

## **Gunner Harold Wilson Hitchen©**

**Regimental number: 186221**

**275th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery**

**born: 1888 - died: 29 May 1918**

Gunner Harold Wilson Hitchen was the only son of Wilson and Mary (nee Farrar) Hitchen of Halifax, Yorkshire.<sup>1</sup> Both his parents were born in Ovenden, near Halifax, in 1859—Wilson in April and Mary in June. They married in 1880 near Halifax<sup>2</sup> and had four children: Eveline (born in 1884),<sup>3</sup> Maggie (born in 1886),<sup>4</sup> Harold (born in 1888)<sup>5</sup> and Janet (born in 1895).<sup>6</sup>

All the children were born in Halifax—a town that has long been associated with textile manufacturing. In the 19th century, the town, with many weaving mills, thrived on the cotton, wool and carpet manufacturing.<sup>7</sup> The life of the Hitchen family was tied up with this industry.

Already at the age of 11, Harold's father was a worsted spinner—a spinner of high-quality wool.<sup>8</sup> In 1881, the year after they were married, Wilson was a warehouseman in a factory and his wife Mary was a mantle knitter.<sup>9</sup> They were living with his parents at 2 Melrose Street in Ovenden.

Ten years later, the family was at 2 Buxton Street in Lee Mount, Ovenden. Harold's father was a factory warehouseman, perhaps in the textile industry, and Harold, at the age of 13, was a doffer. (A doffer replaced the full yarn bobbins with empties on the looms.<sup>10</sup>) Harold's two sisters were also working in the industry—Eveline was a worsted coating mender and Maggie was a worsted curler.

In 1911, Harold's father was a timekeeper at "Kythouse" and the rest of the family were working in the textile industry—Harold's older sisters were both coating menders for a worsted manufacturer and his younger sister Janet was a "setter" for a carpet manufacturer. Harold himself had obviously gained experience for, at the age of 23, he was in a supervisory position—he was a winding "overlooker" for a carpet manufacturer. The family was still living at 2 Buxton Street.

Growing up in Lee Mount, Harold participated in St George's church Sunday School and the choir.<sup>11</sup> He played football for Lee Mount School and Boothtown (a suburb of Halifax) and worked at the design department at Dean Clough—a group of large factory buildings built in the 1840s–60s for Crossley's Carpets and, at half a mile long, was one of the world's largest carpet factories.<sup>12</sup> After leaving Dean Clough, he became a tram driver.

In 1912, Harold married Lily Sutcliffe,<sup>13</sup> who was the daughter of Job and Mary Ann Sutcliffe and was born in about 1885 in Halifax. The year before her marriage, she was working as a carpet mender.<sup>14</sup> They had a son, Selwyn, born in 1917.<sup>15</sup>

In 1914, Harold's father died at the age of 55 and was buried on 5 December in the parish of St George in Ovenden.<sup>16</sup>

Harold enlisted in the Royal Field Artillery in about November 1916<sup>17</sup> in Halifax.<sup>18</sup> When he enlisted, he and Lily were living at 27 Livingstone Street in Lee Mount.<sup>19</sup> Less than two years after he enlisted, he was wounded and admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station with shrapnel wounds to his chest and head. He was admitted on 29 May 1918 and died the same day. He was buried the following day in Pernes Military Cemetery (Plot 2, Row D, Grave 34) with the

Canadian chaplain J. K. Tibbits, presiding.<sup>20</sup> His wife had the following inscription placed on his gravestone:

DEARLY LOVED HUSBAND  
OF LILY HITCHEN  
AGED 30 YEARS<sup>21</sup>

In May 1918, nearly 4,000 soldiers were admitted to No. 1 CCCS.<sup>22</sup> There were 115 deaths that month—more than in any of the other three and a half months that No. 1 CCCS was in Pernes. The Pernes British Military Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when No. 1 and No. 4 CCCS came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.<sup>23</sup>

His wife, who was living at 27 Livingstone Street in Lee Mount, was his next of kin and was notified of his death.<sup>24</sup> She received the monies owing to him from the army upon his death.<sup>25</sup>

Harold was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).<sup>26</sup>

Harold's mother died in Halifax in 1928 and, like her husband, was buried in St George's Church in Ovenden.<sup>27</sup> In 1939, Lily and her son Selwyn were living at 8 Rugby Terrace in Halifax. Selwyn was not in the same line of work as his father's family—he was the head clerk for a coal merchant. They were living with Lily's sister Elizabeth and possibly a nephew, John.<sup>28</sup> Lily probably died in 1970 in Halifax.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org); accessed 29 August 2017), entry for Hitchen, Harold Wilson, Service No: 186221

<sup>2</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 8 September 2017), entry for Wilson Hitchen, Registration district: Halifax, Inferred county: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9a, Page: 832

<sup>3</sup> "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>; accessed 9 September 2017) entry for Hitchen, Eveline, Registration district: Halifax, Volume 09A, Page 494

<sup>4</sup> "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>; accessed 9 September 2017) entry for Hitchen, Maggie, Registration district: Halifax, Volume 09A, Page 507

<sup>5</sup> "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>; accessed 9 September 2017) entry for Hitchen, Harold Wilson, Registration district: Halifax, Volume 09A, Page 493

<sup>6</sup> "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>; accessed 9 September 2017) entry for Hitchen, Janet, Registration district: Halifax, Volume 09A, Page 463

<sup>7</sup> "Halifax, West Yorkshire," *Wikipedia* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halifax,\\_West\\_Yorkshire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halifax,_West_Yorkshire); accessed 9 September 2017)

<sup>8</sup> "1871 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 27 January 2017), entry for Wilson Hitchen, Registration district: Halifax, Sub-registration district: Ovenden, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 10, Household schedule number: 27, Piece: 4420, Folio: 49, Page: 5; "Worsted," *Wikipedia* (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worsted>; accessed 11 September 2017)

<sup>9</sup> "1881 England, Wales & Scotland Census," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk); accessed 8 May 2017), entry for Wilson Hitchen, Registration district: Halifax, Archive reference: RG11, Piece: 4419, Folio: 113, Page: 27

<sup>10</sup> "Old Occupation Names," *Hall Genealogy Website* (<http://www.rmhh.co.uk/occup/d.html>; accessed 9 September 2017)

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- <sup>12</sup> "Dean Clough," *Wikipedia* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dean\\_Clough](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dean_Clough): accessed 11 September 2017)
- <sup>13</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 8 September 2017), entry for Harold W Hitchen, Registration district: Halifax, Inferred county: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9a, Page: 1011
- <sup>14</sup> "1911 England, Wales & Scotland Census," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 8 May 2017), entry for Lily Sutcliffe, Registration district: Halifax, Registration district number: 496, Sub-district number: 5, Enumeration district: 5, Sub-district: Halifax North, Sub-district number: 6, Census reference: RG14PN26521 RG78PN1529 RD496 SD6 ED5 SN90, RG78 code number: 1529, Piece number: 26521
- <sup>15</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2005," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 11 September 2017), entry for Selwyn Hitchen, Registration district: Halifax, Inferred county: Yorkshire, Volume: 9a, Page: 612
- <sup>16</sup> *Find A Grave* (<https://www.findagrave.com/>: accessed 9 September 2017), entry for Wilson Hitchen
- <sup>17</sup> Based on "War Gratuity Calculator" (<https://wargratiuity.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/gratuity-calculator/>: accessed 18 May 2017) ; "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 8 September 2017), entry for Harold Wilson Hitchen
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- <sup>19</sup> "Calderdale War Dead," *Calderdale Council* ([www.calderdale.gov.uk/wtw/uploads/Calderdale-War-Dead.pdf](http://www.calderdale.gov.uk/wtw/uploads/Calderdale-War-Dead.pdf): accessed 11 September 2017), entry for Harold Wilson Hitchen
- <sup>20</sup> "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* ([www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca): accessed 29 August 2017), entry for Hitchen, H.
- <sup>21</sup> *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org): accessed 29 August 2017), entry for Hitchen, Harold Wilson
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- <sup>24</sup> "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* ([www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca): accessed 29 August 2017), entry for Hitchen, H.
- <sup>25</sup> "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 8 September 2017), entry for Harold Wilson Hitchen
- <sup>26</sup> "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 8 September), entry for Harold W Hitchen
- <sup>27</sup> *Find A Grave* (<https://www.findagrave.com/>: accessed 9 September 2017), entry for Mary Farrar Hitchen
- <sup>28</sup> "1939 Register," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 11 September 2017), entry for Lily Hitchen, Ref: RG101/3393H/019/18 Letter code: KEAS
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