Wilfred Hirst



Rank: - Private

Number: - 7212

Regiment: - Durham Light Infantry 1/9th Battalion

Died of Wounds: - 11th November 1916 aged 38

Cemetery: - St. Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen, Seine Maritime, France O.11.A.5

Batley News, 18 Nov 1916

Family Details

Wilfred was born in Batley on 8th March 1878 the eldest son of Hedley and Sarah Jane Hirst (nee Hinchliffe). He was baptised at Hick Lane Chapel on 15th May 1878. The couple had married at Batley Parish Church on 6th January 1878. In 1881 the family was living with Sarah Jane's mother Elizabeth Hinchliffe and a boarder in Suffolk Street, Batley.

George was born in 1882 followed by Annie in 1884. In 1891 the family was living at 29, Suffolk Street, Batley and 13-year-old Wilfred was employed as a woollen piecer.

His mother died at the small pox hospital in March 1892 and his father married widow Sarah Jane Hirst nee Riley at Holy Innocents, Thornhill Lees on 28th January 1893. The family moved to Winton Place, Snowden Street, Batley and Harold was born in 1894 followed by Hilda in January 1896. Sarah Jane had children Albert and Hannah.

Wilfred was well known in Mount Pleasant being a member of the Mount Pleasant Bowling Club and as a Challenge Cup winner. He was associated with Purlwell Wesleyan Church and was an old scholar of the Sunday school and a member of the choir.

Before 1911 Hedley had become an Insurance Agent and the family was living at 97, Taylor Street, Batley. Hedley died in June 1915.

The family moved to live at 7, Cross Mount Street, Warwick Road, Batley before 1919.

Service Details

Wilfred enlisted into the army reserve on the 2nd December 1915 giving his details as being employed as a gas meter inspector and was five feet four inches tall. He was sent to Pontefract for his medical on 2nd June 1916 and had good physical development but had hammer toes on both feet.

He was in the army reserve from 3rd December 1915 until the 5th June 1916 when he was embodied into home service until 6th October 1916. He went to France on the 7th October and was posted to the 9th Durham Light Infantry on the 21st

October. It was part of the 151st Brigade attached to the 50th Northumbrian Division.

In front of the line lay an otherwise unremarkable chalk outcrop, the Butte de Walencourt, this gave some observation over the rear of the British lines in that area. This was to be the object of the next attack. The main German front line (named 'Grid' by the British) ran behind the butte, with another trench in front ('Butte'). The heavy rains and consequent muddy ground forced postponements of the attack originally planned for 26 October to the 28th, then 1 November, then the 5th. By this time the German artillery and the difficult conditions had exhausted the brigades in the front line and on 4 November the 151st Brigade relieved the 149th. Heavy rain again fell on the night of 4–5 November, and when the advance began the mud reduced it to a literal crawl behind the creeping barrage. Both flanks of the advance took flanking fire by machine guns, and on the right, 8th Durham Light Infantry also took hits from 'shorts' from British trench mortars and artillery, it was stopped in front of 'Butte' trench and forced back. In the centre the 6th Durham Light Infantry had mixed fortunes, the right suffering in the same manner as the 8th, while the left succeeded in establishing a block in the 'Grid' trench. On the left, by mid-morning the 9th Durham Light Infantry had taken a quarry to the West of the butte and a section of 'Grid' trench to the East and later another West of the butte. In the afternoon the Germans counterattacked, using artillery to prevent reinforcement from the British lines, and the 9th battalion, with part of the 6th and a section of the Brigade machine gun Company held out until evening when they were forced back to their start lines. The infantry battalions of the 151st Brigade lost 967 men of all ranks, killed, wounded or missing and with the pioneers and machine gun companies the losses approached 1000.

His mother received a telegram from the Territorial's Records Office at York saying Wilfred was dangerously ill in hospital in France. This was followed two days later by a letter dated 11th November 1916 from a nurse at a hospital which read: -

"I *am very sorry to send you sad news of your son. He was brought into my ward two days ago dying. He had a gunshot wound in his head and the bullet had gone to a part of the brain which made recovery impossible. He was unconscious all the time but that saved him suffering and he died very quietly this morning at 10 am. Prayers were offered for him beside his bed and everything that could be done for his comfort was done. He is buried in the French cemetery near here."*

He had only been at the front for a few weeks. His brother George was training with the Durham Light Infantry and his brother Harold with the Duke of Wellington's.

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

He is remembered with Honour at Batley War Memorial and Purlwell Wesleyan Chapel.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group