

THE REV. HUBERT OCTAVIUS SPINK

Chaplain 4th Class, Army Chaplains Department



Hubert 'Hugh' Octavius Spink was born in Dulwich in 1878 into a prosperous, upper-middle class family. His father was a senior official at the Bank of England, and Hugh and his brothers were all sent as day boys to Dulwich College. He was a keen gymnast and was later president of his old boys' gym club and also played rugby for Streatham Rugby Club.

Although Spink initially followed his father into the City, a religious vocation evidently proved irresistible and, in 1902, he left London for theological college in Birkenhead. From this point onwards, the remainder of Spink's life within Britain was intimately connected with the north of England.

After Birkenhead, he moved to Durham in 1905. He was a good bat and a useful wicket keeper, and also won the University's 'putting the weight' competition. He became a deacon in 1904 and was ordained as a priest of the Church of England in 1905. He took his B.A. in 1907 and M.A. in 1912. He was, in short, a paradigm of muscular Christianity.

On his ordination as deacon, Spink was appointed curate of St. Philip's, Litherland, Liverpool, and in 1905, as priest, became curate of St. Cyprian's, Edge Hill. Both appointments must have required a considerable degree of regular travelling given that Spink was still keeping term at Durham until 1907.

In 1909, Spink left Liverpool for Hong Kong, where he had been appointed to the parish of St Andrew, Kowloon. His claim to fame – still acknowledged locally - was his foundation of the

St. Cuthbert's Alumni Association

The alumni association of St. Cuthbert's Society, Durham University

first scout troop, or at least a corps of the Boys' Brigade with Scouts training. So far as Hong Kong itself was concerned, Scouting had been introduced, and Spink received the credit both from the governor, and Baden-Powell himself.

After three years in Hong Kong, Spink returned to Merseyside. He was appointed vicar of St Clement's church in Toxteth, even then notorious for its slums. He also became chaplain to the Toxteth Poor Law Institution, and President of the Liverpool Boys' Brigade in 1913. Spink's was evidently a practical, Low Church Christianity, entrenched in the world of local, voluntary, boys' institutions.

At the outbreak of War in 1914, it would seem that Spink's first instinct was to join up as a fighting man but the Bishop of Liverpool was implacably against this. Nevertheless, his devotion to his flock was unconditional, and he was evidently eager to accompany the young men who flocked to the recruiting offices of Liverpool.

On 31 January 1916, Spink joined the Army Chaplains' Department, serving with the 1/5th Battalion of the South Lancashire Regiment, attached to the 166th (South Lancashire) Brigade, part of the 55th (West Lancashire) Division.

Spink's division moved to the Somme in late July, taking over a section of the front line near the village of Guillemont, east of Albert. As the Battle of the Somme ground bloodily but irresolutely on, there he remained for this notorious centre stage of the Somme campaign, where a number of woods became notorious killing grounds. Delville Wood became an inferno, the trees burning fiercely after days of bombardment, despite a drenching rainstorm. It disintegrated into a shattered wasteland of shattered trees, charred and burning stumps, craters thick with mud and blood, and corpses everywhere; in places piled four deep.

It was at Delville Wood in the early hours of 9 August that Spink was killed by a shell while tending the wounded and doing what he could to bury the dead. He had already been slightly wounded three times in the previous forty-eight hours and although apparently sent to the rear, refused to remain there so long as he could be of assistance to his men. Having already completed his own shift that day, he died while doing a further shift for a fellow chaplain who had withdrawn from exhaustion.

Spink was buried in Dive Copse British Cemetery, outside the village of Sailly-le-Sec.