemoor Cemetery.

Old Bradfordians—'We will remember them'



Acknowledgements:

The photo is from the School memorial book courtesy of the O.B.A. and B.G.S. Ancestry.co.uk and findmypast.co.uk were used to research the family. Robert's years at B.G.S. are recorded in the Annual Reports for 1907-1913. For his sporting achievements, see *The Bradfordian* for Nov. 1911 and March and July 1912. There is a biography of Robert at <http://www.shipleyww1.org.uk/mws%20consantine,%20rbt%20b.htm>, which is inaccurate regarding his military record. Robert's Service Record also contains the papers of another man of the same name who enlisted in Ashton-under-Lyne. His Officer Record is TNA WO374-15090. The account of his military service is based on these together with 1st Corps Cyclists Battalion War Diary, TNA WO95-623-1. Robert's Medal Index Card notes that his mother applied for the 1914-15 Star but that he was ineligible (as he did not serve overseas until 1917). For his absence from the officer photos, see Capt. E.C. Gregory, *History of the Sixth Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, vol. II, 2/6th Battalion* (Bradford, Percy Lund & Humphries, 1923). Dates given for Robert's commission range from 3.2.1915 (Gregory, 191; at 162 he is not in the list of officers who embarked on 6.1.1917), 11.3.1915 (Service Record) and 12.3.1915 (London Gazette 11.3.1915). For Baildon R.U.F.C., see Yorkshire Rugby Football Union, *Commemoration Book 1914-19 and Annual Handbook Season 1919-20* (1919). Robert features in a photo titled 'Horton & Baildon R.U.F.C. 1914' taken while 1st-6th West Yorks was in camp at York, October 1914 (my thanks to Tricia Platts for supplying me with this unpublished photo). With him were Harold Field, who enlisted on 5th August 1914, and John Chalton Whittaker who probably joined on the same day (their numbers were 1804 and 1801, Constantine's was 2207). Both were Baildon club members and O.B.s.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper in January 2019. For further information, contact Nhooper1956@googlemail.com, or see <http://www.bradfordgrammar.com/former-pupils/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>.