John Helliwell





Rank: - Private

Number: - 3/1061

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 2nd Battalion

Died of Wounds: - 18th December 1917 aged 22

Cemetery: - Mendinghem Military Cemetery, West Vlaanderen, Belgium. V1.BB.23

"SLEEP ON DEAR SON THE BATTLE IS FOUGHT THE VICTORY WON MOTHER"

Batley News, 5 Jan 1918 (photo)

Family Details

John was born in Batley in 1895 the son of Hunslet born Sam Helliwell and his wife Rachel (nee Robinson) who was born in Millgate, Bacup, and Lancashire. The couple had married in Halifax in November 1878 and their first child, Edwin, was born in Castleford in 1879 although by 1881 they were living in Burnley. Sam was a miner so probably moved about looking for work.

Their next two children, Edith (1880) and James (1882) were born in Manchester. The family then moved to Hebden Bridge where the family was increased by Emily (1884), Ellen (1886) and Frank (1888), then to Fryston near Castleford before the birth of Alfred (1891-1918). Sarah (1894), John (1895) and twins Minnie and Lilly (1899) were born at Batley.

When the family arrived in Batley, they lived at 10, Coal Pit Lane, Carlinghow before moving to 2, Tillotson Street, Cross Bank. It would appear Sam continued to move about and died at Sedgfield, Co Durham in 1906. James followed his father to be a miner but the other three boys worked in the mills. In 1911 Rachel was living in a 4 roomed house at 2, Tillotson Street with six of her eleven children.

John was a tier-on at Messrs. G. & J. Stubley, Batley before moving to do the same job at Messrs. Taylor, Yielding & Co. Birstall.

His brother, Alfred, was in the Royal Air Force and was killed 6th September 1918.

Service details:

John was in the Reserve, and at the outbreak of war he was at camp where he was retained for active service.

The 2nd Battalion in August 1914 were part of 13th Brigade in 5th Division, landing at Le Havre on 16 August 1914. They fought in the Battle of Mons, 23rd August 1914, which was the first major action of the British Expeditionary Force and was the first confrontation to take place on European soil since the Battle of Waterloo on 1815. It took place near the 60-foot-wide Mons-Conde Canal in Belgium near the French border. The British had 70,000 soldiers with 300 guns and faced a German Army of up to 160,000 men with 600 guns.



In 1915 he would have been in the Second Battle of Ypres and the capture of Hill 60.

On 28th December 1915 they transferred to 97th Brigade in 32nd Division.

In 1916 he fought in the Battle of Albert, Bazentin and Ancre which were all phases of the Battles of the Somme 1916.

In 1917 he took part in the operations on the Ancre in the pursuit of the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line

John served for three years in France except for two service leaves home and had not been wounded before December 1917

Official information was received that John had died of wounds at a clearing station in France. Prior to this a telegram arrived saying he was dangerously ill. A letter was also received from a nurse: --

"I *fear that by the time this reaches you, you will have received a wire from the War Office conveying to you the sad news of your son Private Helliwell. He was admitted into hospital on the night of December 17th, suffering from many wounds, one very bad, one in the chest amongst them. Everything was done which possibly could be, but your son was in a much-collapsed condition. The sisters and doctors never left him during the time he was with us, and we were hoping that he might be spared. He was one of our Mons heroes too! But he passed away at 4.30 p.m. on December 18th. He sent. His love to home, but he could not speak much, he was too weak, and so I regret to say that this was his only message."*

His brother Edwin served for three years and four months in the South African War and was with the Royal Engineers in France and had been wounded. Lance Corporal Frank Helliwell was at the time home on leave after being in hospital but was ready to re-join his unit. Alfred was gassed at Hill 60 and discharged for 12 months but called up again and he was killed in September 1918.

John was awarded the 1914-18 Star, British War Medal 1914-20, Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour: - Batley Parish Church, Batley War Memorial, Mendinghem Military Cemetery, France where there were 4 others buried on the same day. There are 2,385 soldiers commemorated on the memorial at Mendinghem Military Cemetery.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group