John Cawthorne





Rank: - Private

Number: - 15793

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 8th Battalion

Killed in Action: - 1st July 1916

Cemetery: - Blighty Valley Cemetery, Authuille Wood, Somme, France V.D.15

Batley Reporter, 3 Aug 1917 (photo). Batley News, 19 Aug 1916 (photo), 28 Oct 1916

Family Details

John was born in Morley in c.1892 the son of James William and Mary Cawthorne nee Rowbottom who had married in 1884, registered Doncaster.

In 1891 Lincolnshire born James William, who was a general labourer and his family were living at Howley Park's Colliery Yard, Morley which is only just over the Batley boundary near Howley Hall. Annie was born in Hemsworth in 1885 followed by Fred 1886 in Morley, Alice 1887, Emma 1889-1891, Hilda 1891, John, Arthur 1894, Ada 1897 and Laura 1899. Mary died on the 30th September 1900 and was buried at Batley Cemetery.

In 1901 James William with six of his children was living in Scotchman Lane, near the Cardigan Arms. Laura had become the adopted daughter of Batley born William Firth and his wife and was living at Ossett. However, she returned to her family and was living with them at 109, Taylor Street, Batley in 1911. John was also living at this address with his father and four siblings and a nephew, working as a coal mine pony dresser.

On the 26th February 1907 James William married spinster Edith Rhodes at Batley Parish Church. He gave his address as 3, Wilton Street, Batley and she was a domestic servant living at the Borough Arms, Batley. Edith was a visitor in Middlesborough when the 1911 census was taken. Norman was born in 1915 followed by Wilfred in 1916 and the family moved to live at Talbot Street, Batley.

In 1912 John married Catherine Clark (registered Dewsbury) and Mary was born in 1913 and James William in 1915.

The family lived at 37, Brownhill Road, Batley.

Before the war John was a colliery bye-worker at Howley Park Colliery where he was well-known. He had attended St. Patrick's Roman Catholic School, Birstall.

Service Details

John enlisted at the outbreak of war and went to France in September 1915 and was wounded at Christmas 1915 and came home. The 8th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry was attached to 70th Brigade in 23rd Division.

The Division took responsibility for a front-line sector for the first time in September 1915, taking over between Ferme Grande Flamengrie to the Armentieres-Wez Macquart road. CIII and CV Brigades RFA were attached to 8th Division for operations in connection with the Battle of Loos. At this time, 23rd Division was holding the front at Bois Grenier. It remained in this area for a considerable time. 10th Northumberland Fusiliers carried out the Division's first trench raid in the night of 31 December / 1 January.

The Division was relieved after a lengthy five-month spell in the front line by 34th Division, between 26 January and 8 February 1916. After a certain amount of confusing movement, Divisional H.Q. was established at Blaringhem and the units concentrated around Bruay.

The German Attack on Vimy Ridge on 21 May fell most heavily on 47th (London) Division, which was to the 23rd Division's right in the area of Berthonval. Shellfire fell heavily around Aix Noulette from 4.30pm. Divisional artillery was very active in support of the 47th Division until 24 May and again on 1 June when 2nd Division continued operations to recover lost ground. 23rd Division was relieved by 47th (London) Division on 11 June and moved to Bomy, with the artillery going to Chamblain Chatelain ("Charlie Chaplin") and Therouanne. Intensive training commenced.

In due course John had returned to France and was posted missing on the 1st July 1916 which was the first day of the Battles of the Somme. The Battle of Albert in which the Division played a part in the capture of Contalmaison is where John was officially posted missing.

He had not been heard of since June 22nd 1916.

His wife had made official enquiries and in October 1916 received notification:-

"I*n reply to your enquiries I am directed to inform you that the soldier mentioned has been posted missing since July 1st. I am to add that full lists of missing soldiers are sent monthly to Germany for distribution in camps and hospitals. By this means complete machinery is provided for ascertaining whether a man is a prisoner-of-war and also whether other prisoners-of-war can give evidence as to his fate. Individual enquiries for missing soldiers are not sent to Germany."*

His sister Alice had married John Thomas Lynch in 1908 and he was killed in action on the 21st July 1917 in France. His brother Fred of Upper Batley Low Lane had been a prisoner of war for many months.

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

He is remembered with Honour at St. Saviour's Church, Brownhill and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group