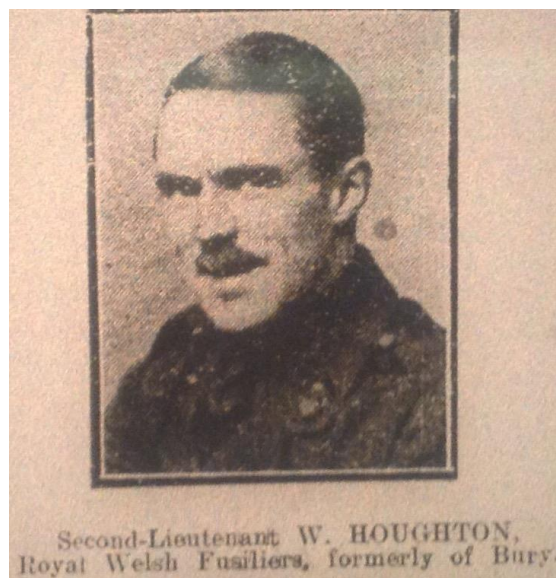


## **Bury Grammar School Centenary Roll of Honour**

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant William Houghton, attached 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, died 9<sup>th</sup> April 1916 aged 29.**

William Houghton was born in Bury in 1887, the youngest of six children of James Houghton and his wife Nancy. James Houghton was a bricklayer's labourer and at the time of the 1891 census the family's address was 114 Georgiana Street. 10 years later five of the children were still living at home with their widowed mother at 13 Eden Street, Bury. The School Register records that William only attended Bury Grammar School from September 1900 to December 1901. Previously he had attended St. John's Elementary School. A note indicates that he left for Hulme Grammar School. However no record of him attending Oldham Hulme School or William Hulme's Grammar School, Manchester has so far been found. He is not recorded on either school's Great War Roll of Honour. It is also noted in the Register that he was subsequently employed as a draughtsman by Bentley and Jackson.

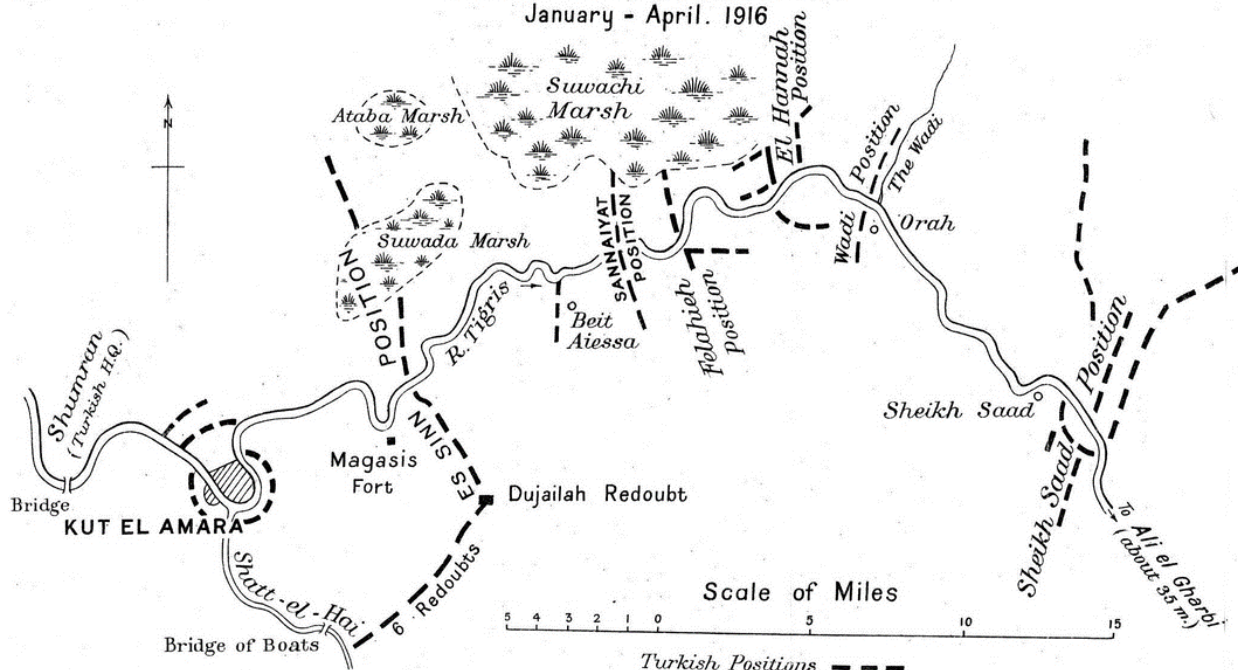


William clearly kept in touch with his old school because the April 1908 edition of school magazine 'The Clavian' records that 'W. Houghton has had sketches accepted by *Punch* and *London Opinion*. A specimen of his work now decorates our corridors.' A year later, 'The Clavian' reports that 'W. Houghton, a specimen of whose work hangs in the corridor, has gone to London to embark on an art career. Readers of 'London Opinion' have no doubt seen and admired several of his productions therein offered to the public. We heartily wish him success and distinction'. By 1911 he was lodging with the Mercer family at 91 Honeybank Road, Clapham Park in London together with another Bury native, 27 year old Harry Alden, an accountant's clerk. William Houghton's occupation is given on the census return as 'artist'. In 1913 'The Clavian' commented: 'We wonder how many of our readers know that Will Houghton is regarded among the first rank of poster artists.'

In the Great War he enlisted in the Royal Fusilier Regiment, serving in the 11th and 15th Battalions. On 8th February 1916 he was one of a draft of six Royal Fusilier officers who were transferred to 8th Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers at Port Said in Egypt. 8th Royal Welsh Fusiliers was training and refitting in Egypt after seeing heavy fighting in the Gallipoli campaign. On 14th February the battalion boarded the SS 'Briton' at Port Said, bound for the port of Basra in modern-day Iraq. There they joined the rest of the 13th (Western) Division as part of a force aiming to relieve the siege of Kut Al Amara. In 1915, British and Indian soldiers under General Charles Townshend had advanced up the Tigris River in an attempt to extend British control over the Turkish province of Mesopotamia (now Iraq). After initial success, Townsend's force of around 11,000 men ended up besieged at Kut Al Amara, 100 miles south of Baghdad. The first attempts to break through the Turkish lines to rescue Townshend and his men failed and reinforcements, including 13th Division, were sent up from Basra to have another try.

SKETCH MAP ILLUSTRATING  
ACTIONS FOR THE RELIEF  
OF  
**KUT EL AMARA**

January - April, 1916



In late March, the battalion set off up the River Tigris towards Kut. On the night of 31<sup>st</sup> March/1<sup>st</sup> April they made a 'very trying' night march from Sheikh Saad in a heavy thunderstorm which made the ground slippery and greasy underfoot. After arriving in their positions at 5 am, they spent the rest of the day in bivouacs before crossing the Tigris early in the evening of 2<sup>nd</sup> April and taking over trenches from troops of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division. On 5<sup>th</sup> April they joined the rest of the 13<sup>th</sup> Division in an attack on the Turkish defences at El Hannah. It turned out that the Turks had practically abandoned these positions and the British were able to advance four or five miles to Felahieh where the attack was checked by machine gun and rifle fire. The Fusiliers dug in until fresh troops moved up and captured the Turkish trenches. The 13<sup>th</sup> Division was now tasked with capturing the more formidable Sannaiyat defences, protected on one side by the River Tigris and on the other by an impassable marsh. The plan was for the Division (comprising the 38<sup>th</sup>, 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigades) to advance at dusk, move close to the enemy positions under cover of darkness, then rush the defences at dawn. 'The War Diary of 8<sup>th</sup> Royal Welsh Fusiliers, who were part of 40<sup>th</sup> Brigade, takes up the story:

8<sup>th</sup> April 1916

7pm- The Brigade moved off and got into position as intended in lines of platoons at a supposed distance of 1100 yards from the Turkish trench. The night was very still not a shot being fired. It was excessively cold and by morning the troops were very thoroughly chilled.

SANNAIYAT

9<sup>th</sup> April 1916

4-20am-The whole Division rose and moved forwards simultaneously. The 38<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> Brigades in the first line and the 39<sup>th</sup> in support in rear. For the first few hundred yards all went well till the Turks suddenly put up a flare and opened fire. The line wavered, lost direction and for a time broke. The effort was made to endeavor to get the men forwards but this was found to be impossible. It was rapidly growing light as directions were given to dig in on the line that had been reached. Battalions and brigades had been considerably mixed up and no attempt could be made till dusk to sort out the line. After dark, the 38<sup>th</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> Brigades withdrew, leaving the 40<sup>th</sup> on the left near the river.'

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant William Houghton was killed in this disastrous attack. Further attempts to break through the Sannaiyat defences failed and on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1916 General Townshend surrendered Kut to the Turks. Most of his men subsequently died in captivity. Despite this humiliating defeat, British forces remained in Mesopotamia, eventually capturing Kut and Baghdad in 1917. Bury Grammar School old boy Gunner James Donald Sykes of the Royal Field Artillery attached to 13<sup>th</sup> Division HQ, died on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1916 and is buried in Amara Military Cemetery.

William Houghton is one of over 40,500 servicemen from Britain and her Empire who died in the fighting in Mesopotamia but have no known graves. Their names are recorded on the Basra Memorial to the Missing. This imposing memorial was originally located on the quayside of the naval dockyard at Maqil. However, in 1997, on the orders of the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussain, it was dismantled and painstakingly reconstructed inland, on the road to Nasiriyah. The reasons for the move, which involved considerable manpower and engineering skill, are unknown. The 2003 invasion of Iraq, the fall of Saddam and subsequent political turmoil in the country mean that, at the present time, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission is unable to maintain the memorial. The names of those commemorated can be seen on the CWGC's online database and in a special two volume roll of honour on display at the Commission's headquarters at Maidenhead in Berkshire.



**The Basra Memorial, on which William Houghton is commemorated (CWGC)**

In 1896 William Houghton's sister Mary married James Binns, who went on to become landlord of the Fernhill Tavern, Hornby Street in Bury. Two years later their son John Houghton Binns was born. Like his uncle William, John Binns was a pupil at Bury Grammar School, from 1911-1915. 19 year-old Lieutenant John Binns, 29 Squadron Royal Flying Corps, was shot down and killed in Belgium on 4th September 1917. William Houghton and John Binns are the only known uncle and nephew whose names appear on the Bury Grammar School First World War Memorial.