

Francis Hanby

1887 - 1916

Methodist minister's son

Educated at Bradford Grammar School and Jesus College Oxford

Schoolmaster

Died near Richebourg, aged 28, on 30 June 1916

Family and Education

Francis James Hanby was born on 18 July 1887 in Hay, Breconshire. His father was the Rev James Hanby, a Methodist minister, his mother Harriett Alicia. He had a sister and two brothers. He was educated at Bradford Grammar School, and gained a Welsh Classical Exhibition at Jesus College, Oxford, beginning his studies there in 1906. He achieved Third Class in both his first year and his final exams (1910) in Classics. In 1911 Francis was a schoolmaster at the residential Willaston School, at Nantwich in Cheshire. This was a small public school founded in 1899 to educate the sons of impoverished Unitarian ministers. It is recorded that 10 old boys and one master died in World War I.

Francis's medal index card shows that he joined an Officers' Training Corps in 1914. These were attached to schools, universities and workplaces such as the Inns of Court. After a few months' training suitable candidates could be commissioned as officers. This seems to be the route that Francis took.

War Service: 12th (Service) Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment

Francis began active service on 23 December 1915, and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the 12th Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment. Since October the Battalion had been at Witley Common in Surrey. Then in March 1916 it formed part of a brigade which landed at Le Havre and led the attack on the Boar's Head at Richebourg on 30 June 1916. This was intended to be a diversionary action prior to the battle of the Somme, to take an exposed salient which had the look of a boar's head.

At 3.05am on 30 June 1916 the attack began. The 12th Battalion advanced on the right, with the junction of the 12th/13th being the tip of the Boar's Head, where an old communication trench ran from the British parapet across to the German front line. The 12th Battalion succeeded in seizing and holding a stretch of front line for 4 hours, and the support line for half an hour. Cut off from reinforcements, however, their supply of grenades and ammunition ran out, and they were forced to withdraw in the face of counter attacks. When relieved they had lost 412 men. Many of their bodies were not found, and Francis was one of the missing. He was recorded as having died aged 28 on 30 June 1916. He is commemorated on the Loos Memorial.



Francis Hanby with the Willaston School rugby team of 1913-14

The Willaston School Collection in Manchester University John Rylands Library, courtesy of Willaston & District History Group



Francis visiting cadets at Willaston School, after he was commissioned as an officer

Manchester College Oxford (Unitarian)

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/>

Francis Hanby's story draws on research by Nick Hooper, former Head of History at Bradford Grammar School, and uses photos obtained through him.

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