Alfred Brewer





Rank: - Sergeant

Number: - 18654

Regiment/ Battalion: - Grenadier Guards 3rd Battalion.

Killed in Action: - 25th July 1917 aged 29.

Remembered with Honour: - Ypres (Menin Gate) Panel 9 and 11.

Batley News, 4 Aug 1917 (photo) Batley Reporter, 5 Nov 1915

Family Details:

Alfred Garton Broadley (later Brewer) was born in Leeds on 5th March 1888 the son of Garton Watson Broadley and Annie (Nee Bunning). He was baptised at the Primitive Methodist Chapel, Leeds on 4th September 1888. Garton Watson Broadley had been a Private in the 4th Irish Dragoon Guards at Aldershot in 1881. He married Annie Bunning in 1884 at Lexham, Norfolk. They had a daughter Louisa Bunting Broadley who was born in 1886 in York before they moved to Leeds. By 1891 the couple had gone their separate ways, Garton had been sentenced to 9 months imprisonment for larceny and was detained at Her Majesty's Pleasure at Armley. Annie and the children were living with David Henry Brewer, born Stratford on Avon Warwickshire at 2, Mill Street, Holbeck, Leeds. They had a daughter Gertrude Ada (1890) and a live-in domestic servant Florence Wright (1876) and two boarders James Peaker and Thomas Keal living with them.

Garton died in 1893 in Leeds and David Henry and Annie married in 1895 in Leeds.

By 1901 David Henry, Annie, Louisa, Gertrude with additions to the family of Robert Clifford (1896) and Alan Percy (1900), both born in Leeds, had moved to National Schools, Brayton St. Wilfred, Hambleton, Selby. Henry was working as a threshing engine driver.

Alfred was living at Green Lane, Hotham, near Goole with his aunt and Uncle Robert and Louisa Parnell. Louisa and Annie were sisters.

David Henry died in 1905 in the Selby area and Annie with the younger members of the family moved to Ossett before 1911.

Annie states on the Census of 1911 when she was living at 5, Scott's Yard, Manor Road, Ossett that she had been married for 26 years and four of her nine children had died. Alfred was employed as a conductor on the cars, Gertrude was working at a rag warehouse and Clifford was working at a pit.

Sometime after this the family moved to 11, Victoria Street, Carlinghow, Batley and Alfred became a driver on the Dewsbury and Birstall Tramway. Gertrude Ada married Tom Brown at St John's, Carlinghow in October 1914. Annie must

have been a friendly person because she is named in the newspapers as the adopted mother of Albert Gunn who came from Boking, Essex.

Service Details:

Alfred enrolled at Dewsbury in September 1914 and disembarked 26th July 1915. The 3rd Battalion Grenadier Guards came under the command of 2nd Guards Brigade, Guards Division from 19th August 1915.

His first major battle would have been the Battle of Loos (25th September – 18th October 1915). Albert Gunn, his adopted brother, was killed on the 17th October 1915.

A letter was received from him to Miss May Brook of the Bridge Hotel, Carlinghow he wrote: -

"I am going on very well considering what I have had to go through. My face is healing champion, but I am very sore inside. I will try to explain how I "got it". We had been bombing the enemy all night on the 15th and were dead tired. At 12.30 noon they gave us a hot bombardment and a private, a corporal and myself were in a German dugout when a shell came blowing the trench in. We were buried alive with a good 5 feet of earth on top of us. As luck would have it, a beam fell across and before the hole was full someone heard me shout. But another shell burst and filled the lot in. I lay there helpless and knew I was dying. I cannot tell you what it was like. It is impossible but I shall always say my spirits kept me alive. I could hear my friends start digging and wondered if they would get me in time. I knew perfectly well the other two were dead.

As luck would have it they got the earth off my face first but it was very slow on account of the shell fire. They got me out in about an hour's time and I fell away altogether. They had to get one comrade off the top of me, he was quite dead. My mouth and my throat were full of earth and I could not see for a long time. My bottom teeth were broken to pieces and then I got shrapnel in the face, but they are only flesh wounds and will soon be right. All my nose is cut and my forehead. If you saw me you would think I was a prize fighter.

I do not look very pretty, but I am one in a thousand to be alive, as the other two were stone dead. My back and chest are very sore. I cannot explain all about it on paper, but I lay there about two hours and could not move. Some of

our chaps were blown to pieces and the enemy might have dropped the shells just on top of us. They had the range a treat. I walked and crawled to the first dressing station about two miles away the best I could, expecting going up to Heaven every minute, as the fire was terrific. I got up on a motor ambulance, and I landed in ----, stayed a night in hospital there, got put on a hospital train, and landed in ---- after about 15 hours ride. We had a lot of wounded Guardsmen. You may have read about the affair in the papers.

I shall never forget it as long as I live especially October 17th. I trust to God I shall be spared to come back again, but I must say I would rather be blown to atoms than buried alive again. My case is a miracle.

Private Frew was shot dead on top of me. He had only just finished telling me that he wished that he was dead on the parapet, and he got his wish five minutes later. The other Corporal Cresswell only joined us two days before, and he never saw any Germans. He lay by my side.

There are some bad cases in my ward – some with arms off and some with legs off. The staff treat us very well, the sisters are so kind, so do not worry, as I shall soon be better and having another smack at the dirty devils. They will not face you and have a right set-to. They are monsters but their hearts are not in comparison. It is their guns that do it. The hills are lined with them. They are losing a few men as we are. We took a very important trench off them just before I got my hit.

I lost all my kit and everything but thank God my life was saved. I was the last left of our old platoon before I got buried, so you will have an idea of what grand boys we have lost."

In 1916 the Guards Division fought at the Battles of Flers-Courcelette and Morval in which the Division captured Lesboeufs. These were battles of the Somme. In 1917 the Division was involved with the German retreat to the Hindenburg line fighting at the Battles of Pilkem, Poelcapelle.

There was little more significant activity on this front until 1917, when in the Third Battle of Ypres an offensive was mounted by Commonwealth forces to divert German attention from a weakened French front further south. The initial attempt in June to dislodge the Germans from the Messines Ridge was a

complete success, but the main assault north-eastward, which began at the end of July, quickly became a dogged struggle against determined opposition and the rapidly deteriorating weather.

News of the death of Alfred was received by his mother in a splendid tribute from a regimental officer: -

"This terrible blow which has fallen upon you I can say has made me more miserable than anything which has happened to the Company. Sergeant Brewer is quite irreplaceable. He was killed by the same shell which killed six others, including that of the Corporal who saved Sergeant Brewer before, in 1915, by digging him out when a shell buried him. He was such a good fellow, and you indeed might be proud of him. The poor fellow tended his duties magnificently. Please accept my most sincere sympathy."

Another letter was sent to his fiancée, Miss Brooke of the Bridge Hotel, Carlinghow from Private Stanley Bowden of the Coldstream Guards who lived at Richmond Street, Cross Bank: -

"I am sorry to tell you Sergeant Brewer and Private Parkin of Carlinghow were killed here this week. I was in the front line and saw the poor fellows. They were both hit by shells but on two different days. Parkin came to see me the morning before he met his death. I myself have been lucky to come through all this. They were both good lads and it upsets me, I can tell you."

Alfred had been promoted to sergeant which was a creditable achievement in a Guards Regiment.

He had been wounded once before and buried twice by the aftermath of shell fire.

Albert Gunn, also of the Coldstream Guards who was killed in 1915 was his adopted brother. At the time of his death his brother, Clifford was in France with the K.O.Y.L.I.'s and Allen was in training at Rugeley.

A year later in the Batley News Miss M. Brooke put the following in the local paper.

BREWER *– In loving memory of Sergeant Alfred Brewer, Grenadier Guards, Killed in Action July 24th 1917.*

The day brings back the memory,
Of one who was called to rest,
And those who think of him today,
Are those who loved him the best.

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

He is remembered with Honour on St. John's, Carlinghow, Batley War Memorial and the Menin Gate Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group