Robert Exley





Rank: - Lance Corporal

Number: - 1598

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 1st /4th Battalion

Killed in Action: - 5thAugust 1915 aged 20

Remembered with Honour: - Ypres (Menin Gate), Belgium. Addenda Panel 57

Batley News, 14 Aug 1915 (photo)

Family Details:

Robert was born in Batley on 4th December 1894 the eldest child of James Samuel Exley and his wife Martha (Nee Broadley) and was baptised at St.John's, Carlinghow on 13th January 1895. His parents lived in Carlinghow Lane and James's occupation was a fireman. The couple had married at Batley Parish on 6th February 1892.

In 1901 the family was living at Exley's Farm, White Lee with the additions of George Henry (1896-1903) and Albert (1899). James Samuel was now a farmer but when Albert was baptised in 1899, he was living in Carlinghow Lane and his occupation was an engineer.

John was born in 1902 and Emma Ann in 1903, James's occupation was given as a milk dealer living at Exley's Buildings, Carlinghow Lane when she was baptised. James Samuel (1906), Susie (1907), Hilda (1909) and Thomas (1910-1910) completed the family.

By 1911 the family was living in a four roomed home at 51, Carlinghow Lane and James was a Stationary Engineman whilst Robert was working as a Worsted Piecener.

Robert was associated with St. John's Church, Carlinghow, and in his spare time was an enthusiastic member of the International Correspondence School. He worked as an assistant engineer at the West Riding Carbonising Company, Carlinghow Lane, Batley. He had a quiet nature and was popular wherever he went.

Service Details:

Robert had joined the K.O.Y.L.I. in 1911 and was on camp when war was declared. He had been Captain Critchley's orderly for some time but relinquished this role when he volunteered for the Front.

The 1st /4th Battalion of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry was at camp in Whitby when war broke out in August 1914. They returned home immediately and were taken to train at Doncaster and pitched their tents on Doncaster Racecourse, later moving to Sandbech Park and then to Gainsborough in November 1914.

On Christmas Eve 1914, the GOC 1st West Riding Division issued a report saying that the officers were "keen and efficient", well-behaved and that the physique of the N.C.O.'s and the men of 1st/4th was good and healthy.

At Gainsborough a tragic accident happened on Friday 19th February when the battalion were taken to the gyme (a deep pool) for raft-building exercises. Unfortunately, when the raft tried to return to the bank, the pole would not reach the bottom. Pandemonium ensued, with the raft titling and many of the men either falling or jumping into the water. Seven men subsequently died in this accident, including Edmund Battye (Batty) from Batley. Harold Hirst (son of Joseph Hirst of G. H. Hirst and Sons, Batley) was in charge of the exercise at the time, though he was not held responsible for the tragedy that occurred.

The battalion moved then to York in February 1915 and from there on the 13th April the 1st/4th and 1st/5th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry Divisions boarded trains to Liverpool Street station, London. Arriving at 6:20p.m., the two K.O.Y.L.I. divisions joined with the 1st/4th and 1st/5th York and Lancaster regiment, making up the 3rd West Riding Division Brigade commanded by Brig. Gen. R. Dawson. The fully-formed Brigade then crossed during the night to Boulogne-sur-Mer in northern France. They became part of the 148th Brigade, 49th (West Riding) Division.

By the 19th April the Division had concentrated in the area around Estaires-Merville-Neuf Berquin.

They were involved in the Battle of Auber's Ridge on the 9th May. An attack at Hooge on 19thJuly, which included the explosion of a mine in the grounds of the chateau, provoked an immediate reply from the Germans and an artillery duel began along the whole of the line around Ypres throughout the night the 1/4th in trenches south of Boesignhe carried on a hand grenade fight with the Germans.

On the night of the 29/30 July the Germans near the recently created mine crater at Hooge, launched an ancient weapon of warfare, liquid fire.

Most of the men of this Kitchener division had enlisted less than a year before, but over the next 3 days they displayed courage in halting the advancing Germans and stabilising the front.

The last letter to be received by his parents was one telling about the death of Lance Sergeant Clifford Parkin who had died on the 2nd August. This was received on Sunday 10th August and two days later a letter arrived from Lieut. Colonel Haselgrave to say Robert had been killed by the bursting of a shrapnel shell.

The letter from Lieut. Colonel said:-

"It is with extreme regret that I write to inform you of the death of your son, No.1598 Lance Corporal Robert Exley of the Battalion under my command. He was killed instantly with the bursting of a shrapnel shell. Please accept my heartfelt sympathy in this your sad bereavement, but your consolation must be the fact that he suffered no pain but died bravely fighting bravely for his King and country. He is buried in a military cemetery just behind the firing line, and the place is marked with a cross."

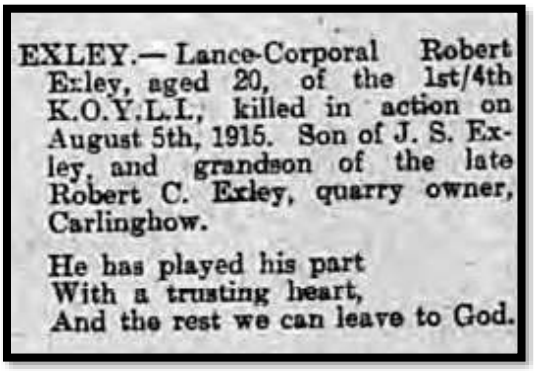
The following appeared in the Batley News:-

Exley –*Lance Corporal Robert Exley, aged 20 of the 1st/4th K.O.Y.L.I., killed in action on August 5th 1915. Son of J. S. Exley and grandson of the late Robert C. Exley, quarry owner, Carlinghow.*

He has played his part

With a trusting heart,

And the rest we can leave to God.


EXLEY.— Lance-Corporal Robert Exley, aged 20, of the 1st/4th K.O.Y.L.I., killed in action on August 5th, 1915. Son of J. S. Exley, and grandson of the late Robert C. Exley, quarry owner, Carlinghow.

He has played his part
With a trusting heart,
And the rest we can leave to God.

On the 14th August the Batley News reported a letter to his parents from Private William Riley (1st/4th KOYLI). He wrote:-

"*My dear Friends—I write to express by deepest regret at the death of your son, Robert. I hope you will accept this, as I am sure we have lost one of our best lads and also one of the best soldiers in the Battalion. Robert was thought so much about by the lads and they miss him awful. I spent a good deal of my time with Bob and I am sure he was one of the bravest men amongst us. He was killed whilst doing his duty in the trenches by a German shell. His death was*

instantaneous, which was a blessing. I buried him just behind the trenches and placed a roughly made cross over him which I made. "

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

He is remembered with Honour at Carlinghow, St. John's Church, Batley War Memorial and Ypres (Menin Gate) along with 23 others killed on the same day.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group