Rockley Cumberbatch





Rank: - Sapper

Number: - 506709

Regiment: - Royal Engineers 225th Field Company

Missing, presumed Killed in Action: - 25th September 1917 aged 27 years

Memorial: -Tyne Cot Memorial, West Vlaanderen, Belgium Panel 8 and 162

Batley News, 27 Oct 1917 (photo). Batley Reporter, 19 Jul 1918

Family Details

Rockley was born in Batley on 7th January 1890 the son of Thomas and Mary Cumberbatch (nee Battye) who lived at 77, Peel Street, Batley. He was baptised at Batley Parish Church on 16th February 1890 and his father's occupation was given as a carter.

The couple had married in 1880 and John William was born in 1880 and died 1881,Rose Julia was born in 1883 but sadly died in February 1885 aged 19 months, Fanny died in May 1887 aged 2 and Tom was born in 1887 but sadly died aged 23 months in January 1889.

Mary, married Hinchliffe Dyson on 19th December 1872 at Batley Parish Church but he died in 1875. Hannah was born in 1874 and married James Warden in 1895. Hannah was brought up with her Battye grandparents.

In 1901 Mary and Rockley were living with Hannah and her husband at 8, Purlwell Hall Road, Batley. Thomas had gone to live as a boarder in Leeds.

In 1911 he and his widowed mum were living with Hannah and her husband, who was the Town Hall Keeper and Market Inspector at 17, Hanover Street, Batley.

Rockley was adopted by the couple and was often seen helping James with his duties as Town Hall keeper. After leaving school he was apprenticed to Mr. W.T. Exley with whom he worked until he was called up.

His father died in May 1908 in Leeds; his occupation was a railway labourer.

On 27th April 1912 he married Emily Helen Smith at Primitive Methodist Chapel, Wellington Street, Batley. Mary was born later that year followed by James in 1914. The family resided at 25, Hanover Street, Batley. Mr. & Mrs. Warden and his mother later lived at 15, Surrey Street, Batley.

He was actively connected to Wellington Street Primitive Methodist Church.

Service Details

The 225th Field Company was attached to the 39th Division.

Rockley was called up in October 1916 and he went to France in May 1917. His last letter home he said that he was"in the thick of it". He would have taken part in the Battle of Pilkem Ridge 31st July – 2nd August, the Battle of Langemarck 16th -18th August and the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge 20th -25th September where he was presumed killed.

The Battle of the Menin Road Ridge, was the third British general attack of the Third Battle of Ypres in the First World War. The battle took place from 20–25 September 1917, in the Ypres Salient in Belgium on the Western Front. During the pause in British and French general attacks between late August and 20 September, the British changed some infantry tactics, adopting the leap-frog method of advance, where waves of infantry stopped once they reached their objective and consolidated the ground, while other waves passed through the objective to attack the next one and the earlier waves became the tactical reserve. General adoption of the method was made possible when more artillery was brought into the salient, by increasing the number of aircraft involved in close air support and by specialising the tasks of air defence, contact-patrol, counter-attack patrol, artillery observation and ground-attack.

In early September, optimism increased among German commanders as the Flanders offensive had been defeated and several divisions and air units were transferred elsewhere. Drier weather and extensive road repairs made it much easier for the British to move vast amounts of supplies forward from the original front line. Visibility increased except for frequent ground fog around dawn, which helped conceal British infantry during the attack, before clearing to expose German troop movements to British observation and attack.

The British infantry succeeded in capturing most of their objectives and then holding them against German counter-attacks, inflicting many casualties on the local German defenders and *Eingreifdivisionen* sent to reinforce them by massed artillery and small-arms fire. German defences on the Gheluvelt Plateau, which had been retained or quickly recaptured in July and August were lost and the British began a run of success which lasted into early October.

Rockley was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal

He is remembered with Honour at Wellington Street Primitive Methodist Chapel, Batley Working Men's Club and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group