Captain Ralph Constable and the Battle of the Somme

Captain Ralph Constable lived with his father Arthur, a local builder, and mother Henrietta at The Quarry, Rogues Hill, Penshurst. He was at School at Lancing College, aged 14 in 1911. He may well therefore have inflated his age when he enlisted in the 10th Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers, the second largest regiment in the British Army, which became part of Kitchener’s New Army (K3) and went to France in August 1915. His division entered the Somme offensive on 4th July 1916 and fought at the Battle of Albert, and until October fought in a number of engagements on the Somme including Flers-Courcelette (when tanks were first used) and where, on 25th September, having been made a temporary Captain , Ralph Constable was killed, aged 20 (according to the records).

A Fellow officer describes what happened,

“His platoon was detailed to make an attack on the left of the village, and was within 100 yds of the objective. He had his men well in hand, and had just got up to make the final rush when he was shot through the head and killed immediately. His men would have followed him anywhere. He was also a favourite amongst the officers.”

His entry in the Lancing Memorial book reads,

“Quiet and unassuming as he was, he was yet possessed of much spirit, and the many friends he had will not be surprised to know how gallantly he has played his part in the war”

We will leave the final word on Ralph Constable to a private from his platoon,

“I cannot tell you in words how your son was thought of by the men in his company. Any one would have been ready to lay down their life for him”

Constable’s father owned the long-established firm of builders and undertakers at Penshurst, Messrs Arthur Hope Constable which ceased trading in 1932. The business was passed on to the Johnston family.