Robert Randerson





Photo thanks to Peter Bennett

Rank: - Captain

Regiment: - Alexandra, Princess of Wales's Own (Yorkshire Regiment), 6th (Service) Battalion.

Died: - Killed in Action 7 August 1915, age 24.

Cemetery: - Lala Baba Cemetery, Turkey II. C. 9.

Robert was born in York on 29 November 1890 and this was where he spent his childhood. His father, Robert, and grandfather, William, were well known corn miller and corn sellers in the city. His father regularly won contracts to supply York Board of Guardians with flour and oatmeal for the workhouse and in 1890 his Roller Flour \Mill was upgraded to make it "*one of the most advanced mills in the district".*

Robert's parents, Robert (senior) and Annie Wilkinson married at St. Leonard's Catholic Church in Hazlewood, Tadcaster on 30 September 1885. Robert was their third child.

Annie Elizabeth was born in 1886 followed by Benjamin in 1889, then Robert, next William in 1892 but who died in February 1902 aged nine; John Wilkinson in 1897 and George in 1899.

After completing his education at Archbishop Holgate's Grammar School in York, Robert furthered his education at St. Mary's College, Hammersmith. This establishment trained Catholic men to serve as teachers in Catholic schools. It was whilst at college that Robert's sporting ability reached national attention. In May 1912 he was described as a "*diamond in the rough"* during the annual inter-collegiate championships at the Stamford Bridge Grounds. On 4 May he ran 100 yards in just over 10 seconds on a rain-sodden track and on 18 May he was taking his place in the A.A.A. Olympic trials again at Stamford Bridge.

By April 1913 Robert was in Batley, taking up an appointment as an assistant master at St. Mary's school, taking apartments at Mrs Power's home at 37, Norfolk Street, Batley. He took up the role of choirmaster at St. Mary's Church and also continued his sporting interests.

He was spotted by Batley rugby club whilst carrying on with his sprint training at Mount Pleasant, the home of Batley Athletic and Cricket Club. Despite having never played either rugby code being a soccer player at Archbishop Holgate's the club recognised his potential. Eventually he asked and received permission to do so from the Education Committee. He held back from signing professionally because at this stage he intended to return to York. He originally turned out for the reserves, his first game being a 7-5 loss on 1 November 1913 against Lane End United in the Leeds and District League. Even though they lost it was agreed that in his first game of Northern Union playing on the wing, "*he made a surprising good show*." He wrote "*I have received a good start in the handling code and will try to keep up uniform success. Every match at some time or another I will try by an extra effort to do "something" for that is how players get their names*."

His first home game was called off but his next game was away to York Reserves. Despite Batley's one-point victory Robert came away frustrated, in particular with his centre:

"I was eager to shine at York it being my home town and I did not get a single pass throughout the game Tom Parker was my centre. It was nothing but tackle and tackle again and, on several occasions, he left me with two and even three to one. There will

never be good combination between wing men and centres while the praise a centre playing a good game when he has wasted his wing."

Despite his exasperation, he won plaudits for his performance, as illustrated in the Batley News:

"*The outstanding player, however, was Randerson who made his second appearance in the wing three-quarter position. Although the passes he received were few he found plenty of scope in the tackling department. He worked like a Trojan and his play was applauded by the home spectators. It is to be hoped the Batley Committee will keep their eyes on this promising player."*

He scored his first try for the Reserves against Methley at the end of November 1913. He was now settling into the game. Besides descriptions of the games, conditions and weather, his scrapbook is full of anecdotes about his Northern Union escapades.

Robert was becoming accustomed to the game feeling *as quick as a cat* and thought he ran even faster with the ball than without.

Even at this stage he did not play for the Batley first team—he had not given up on his ambition to transfer to his home team of York. He wrote to York in February telling them:

"if they do not find me a place this week the offer of signing on for nothing was off"

Nothing came of it and on 11 March 1914 Robert signed on as a professional for Batley "*feeling in better form than ever."* Three days later he made his first team debut in an 11-0 Challenge Cup defeat against Halifax. The local press described as a "*creditable debut*" they reported he was the only man in the three-quarter line to escape criticism and if the ball had gone to him more frequently:

"*It is quite clear that Randerson's first appearance in big football might have been of a sensational character."*

Robert was disappointed to not score in his first match.

As soon as war was declared Robert was the first Batley player to enlist. Applying for an Army Officer on 10 August 1914 he was quoted as saying:

"I am not a fighting man, I don't like to fight, but I ought to go and fight at a time like this."

His service papers show he stood at 5'9 ½" and weighed 164lbs. He was accepted and went to serve in the 6th (Service) Battalion, Alexandra, Princess of Wales's Own (Yorkshire Regiment) better known as the Green Howards.

It was whilst serving with the Yorkshire Regiment based at Belton Park, Grantham, that he made his final appearance for Batley in a home match against Keighley on 10 October 1914. He told club secretary Kershaw Newton it would be his last game with the Gallant Youths until peace was signed as, with his exhaustive training programme of marching, drilling, lectures and special studies as a n officer, he was "*about played out by the weekend." He* explained his decision in a statement published in the Batley News: "*I have 60 men under me and am responsible for them, and I will have to lead them in war. To make them and myself efficient requires all my time an energy, and I do not think it would be right to risk laying myself up with an injury."*

Poignantly he wrote of his final game "... *I will come, and hope to see many of my old friends round railings as sort of good-bye until we get the serious business through and when honour and justice are satisfied, I trust to have many a jolly game on the hill."*

Robert scored one try in Batley's 19-0 victory but he suffered a kick to the head which confined him to a dark room on returning to Belton Camp. Whilst at Belton Camp he organised football matches and cross country running for the men.

In April 1915 the battalion moved to Witley Camp near Godalming, Surrey and at the end of June orders were received to travel to Liverpool from where they deported on board H.M.T. Aquitania on 3 July bound for the Dardanelles. They initially docked at Lemnos on 10 July then moved to Imbros. During July they acclimatised and practised night landings and attacks. On the evening of 6 August, crammed into two lighters they left Imbros These crafts were described as a kind of tug-boat with a small bridge, covered over to protect troops from shells. They could ground easily on the beach and the back dropped down to let the troops off. They had a small engine and could travel at about 6 miles per hour. As they neared their destination, searchlights appeared to pick them up and when they neared the shore under their own engine power, they were greeted with a burst of rifle fire. They finally disembarked at around 11pm on the Gallipoli peninsula, south east of Nibrunesi Point. The aim was to take Lala Baba, a low hill between the southern side of Sulva Bay and the Salt Lake. As the men moved off from the shore they were immediately engulfed by total darkness, unable to see their comrades around them. It was then the Turks struck.

Lala Bala was eventually taken, but the Unit War Diary records a heavy price paid with 16 officers and 250 other ranks killed or wounded in the fighting during those first hours of the night 6/7 August 1915. This was from a total of 25 officers and 750 other ranks who had left Imbros a short time earlier. Robert was one of the officers killed and the War Office to the family read: *Deeply regret to inform you that Capt. R. Randerson was killed in action 7 August. Lord Kitchener expresses his sympathy*.

In a letter to Robert's father a fellow officer wrote:

"*We made our landing of the evening of 6 August below the Salt Lake. The 6th Yorks. covered the landing of the rest of the Brigade. At about 10am we disembarked from the barge with little opposition and started up the peninsula to take a hill called Talla Baba and there we lost men. I got out at just before 12 midnight. Some of our men had gone over and some were held up by the Turks entrenched on top and there were several of our officers wounded and killed there. I was told your son had been killed there and the sergeant who told me said he had been shot through the head, so his death was instantaneous."*

Robert is buried at Lala Baba Cemetery, Turkey.

He is remembered on the family headstone at York Cemetery, St. Mary's War Memorial, Batley War Memorial, in York Minster's the King's Book of York Heroes, on the War Memorial at Archbishop Holgate's School in York and on the Leeds' Brotherton War Memorial. Thanks to Jane Roberts and for further details and acknowledgements please see www.pasttopresentfgenealogy