Percy Birkett France



Rank: - Private

Number: - 33143

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 6th Battalion

Missing, presumed Killed in Action: - 10/04/1917 Age: 28 years

Memorial: - Arras Memorial, Pas de Calais, France Bay 7

Batley News, 23 Aug 1919. Batley Reporter, 20 Apr 1917

Family Details

Percy Birkett was born in Batley Carr on the 13 Nov 1888 the son of Hiram and Julia Ann France nee Burkett, who had married on 22nd April 1878 at Dewsbury All Saints Church. He was baptised at St. John's Church, Dewsbury Moor on 30th May 1889 on the same day as his cousins John France born 1888 and Ernest born 1889. His father was a stonemason who came from Badsworth. In 1881 the couple were living at Gladstone Street, Dewsbury with Elizabeth born 1878 and Clara 1880 who sadly died in 1882.

Tom was born in West Hartlepool, Durham in 1885 but the family had returned to the Dewsbury area before Percy was born in 1888 and in 1891 was living at 40, Reform Street, Dewsbury and although Percy was only 2 years old Julia was back at work as a weaver. Although Julia said she was married Hiram was not at home when the census was taken.

In 1901 Julia states that she is a widow and is living at 58. Belvedere Road, Batley with her children Elizabeth, Tom and Percy. Within the next decade Tom has married and the rest of the family moved to live in a two roomed house at 25, Carlisle Street, Batley Carr and also with them is 9 year old Oswald France the son of Elizabeth who was baptised on 26th February 1902 at St. Mark's Church, Dewsbury Moor when Elizabeth gave her address as the Dewsbury Union (workhouse).

On 7th October 1911 Percy married Florence Emma Lancaster at Holy Trinity Church, Batley Carr. Ernest was born in 1912 followed by Jack 1913, Eveline 1915 and Percy Birkett 1917. Sadly, Jack died in 1919. Another sad thing for this family is that Florence Emma moved to Blackpool but her youngest son left London on 12th November 1937 on a ship bound for Yokohama but his intention was to move to Gibraltar. His last address was 47, Parker Road, Thornhill Lees and his occupation was a soldier. In 1942 he was with the signal section of the 2nd Bn. K.O.Y.L.I. serving in Rangoon and Burma. He was last seen on the 10th April 1942.

In 1917 his wife and children lived at 36, Craven's Place, High Street, Batley Carrand before Percy enlisted, he worked as a willyer at Messrs John Fenton and Sons, woollen manufacturers, Batley Carr.

Service Details

Percy enlisted on 12th July 1916 and went to France on 8th October 1916. The 6th (Service) Battalion was part of 43rd Brigade, in the 14th (Light) Division.

The Battalion had fought in 1916 at the Battles of Delville Wood and Flers-Courcelette near the Somme before he arrived in France.

In 1917 they took part in the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line (14 March-5th April) and the First Battle of Scarpe. It was in this battle where Percy was reported to have been killed.

Pte James Conley of Hirst's Yard, Batley Carr wrote home to say his pal Percy France had been killed. He was a married man with a young family and lived at High Street, Batley Carr. Many other rumours were saying he had only been wounded but no official notification. Pte Conley says" *He has been killed in this big battle. Let them know that he has been my best comrade."*

Percy took part in the Battle of Arras on Easter Monday and had been missing from that date but his wife kept hoping that he would be found and was still appealing for news in the local paper in August 1919 when the soldiers were returning home.

His effects only totalled 12shillings and 10 pence (64p).

Percy was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at St. Paul's Church, Hanging Heaton, Hanging Heaton War Memorial and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group