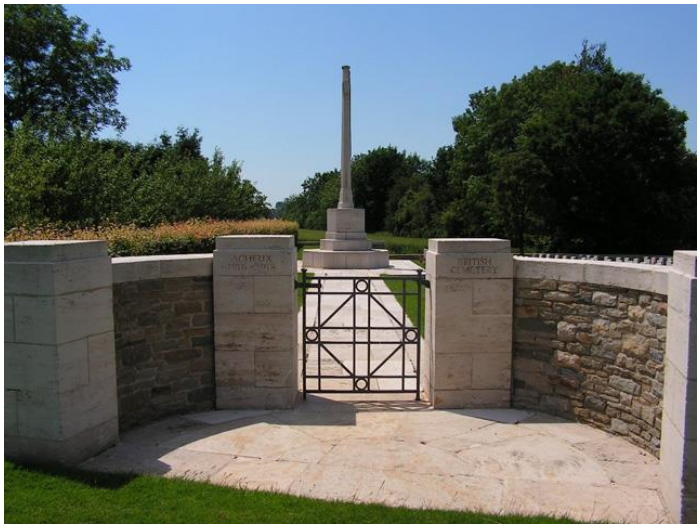
William Allerton





Rank: - Battery Sergeant Major

Number: - 712

Regiment: - Royal Field Artillery "C" Battery West Riding Bde.

Died of Wounds: - 3rd September 1916 aged 27 years

Cemetery: - Acheux British Cemetery, Somme, France 1.A.23

"AT REST OF SOOTHILL, BATLEY"

Batley News, 16 Sep 1916 (photo). Dewsbury Reporter, 16 Sep 1916 (photo)

Family Details

William was born in Stanningley (Bramley) in 1889 and was the illegitimate son of Elizabeth Ann Allerton. He was privately baptised at Stanningley in 1890 but was received into the congregation at St. Luke's on March 1st 1905 by Charles James Barton the officiating minister from Stanningley.

Elizabeth Ann was the eldest daughter of John and Elizabeth Allerton nee Wade. It appears William was brought up as their son because he is described as their son in the 1891 census. John came from Bramley and Elizabeth in Pudsey and they married on 27th August 1866.

John James was born in 1866 followed by Elizabeth Ann 1868, Clara 1871, Esther 1872, Job 1874, and Frances 1878, Annie 1879 and William 1889.

The family continually moved around Stanningley, Farsley, Pudsey and Soothill.

Before 1895 the family was living in Soothill Lane and several of the children were baptised at St. Paul's, Hanging Heaton.

John who was an overlooker died in December 1903 and Elizabeth a few weeks later in January 1904.

William lived with John James and Annie Allerton at 52, Rock Terrace, Soothill Lane, Batley. On the 1911 census he was described as their nephew but all the newspaper reports says that Annie was his sister. He was certainly highly thought of within the Allerton family because Annie still spoke about him in the late 1950's to the author.

Clara married John Wilson who was a rag merchant in Oaks Road, Soothill on 26th April 1902 and Esther married his brother, George Wilson on 15th May 1902. William went to work for the firm of rag merchants G. & J. Wilson, and had become the foreman before he enlisted.

William was associated with St. Luke's Church and Sunday School and took an active part in all church efforts especially those promoted by young men. He was also a member of Batley Working Men's Club.

Service Details

William had served with Heckmondwike R.F.A. for 5 ½ years before war broke out and was called up the Wednesday after war was declared. He was at that time a bombardier but within a few weeks of going into training he was promoted to corporal and received his sergeant's stripes before going to the Front.

He went abroad in April 1915 and when his seven years term expired in April 1916 he volunteered for further service and started the new period as a sergeant major. Shortly before he was injured he wrote home to Annie saying:-

"*By the way, I might tell you I was mentioned in Despatches during the great offensive, but it is not anything very much because we can only do our duty."*

Annie received a parcel from the Front which contained a few personal items and a letter written by William on 1st September including a letter from his Quarter-master Sergeant: - "*It is with the deepest regret I write these lines. Still, I feel it is the least I can do, for your brother was one of my best friends, we have served together since mobilisation. We were also transferred from the old battery at the same time. There is not a man in the battery who doesn't speak of him in high terms, and one and all tender their deepest sympathy in your trouble. I wasn't with him when he was wounded but he was hit pretty bad and taken to hospital (which I cannot say) and he died there."*

A letter from Captain Raymond L. Shaw said: -

"I am writing to tell you the sad news that your brother died of wounds last Sunday night. He was very badly hit when the battery was shelled during Sunday afternoon, and although the doctor did everything, he could for him he died in hospital the same night. I know the news will be hard for you to hear, but I am sure it would make it easier for you if you knew the tremendously high opinion which both General Kay and Colonel Whitley held of him. As for myself and the officers of my battery it is impossible to express the loss we feel. It was a new Battery but, it has already made a good name for itself and I also in no way exaggerate when I say it was in a very measure due to your brother that when the Battery went into firing line it acquitted itself so well.

All through training he worked hard to bring the Battery up to the standard of the older batteries, nothing was too much trouble and as a result I do not think that there was a better trained battery in the Division. As he lived, so he died, absolutely game to the end. When lying wounded he sent for the one Sergeant left untouched and handed over everything to him and never complained of his wounds. I have not been able to find out where he was buried as he was taken to hospital some way back, but as soon as I do I will let you know where it is and if it is within my power I will see that his grave his kept in every respect as if it had been in England. I am afraid all this is poor comfort to you, but if sympathy can do anything to lighten the blow that you have suffered, then I know that you have the sympathy of every officer and man in the Battery."

A sympathetic letter from Lieut. W.H. Turner was also received: -

"I think you will have heard from Captain Shaw the details of your brother's death, but I want to send you a few lines to express my deep sympathy with you in your loss and to tell you how much we thought of him and how much we shall miss him.

I don't know if you realise how big a Battery –Sergt. Major's responsibility is and to what an extent the whole Battery and the officers in particular rely upon him. Your brother never once failed us, and it is very largely due to him that the new battery, so soon after its formation, has been able to take its place with credit and honour by the side of batteries of older formation. I think we all realise how great is the debt we owe him. To us personally, as to all the NCO's and men, his loss is a very personal grief, but to the battery as a battery his loss is a blow from which it is difficult to know how it will recover."

A third letter was received was received from Lieut. Alfred H. Ackroyd read:-

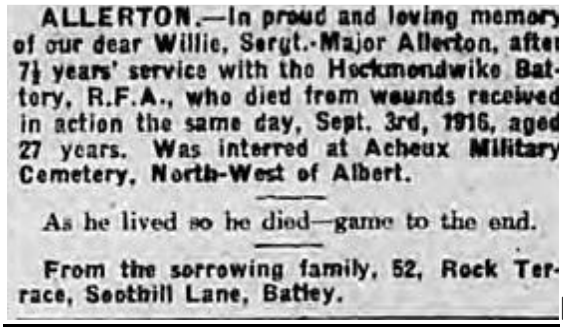
" It is with the greatest sorrow that I write to offer you my sincerest sympathy. I knew your brother very well ever since he was a Bombardier and from the time he was made a Sergeant he was with me in my section in the ---Battery until he became Capt. Shaw's Battery-Sergt. Major. I always had the greatest respect for him, and he was time and time again of very great help to me and

his Battery. When lying badly wounded his last thoughts before being carried away was of his duty as he handed over his book and battery watch to his Senior

Sergeant. Knowing him as I did I regarded him more as a friend than merely one of our NCO's. Please accept my heartfelt sympathy, and if ever now or in the future I can be of any material use to you I do hope you will not fail to let me know."

Second Lieut. H. Longbottom on the 6th September said:-

" I extend to you my heartiest sympathy in the loss of your brother. His work was greatly admired by all the officers in our battery and whatever he undertook we could rely on being done well. He took an important part in the work of our guns during very heavy fighting. My Captain has told you the circumstances of his death, and I hope the fact that he died fightng like a true Britisher will be some consolation to you in your great loss."



ALLERTON.—In proud and loving memory of our dear Willie, Sergt.-Major Allerton, after 7½ years' service with the Heckmondwike Battery, R.F.A., who died from wounds received in action the same day, Sept. 3rd, 1916, aged 27 years. Was interred at Acheux Military Cemetery, North-West of Albert.

As he lived so he died—game to the end.

From the sorrowing family, 52, Rock Terrace, Soothill Lane, Batley.

Batley News 6th September 1919

William was awarded the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at St. Luke's Church, Hanging Heaton War Memorial and Batley War Memorial.

Researched by members of
Batley History Group