Henry Groark



Rank: Private

Regiment: 8th (Service Battalion) King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry

Service No: 18810

Date of Death: 19 September 1917

Cemetery: Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Poperinge, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium.

Henry Groark is one of three brothers on the St. Mary's Memorial. The family name is interchangeable between Rourke and Groark [and variants]. The early surname variant tended to be Rourke, the name under which Henry's birth is registered but by the turn of the century it seems to shift to Groark the name under which he is recorded on St. Mary's and Batley War Memorials. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission record him as Groak.

Henry was born in Batley in 1892 the son of Patrick and Bridget Groark nee Mullany. Both Patrick and Bridget came from Ireland, with the 1911 and 1921 census giving Patrick's birthplace as Swinford. This is in contrast to the 1891

which indicate both husband and wife came from County Sligo. The couple married at St. Paulinus Church, Dewsbury in November 1876 and their eldest child, Michael, was born the following year. He was the first of their 11 children.

In addition to Michael Henry's siblings included Mary Ann [born in 1879 and died in March 1904], James Henry [born in 1881 and died the following year], Maggie [whose birth was registered in the first quarter of 1883], Catherine [born in 1885 and died the following year], Lizzie [born in 1887], James [born in 1889], Francis [born in 1894], Nellie [born in 1896], and Agnes [born in 1900].

Patrick was described as a cart driver in the 1881 census, when the family lived at Ingham Road, Dewsbury. They later moved to Batley, living first at North Street in 1891 followed by Wooller Houses, Cross Bank in 1901. By 1911 they were back in North Street, Cross Bank. During this period Patrick worked in the agricultural sector as a farm labourer and the 1911 census gave more detail specifying, he was a cowman.

Bridget worked in the woollen industry in 1881 as a weaver and in the following census as a rag sorter. Bridget died in 1911, her burial taking place at Batley Cemetery on 2 March, a month before the 1911 census. In this census Henry was employed as a mill hand in a woollen mill, undertaking piecener work.

By 1915 Patrick and his family had moved to Fleming Square, Commercial Street in Batley. Henry had attested as a Private in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry [KOYLI]. This was the same regiment as his youngest brother, Francis. His brother James, was with the York and Lancaster Regiment, whilst his eldest brother Michael a former Regular soldier had rejoined his old regiment, the Royal Scot Fusiliers.

Although his service papers have not survived, Henry's service number puts his enlistment date around the 2/21 October 1914. He initially served with the 10th KOYLI.

Moving from Pontefract, the battalion undertook training at Berkhamstead, Halton Park [Tring}, Maidenhead, back to Halton Park in April 1915, before going to Witney in August 1915 in preparation for deployment overseas. They left Witney Camp for Southampton in the early hours of 11 September 1915, setting sail later that morning and arriving at Le Havre the following day. Part of the 64th

Brigade in the 21st Division, it proved to be a baptism of fire. Days later they would be involved in the Battle of Loos.

Along with the 9th KOYLI, on the night of 20 September, they began a series of marches setting off from billets at Zutkerque. They arrived at trenches north east of Loos in the early hours of 26 September—a distance of about 50 miles.

The Unit War Diary's description of the events of 26 September is brief:

Sept

Loos 26 - The Battalion arrived first before day break and occupied a line of old German trenches about ½ mile N.W. of LOOS, with the 9 KOYLI in LEFT and Durham Light Infantry Battalion dug in on left Front. TRENCHES were under fire all day and at 1 pm other attacks having failed, the 10 Battalion were ordered to advance to road at bottom of Valley facing German Redoubt and to take up a position there in readiness to support the Battalion KOYLI who were assaulting the Redoubt. Assault unsuccessful and at four PM Battalion retired under very heavy shell fire to a line of old German Trenches a mile in rear of the original line taken up the night before at 1 AM. The Battalion was relieved by units of the GUARDS DIVISION.

The brevity of the entry hides the reality of that day. The multiple attacks by the 14th and 15th Durham Light Infantry and the total confusion when the 9th KOYLI independently launched a failed counter attack, hastily followed by the 10th KOYLI, then the retreat to the original line "all *the time under a destructive bombardment which caused many further casualties."*

In their first engagement with the enemy the 10th KOYLI lost three officers wounded, two others gassed, five other ranks killed, 113 wounded and 28 missing and unaccounted for.

Henry was wounded in the autumn of 1916, appearing in the weekly War Office casualty list published in the *Batley News* on 4 November 1916. It is not clear with whom he served at this point. Records which do survive show in addition to the 10th KOYLI he also had service with the 7th and 8th KOYLI. It was whilst with the latter he received what proved to be fatal injuries.

His death is recorded as taking place on 19 September 1917, and he is buried at Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Belgium. There was a large Casualty Clearing Station at Lijssenthoek during World War 1.

There is no indication as to where he received his fatal wounds. The CWGC website indicates between 7 and 19 September 1917 he was one of five men from the battalion to die. Three have no known graves and are commemorated on Tyne Cot Memorial and of these one died on 16 September and two on 18 September. The other man died on 17 September and is buried at Railway Dugouts Burial Ground [Transport Farm]. Turning to the 8th KOYLI War Diary on 15 and 16 September the battalion were moved up to the trenches at Railway Dugouts, becoming the brigade's reserve battalion. From this position on 16 September, they supplied working parties. On 17 September they left Railway Dugouts, with two companies going to Bedford House, one company moving to Front Line trenches, and another to Torr Top Tunnels. They were relieved on 18 September. In this period two wounded officers on 16 September are referred to. The supposition is it is during this spell in the trenches that Henry received his injuries.

Henry was awarded the 1914-15 Star, Victory Medal and British War Medal. In addition to St. Mary's, he is also remembered on Batley War Memorial.

Of the four Groark brothers, only Francis survived the war.



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