

Cpl. Gilbert PATTISON (1893 – 1915).

Royal Flying Corps.

“If I should die, think only this of me,

That there’s some corner of a foreign field that is forever England”

(Rupert Brooke ‘The Soldier’ 1914.)



Gilbert Pattison’s Grave Stone in Batley Cemetery.

Gilbert Pattison was born in Morley in the summer of 1893. His baptism records for August of that year show that his parents were John James and Eliza Pattison. John Pattison’s occupation as shown on the record was that of a colliery manager. At the time of Gilbert’s birth the family were living at Weeton Cottage in Batley, but he was actually born in Morley.

By 1901 the family were well enough off to have a servant, one Harriet Nelson, living with them. They were still living in Batley, but John, Gilbert's father, had changed jobs to being a 'mining engineer', no longer the manager of the colliery. Unfortunately John died, some time around 1905, but not before having a further child, a brother to Gilbert, named John James after his father. At the time of the 1911 census John was six years old and Gilbert was seventeen years old.

Gilbert had entered the school in the spring term of 1906. But by 1911 he had left and was an apprentice electrical engineer. Without the father's wages Eliza had taken her two children to live in Morley by 1911. She moved back to her family home at 5 New Park Street in Morley, with her brother Alfred Crowther and her mother Sarah Crowther, like her daughter, a widow, but sixty nine years old. Probably for this reason Gilbert's name is actually on the War Memorial in Morley's Scatcherd Park.

Gilbert Pattison's fledgling occupation in 1911, as an apprentice electrical engineer, gives us some clue as to why he was swiftly transferred from the infantry and promoted to corporal in the Royal Flying Corps. His skills in electrical engineering, further honed by three more years until 1914, would no doubt have been invaluable to the newly formed corps, the forerunner of the Royal Air Force.

Nothing is known of whether Gilbert served in France in those last few months of 1914. In all likelihood, he probably did not have the time to do so after enlisting at Halifax. However, he was willing to go to war right from the start of the conflict.

Rupert Brooke's lines in his poem 'The Soldier' probably did much to encourage young men, and probably older ones too, that they should do their bit for the cause after August 4th 1914. The sense of patriotism it evoked was likely to have been foremost in Gilbert Pattison's mind as he joined the 8th Battalion of the Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment, some time in late 1914. The regiment was formed in Halifax and as an early recruit Gilbert Pattison was certainly one of the first Batley Grammar School boys to join any service.

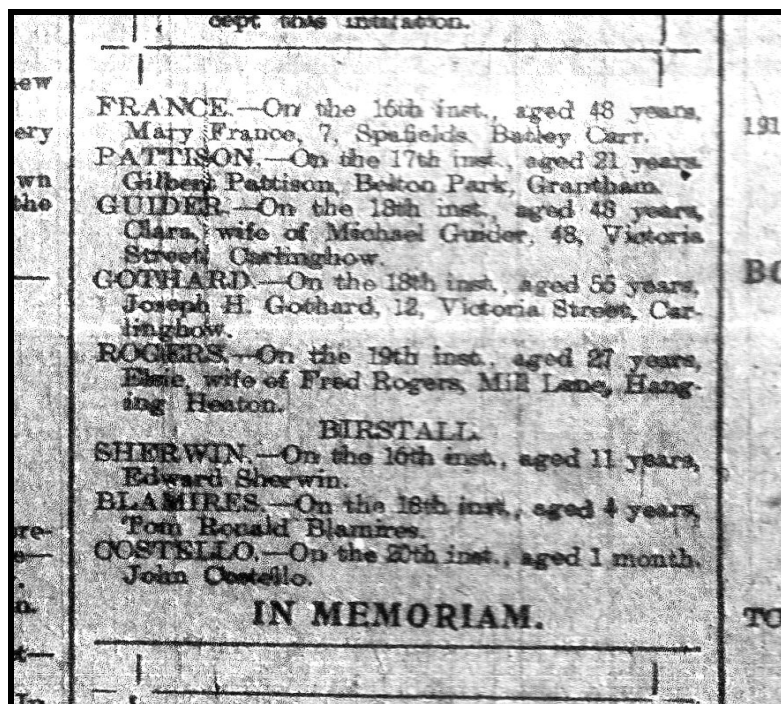
Unfortunately he was to have another distinction, not long after joining the 8th Battalion and then the Royal Flying Corps. That was that he became the first old boy of the school to die whilst serving in His Majesty's Armed Services in the Great War. Ironically he did not die on active service. In fact it is doubtful that he even left these shores for Brooke's romanticised 'foreign fields'. He died of pneumonia at the military hospital at Belton Park near Grantham on January 16th 1915 and is actually buried in Batley Cemetery.

His headstone in the cemetery, as can be seen by the photograph, is not that of the Commonwealth War Commission standard white stone, but rather a normal family type

grave stone. Unfortunately, Gilbert Pattison's records did not survive the bombing of London in the Second World War. Thus, we are unable to complete the full story of his military life, short though it was, from August 1914, to January 1915.

The medal card for Gilbert Pattison has also been lost in the mists of time. Gilbert is certainly recorded in the pages of 'UK Soldiers, Died in the Great War 1914-1919'. There he is shown as a Lance Corporal in the 8th Duke of Wellington's Regiment, having enlisted in Halifax, where the regiment was indeed raised, in late 1914.

However, by the time the school was compiling its first roll of honour in the school magazine Gilbert Pattison was shown to be serving in the Royal Flying Corps as a Corporal when he died. A short column in the Batley News shows that he had been transferred to the Royal Flying Corps by this time and was probably based at RFC Station, Harlaxton, near Grantham.



The Obituary notice from the Batley News which shows that
Pattison died at Belton Park Military Hospital.

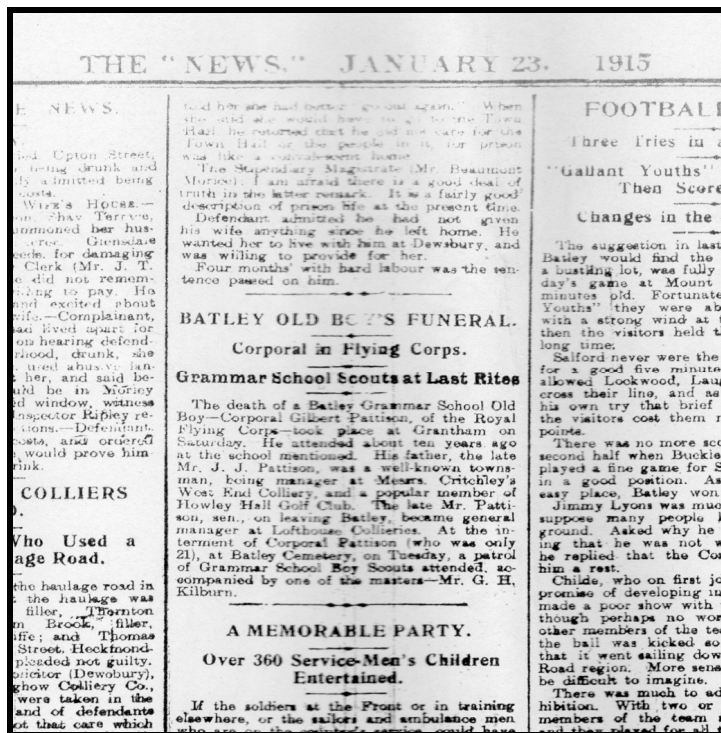
The school magazine was right that Gilbert Pattison was serving with the fledgling Royal Flying Corps at the time of his illness and death. His life prior to joining the army working as an electrical engineer tell us why he would first join an infantry regiment, but then be promoted and seconded to the RFC.

Gilbert's death was announced in the columns of the Batley News on January 23rd 1915, both in the 'In Memoriam' columns and also in a short piece on him. However, the report seems to dwell more on his father and his standing than it did Gilbert's short life. It read:

**"Batley Old Boy's Funeral
Corporal in Flying Corps.**

Grammar School Scouts at Last Rites.

The death of a Batley Grammar School Old Boy – Corporal Gilbert Pattison, of the Royal Flying Corps- took place at Grantham on Saturday. He attended about ten years ago at the school mentioned. His father, the late Mr. J. J. Pattison was a well known townsman, being manager at Messrs Critchley's West End Colliery and a popular member of Howley Hall Golf Club. The late Mr. Pattison sen. On leaving Batley became general manager at Lofthouse Collieries. At the interment of Corporal Pattison (who was only 21), at Batley Cemetery on Tuesday, a patrol of Grammar School Boy Scouts attended, accompanied by one of the masters – Mr. G. H. Kilburn"



The death of Gilbert Pattison as announced in the Batley News of January 23rd 1915.

The 'In Memoriam' notice gave details of where Gilbert died:

“On the 17th inst. aged 21 years, Gilbert Pattison, Belton Park Grantham”.

In November 1915 the Alma Park estate, then known as Harrowby Camp, together with Belton Park near Grantham had been a training centre for the Machine Gun Corps and together the two adjoining estates had housed and trained 18,000 men. During the First World War hundreds of temporary wooden huts had been built over the Belton Park Golf Course's fairways.

Belton Park itself became an RAF station during the Second World War, but there is no indication that it was a Royal Air Force base in 1915 when Gilbert died there. It is likely that as the Machine Gun Corps were there, a full hospital was needed, and indeed Belton Park Military Hospital was on the Belton House Estate, serving the Machine Gun Corps camp and probably the fledgling Royal Flying Corps base at nearby Harlaxton.

Remarks written in the school magazine at the time of the death of Herbert Pearsall in 1919, indicate that Pearsall himself, as well as other teachers at the school, were present at Gilbert Pattison's funeral. It was fitting that they were, as he was the first of many to come. Sadly the school would get to send representatives to one more funeral in Batley, in 1918, when Robert Ramsden Barber died from pneumonia, as did Pattison. The rest of the funerals, where bodies were found at least, were to be held in Brooke's 'foreign fields', as far away as Gallipoli and Basra, and nearer to home in France and Belgium. The irony was that Gilbert Pattison was not laid to rest in a 'foreign field' at all, but near to where he had grown up, in Batley Cemetery, dying of pneumonia and not from horrific battle injuries.

A further ironic twist in this sad tale came from the headstone under which he was buried in a family plot. It reads **“His end was peace”**, which, for the times, was a very good play on words chosen by his family.

Researcher : Philip Wheeler

(Taken from Philip Wheeler's book - BATLEY LADS (The story of the men on the Roll of Honour at Batley Grammar School who died in the Great War 1914-1918). Published 2014.