

Alfred Peel

1895 - 1917



Methodist minister's son

Educated at Kingswood School, Bath; Bradford Grammar School; and Corpus Christi College Oxford

Recuperated from wounds at Somerville College

Died near Arras, aged 22, on 5 May 1917

Family and Education

Alfred Peel was born on 27 January 1895 at Leyland, Preston, Lancashire. His father the Rev John Edward Peel was a Wesleyan Methodist minister. His mother was Laura Jessie Hill and he had an older brother. When Alfred was three his mother died, and two years later his father married Catherine Mann: two more sons were born.

Alfred went to Kingswood School, Bath, a Methodist foundation, but in 1910 when he was 15 his father was moved to Shipley in Yorkshire. Alfred then went to Bradford Grammar School, where he was an outstanding scholar. In December 1913 he came first in the Scholarship Exam for Corpus Christi College Oxford; the following summer he gained school prizes in History, Classics, Latin composition and English. He had come top in four more subjects, but their prizes were awarded to the second-best candidates to spread the honours.

Alfred started at Oxford in the autumn of 1914, joining the University Officers' Training Corps. He completed his first year's studies, but then enlisted. His family had moved to Newbury, Berkshire, and in August 1915 he became a Second Lieutenant in the 6th Battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment.

War Service: 6th (Service) Battalion, Royal Berkshire Regiment

When Alfred went to join his battalion in May 1916 it was already in France, in training for the Somme offensive, in trenches that copied the German lines that were to be its objective. The training paid off, with the lines successfully captured during the Battle of Albert on 1 July: this was one of the few achievements of that day's extensive attacks. But its cost was high, with 12 of the battalion's 20 officers either killed or wounded. Later in July the unit sustained 40% casualties at Delville Wood, and it remained in action in the war of attrition over the following months, although little ground was gained. At one stage Alfred was the only officer left in his company, and subsequently his health broke down due to 'trench fever'. He was invalided home to England and recuperated at Somerville College. He returned to his battalion at the Somme in January 1917 and was appointed the battalion bombing officer and later intelligence officer.

After the successful capture of Grandcourt in February the battalion was rewarded with a prolonged spell away from the front line. Then at the end of April it moved up to the front near Arras. In the early hours of 5 May it took over the front line near Cherisy. The Unit War Diary recorded a quiet day, the one event being the death of Second Lieutenant Peel by shellfire at 3pm, while in the support trench.

Alfred was aged 22, and the Rev W B Brash, minister during Alfred's time at Wesley Memorial, wrote of him:

He was a loyal member of our church, a member of the Wesley Society and of the University Society Class. The army had not taken from him any of his dreams. In his leisure hours he pursued his classical studies and found Homer still an unfailing joy.

He is buried in the London Cemetery, Neuville-Vitasse. His older brother Edward served with the Royal Field Artillery, and survived the war.

This is the story of one of the men who appear on a war memorial at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church in Oxford, UK. These stories were compiled in 2018-19 from a variety of family history and military sources. In particular, Chris Baker's site, 'The Long, Long Trail' has provided valuable details of the men's experience of battle:

<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/>

Alfred Peel's story draws on research by Nick Hooper, former Head of History at Bradford Grammar School, and incorporates details from Kingswood Magazine, kindly provided by the Kingswood School Archivist. The photo is reproduced with the permission of the Bradford Grammar School Old Bradfordians Association.

<https://www.bradfordgrammar.com/old-bradfordians/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>