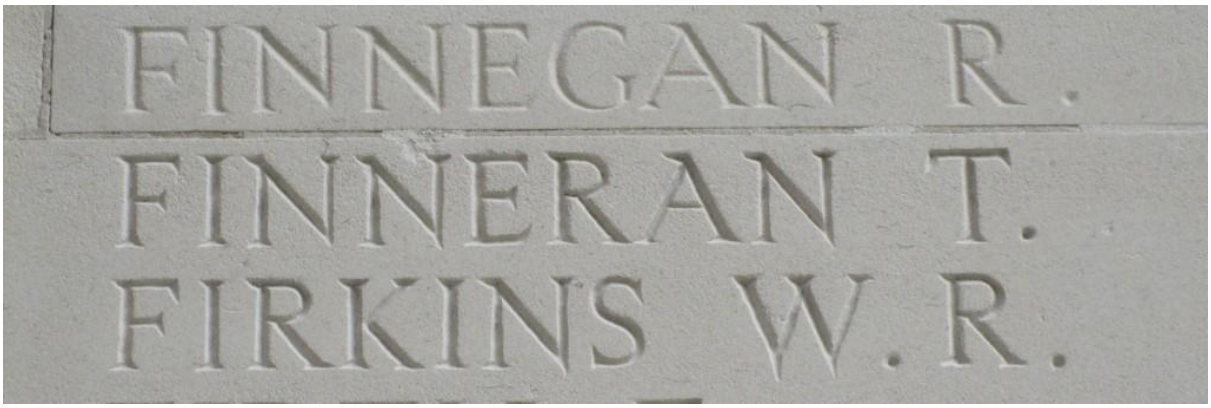
Thomas Finneran



Rank: - Private

Number: - 30963

Regiment: - The Kings' Liverpool Regiment 1st Battalion

Died: - Missing, believed Killed in Action, 8 August 1916

Memorial: - Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France.

Thomas was born in Batley on 15 January 1888 and was baptised at St. Mary's Church a week later. He was the eldest son of County Mayo born Michael and Ann Finneran (nee Callaghan) who was born in Charlestown.

The coupled had married locally in 1883 and lived at 30, Hume Street, Batley. Their eldest child, Catherine, also known as Kate, was born in December 1883, Mary followed in March 1886, Thomas, John in April 1889. Twins Michael James and Ann were born in November 1890 but Ann only survived seven weeks and her twin died on 25 August 1891. Michael was born in March 1894.

On 12 April 1894 49-year-old Michael died leaving widowed Ann with five young children.

Thomas attended St. Mary's school where he attained a Standard 1V education. Before 1901 he working as a trapper at a coal mine and his elder sisters, Kate and Mary were working as rag sorters.

In 1908 Kate married Patrick Hopkins, meaning in 1911 the Finneran household comprised of Ann and four working children and Thomas was working as a labourer at a brickworks. On Christmas Eve 1909 he was convicted at Batley Court for playing football, presumably in the street, and received a five-day custodial sentence spending Christmas in Wakefield Prison. From these records we have a basic description of 21-year-old Thomas. He was 5'5" tall, had brown hair and was still employed as a miner.

Thomas attended St. Mary's church and was a member of the Batley Irish National Club. In May 1912, his sister, Mary, married Alexander Jessop at St. Mary's and in November 1913, after giving birth to a daughter she died. On 16 September 1914, Thomas' mother, Ann, died and on 26 October 1914, Mary and Alexander's 11-month-old daughter, Ann, also died.

Before he enlisted Thomas was employed as bye-worker at Howley Park Colliery.

In August 1915 27- year-old Thomas enlisted as a Private with The King's (Liverpool Regiment) and after training he went to France in March 1916 with their 1st Battalion.

In August the British tried for a third time to capture the village of Guillemont during the Battle of the Somme.

At 4.20am on 8 August 1916, as a thick mist covered the battle field- a mist intensified by the smoke from the guns which for most of the preceding 17 hours had bombarded Guillemont - B, C and D Companies of the 1st King's advanced to attack. The mist was so thick they could hardly see more than 10 yards ahead. Their objectives were the German front line from the strong point of Brompton Road, the Guillemont railway station and finally High Holborn which was the name of the road between Guillemont and Waterlot Farm. As they advanced, A Company took their place in the jumping off trenches. Their task was to follow close behind the leading companies, in a mopping up exercise. Unfortunately, they met with severe machine-gun fire and a shower of bombs from the strong points, which the leading companies had missed in the mist.

The three leading companies captured High Holborn and Guillemont Station but from this point onwards there is little information as to what happened to them.

According to a summary by Captain Hope of the 1st Kings:

The Battalion appears to have obtained objectives very easily but without any support on the right with a result that the three attacking companies B. C. &D were cut off and most are missing. A number of men of these companies have returned but mostly shellshock cases...

Mist, smoke, insufficiently cut barbed wire and also own barrage not lifting before the first advance caused apparently many casualties at the barbed wire" gaps". It is clear that the enemy trained their guns on their own front line immediately the attack was delivered. This caused much trouble.

As the day progressed, the Germans bolstered by reserves, countered and many British infantrymen were killed, wounded or captured.

Some pockets continued to hold out until the following day, 9 August, with the 1st Kings withdrawn in the early hours of that morning to trenches near the Brigade Headquarters on the Carnoy - Montauban road. According to the 6th Infantry Brigade Headquarters Unit War Diary the strength of the 1st Kings on withdrawal was about 180 all told. One officer was killed, six wounded and eight missing. Of the other ranks 16 were killed, 130 wounded and 225 missing. Thomas was amongst those missing. In February 1917, the family received official news from the War Office that Thomas had been missing since 8 August 1916.

Thomas was awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at St. Mary's church and Batley War Memorial.

His brother-in-law, Alexander Jessop, is also commemorated on Batley War Memorial, and the family believed he probably joined the Durham Light Infantry bit there are no rank, service number, medals or Commonwealth War Grave recognition and into the 1930's the family continued to seek answers.



Thanks to Jane Roberts and for further details and acknowledgements please see www. pasttopresentgenealogy.co.uk