Ernest Harwood





Rank: - Gunner

Number: - 151966

Regiment/Battalion: - Royal Field Artillery 56th Bty., 34th Army Brigade

Killed in Action: - 26th September 1917 aged 27

Cemetery: - Bard Cottage, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium 111.H.30

Batley News, 13 Oct 1917 (photo)

Family Details

Ernest was born in Batley in 1890 the son of John and Eliza Ann (nee Broadbent) who both came from Sowerby Bridge. John was a blacksmith and in 1891 the family with elder brother Albert (1883) was living at White Lee.

John died in 1897 and in 1901 the Eliza Ann was working as a carpet weaver; Albert a grocer's assistant and Ernest was helping at barbers. They lived at 53, Purlwell Road, Batley.

The 1911 census shows the couple had also another child born alive but had died in infancy. Ernest was working in a rag warehouse and lived at 52, Liberty Terrace, Purlwell Hall Road, Mount Pleasant.

Ernest was a keen cricketer and was well known in the area. He assisted Batley for a few seasons and was a member of the team which defeated Hopton Mills in the finals for the Heavy Woollen District Cup in 1911. In that year's cup tie he scored 60 in the semi-final against Morley, and scored 20 in the final tie, when he opened the innings with Tom Sissons. The following two seasons he played for Birstall where he also did good work. The flag was flown at half-mast at Mount Pleasant on the Saturday following the news of his death.

He attended St. Andrew's Church and was a member of the young men's class. Before enlisting he was employed as a foreman in the rag department of Messrs. Becker Bros. Howden Clough.

Service Details

Ernest joined the Forces in July 1916 and was sent to France.

The 56th Battery of the Royal Field Artillery would be equipped with 18 pounder guns (named for the weight of the shell they fired). They would be positioned behind the trench lines but were in range of German artillery.

Gunner Harwood was killed at a time of great innovation in British tactics. There was careful choice of objectives to improve the British position, short but very intense artillery barrages and strong reserves to stop counter attacks were all used.

These tactics were very successful in gaining new ground and wearing down the German reserves. However, they led to heavy German shelling of British positions, which is probably how Gunner Harwood met his death.

News of his death was received in a letter on Saturday morning from an officer

"Your son Gunner E. Harwood of this battery was killed by a shell on September 26th. As his Commander, I feel his loss very deeply for he was always a good and willing worker, never grumbling and always cheerful. He was killed instantly and suffered no pain at all. We buried him on Friday September 28th in one of the British Cemeteries out here."

A Chaplain also wrote offering his sympathy

"A shell hit his dugout one night and killed him instantly along with five of his companions."

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

He is remembered with Honour at St. Andrew's Purlwell, Howden Clough Methodist Church, Batley War Memorial and Bard Cottage Cemetery, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group