HERBERT BOOTH



Herbert Booth's Headstone - Photo by Jane Roberts

Name: Herbert Booth
Rank: Lance Corporal
Unit/Regiment: 9th (Service) Battalion, The King's Own (Yorkshire Light Infantry)
Service Number: 16960
Date of Death: 1 July 1916
Cemetery: Gordon Dump Cemetery, Ovillers-la-Boisselle, Somme, France

Family Details

Herbert Booth, the son of John William and Jane Booth (née Gill) of Beck Lane, Carlinghow, was born on 15 May 1885. His father was a stone mason, and his grandfather James Booth was a contractor and builder. Baptised on 16 July 1885 at St John's, Carlinghow, as a boy Herbert attended the church and became a member of the choir.

Herbert had two older brothers, George (b1878) and James (b1880), and a younger sister, Hilda (b1890). George died in childhood.

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The family continued to reside at Beck Lane and in 1901, 15-year-old Herbert had employment as a cloth cutter. Following the death of his father, Herbert's mother re-married in 1910, to John Hudson.



Herbert converted to Catholicism, being baptised at St Mary's on 28 July 1909. On 15 January 1910 he married Ellen Scally.

By the time of the 1911 census Herbert and Ellen were living at 44, Low Lane, Birstall. He was a woollen cloth finisher and she was a rag sorter. They had an infant son, James. The couple had a second child, a daughter Hilda, who was born in 1913. At the time of his death the family were living at Beck Lane.

Whilst in the textile industry Herbert was employed by Wildsmith, Carter and Company shoddy manufacturers, Carlinghow. However, before the war he had a career change, shifting from the town's staple shoddy trade to work for the Yorkshire (Woollen District) Electric Tramways Ltd at Savile Town.

He was a member of Carlinghow Working Men's Club and, harking back to his choir days, was popular amongst the members as a singer.

Service Details

Herbert enlisted just after the outbreak of the war and disembarked in France in September 1915. He took part in a number of engagements, including the Battle of Loos in September 1915.

Just before the first day of the Battle of the Somme he wrote to his brother James[1]:

Well, old boy I do not know when I shall be able to write you another letter after this. In fact I will tell you the truth, it is like the song "It may be for years, or it may be for ever"; but never mind lad, whatever happens to me you can depend on me meeting it with a brave heart. I will tell you this kid, it is going to be one of the biggest scraps that has ever been known, and I have not the slightest wish to withdraw. If the worst happens, it is only death, and that comes to everybody at some time or another. I understand by your letter that you have been rejected. I know that you would like to have a smack at the Huns, but never mind, you have the satisfaction of knowing that you offered your services to your King, and that is what a lot of single young men have not had the pluck to do. If things turn out right, and I have luck enough to come through this job safely I shall be able to tell you as much as anyone here can. This is

[1] *Batley News*, 12 August 1916.

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my tenth month out here and I have not been away from the battle area one month out of the ten. Perhaps by the time you get this you have read all about this affair in your papers. If I have the good luck to come out alive, I will drop you a field card or a line of some sort at the earliest possible convenience, and let you know how I have gone on.

Herbert was killed on 1 July 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, along with over 19,000 other British troops. He was 31.

The 9th King's Own (Yorkshire Light Infantry) made a futile attack on a position known as 'Crucifix Trench', during the battle for the village of Fricourt. In the assault the Battalion suffered catastrophic losses from machine gun fire and shrapnel. The battered survivors from this initial assault took cover in pre-existing shell holes, maintained their position all day and were not withdrawn until nightfall[2]. The Battalion War Diary for the day records that 22 of the 24 Officers of the Battalion had either been killed or wounded as a result of the action. In addition, there were 475 casualties in the other ranks, about 145 of whom were killed.[3]

Herbert's wife initially received a letter from an officer confirming her husband's death[4]. It stated:

I have your postcard enquiring after your husband, Lance-Corpl Herbert Booth, and I am extremely distressed to have to tell you that the news I have to give you is the very worst, and that your husband was killed in action on the 1st of July. He took part in the major advance made by this battalion at such a terrible cost. I am sorry that I did not know your husband personally, but I have only just come to command this company from the transport which I looked after during the attack. None of the officers of "A" Company who took part in the advance are here now; they were all either killed or wounded. Nothing I could say in a letter could possibly help you, I am afraid, to bear this terrible blow, but I can honestly say that you have my deepest and sincerest sympathy.

She was given false hope when she subsequently received a communication from the Territorial Record Office in York stating that her husband was posted missing after the engagement on 1st July.

However, final confirmation of his death came in the middle of July. Corroboration came from a Pte.W H Fisher in hospital in London which set out the circumstances[5].

[2] For more details see the 9th KOYLI's unit war diary and *From Pontefract to Picardy* by Derek Clayton.
[3] Subsequent analysis of CWGC records show that 177 men from 9th KOYLI died on 1st July 1916 (includes one attached to another battalion and one from another battalion attached to the 9th KOYLI)
[4] *Batley Reporter and Guardian,* 11 August 1916 and the *Batley News* 12 and 26 August 1916.
[5] *Batley News*, 26 August 1916.

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Corporal Booth was one of my best pals. We went "over the top" on the morning of July 1st, like two brothers, and we had only got about 30 yards out when he was hit right through the temple. I had to leave him and got about another 150 yards when I was wounded. I spoke to him, but he never spoke.

Like many families Herbert's wife, mother, brother and sister continued to remember him on the anniversary of his death in the local newspapers. This entry is by his wife and children in 1917[6]:

For We often sit and mourn for him,
But not with outward show,
For the heart that mourns sincerely
Mourns silently and low,
We think of him in silence,
His name we oft-times call,
But there is nothing left to answer
But his photo on the wall
RIP

He was awarded the 1914-15 Star, Victory Medal and British War Medal. In addition to St Mary's, he is also remembered on the Batley War Memorial and those of St John's Carlinghow, and Carlinghow Working Men's Club.



Carlinghow Working Men's Club War Memorial

[6] *Batley News*, 7 July 1917

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