

William George Hoare

2nd Lieutenant, 1st Battalion, Honourable Artillery Company



Photo courtesy: Sue Brigden

William George Hoare was born on 21 January 1885 at Wembley, Middlesex. His mother Jane, née Williams, had been born in Amersham where later she was to marry Alfred Parker Hoare. The marriage took place on 17 April 1884 in the Parish Church of St Mary. It was therefore not surprising that they chose to baptise their first child, William George, in the same church and the ceremony was performed there on 8 March 1885

Alfred was employed in the grocery trade and by 1891 had risen from clerk to the position of manager. At that time the family, now numbering four with the arrival of a daughter, Daisy, in 1888, was living in South Norwood, Croydon. Also resident with them then was Emily Saunders, a seventeen-year-old girl employed as a general domestic servant, so the family was presumably quite able to afford that sort of help. Another son and brother to William, Harry Robert, was born to the Hoares in 1894 and completed the family.

The 1901 Census of England and Wales shows William George Hoare, aged 16, as a student at Bedford County School, Ampthill Road, Kempston, Bedfordshire.

In the mid 1800s there had been perceived a need to provide education at a level between that offered by the great Public Schools and the National Schools attended by those children of families who simply did not have the means to fulfil any greater aspirations that they may have had with regard to the schooling of their offspring. The thought was to create a type of Public School for the middle classes based on the existing county administrative structure. Fees would be charged but not at a level that would preclude the admission of the sons of farmers or those making their way in business. Thus was born the County School, a boarding school with a curriculum designed to provide an education not in preparation for university entrance or the higher professions but a little

more general and suitable to prepare boys to take up local middle-class occupations.

Bedfordshire Middle Class Public School was opened in 1869 with 70 boys whose ages ranged from nine to 18. In 1875 the name was changed to Bedford County School as the word "Class" was becoming increasingly odious in that context. Later it was to become simply Elstow School. One can imagine that it was just the type of school that Alfred Hoare would want for his sons; there is evidence that Harry Robert later also attended there and featured regularly in the cricket team.

William obviously had a talent for drawing, as can be seen from some examples of his work when he was still quite young. His sister Daisy Jane was a trained singer and it seems that William also had a good voice. As for sports, he apparently



American Cowboys, W G Hoare, 1894, Courtesy: Sue Brigden

became keen on hockey and he founded and was captain of the Old Elstonian Hockey Club. A School Corps, which later became the Officer Training Corps, was formed in 1901, most likely in response to the heavy demand for officers being placed on the army by the war in South Africa. It is not clear if William became a member of the Corps, since he left the school shortly after it was created.

His first job was with Waring and Gillow, furniture manufacturers and retailers, probably at their impressive store in London's Oxford Street. In 1910 he left to become a director of the Globe Printing Company Limited of Scrutton Street, Finsbury, London E.C.2. The company went into voluntary liquidation in 1922.

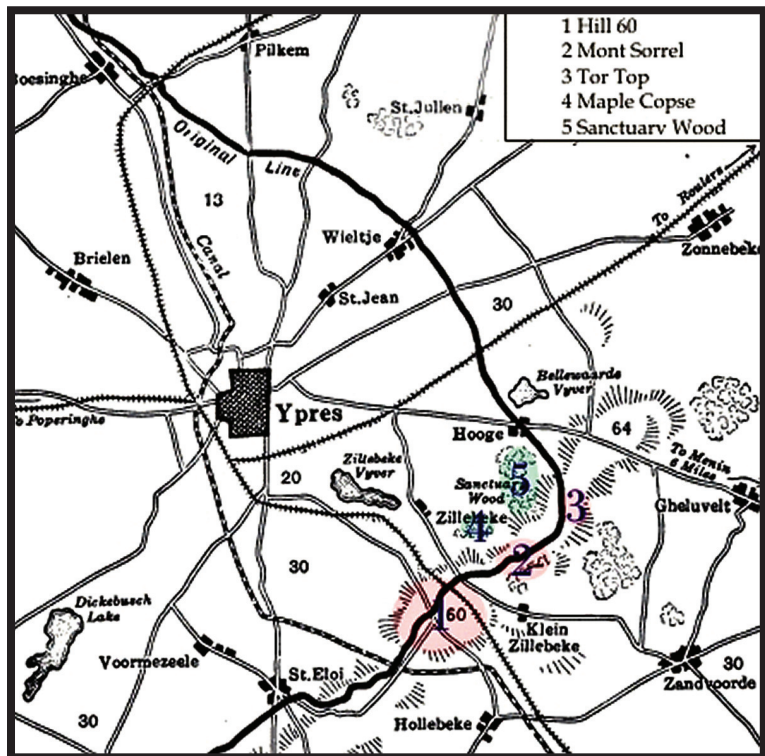
On 15 February 1909 he joined the Honourable Artillery Company (HAC), the oldest regiment in the British Army. He was attached to the 3rd Company under Captain Hesham. The previous year the HAC had become part of the Territorial Force whose role was home defence and whose members undertook "part-time" soldiering.

On 20 May 1915 Alfred Parker Hoare, William's father, was admitted as a Freeman of the City of London. He was recorded as being a director of Williamsons Ltd of Trinity Warehouse, Savage Gardens, London. Trinity Warehouse would seem to have been a centre for the trade in tea and possibly for the grocery business in general. At about this time, he procured the tenancy of Town Farm in High Street, Amersham, and began dairy farming there; he is certainly recorded as being resident in the 1918 Electoral Register. He also ran a grocery shop on the site and possibly another in White Lion Road, Amersham Common. In 1928, Alfred was able to purchase at auction the freehold of Town Farm, comprising 37 acres, together with three other cottages, from the Tyrwhitt-Drake family.

The *Supplement to the London Gazette* of 14 December 1914 confirmed the promotion of Serjeant William George Hoare to the rank of Second Lieutenant, Honourable Artillery Company (HAC), effective 15 December 1914. He volunteered for service abroad and went almost immediately to the front. He is first noted in the *War Diary* of the 1st Battalion of the HAC at Dickebusch on 25 April 1915 supervising a fatigue party carrying material to the trenches in the evening. Dickebusch, to the south-west of Ypres, was where the battalion was billeted, in wooden huts, behind the lines, when

not serving in the trenches. In the *War Diary* it is described as a “very nice situation”.

The planned action at that time was to take and occupy **Hill 60**, nothing more than a large, 150-foot-high spoil heap created from the diggings of a cutting for the Ypres-Comines railway. However, the Hill, to the south-east of Ypres, gave commanding views towards the city and to Zillebeke, and was thus advantageous to whoever held it. The British had carried out extensive tunnelling under the German positions on the Hill and placed a number of mines there that were to be detonated prior to the attack by the infantry. On 17 April 1915, following heavy bombardment of the approaches by British artillery, the mines were detonated causing devastation amongst the German garrison and allowing the British force to advance and take possession of the Hill. William undoubtedly was present in the trenches at St. Eloi during these operations. The battalion



Ypres showing Hill 60

War Diary entry for 25 April notes “We hear that Hill 60 is now absolutely in our hands”. Unfortunately, this situation was not to prevail and following a series of attacks using gas in early May, the Germans were able to retake the Hill.

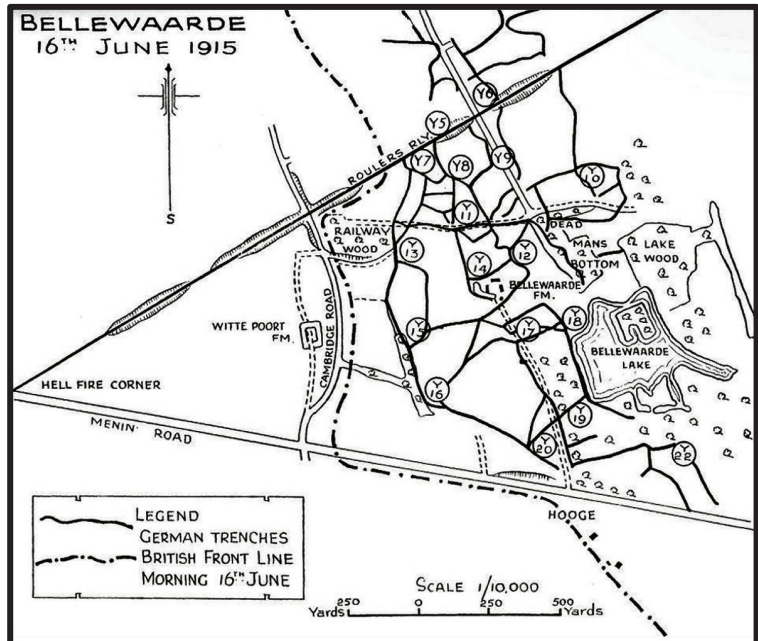
At the beginning of June 1915, the battalion moved to Ypres, as part of the 7th Infantry Brigade, 3rd Division, and was billeted in the ramparts of the city. The *War Diary* notes, “The town is in a terrible state of destruction” and “Early in morning a pigeon alighting on a roof brought down a large tile on the head of and wounding Pte. Fairhead”. The men were kept busy during the day cleaning up and securing the Ramparts.

At night, large parties of other men of the battalion went up to the village of Hooze, on the front line about 4 km to the east of Ypres along the Menin Road. They carried barbed wire and other materials to reinforce the position where they were shortly to relieve the Wiltshire Regiment.

On the evening of 8 June the relief took place with B and D Companies of the 1st Battalion moving into the trenches and A and C Companies being in support in Zouave Wood nearby. The position was described as being practically at the apex of the Salient with “rifle fire from all sides and the rear even”. The *War Diary* sets the scene the following day: “Trenches not at all good having been practically non-existent before the 3 Divn. came here. The enemy very bold and showing himself – evidently allowed to before. A great many good targets for our sniping and we got good bags. Have seen more Huns today than ever before. Much work in improving parapets. In our trench of right sector enemy just other side of a barricade across an old trench of our own – and our men can hear names and talking quite plainly”.

Because of the exposed position of this part of the line the battalion suffered numerous casualties over the following days and, following rumours that the division was about to mount an attack at **Hooze**, orders were received on 14 June 1915 confirming this planned action. The attack was to be in the region of “**Y Wood**”, **Bellewaarde**, in an effort to push forward and straighten the British line and thus remove a “pocket” held by the enemy which enfiladed the British positions.

The plan called for the battalion to act in a supporting role being in position in newly dug trenches opposite Y Wood (Y15 and Y16) on 16 June, the day of the attack. As the attacking line reached the first German trenches, B and C Companies, and D Company, to which William was attached, were to move forward and consolidate the position won. A Company was given the difficult task of digging a communication trench back to the original line and also forward to the German line. The men appointed carried spades and pick-axes and also two slings of extra small-arms ammunition. Of course this dangerous work was, of necessity, carried out while the men were much exposed to enemy fire.



Bellewaarde Trench Plan (Courtesy: The Western Front Association)

The attack began with heavy shelling of Y Wood by British artillery, promptly followed by the infantry pressing forward towards the enemy line; they were soon lost to sight, obscured by clouds of smoke. The HAC companies moved as ordered into the support line and thence into the front line trenches. The *War Diary* records that, "Mr Hoare was mortally wounded in the enemy's trench as soon as he arrived there". He was hit in the forehead by a sniper and died the same day in hospital.

The attack continued to be pressed forward into the third German line where the troops were shelled by their own artillery! This, together with heavy enemy fire and developing counter-attacks, forced them back to the original German line, already occupied by support troops, now very crowded and a perfect target for the enemy's guns. A request that British artillery act to suppress the enemy fire was met by the response that ammunition was scarce and that the allowance for the day had already been used! Despite repeated requests from the front not to send up more men, a hastily contrived attempt to retrieve the situation by sending up reinforcements mid-afternoon, simply exacerbated the difficulties and resulted in many more dead and wounded than there otherwise would have been.



The HAC in the attack of 16 June 1915
Drawn by: Steven Spurrier

Fighting in the area around Hooge continued for the remainder of the war and possession of the ground changed several times. The village was ultimately completely destroyed and today is the site of a major theme park.

William's company commander wrote of him, "He was a very conscientious and capable officer, and during the time he was with his Company they had become very fond of him, and his men knew him to be a very good and sound soldier and they would have done anything for him and followed him anywhere".

William George Hoare is remembered with Honour on the
Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Panel 9¹



Harry Robert Hoare known as “Joe”, William’s younger brother, also served in WW1, first with the 12th London Regiment and then in 1916 he obtained a commission as 2nd Lieutenant in the Middlesex Regiment. He survived the war and returned to marry and continue to live in Amersham. It is believed that he applied for and received the medals due to William: The British War Medal, 1914-18, The Allied Victory Medal and The 1914-15 Star. On his death in 1987, it is understood that the medals were sent to the HAC for safekeeping.

Alfred Parker Hoare, the father, died suddenly in 1933. He was appearing in court as a witness to a motor accident when he collapsed and died. His widow, Jane, was unable to continue with the business, and Town Farm was leased to tenants. Happily, in 1958 when the lease expired, Alfred’s grandson was able to take back the property and became the fifth generation of the family to live there.

Sources:

I am indebted to Sue Brigden, great-niece of William George Hoare, for providing photographs and documents and for her help in general.

Allsobrook, David, *Schools for the Shires: The Reform of Middle-class Education in Mid-Victorian England*.

The London Gazette, 5 September 1922

Supplement to the London Gazette, 14 December 1914 (10681)

Wikipedia

1st Battalion, Honourable Artillery Company, War Diary, National Archives Ref. WO/95/1415

Diary of Brigadier General Alexander Johnston

¹ For details of the memorial and engraving, see the chapter on Memorials to the Missing