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Huddersfield's roll of honour: 1914-1922

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Huddersfield Roll of Honour 1914-1922

Introduction

In March, 2013, I received a call asking if a gentleman could visit the Arms and Armour Research Institute to seek advice on the publication of a book. Mr Alan Stansfield arrived clutching a large ring binder along with a box full of newspaper cuttings and photographs. Alan recounted a lifetime's work, 'The Project' as he called it, undertaken principally by his late wife, Margaret, to document all the soldiers from Huddersfield who had lost their lives during the First World War. There began the final chapter in a 30 year-long journey to honour the fallen of Huddersfield in this published Roll of Honour.

As the account unfolded it became clear that Margaret's work encompassed many hours spent in Huddersfield Library, along with visits to war memorials, archives and a significant series of trips to the battlefields themselves. It also became clear that this was one of the occasions when, as a University, we should support the publication, creating an enduring memorial in the year of the 100th Anniversary of the beginning of what had once been described as 'the war to end all wars'.

In carrying out this research Margaret aimed to document the fallen of Huddersfield. However, defining that presented its own issues. Did it mean those born in Huddersfield or those who lived in Huddersfield when they joined up? In practice both are included and without doubt there will be omissions and possibly even inclusions of those who, based on today's boundaries, are not strictly in Huddersfield. However, the important factor is not whether they are included or not, dependent upon an arbitrary line on a map, but that they are remembered. So in geographical terms Margaret erred on the side of inclusion. Ultimately this work will exist in electronic form and should any omissions be discovered they can be included at a later date.

Margaret worked hard to ensure the information in her work was as accurate as possible but it was not without its challenges. Her sources included the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the publication 'Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919', regimental archives, family correspondence and records supplied after the war to local libraries to enable the erection of war memorials. One constant challenge in works such as this is the spelling of individual names. Margaret took an informed decision to use the Commonwealth War Graves Commissions database (CWGC) and in editing the volume I have followed her lead. The issue is best illustrated by Private Joseph Batty. On two memorials in Huddersfield he is listed as Battye. His birth certificate reads 'Battye' as it is on his father's marriage certificate. His baptism certificate records his surname as 'Batty'. On the 1901 Census he is recorded as 'Batty'; on the 1911 Census it is 'Battye'. Hence in this, and in several other cases, Margaret took an executive decision which I have chosen to abide by. As well as some variations in spelling there is a further anomaly which must be considered when searching for a relative among Great War casualty lists. For a variety of reasons soldiers and seamen did not always give their real names. Sometimes this was because they were fleeing some personal crisis at home or sometimes to avoid identification as being too young to join up. There are many tragic examples of soldiers who lied about their age to serve their country. In some cases they paid the ultimate price.

This publication records the fallen from the beginning of the conflict in 1914 through to 1922. These casualties were not of course restricted to those serving on the front line. Although the majority of the service personnel listed were killed as a result of enemy action, some died in accidents, such as Louie Fethney, an Assistant Inspector of Munitions, who, in May, 1918, at the age of 20, died in an explosion at the Naval Munitions Factory, Crosland Moor.

Personnel from all the armed services are commemorated in this book. The vast majority are soldiers but those serving with the Royal Navy, Merchant Navy, Royal Flying Corps (latterly the Royal Air Force) and Royal Naval Air Service appear, along with one nurse, Ada Stanley, who died in 1915.

Most of the deaths commemorated in this book took place on the Western Front, though the campaign in the Dardanelles in 1915 and early 1916 claimed many lives, particularly the landing at Suvla Bay in August 1915. There were of course, a number of those listed who lost their lives at sea, however, as a unit, it is the Duke of Wellington's Regiment which features most prominently, mainly as a result of this part of Yorkshire being their primary recruiting ground.

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in Sarajevo was the spark that began the sequence of events that would eventually lead to war. War was declared on 4th August 1914 and the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) began to embark for France. The BEF was a small army comprising 80,000 men initially formed into two Corps. The 2nd Battalion the Duke of Wellington's Regiment formed part of the 13th Brigade, 5th Div, 2nd Corps, arriving in France on 16th August and crossing the Belgian frontier to deploy in St. Ghislain six days later. The Battle of Mons was the first engagement of the war with the BEF outnumbered three to one. Nevertheless they succeeded in halting the German advance long enough to prevent the French Fifth Army from being outflanked. Many of the casualties listed in 1914 are from the 'Dukes', such as Private James Edwin Lunn of the 2nd Battalion, who lost his life during the retreat from Mons on 23rd August.

During 1915 the number of casualties continued to rise. Part of this was due to the arrival in April of that year of the 49th (West Riding) Division, which comprised units from the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, The West Yorkshire Regiment, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and the Yorkshire and Lancashire Regiment. Significant numbers of these men were recruited from Huddersfield. The Division was created from members of the pre-war Territorial Force who had volunteered for overseas service. A reference which appears frequently is *Hill 60*. The 2nd Battalion of the 'Dukes' were heavily involved in this engagement which was critical to the offensive at the southern edge of the Ypres Salient. The entry for Private Thomas Boyle includes a moving letter to his uncle from his Company Sergeant Major detailing his death and giving reassurance, as so many of these letters do, that he did not die in any pain. Some of the casualties listed suffered from the effects of gas and it was during this phase of the war that this dreadful weapon was first used, to devastating effect.

Of course there are many soldiers from Huddersfield represented in other units. The Machine Gun Corps, as it developed, recruited from within the ranks of the existing Infantry battalions which were called upon to provide the most suitably qualified men. This was also the case with the fledgling Royal Flying Corps. Soldiers were given the opportunity to transfer such as 2nd Lieutenant Charles William Brook, who joined the 8th Battalion of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment as a Private soldier, eventually qualified as a pilot but tragically died in a flying accident.

The Battle of the Somme in 1916 is arguably the most infamous engagement of the war. The 10th West Yorks suffered one of the highest instances of casualties and there are frequent references in this book to Thiepval, and the Schwaben Redoubt where the engagement was at its fiercest. Of those listed as killed in 1916, more than half were soldiers from the Duke of Wellington's Regiment. Visitors to the cemeteries in this area will recognise the cap badges of both these units, in significant numbers, on the regimented rows of white headstones. The entry for 2nd Lieutenant Frank Thornton, of the 7th Battalion, East Yorkshire Regiment, provides a vivid account of the action which ultimately led to his death on the 1st July. Lieutenant Robert Huntriss Tolson, of the 15th Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment – 'The Leeds Pals' – died the same day, tragically followed by his brother, Lieutenant James Martin Tolson, who died of wounds near Cambrai only a few days before the war ended. The Tolson brothers were commemorated by the establishment of the Tolson Memorial Museum In 1919. Their uncle, Legh Tolson gave Ravensknowle Hall to Huddersfield Corporation as a museum in memory of his two nephews. The museum was formally opened on 27 May 1922.

The year 1917 witnessed the highest number of casualties, principally due to the engagements at Arras, the Third Battle of Ypres (known more commonly as Passchendaele) and Cambrai. The significant number of deaths of Huddersfield men in 1917, almost double the number of 1916, is accounted for partly by the arrival of the 62nd (2nd West Riding) Division. This Division was made up mostly of men serving in either the Prince of Wales Own Regiment of Yorkshire (The 'West Yorks') or the 'Dukes'. There were significant fatalities among these units. Two unsuccessful offensives at Bullecourt to the south east of Arras in April and May of 1917, still remain one of the darkest memories of the war. The map on the front cover of the book is part of the trench map used during this battle. The Roll of Honour in the Huddersfield Drill Hall records many names of soldiers who died here. Among them is Private Lewis Townend of the 2/5th Battalion, Duke of Wellington's Regiment. A member of Huddersfield Amateur Operatic Society as well as his church choir, he has no known grave but, like so many of his comrades who died at Bullecourt, is commemorated on the Memorial to the Missing in Arras.

The campaigns of 1918 began slowly and a series of German offensives in the Spring caused crippling losses to all of the locally recruited Battalions. It was, however, the last gasp of the German onslaught and the incredibly successful response of the British and Dominion Divisions, supported by the arrival of American forces, eventually ground down the exhausted German forces leading to the Armistice in November. Depleted German medical services and freezing conditions had a devastating effect on those who were held in Prisoner of War camps. Many detainees, already weakened by wounds or sickness, died before they were able to return home to their loved ones.

While the war raged on land, naval engagements claimed many lives. The most famous engagement, the Battle of Jutland, was fought over two days between 31st May and 1st June, 1916. The magnitude of fatalities in this conflict assumed horrific proportions. Ordinary Seaman Wilfred Haigh from Skelmanthorpe died on board the battle cruiser *HMS Indefatigable*. The ship was hit in the first few minutes and went down with only two of the crew of 2,019 surviving. Boy 1st Class Thomas Quarmby, from Crosland Hill, died on board *HMS Queen Mary* which sank with the loss of 1,266 men. In total five Huddersfield men died at Jutland, however a further four died on board the destroyer *HMS Partridge* on 12th December 1917, the full account of which is in the entry for Able Seaman Donald Haigh. It appears to have been a tragic coincidence that these four men from Huddersfield perished together in a small vessel so far from home.

In the biographical entries there are a number of references to locations of memorials and graves. It was determined early in the conflict, that those killed in action would be buried in

the theatre of war rather than repatriated. In many cases therefore there is a headstone and a grave location and if known it is listed. In some cases however the casualty has no known grave. There are many reasons for this not least that on occasion burials took place in the heat of battle and soldiers were buried where they fell. While every attempt was made to mark these, subsequent shelling and the constantly moving battle lines meant that they were often lost. These soldiers are commemorated on one of the many Memorials to the Missing such as those at Thiépval, The Menin Gate at Ypres and the Memorial at Arras. Even today in both France and Belgium the bodies of soldiers are still being uncovered. Where they can be identified they are buried in marked graves, where they cannot, they too are recorded on a Memorial to the Missing. They are always re-buried with full military honours, whether identified or not, and, wherever possible, members of the soldiers' families are invited to attend the burials. The cemeteries that are scattered across the Western Front contain many headstones commemorating soldiers who are not able to be identified, often with the simple inscription '*Known only to God*'. Those who were lost at sea are commemorated in many coastal towns around the country though there are large Memorials to the Missing in Portsmouth, Plymouth and Chatham.

Locally there are many War Memorials in villages across Huddersfield and in churches, churchyards, schools, and clubs. After the war every attempt was made to record those who had lost their lives and lists were sent to local libraries. For a variety of reasons however, sometimes administrative and sometimes economic, they were not recorded. As a result there are soldiers listed here who are commemorated in several places. There are some, like Pioneer James Starkey of the Royal Engineers, who are only commemorated in this volume.

Perhaps one of the most poignant memorials is in the Huddersfield Drill Hall. There, as one walks into the Hall and gazes to the right, there are two huge edifices commemorating soldiers of both the 5th and 7th Battalions of The Duke of Wellington's Regiment. The impact is powerful and causes visitors to stand and contemplate the immense sacrifice made by these men. Their heritage is maintained as the Drill Hall is currently home to Corunna Company of the 4th Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment.

During the conflict there were a number of gallantry medals awarded to local men and during the war a decision was taken to also award campaign medals. These are illustrated in the centre pages of this book. The gallantry awards represent an acknowledgement of particularly gallant or brave conduct. The most well-known, the Victoria Cross, was not granted to any of the Huddersfield fallen, although one recipient, 40989 Pte E Sykes VC who died in 1949, is buried in Lockwood Cemetery. Nevertheless, there are over seventy other examples of gallantry awards. In cases where the serviceman was awarded the medal on more than one occasion, a bar was affixed to the medal ribbon. After the war the campaign medals were issued and these are the medals most frequently owned by family members today. There were three representing campaign service, which are illustrated with descriptions of the criteria for receiving them.

In many of the entries in this book there are included excerpts from letters. These are often deeply moving and represent an attempt by a senior officer or colleague to bring some small comfort to the family having received the stark and somewhat formal notification of the death of a loved one. It is hard to comprehend the shock to a family as this notification arrived. As the war went on there were few who had not experienced such a loss or at least were close to someone who had. There are two examples in this book of multiple members of a family being killed. Sergeant Stephen Hargill Lee DCM and Bar 2/5th Duke of Wellington's Regiment who enlisted on the day war broke out in 1914 and was killed on the 7th November 1918, just four days before the Armistice. He was awarded the DCM for "*conspicuous gallantry and devotion to*

duty". His brother Private Henry Lee of the Army Cyclists Corps died of wounds on the 20th October 1917, his older brother Private John Lee of the 1st Royal Montreal Regiment had emigrated to Canada and enlisted in 1914. He was killed by a German sniper while recovering a wounded German soldier on the 29th May 1915. The trauma for their parents Henry and Ada can barely be imagined.

The letters themselves are a brave attempt to soften the blow. They also provide an insight into the day to day horrors of the engagements with the enemy and the effect on colleagues. This letter from Major W.U.Rothery to the parents of Private John William Wagstaff, 1/7th Battalion Duke of Wellington's Regiment, depicts a slightly formal but nonetheless compassionate response:

"I am extremely sorry to inform you that your son was killed yesterday. He was in charge of the bombers and after a successful sniping shot he received a bullet through the head. I saw him immediately afterwards and death was instantaneous. He was buried in our cemetery last night by the Brigade Chaplain and his grave will be marked with a cross. His death is a blow to me as he was one of the very few old members of the Milnsbridge Company and I knew him intimately. He was a good soldier and will be a great loss to the Company. I am afraid I can say nothing which will comfort you but it will be some satisfaction to you to know that he gave his life whilst actually fighting for his country."

Sadly, this is not the only letter in this book from Major Rothery to the family of one of his men.

There are recurring themes in the letters reflecting the love for the soldier's family and often a reassurance that in death the comrade had felt no pain. This moving letter from Lance Corporal Foulkes to the wife of Private George William Smith, 1/5th Duke of Wellington's Regiment ably demonstrates the thought and effort that went into writing to loved ones:

"He was killed almost instantly. I remained with him in the last moments and succoured him as a comrade should. You may take great consolation in the fact that his last thoughts and words were of his dear wife and little ones until God called to him. As his Section Commander I deeply regret the loss of your husband as he was a steady, reliable man whom everyone could get along with and I can assure you that the men both of the section and platoon will keenly feel the loss of such a good comrade. You may take consolation also in the fact that he died a soldier's death, facing the foe and bore himself splendidly throughout the great crisis."

Some of the letters also reflect the sorrow felt by those writing. This is particularly evident in a letter from a comrade of Corporal Samuel Earnshaw of 'C' Battery (Holme Valley) 168 Brigade Royal Field Artillery. It seems Corporal Earnshaw had taken it upon himself to try to repair a telephone wire and when he did not return his comrades went to search for him. The poignancy of the account is striking and warrants its recounting in full:

"I hardly know how to start this letter, but I feel that I must write and express to you the regrets and sympathy not only of myself but of the whole Battery in your sad bereavement. I know quite well how you will miss Sammy for I know how we miss him out here. In fact it is very difficult to realise that we shall not see him again. I thought I should like to write to you tonight not only to express my sympathy but also to tell you as much as possible how Sammy met his death. Unfortunately no one can tell you how or where he was killed as he was alone at the time but as I was one of the search party who found him perhaps I can tell you as much as anyone can. The last time I

saw Sammy was on the afternoon of the 11th November when he was leaving the Battery for Signal Headquarters. As usual he stopped and had a few cheery words with me and then went on his way. From what I can gather he left the Signal Headquarters some hours later and returned to the Battery which however he never reached. We found him about a mile away from the Battery. Evidently he had decided to overhaul one of the telephone wires on his way back to the Battery for we found him laid beside the wire which was some distance from his usual way back. You will be glad to know as we were that he must have died instantaneously as he was wounded through the head and heart. Poor lad - he died as he would have wished to have died, doing his duty and working to the last. He will be missed by all of us for I can safely say that there isn't a man in the Battery whom he had not helped sometime or other even if only been by his cheery smile."

The archives of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment provide an enduring insight into the final thoughts of one Huddersfield soldier and the effect of his death. ¹

The following letters concern the death of Private Charles Langrick, 1/5th Battalion (Huddersfield Territorials). Charles was the second son of Mr L Langrick, headmaster of the Armitage Bridge National School. The last letter written by Private Langrick to his father on August 20th two days before he met his death seems to contain a strange presentiment of what would happen to him a few hours later. The letter reads as follows,

"Dear Dad, Very many happy returns of your birthday, as you say, and to my great surprise as I had always looked upon you as one young and energetic. It is now 23 years since you took up your duties at Armitage Bridge. May you be spared another 23 years to do your duty there and may the evening of your career be abundantly blessed with all the things of life that are best, will always be my prayer.

I am not at all surprised at the Company's action and think they have behaved splendidly towards their staff. Their expenses are sure to have been very heavy.

We are safe again in the trenches and supports, but keep looking forward to a rest. Vernon (Mr Langrick's eldest son) and myself are quite well and all the boys from home are likewise. Poor Samson Taylor's loss was a great shock to us as it was so unexpected and sudden. Always my dear Dad, my thoughts are with you and often in the still hours of the night I can imagine myself at home leading the old life. And then the magnitude of the cross which has been laid upon us all comes home to us with every thought and I hope we shall be able to bear it and not in vain. Well, Dad, I must close now as the shadows are falling and it is almost impossible to write but, as I finish, the song comes into my mind, "Dusk and the shadows are falling." Yours loving son, Charles.

The London, Liverpool and Globe Insurance Company, by whom he was employed, had paid him full wages since the commencement of the war and at the close of the first twelve months intimated that they would now pay half wages. The following is a copy of Private Langrick's last letter written on August 21st to Mrs A M Wheatley, wife of Captain Wheatley,

"Dear Madam, On behalf of, and as a Private of, No 15 Platoon, I beg to tender to you their heartiest thanks for the present of sweetcakes which arrived today. We have been out of the trench just now for a couple of days and are resting in a place about a mile from the firing line, so we were able to eat the cake in comfort surrounded by four

¹ Originating from the Huddersfield Examiner 1st September 1915

walls for the first time for a few months. We often have exciting times but, except for accidents which nobody can help, great care is exercised and we hope that the majority, if not all of us, will be spared to come home. Our life here consists of trench work and spells of rest and, whilst resting, we often amuse ourselves by impromptu concerts and every item, whether serious or comic, is treated to salvos of applause. In fact, we may be said to be like a huge family with our Captain as our head. When we survey our surroundings we feel thankful that old England has been spared such scenes and are determined that it shall ever be thus. When feeling a little doleful presents such as we have received today cheer us up and so, you may guess, Madam, how much your gift is appreciated. We all hope that Captain Wheatley has had a pleasant leave and that it will not be long before he is able to return finally. With renewed thanks, I am, dear Madam, respectfully yours, C Lindley Langrick.

Charles was wounded in the neck by a sniper and died on the 23rd August 1915. Second Lieutenant N Rippon, 15th Platoon, D Company, 1/5th Battalion DWR, wrote to his parents:

"Dear Mr and Mrs Langrick, Please allow me to offer my deepest sympathy with you in the death of your son who was wounded in the neck on Sunday, August 22nd, and died in the Clarence Hospital at 7.15 pm on August 23rd. Immediately your son had been attended to I rang up his brother, Sergeant Vernon Langrick, and everything possible was done for him, but the wound proved fatal. He was a thoroughly good soldier and a splendid fellow to get on with. I am greatly indebted to him for the tremendous lot of work he did for me. He could speak French fluently and always wrote all the letters on behalf of the Platoon. I can assure you his loss is felt by all the Officers, NCOs and men of D Company. I sincerely hope you will be able to take some little consolation from the fact that he died a brave man's death fighting for his King and Country and also he will have a nice little grave in a hospital cemetery instead of just behind the trenches. Again, expressing our united sympathy with you in your great loss."

Second Lieutenant Rippon himself did not survive the war. A member of the famous family of motor engineers and coachbuilders he was killed in action on 18th November, 1915. Finally, in a further letter of sympathy, Platoon Sergeant G H Senior writes,

"He was the life and soul of his platoon and we miss his cheery smile and joke very keenly for he was a marvel of high spirits. Even when lying wounded he had to have his joke. You can understand the blank it leaves in our platoon, we don't feel like the same platoon and you have our deepest sympathy in your heavy loss. Hoping this will in some way help you to bear it."

In the absence of any other comfort these letters may have brought some closure to the grieving families. In some cases however there were no letters and indeed no memorial until much later. This sorrowful state of affairs simply serves to underscore the value of Margaret's work in compiling these entries.

The reader will be able to pursue many of the names in this book and find further details in local churches, war memorials and in archives. For some it will be the beginning of a search that will shed light onto an otherwise dimly lit page of family history. There will be those who, as a result of the information here, follow in the footsteps of Margaret and her husband, Alan, as they walk quietly through rows of headstones, seeking a particular name or Regiment close to a French or Belgian battlefield.

There will, however, be those commemorated here for whom this book will be the only memorial of an enduring sacrifice that took them away far away from their families and friends, who lived in the warm and friendly town of Huddersfield, to the horrors of a battleground in a distant foreign land. The dedicated pilgrimage undertaken by Margaret has brought the stories of these local servicemen and one woman, together to ensure that we will always remember those from this town who paid the ultimate price.

Reverend Paul Wilcock BEM