

HENRY WHITEHEAD



4th March 1919

1895-1919 Aged 23

Lieutenant Army Service Corps Mechanical Transport.

Harry was the third son of Henry Whitehead, who was knighted in 1922 for his part in organising the wool textile industry for war and whose extensive business empire Harry would have inherited but for his death following his discharge from the army. The elder Henry was in every sense a self-made man. Born to working-class parents near Manchester, he crossed the Pennines at fifteen to become a clerk with a Bradford spinner and supported his widowed mother. At nineteen he joined Messrs. Firth and Renton. Such were his abilities that he was made an equal partner (1894) and succeeded to sole proprietorship of the business under his own name. In 1918 he became a one third partner in the Saltaire Mills and village. He had extensive business interests in Bradford, Heckmondwike, Scotland and Australia and at his death in 1928 his estate was valued at £40 million in modern values.

In 1887 Henry married Alice Mawson, a nurse from Wath on Dearne who lived in Manningham. Harry was the youngest of their four children and the third son, born on 1st November 1895. He attended the Bradford Grammar School for six years from 1904. He was an able pupil who did especially well in Art. After completing Third Classical Upper, in 1910 he moved to Sedbergh School. There he was described as 'a very popular boy, of retiring disposition, with a strong affection for every healthy outlet of Sedberghian energy.' He loved the hills and played at full-back in his House rugby XV. However, his eldest brother Alfred had died of TB in Australia in 1909 and George died of food poisoning a year later. In their memory Henry and Alice paid for the Whitehead Memorial Hall at Heaton Parish Church. By this time the family home was 'Hawkswood' in Baildon. When Harry left Sedbergh in 1913 he joined his father in business, and like him he started as a clerk.

Harry was nineteen when war began, but it was not until December 1915 that he enlisted as a trainee lorry driver in the Army Service Corps. Although he had served in Sedbergh's O.T.C. he did not apply for a commission. In late May 1916 he went to France to serve with the transport of 85th Siege Battery R.G.A.. After a month a gun carriage crushed his right foot and he was sent to hospitals in Britain in



late June. When passed fit for General Service in October he applied for officer training. He was described as '[t]horoughly efficient and reliable.' In March 1917 he was commissioned and returned to France to command the ammunition column attached to 249th Siege Battery R.G.A. An officer who knew him wrote later that, 'Harry was always very modest about the work that he did in France, and wished his family to believe that he was seldom if ever in any special danger; but I think that you ought to know that such was by no means always the case. He had many tasks to carry out which involved at times very considerable risks, and I should like to take this opportunity of paying a tribute to the unflinching courage and cheerfulness with which he undertook the most disagreeable and risky jobs, always volunteering to do more than his share.' To be sure he did not serve in the front line, but his duties required him to lead his vehicles under fire to supply ammunition and to move the guns.

Even before the war's end Henry Whitehead applied to the War Office for his son's demobilisation as 'a pivotal man' in the family firm. As Henry was a man of some influence the request was granted by the Ministry of National Service and Harry was released from the Army. While on leave following demobilisation he took a holiday in Blackpool at the Hotel Metropole, where he died from pneumonia resulting from influenza. He was buried in Nab Wood Cemetery, Shipley.

Old Bradfordians—'We will remember them'



Acknowledgements:

Harry Whitehead'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 the newspaper archive of findmypast.co.uk. There is a family history at <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/chrisheaton/4924797180>> (accessed 18.2.2019). For Sir Henry Whitehead see *Yorkshire Post* 1.3.1928. Harry's years at B.G.S. are recorded in the Annual Reports for 1904 to 1910. For his years at Sedbergh, I have quoted his description and the letter from a fellow officer from <<http://pilgrimage.sedberghschool.org/category/surname/w>> (accessed 18.2.2019). His Service Record as A.S.C. Private 138087 survives, and his Officer Personal Record is T.N.A. WO 339-86082. Harry's death was reported in *ShIPLEY Times and Express* 7.3.1919, and his funeral *idem.* 14.3.1919.

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