

Ashville Cenotaph: **HODSON W C M**

Ashville Memorial Hall: Wilfrid Campbell McDougall West Yorkshire Regiment (According to the listing on the Wharfedale Family History Society website)

On the 1921 Roll of Honour, so presumably on the original Clock Memorial

I am afraid the plaque in the Memorial Hall appears to have got his first given name wrong, it should be William. His other two given names are a minefield for errors especially the last one. The definitive version has to be how he signed his name on his enlistment papers – **William Campbell MacDougall Hodson**. How a Yorkshire born and bred young man came to have such Scottish given names is discussed under “Family Life” below.

Date & place of birth: 31<sup>st</sup> March 1899 in Pannal, Yorkshire (Pannal is a village on the southern edge of Harrogate).

Connection to Methodism: None detected to date but he definitely attended Elmfield College as he appeared, aged 12, on the College’s 1911 Census Return. If he attended from age 11 to 16 he would have been there from 1910 to 1915.

**War:** William offered his services to Country and King in Bradford at the end of November 1917 and four months before his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday – the minimum age for enlistment was 18 and for serving overseas 19. They took down his particulars and allocated him to the Army Reserve. Again in Bradford, he was given a medical on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1918 when, besides his age, he proved fit for service. On the following day he was appointed “a soldier assistant teacher entitled to extra duty pay” and an as unpaid Lance-Corporal. His fire-damaged service record says he was mobilised on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1918, a month after his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

On mobilisation he was assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment, a training battalion based in the UK. On 6<sup>th</sup> June 1918 he was promoted to Corporal and on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1918 he embarked for France. On the 6<sup>th</sup> July he joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment on the Western Front.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment were part of the 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division of the British Army. When William arrived at the Western Front in early July 1918 the Allies had seen off the major, and nearly successful, German offensive of spring 1918 and were commencing the counter offensive which eventually led to the end of the war.

When William joined the Battalion they were in reserve but still suffering light casualties. On the 12<sup>th</sup> they moved up to the front line where they remained for four days before being relieved and going into billets. They returned to the front line on 21<sup>st</sup> and were relieved on the last day of the month by an American Infantry Battalion. This was a fairly typical pattern for an Infantry Battalion during the heaviest periods of fighting in the summer – spending on average about a week in the front line before being relieved and going into reserve or billets for a slightly longer period.

The first 5 days of August were spent in reserve but they suffered quite high casualties during the next 4 days when they were back in the front line. They were relieved on the 10<sup>th</sup> and went into reserve until 21<sup>st</sup> when they went into billets for the rest of the month. So they had an unusually “quiet” August.

During the first 12 days of September they underwent training exercises and then relocated by train and marching to the area of Holnon Wood & Village. They moved into the front line there on the 13<sup>th</sup>. For the first few days they suffered light casualties but on 16<sup>th</sup> they suffered heavy enemy shelling, including gas shells, and on 17<sup>th</sup> they attacked enemy positions in conjunction with the 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Essex Regiment and French infantry. During these two days they suffered heavy casualties - Officers: 1 killed, 11 injured, 1 missing and Other Ranks: 119 wounded, 86 missing. At the start of the month the strength of the Battalion was given as 40 officers & 813 Other Ranks – so in two days the effective fighting strength of the Battalion had been reduced by a quarter.

The following day, 19<sup>th</sup> September 1918, William was killed in action. This is the entry in the Battalion War Diary for that day:-

“Battalion attacked enemy positions NE of Holnon Village in conjunction with the 1<sup>st</sup> Leicestershire Regiment. Zero hour 5.30 am. “A” and “C” Coys were assaulting, “C” Coy having very intricate manoeuvres to make in changing direction southwards through Salency. “B” and “D” Coys, formed into one composite Coy on account of weakness in numbers, were in reserve near Battalion HQ when they were very heavily shelled. Assaulting Coys came under intense machine gun and shell fire and made little progress, although important posts were established in Holnon and near Salency. Battalion was relieved during the night and withdrew to positions south of Atilly. Casualties: Officers: 1 wounded; Other Ranks: 11 killed, 50 wounded, 18 missing.”

The Battalion are then only given two days in reserve to re-organise before going back into action and on the 24<sup>th</sup> they suffered slightly higher casualties than on the 19<sup>th</sup> meaning their effective fighting strength was then just under half what it should have been. At this stage the powers that be took mercy on them and they went into reserve for the rest of the month and received considerable reinforcements.

Fortunately there were sufficient resources to recover William’s body and he was buried in a small cemetery near where he was killed. In June 1919 the burials in the area of Holnon were “concentrated” into the Chapelle British Cemetery, Holnon. The inscription on his headstone states “DEARLY LOVED ONLY CHILD OF THE LATE W. C. AND MRS. E. HODSON HARROGATE”

He is also commemorated on the War Memorial in Harrogate, near where he was born.

**Family Life:** As one might expect from his given names, William did have Scottish ancestors but you have to go back four generations to find ones born in Scotland. Four of his great-great grandparents, on his father’s side, were born in Scotland but moved south of the border during their lifetimes. Two of them were a Duncan MacDougall and a Jean Campbell. The Campbell surname died out at that stage but it reappeared as a given name in William’s father who was William Campbell Hodson. The MacDougall surname survived longer and William’s paternal grandmother was born Marianne Eliza MacDougall.

William Campbell Hodson married an Emily Wilson in Manchester in November 1897 and William Campbell MacDougall, their only child, was born 15 months later. Their wedding certificate shows William senior was a farmer near Leeds but his mother did not give an occupation and her address was written merely as “The Albion Hotel”. There was a Manchester city centre hotel called the Albion Hotel at the time, it subsequently became a Woolworths.

By the time of the 1901 Census the family were living at Pannal near Harrogate and William senior was still a farmer. In 1906 when William junior was six his father died.

The 1911 census finds William at Elmfield College and his mother at the Grand Hotel, Harrogate where she is employed as the Housekeeper – a senior post in the hierarchy of the staff of large hotels. So presumably when she married she was working at the Albion hotel rather than residing there. When William enlisted he gave his address as the Stray Hotel, Harrogate and as the address of his next of kin, his mother. I cannot find any mention of the Stray Hotel today but there is an area of Harrogate known as The Stray.

So like Percy Bernard Wrigley, we appear to have a widowed mother ensuring, by her own diligence, that her only son gets a good education. The personalised inscription on his grave headstone, which she arranged, indicates how much she missed him. Sadly William had even less opportunity than Percy to put his education to good use although I wonder if his initial role in the Army as “soldier assistant teacher” did mean he passed on some of its benefits to his educationally less fortunate fellow recruits.

A final thought, as his family were obviously proud of their Scottish roots, during his short “real” war lasting 75 days did William Campbell MacDougall Hodson go into battle crying “*Buaidh no bàs*” - the MacDougall Clan motto, pronounced “Bwee naw bas” and meaning “Victory or Death”.

David Redhead, April 2018