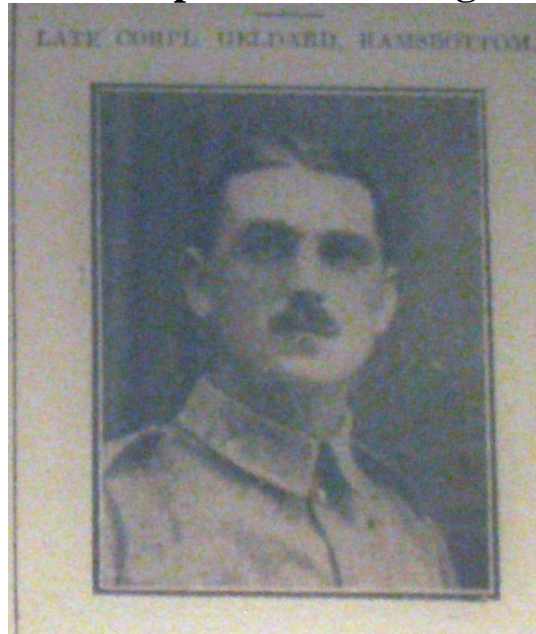


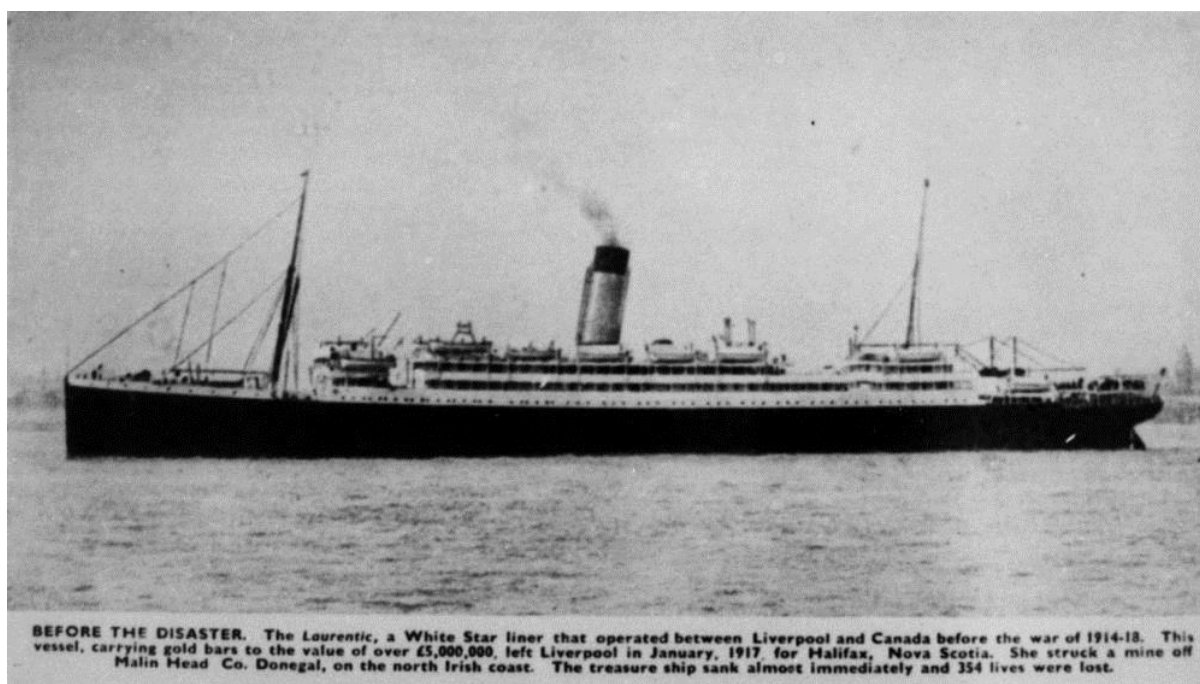
Bury Grammar School Centenary Roll of Honour
Corporal Gordon Geldard 1/6th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers,
died 6th September 1917 aged 32



(Ramsbottom Observer)

Gordon Geldard was born in Ramsbottom on 17th April 1885, the youngest of the seven children of John Geldard and his wife Emily. At the time of the 1891 Census the family was living at 151 Wood Road, Elton in Bury. John Geldard, who had been born in Clitheroe, was the manager of a textile mill. By the time Gordon started at Bury Grammar School on 22nd September 1896, the Geldards had moved to Wellfield House, Nuttall, Ramsbottom and Gordon had received his early education at St Andrew's School nearby. His older brother Bertram started at BGS on the same day. Gordon is not recorded as being a member of the school's Cadet Corps, which had been founded in 1892. He left Bury Grammar School in July 1898 and went to work in Nuttall Mill. At the time of the 1901 Census, Gordon was living at Willow Cottage, Bacup with his father and two of his sisters. Gordon's occupation is listed as a clerk in a cotton mill. Meanwhile his mother and Gordon's brothers Bertram and Reginald were living at 223 Nuttall Road in Ramsbottom with a servant, Eliza Storey. The reason for this family separation is not known.

Gordon Geldard's mother Emily died in 1909, aged 61. The same year, on 29th April, Gordon left Liverpool for Montreal, Canada on board the White Star liner SS 'Laurentic'.



The SS 'Laurentic', on which Gordon Geldard sailed to Canada, sank in January 1917 after hitting a mine off the coast of Ireland.

After spending some time in Winona, a suburb of the city of Hamilton, Ontario, Gordon crossed the border into the United States at Niagara Falls and made his way to the town of Fall River in Bristol County, Massachusetts. At this time, Fall River was a prosperous centre of textile production and Gordon Geldard secured a job as a weaver at a cotton mill there. At the time of the 1910 US Census he was lodging in Fall River with John and Agnes Flynn, who had arrived in the USA from England with their family in 1907. Another English immigrant, John Lancaster (25), was also boarding with them. For some reason all of his US documents refer to him as 'Gildard'. In early 1911 Gordon applied to join a local Masonic Lodge and his membership card survives:

Name <i>Gildard, Gordon</i>			
Residence <i>Fall River</i>	Occupation <i>machinist</i>	Notably <i>1885-4-17</i> <i>Wellfield, Eng.</i>	
Lodge <i>Mr Nope</i>	Initiated <i>1911-2-10</i>	Passed <i>1911-3-17</i>	Raised <i>1911-4-28</i>
Membership <i>1911-4-28</i>	Dim <i>1913-12-5</i>	Reinstated	Deceased
Remarks:			

Gordon returned to England before his membership of the Lodge expired, as the Bury Grammar School magazine 'The Clavian' records that he attended an Old Boys' dinner in July 1912. By the time war was declared in August 1914 he was working as 'inside manager' at Nuttall Mill for his brother Harold. At the outbreak of war he wrote to his father:

'At a crisis like this, when the country is in danger, I think there is only one duty before us, and that is that everyone capable of bearing arms should do so, and do it at once. There is no alternative; the time is here, and anyone with a sense of duty cannot look at the position to-day otherwise. I hope you will realise that I, as a young man, must do something at once. So I have decided after full consideration to go with the Territorials'.

According to his obituary in the 'Ramsbottom Observer', Gordon's letter was later quoted on a Manchester recruitment poster. Gordon Geldard was as good as his word and promptly went to Rochdale to enlist as Private 9552 in the 6th Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers (Rochdale and Middleton Territorials). It is not clear why he did this rather than join the local 5th Battalion, which included a number of Bury Grammar School old boys. The Territorial Force had been formed in 1908, with their original task as home defence while the regular army was abroad. In peacetime the Territorials were part time soldiers, training in the evenings and weekends with a regular summer camp. After the outbreak of war the four Lancashire Fusilier Territorial Battalions (5th, 6th, 7th and 8th) went into camp together at Turton near Bury, forming what became known as the Fusilier Brigade. There, they made themselves up to full strength with new volunteers and the men were invited to volunteer for overseas service. The majority, including Gordon Geldard, quickly did so and the Fusilier Brigade became part of the first Territorial Army Division, 42nd East Lancashire, to be sent overseas. On 9th September 1914, 1/6th Battalion left Southampton on board SS 'Saturnia', bound for Alexandria in Egypt. The division's task was to take over the garrisoning of British-occupied Egypt, including the defence of the vital Suez Canal, freeing up regular troops for service elsewhere.

Despite the entry of Turkey into the war in November 1914, the Lancashire Territorials spent the first few months engaged in boring (and very hot) spells of drilling and training near Cairo. However, in early May 1915 they were ordered to embark at Alexandria as reinforcements for the recent landings on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

The Fusiliers landed on 5th May at 'W Beach', which the Regular 1st Battalion had captured a few days before, in the process winning the famous '6 VCs Before Breakfast'. Gordon Geldard and his comrades of 1/6th Fusiliers had the honour of being the first battalion of the East Lancashire Division to take over part of the front line, between Gully Ravine and the sea on the night of 5th/6th May. On 6th May the battalion launched its first attack, capturing a ridge 400 yards beyond its starting point, despite suffering heavy losses. This was the start of eight months at Gallipoli for the Territorials, at first engaged in attempts to expand the allied bridgehead in the Second and Third Battles of Krithia and the Battle of the Vineyard, then in the prolonged trench stalemate which followed. Unfortunately, the specific details of Gordon Geldard's service are not known but the 'Ramsbottom Observer' comments in his obituary that: *'...he had emerged from so many dangers that his friends thought he bore a charmed life.'* The 1/6th Lancashire Fusiliers were evacuated from Gallipoli in SS 'Ermine' on 27th December 1915, returning to Egypt via the island of Lemnos. For the next year they were engaged in the defence of the Suez Canal, which consisted mainly of building and manning fortifications in expectation of a Turkish attack. On 21st February they travelled by train to Alexandria and embarked on HM Transport 'Megantic' with 1/5th Battalion, bound for Marseilles. Three days into the voyage, an enemy torpedo missed the ship by about thirty yards but she arrived safely on 28th February. The 42nd Division was redeployed to the Western Front and took part in regular trench duty on the extreme right of the British line in the Somme sector. They were not engaged in the major battles at Arras and Messines which raged in the first half of 1917. According to his newspaper obituary, Gordon Geldard had initially resisted promotion but was eventually made up to Acting Corporal and in the summer of 1917 his battalion put forward him and another Fusilier for commissions. Although the papers were sent through, Gordon was killed before anything came of it. On 31st July, the main British offensive of the year, the 3rd Battle of Ypres, or Passchendaele, began. On 22nd August 1917 the 1/6th Fusiliers travelled by train from Albert to Godeswaersvelde on the Belgian border, then marched to Ypres where they took up temporary residence in the ruins of the town's Asylum. On 30th August they went into the front line at Frezenburg, alongside the 1/5th Battalion. The next night BGS old boy Captain Austin Hudson of 1/5th was killed by a shell while accompanying a ration party up to the front line.



1917 British Trench Map showing positions attacked by 125th (Fusilier) Brigade on 6th September 1917 (National Library of Scotland)

The positions at Frezenburg were a line of outposts rather than a proper trench system and it was felt necessary to secure a better line before future major operations could be undertaken. As a result an attack on 6th September 1917 by the Fusilier Brigade was ordered. Their mission would be to capture the German defensive positions at Borry Farm, Beck House and Iberian Farm, north east of Frezenburg (see map). While two companies of 1/5th Battalion took Borry Farm, one company of 1/6th would attack Beck House and two would assault Iberian Farm. British artillery preparation was thorough and the German positions were bombarded on 3rd, 4th and 5th September, although this provoked German retaliation and parties carrying rations up to the 1/6th's positions on the evening of the 5th suffered heavy casualties. At 7-15 am on 6th September, a heavy British bombardment was opened on the objectives, particularly Borry Farm and at 7-30 am the attack was launched. The company of 1/6th attacking Beck House was shielded from enemy fire at first by the sloping ground and they managed to secure their objective, capturing 2 German officers and 30 men out of a 49 strong garrison. To their left, the two companies attacking Iberian Farm were not so lucky. The key to any attack on Iberian was Hill 35, 300 yards north of it. The hill was supposed to have been captured the previous night by a battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment but this attack failed. As a result, when the two companies of 1/6th Lancashire Fusiliers began their advance, they came under withering machine gun fire from gun pits on the southern slopes of Hill 35 and a camouflaged dug out near Iberian Farm, as well as from Beck House before it was captured. It seems likely that it was at this point that Corporal Gordon Geldard fell. An officer wrote to Gordon's father in Nuttall Hall Road:

'You have reason to be truly proud of your boy. He was the first man of the company over the top and the lads tell me he was simply magnificent. He was killed just as he left the trench on September 6th 1917. He was tremendously liked and respected by his officers and men, and we shall all miss him enormously'.

Like Gordon Geldard, most of the attackers became casualties before they got very far. A few men managed to reach trenches north and south of Iberian Farm but were too weak to press the attack in the face of intense machine gun fire. They eventually withdrew to their original front line. At 10-45 am the Germans launched an attempt to recapture Beck House with three companies who relied almost entirely on grenades. Although they suffered heavy casualties from artillery and rifle fire they succeeded in retaking the house. Only two wounded Lancashire Fusiliers managed to escape back to their own lines. The attack had been a disaster for the 1/6th Battalion: one and a half complete companies had been lost for no gain. No fewer than 134 members of the battalion were killed or died of wounds in the next few days. The majority, like Gordon Geldard, have no known graves and are listed on the Tyne Cot Memorial to the Missing. As well as the Bury Grammar School war memorials, Gordon Geldard is commemorated on the splendid stained glass war memorial window at St Andrew's Church, Ramsbottom, where a wooden reredos was also installed in his honour by his brother Harold.



(St Andrew's Church, Ramsbottom)

Sources: Bury Grammar School Archives; Bury Archives; 'Ramsbottom Observer'; 'Bury Times'; Ancestry: UK Censuses, US Census 1910, Medal Index Cards and other documents; Duncan Francis; St Andrew's Church, Ramsbottom; Commonwealth War Graves Commission; Contributors to the Great War Forum.

Written by M.J. Hone 2017