James Griffin





Rank: - Private

Number: - 10902

Regiment: - York and Lancaster Regiment 6th (Service) Battalion

Killed in Action: - 9 August 1915

Memorial: - Helles Memorial, Turkey

James Griffin was born in Batley on 6 March 1890, and baptised a couple of months later at St. Mary's Church. He was the only son of Herbert Griffin, who originated from Sheffield, and his wife, Batley-born Mary Louise (nee Freeman). The couple married shortly before James' birth, with their marriage registered in the Dewsbury district in the January quarter of 1890. The 1891 census shows Herbert working as a coal miner and Mary a cloth weaver, with family living at 5 Court, 4 Taylor Street, Batley. However, this all changed before the 1901 census. James' mother died, aged just 31, in April 1900. Her burial took place at Batley cemetery on 11 April 1900. James was brought up by his mother's sister and her husband, Angelina and George Henry Marsden. The Marsden s never had any children of their own, so James in effect their child. James is shown with his aunt and uncle at 6, Hamburg Street, Batley. James, now a cotton waste puller, was still living with his aunt and uncle in the 1911 census, at 11 Holland Street, Batley.

Herbert, his father, remarried in 1903 and settled in Wakefield with his new wife Ada (nee Wilson). By 1912 the couple had four children, Frederick (b 1904) John (c 1909), Annie (1910), and Mary (1912).

James married Louisa Harris, a domestic servant, from Barnsley. The wedding took place at St. Peter's Parish Church, Barnsley on 26 May 1912. The couple's daughter, Mary Louise, was born in Barnsley on 20 June 1913.

When Louisa was compiling his next of kin for Army records she omits the still living Herbert and all his half-blood siblings although his aunt Angelina is named.

James enlisted in Dewsbury within days of the outbreak of war, on 19 August 1914. He was described, in a local newspaper, as being well known in Batley, but it is not clear if the family lived in Barnsley or Batley. During the war his wife lived at 3, Wall Street, Barnsley. At the time of his enlistment James was a rag grinder. He stood at 5 feet $2^{1/2}$ inches tall, weighed 112lbs. and had a fresh complexion, brown eyes and dark brown hair. Initially based in Grantham for training, they moved to Witley in April 1915. They came under the orders of the 32nd Brigade in the 11th (Northern) Division.

On 1 July 1915 they left Witley camp, arriving at Liverpool the following day and boarded the troop ship *Aquitania* sailing later that day for the Mediterranean and the Gallipoli campaign. They arrived at the Greek Island of Lemnos on 10 July 1915 dropping anchor at Mudros Bay.

Fighting at Gallipoli, the peninsula to the west of the Dardanelles Straits, took place between British (including large contingents of Indian troops) and French troops against Turkish troops from April 1915 until January 1916.

According to the Unit War Diary, on 20 July 1915 orders were received that the Battalion should be prepared to move to Cape Helles, Gallipoli, at short notice. Two days later the Battalion embarked for the Turkish island of Imbros on the *SS Uganda,* here final training took place for their attack, including practising embarking on lighters and effecting a landing.

It was from here James wrote his last letter to his aunt Angelina. Dated 28 July 1915, it contained the following:

"*I am in the Dardanelles, somewhere. I am quite well. I have not been in the trenches yet, but I do not think I shall be long now. I can hear the guns going off. It is a very hot climate here. There are one or two Batley lads here out of another lot. I cannot get writing paper, it is very scarce here."*

The plans changed again and on 6 August they left Imbros and disembarked at Sulva Bay later that night. During the journey the sealed orders for the coming landing were opened. Orders were given to move quietly, once they had landed, and get the men into formation on the rough, pebbly beach. As they pushed on through sweet, sickly-smelling scrub they met a peaked hill and on the steeper slopes the formation was altered to four lines, one in front of the other, each man two paces from his neighbour. A swarm of bullets flew over their heads and the men scrambled into a long, deep trench, where there are discarded rifles – and their owners...

As they reached the hilltop shells came past and burst behind them but they were safe in a dip of the hill and at dawn they advanced over two miles of open ground under shrapnel, and rifle-fire. Days of fighting ensued. On the 7 August they advanced towards Hill 10, with the lower slopes of Chocolate Hill being reached that day. The 32nd Brigade bivouacked overnight at Hill 10, advancing the following day towards Sulajik. It was in this area on the 9 August, that James was killed in action. Severe fighting took place throughout the day, ground being alternately gained and lost.

The Battalion were relieved on 11 August retiring to Lala Baba. The roll call showed that in the period between landing at Sulva Bay and 11 August, two officers and eight ranks had been killed, a further five officers and 57 men were wounded and three officers along with 207 men were missing.

Priestman wrote in a letter dated 13 August 1915 which included:

"*Without any attempt at the dramatic, I have lived a week in a hell worse than anything ever written or spoken would possibly suggest. To describe the smallest incident would be to ask you to go down into the pit too, the very last thing I could wish anyone I loved to do."*

The Batley News of 11 September 1915 gave a further illustration of the severity of the fighting which came in the form of a letter from a Barnsley man Sergeant Precious:

"It simply rained shrapnel on us and we suffered, but the Turks suffered trebly. The Yorkshire lads have been complimented for their gallant conduct. We keep pegging away at the enemy. Shells are flying over thick as I write but we are all in good spirits and determined to wipe the Turks out. Give our best wishes to al at Barnsley, and let them know that some of our best blood is no more, and we are seeking revenge."

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

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

James' widow, Louisa, remarried in 1920 to coal miner Sidney Cahill, had two children- Hilda born 1921 and John born 1930. Mary Louisa Griffin died in 1921 aged 7 years.



Researched by Jane Roberts, for further information please see
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