(John) Robert Burbeck (Birbeck)





Rank: - Private

Number: - 12/1417

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 12th Battalion

Missing, presumed Killed in Action: - 01/07/1916 Age: 40 years

Memorial: - Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France

Batley News, 26 Aug 1916 (photo). Batley Reporter, 29 Sep 1916

Family Details

John Robert was born in Birstall on the 9th May 1876 the son of Turner and Elizabeth Birbeck nee Gooder who had married on the 25th October 1873 at St. Peter's Church, Birstall. He was baptised at the same church on the 1st November 1876 on the same day as his sister Annie Elizabeth born 16th August 1874.

In 1881 the family was sharing a home with Elizabeth's family at Brownhill and Annie Elizabeth was known as Hannah and Tom was 6 weeks old when the census was taken.

In 1891 the family was living at Huddersfield Road, Birstall and whilst Turner was a miner John Robert was working in a woollen mill as a piecer. Hannah died in January 1894 aged 19 years.

In 1900 Robert married Annie Murphy who hailed from Sowerby Bridge (registered Dewsbury). Annie Elizabeth was born in 1900 and in 1901 the family was living at 21, Huddersfield Road, Birstall with Robert working as a coal miner hewer and Annie as a weaver.

The family moved to 84, Brookroyd, Batley before the birth of Thomas Patrick in 1903, James 1905, Mary Lily 1908 who only lived for a few months and John Robert 1911. Even with five children and one being only four months old Hannah was working as a weaver and John Robert was a coal miner hewer. Sadly, John Robert died later in 1911. Mary was born in 1913.

John Robert worked at Howden Clough Colliery and was a well-known member of the Birstall Working Men's Club and Birstall Irish Land League Club.

Service Details

It is not known when John Robert enlisted but newspaper reports state he had served in Egypt.

The 12th (Service) Battalion (Miners)(Pioneers) was formed in Leeds on 5th September 1914 by the West Yorkshire Coal Owner's Association. They moved to Farnley Park (Otley). In May 1915 they moved to Burton Leonard (Ripon) and attached as Pioneer Battalion to 31st Division.

They moved again to Fovant in October 1915 and in December 1915 they moved to Egypt going to France in March 1916.

On the 1st July 1916 they took part in the Battle of Albert on the Somme which lasted until the 13th July. For the British, the attack on 1 July proved to be the worst day in the nation's military history in terms of casualties sustained.

His wife did not hear from him and made enquiries and in late August she received a letter: -

"*In reply to your enquiries I am directed to inform you that your husband has been officially reported as wounded on July 1st. This is the latest information regarding this soldier that has been received, but if you will forward the authority for the report that he is missing further enquiries will be made."*

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

He is remembered with Honour at Batley and Birstall War Memorials.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group