

Walter Bradfield
1892 - 1916



Methodist minister's son
Educated at The Leys School, Cambridge; Bradford Grammar School; and
Jesus College Oxford
Died at the Somme, aged 24, on 5 December 1916

Family and Education

Walter Lanning Bradfield was born on 4 June 1892 in Leicester. His father was the Rev William Bradfield who was a Wesleyan Methodist minister. His mother was Annie Mary and he had a brother and a sister. At the age of eleven Walter became a day boy at The Leys School, Cambridge, where he was described as a gifted scholar. But a few years later his father was appointed Warden of Wesley Deaconess Institute, Ilkley, and Walter moved to Bradford Grammar School. He won an exhibition in History at Jesus College Oxford in 1911, and joined the University contingent of the Officers' Training Corps. In 1914 he achieved a BA in Modern History (Second Class), then in early September he was one of the first volunteers for the newly-formed Leeds Pals, the 15th Battalion of the West Yorkshire regiment. His background qualified him for a commission as an officer, but he seems to have deliberately chosen to enlist as a private.

War Service: 15th (Service) Battalion (1st Leeds), West Yorkshire Regiment
(Prince of Wales' Own)

The battalion's first months were spent training, but in late November 1915 it was told to prepare to sail for France, under orders of the 93rd Brigade, 31st Division. Advance parties began to depart, but on 2 December the Division was instructed to go to Egypt. However, Walter was kept back with the reserves, and was not sent to join his battalion until April 1916 when it had returned to France.

In July 1916 the battalion was in the first wave of the advance towards Serre, when more than two thirds of its attacking force were killed or wounded. However, at this time Walter may still have been in reserve. Afterwards the battalion was moved north to be rebuilt. Then from mid-October it provided working parties, spending several days at a time in the trenches, and on 5 December Walter was killed by a German shell. He was aged 24, and his commanding officer described him as a good man and a brave soldier, a conscientious man they could ill afford to lose. He was buried in Couin British cemetery.

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/>

Walter Bradfield's story draws on research by Nick Hooper, former Head of History at Bradford Grammar School. 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/>