

LESLIE STUART PRIESTLEY



3rd September 1922

1898-1922 Aged 24

**Lieutenant Royal Garrison Artillery, 95th
Siege Battery.**

Priestley's name does not appear on the School War Memorial as his death occurred after it was erected. His late death date also explains why he was not listed by the War Graves Commission. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that his war service would be the cause of his later death.

Leslie was born on 21st June 1898, eldest child of Albert Priestley and Clara Annie (née Scholefield). At the time the family lived on Manchester Road in Little Horton, next door to Albert's linen drapery business. Leslie was followed by a brother Douglas and two sisters. From 1903 the family lived a few streets away at Pemberton Drive; however in some years they decamped for the summer to the fresher air of the more rural Ox Heys between Wyke and Shelf. The children walked to Halifax Road to take the tram to school, whereas Albert took the train from Wyke & Norwood Green Station to Bradford, even though the tram passed his shop. Leslie started at Bradford Grammar School in 1908 in Third Modern lower, Douglas following him a year later; the girls went to the Girls Grammar School. Judging by his end of year results, Leslie enjoyed Maths and Physics. In the Sixth Form he also did very well in English. He passed Higher Certificates in five subjects in 1915, with special mention in Trigonometry, Statics and Dynamics. Later he would be described as a 'great worker in all branches of the school sports', notably swimming. At the end of 1914, Leslie was one of the first recruits to the new OTC and was soon promoted to Lance-Corporal, then Sergeant, and he became the corps' first CSM. He also won the prize for musketry.

In 1916 Leslie was awarded an Open Mathematical Scholarship to Worcester College, Oxford, but he did not take it up. He volunteered for military service on 10th January 1916, claiming to be eighteen, although his birthday was still six months away. He returned home until his call-up came. Another sign of his eagerness to serve was his application for a commission with the 6th West Yorkshire in July. In August he left school and on 4th October was posted for preliminary training to 2/Artists' Rifles (2/28th London Regiment, well-known as a nursery for future officers) at Romford, Essex. Within weeks Leslie applied again for a commission, adding the RGA to his list of preferences. Knowledge of Maths was essential for the operation of the heavy artillery,



and of seven boys in Sixth Mathematical in 1916 who served, five joined the R.G.A. Leslie reported to the heavy artillery cadet school at Trowbridge on 15th December, was commissioned on 18th March 1917, and at the end of August he was sent to France.

Leslie served with 95th Siege Battery, which operated 9.2-inch howitzers. In 1917 he saw service at Ypres and Cambrai; in 1918 he was involved in the March Retreat, and later that year in the 'Great Advance' to victory. He was mentioned in despatches in January 1918, probably for actions at Cambrai, and he was attached to IV Corps Counter-Battery Staff and to 90th Brigade HQ for spells of duty. At some point in 1918 he received a dose of poison gas, although it was not at the time serious enough to hospitalize him. Soon after the war ended he was demobilized and went up to Worcester College where he took first-class honours in Mathematical Moderations. Leslie was an enthusiastic rower with his friend Bill Parkes, an Australian Rhodes scholar; he was elected captain of boats for his college, and was also active in Bradford Amateur Rowing Club. He joined the Oxford OTC and the college Dramatic Society. He then joined the Civil Service Aircraft-Meteorological Section and was stationed in Essex. However, in 1922 the effects on his lungs of poison gas forced him to enter a sanatorium at Bournemouth, where he died aged 24 on 3rd September. He was buried in Scholemoor Cemetery.

Old Bradfordians—'We will remember them'



Acknowledgements:

Leslie's photo is one of several lent to me by his nephews Edward and Anthony Priestley. I am very grateful to them for information about the family, which I researched further using Ancestry.co.uk. His years at B.G.S. are recorded in the Annual Reports for 1909-1916.

Leslie's military record is found in TNA WO 339-79861, which shows he was unusually tall at 6 ft and half an inch. For 95th Siege Battery, see <<https://www.wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/allied/rgartillery.php?pid=9489>> accessed 28.05.2019; also 90 Heavy Brigade War Diary TNA WO 95-397. Further light is thrown on the battery by Arthur F. Behrend, *Nine Days: Adventures of a Heavy Artillery Brigade of the Third Army during the German Offensive of March 21-29 1918*, 1921 (reprinted Naval & Military Press); Imperial War Museum photograph Q10377 shows 95th Siege Battery in action on 8th August 1918.

Leslie's death was reported with obituary in *The Yorkshire Observer* 8th September, 1922.

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