



Gerald KIRK

2nd Lieutenant, 1/5th Battalion The King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment



Gerald Kirk was the first of the QES 'old boys' to lay down his life in the First World War. A popular figure in the area he had done much for the community, especially in terms of sport. He is also the most researched of all the men on the QES war memorial, yet no previous work has recognized him as a former pupil of Queen Elizabeth Grammar School. It is unquestionable, however, that he was a pupil and he deservedly takes his place on the school's memorial

By April 1915, Kirk's Battalion, the 1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment (KORLR), had arrived at Ypres, and was billeted in the lunatic asylum. It remained there until the 20th April when there was a huge bombardment of the town, and the battalion was moved to St Jean. Consequently, on the 22nd April the battalion was in a prime position to witness the German's bombard an adjacent area with gas, and they subsequently observed the effects of the attack as surviving troops marched past them coughing and vomiting. This act marked the beginning of the Second Battle of Ypres, with the Germans breaking a taboo of civilized warfare and using poisoned gas for the first time. The act received widespread condemnation, with one officer noting that it would be recorded to the "everlasting shame of the German's." Soon afterwards news was received that the enemy had broken through the line between St. Julien and Pilkem, and that the 5th KORL's would form part of an allied attempt to 'plug the gap'. Accordingly on the 23rd an attack was launched to push the Germans back. The 5th KORL's were to act as a reserve force, supporting the main attack made up predominantly of Canadian troops. At 3:45p.m the attack began, but the battalion was almost immediately hit with very heavy resistance. On a bright spring afternoon the attack was fully visible to the enemy, and casualties were accordingly high. The Colonel of the 5th Battalion noted that the whole attack was poorly planned. It is most probable that Kirk was wounded during this initial foolhardy advance. Captain Gerald W. Sharpe described how Kirk, "leading his platoon across an absolute inferno of shot and shell, was wounded through the chest by a bullet." After he had received this injury four of his platoon, including a fellow Ingletonian, Pte Roger Brown, carried Kirk away to a dressing station. The Colonel of the 5th Battalion, whom had been at Head Quarters rejoined his men to be informed, "Kirk is seriously wounded." Despite the prompt medical attention that Kirk received, he died the next day at No. 3 Casualty Clearing Station, Poperinghe. In addition to Kirk, one officer had been killed, 3 wounded, and one gassed, while 36 Other Ranks had been killed, 144 wounded and 1 missing. Included in the wounded was Lieutenant E.M. Lloyd-Evans, who coincidentally had attended Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, but has been omitted from the war memorial. Unusually, Kirk's family had been informed via a telephone message that he had been wounded, but the following day an official telegram was received indicating his death.

In life, Gerald Kirk was an extremely vibrant character, especially in sporting circles. He was born in Headingley, Leeds, on 14th July 1883. As a Yorkshire lad he was educated in Ilkley and then became a boarder at Pocklington Grammar School in 1895. He must have moved to Ingleton to be with his mother at the family home of Greenwood Leghe sometime around 1900, and spent his final years of education at Queen Elizabeth Grammar School. Upon leaving school Kirk embarked on a football career of much promise. He began locally, captaining the Ingleton 'Reds' to unprecedented success, and also playing for the QES 'old boys' team. However, Kirk was destined for greater things and progressed to play two seasons as centre-half for Bradford City, moving to Leeds City for a year in 1906. His style was described as hard but clean. Additionally his sporting ability in cricket, billiards, tennis and fox hunting were all revered, and it was said that in whatever branch of sport he chose he would excel. Despite his career as an amateur footballer Kirk remained anchored in the local affairs of Ingleton. He was a founding member of Ingleton Conservative Club, a manager of Ingleton National School, the originator and first secretary of Ingleton's Farmer's Association, and at one time a sidesman at St Mary's Parish Church. Unsurprisingly when news of Kirks death reached Ingleton a gloom was cast over the village.

When war broke out Kirk joined up almost immediately on the 2nd September 1914 at Lancaster. He became a member of one the 'Pals' Companies of the 5th Battalion King's Own Royal Lancaster's. Tellingly on his Attestation Form, Kirk declared his trade as a 'Gentleman'. Although he had enlisted in the ranks, Kirk's gentlemanly conduct soon marked him out. He was promoted Lance Corporal on 31st October 1914, and before he had finished his training he was gazetted as a 2nd Lieutenant on the 3rd January 1915. He thus sailed to France on the 1st March 1915 as an officer, and gained his first front-line experience at Neuve Eglise. Then his battalion moved to Ypres, where Kirk was to become the first of the QES 'old boys' to fall.

Kirk was buried in Poperinghe Old Military Cemetery close to the Casualty Clearing Station to which he was taken. Colonel Lord Richard Cavendish wrote that Kirk would be "deeply mourned and long remembered." Indeed, today he is remembered on the Ingleton War Memorial, the Pocklington Grammar School War Memorial, and the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School War Memorial. As a more personal tribute, Kirk's wife, Mrs Sarah Jane Kirk (nee Capstick), had a memorial tablet made in her husband's memory, which was unveiled in St Mary's Church, Ingleton, on 9th March 1916, and remains there to this day. The inscription reads:

"In loving memory of Gerald Kirk, 2nd Lieut., 5th Battn. King's Own Royal Lancaster Regt., son of Alfred S. and Isabella Kirk, of Greenwood Leghe, Ingleton. Born July 14th, 1883; died at Poperinghe, Belgium, April 24th, 1915, of wounds received at St Julien the previous day. This tablet is erected by his wife."

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Links

Gerald Kirk's entry on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Website, http://www.cwgc.org/search/casualty_details.aspx?casualty=485456

Gerald Kirk is also included in Cravens Part in the First World War, <http://www.cpqw.org.uk/viewDetail.cfm?sID=050-03&view=main>

There is an additional biography of Gerald Kirk on Batamspast, which charts the history of Bradford City Football Club, <http://www.batamspast.co.uk/EarlyDays/TheGreatWar/geraldkirk.html>

For further information on the King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment explore the Regimental Museum website, <http://www.kingsownmuseum.plus.com/gallerywwone008.htm>

For further information on the Second Battle of Ypres see, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/battles/ypres2.htm>