Michael James Flynn



Photo courtesy of Jane Roberts

Rank: - Private

Number: - 15338

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

Killed in Action: - 12 April 1915

Cemetery: - Poperinghe Old Military Cemetery, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium

Michael James Flynn was born in Batley on 17 December 1879. He was the son of Thomas Flynn from Carracastle, County Mayo and his wife Ellen (nee Egan) from Swinford, County Mayo.

Thomas and Ellen married in 1871. According to the 1911 census the couple had seven children, five still surviving but eight children have been found, John 1872, Mary Ann 1873, Thomas 1875-1876, Thomas 1877-1878, Michael, Margaret Ann 1882-1884, Margaret Ellen 1885 and Catherine 1889.

Michael's father was a labourer in 1881, but by 1891 he was working as a coal miner and then as a pit banks-man in 1901. The Flynn family had a number of addresses. In 1881 they lived in Churchfield Street, Batley but from the 1891 census onwards they are recorded as living at Fleming Street. By 1911 he worked for the Corporation as a night watchman.

Michael was not with the family in 1901 and was working as a coal hewer and boarding at the home of John Thomas and Elizabeth Waters at Barugh, nr Barnsley. The Waters family had Batley links and also lodging with the family were three Batley born miners- George Taylor, Matthew McDonald and Patrick Frain.

Michael was back in Batley by March 1902 when he signed his militia attestation papers with the 3rd King's Own Yorkshire light Infantry. His papers describe him as 5'5 ½" tall and weighing 130 lbs. He had a ruddy complexion, light grey eyes and dark hair. He had five scars on the small of his back down his spine, and his left little finger had been deformed as a result of an accident. The militia was a part-time, home service local defence organisation, in which you did annual training and Michael signed on for six years. After he left the militia he retained his military link by being on the National Reserve list and was still on at the outbreak of war.

At the end of August 1914, the Batley National Reserve secretary, invited men to offer themselves for active service and in excess of 40 men presented themselves before 1 September. One of them was Michael Flynn. Michael arrived in France on 4 December 1914, joining the 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. He died of wounds on 12 April 1915.

It is not clear when he received his fatal injuries. In the period leading up to his death, from 1-10 April Michael's regiment were alternating between support and front-line trenches in the Verbrande Molen area, south east of Ypres. On 1 April the War Diary notes that although the enemy's artillery was active, it did little damage. This changed on 5 April when they were in the front-line trench and "D" Company in Trench 35 were heavily shelled and bombed at intervals throughout the day. They suffered 14 casualties. The shelling and bombing continued the following day. The 2nd KOYLI received support from Belgium artillery but unfortunately one of their shells fell short landing in 36 Trench, wounding 5 men from "A" Company. They were relieved later that day and went to the support dugouts, with "D" Company returning to Ypres. The Battalion HQ at Ypres was hit by a shell on 7 April causing more casualties. Late on 7 April those companies in the support trenches were back in the front-line trenches, relieving the Dorsets. This was a quieter period for the 2nd KOYLIs, with heavy firing to the left of their positions. They were relieved by the Dorsets on 10 April and returned to billets to rest.

Medical information shows Michael was treated by the 14th Field Ambulance on 11 April for a bullet wound to the head. He was then transferred to Number 3 Casualty Clearing Station at Poperinghe and it was here that Michael died on 12 April.

Michael's last letter arrived in Batley the day he died. In it he said that they were having a rough time. Private Matthew McDonald, who had been with Michael at Ypres, wrote to Michael's parents and described it as "*the death trap*" and went on to say" *It is not war, but murder, out there*."

Like Thomas Foley, Michael was buried at Poperinghe Old Military Cemetery and was also a member of the St. Mary's Batley Branch of the National Catholic Benefit and Thrift Society.

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

Michael is remembered at St. Mary's Church and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by Jane Roberts for further information see- pasttopresentgenealogy.co.uk