James Edward Brook





Rank: - Private

Number: - 20426

Regiment/Battalion: - King's Own Scottish Borderers 1st Battalion.

Killed in Action: - 1st July 1916 aged 19.

Remembered with Honour: - Thiepval Memorial.

Batley News, 22 Jul 1916 (photo)

Family Details:

James Edward was born in Batley on 9th June 1898 the son of Batley born John Thomas and Golcar born Mary Hannah (nee Wilde) Brooke and was baptised at St.John's, Carlinghow on 26th June 1898. His father's occupation was given as a Team engine's assistant and the address as Victoria Street, Carlinghow. The couple had married at St. John's, Carlinghow on 5th September 1897.

A daughter, Emily was born in 1900 and by 1901 the family had moved to 13, Birch Street, Batley. John Thomas was an Engine Cleaner.

In 1911 the family were living in a two roomed house at 7, Yard 2, Beck Lane, Carlinghow, Batley and John Thomas was working as a Tramway Motor Man for the Tramway Company which had a depot at Bradford Road, Carlinghow. The family had grown to include Ernest (1901) and twins Eleanor and Maria (1904). They had lost one child in infancy.

James attended Carlinghow Council School and also St. John's Church. He was working for John Stubley, Carlinghow as a gardener before joining the army and was living at 20, Beck Lane, Carlinghow. He was a pal of John Brooks (Killed in Action 1stJuly 1916) and Percy Whiteley (Killed in Action 3rd July 1916).

The Batley News reports that he was highly respected in Carlinghow.

Service Details:

James joined the King's Own Scottish Borderers which had been formed in 1689 to defend Edinburgh from Jacobite forces. In 1914 the 1st Battalion Borderers was stationed in Lucknow in India and returned to England on 28th December 1915 coming under the orders of 87th Brigade, 29th Division. They went to Cape Helles, Gallipoli in April 1915. James enrolled in June 1915 and was sent to the Balkans on 3rd October but was evacuated to Alexandria, Egypt in January 1916. He had been wounded at some point because the Vicar of Batley stated on a Roll of Honour which was published in the Batley News in February 1916 that Edward James Brooke was injured. On the 18th April 1916 they landed in Marseilles for service in France.

On 1st July 1916, supported by a French attack to the south, thirteen divisions of Commonwealth forces launched an offensive on a line from North Gommecourt to Maricourt.

Intended to be a decisive breakthrough, the Battle of the Somme instead became a byword for futile and indiscriminate slaughter, with General Haigh's tactics remaining controversial even today.

The British planned to attack on a 24km (15mile) front between Serre, north of the Ancre, and Curlu, north of the Somme. Five French divisions would attack a 13km (eight mile) front south of the Somme, between Curlu and Peronne. To ensure a rapid advance, allied artillery pounded German lines for a week before the attack, firing 1.6 million shells. British commanders were so confidant they ordered their troops to walk slowly towards the German lines. Once they had been seized cavalry units would pour through to pursue the fleeing Germans.

However, unconcealed preparations for the assault and the week - long Bombardment gave the Germans clear warning. Happy to remain on French soil, German trenches were heavily fortified and furthermore many of the British shells failed to explode. When the bombardment began, the Germans simply moved underground and waited. Around 7.30 am on 1st July, whistles blew to signal the start of the attack. With the shelling over, the Germans left their bunkers and set up their positions.

As the 11 British divisions walked towards the German lines, the machine guns started and the slaughter began. Although a few units managed to reach the German trenches, they could not exploit their gains and were driven back. By the end of the day, the British had suffered 60,000 casualties, of whom 20,000 were dead their largest single loss. Sixty per cent of all officers involved on the day were killed.

It was a baptism of fire for Britain's new volunteer armies. Many "Pals" Battalions, comprising men from the same town, had enlisted together to serve together. They suffered catastrophic losses, whole units died together and for weeks after the assault, local newspapers would fill with lists of dead, wounded and missing.

Despite a preliminary bombardment lasting seven days, the German defences were barely touched and the attack met unexpectedly fierce resistance. Losses were catastrophic and with only minimal advances on the southern flank, the initial attack was a failure. In the following weeks, huge resources of manpower and equipment were deployed in an attempt to exploit the modest successes of the first day. However, the German Army resisted tenaciously and repeated attacks and counter attacks meant a major battle for every village, copse and farmhouse gained.

The Battle of Albert in which James took part was part of the Battles of the Somme 1916. He was killed on the first day along with thousands of others and was the worst day in Britain's military history in terms of casualties sustained.

The following letter was received from the records office at Hamilton: -

"It is my painful duty to inform you that your son, Private J. Brooke, 1st K.O.S.B. was killed on the 1st day of July 1916 and I express to you the sympathy and regret of the Army Council in your loss."

"*The King commands me to offer to you the true sympathy of His Majesty and Queen in your sorrow."*

Before the C. W.G.C. obtained details in the 1920's the family had moved to 185, Ealand Road, Batley.

James was awarded the Victory Medal and the British War Medal.

He is Remembered with Honour on Batley War Memorial, St. John's Carlinghow and Thiepval Memorial along with another 12,383 killed on the same day.



Researched by members of Batley History Group