James Hughes



Photo from Batley News, 9 Feb 1918

Rank: - Lance Corporal

Service Number: - 203612

Regiment: - 4th (Extra Reserve) Battalion the South Staffordshire Regiment

Date of Death: - 28 January 1918

Cemetery: - Dernancourt Communal Cemetery Extension, Somme, France

James was born in Batley on 28 March 1887. His parents were John Hughes, from Ballina in County Mayo and his wife Ellen (nee Kane) from Newport, County Mayo. John and Ellen had married in Edinburgh in 1870 and had a total of 10 children of which three had died before 1911. John was a coal miner. Richard was born in Queensferry in 1871 followed by Ellen, 1874, Thomas in 1876, after a move to West Ardsley, and in 1887, Mary Ann, and John Patrick 1880 both in Castleford, By April 1883 the family had moved to live at Hume Street, Batley, where John Patrick died and two weeks later, Martin was born. James came next followed by Annie 1891and finally Harry in 1896.

James attended St. Mary's school but by the time of the 1901 census he was working, described as an engine road lad in a coal mine working underground. However, 10 years later he had switched industries to work in the textile industry, and was employed as a warp man.

On 14 September 1912, he married Elizabeth Ann Kelly at St. Mary's Church, where James was described as an active member. The couple made their home at 17, Victoria Street, Carlinghow. James was also a member of Carlinghow Working Men's Club.

Before enlisting James became a foreman weft man at Messrs J. Newsome and Sons, Batley Carr. In the early hours of 4 October 1916 fire broke out at the Bradford Road Mills of J Newsome and Sons. Busy with army contracts producing khaki cloths for overcoats, up until early September the mill had been working night and day. Enlistment had reduced the firm's employees to around 300, and the night shift had been abandoned with work finishing at 8 pm. The fire, described as one of the most disastrous to occur in the district for some time, caused around £70,000 worth of damage. The mills occupied the extensive plot in the Jack Lane/ Bradford Road area. It mainly affected the older four storey Victoria Mills buildings, and Bradford Road was closed for a time because of falling masonry, and the tram wires and lines were affected. The fire caused destruction of most of the spinning and weaving machinery, all the warping plant, together with the yarn, was burnt out and the finishing department was gutted. Swathes of employees were thrown out of work although it was hoped some would quickly be back utilising the unaffected parts of the mill and in buildings loaned by other manufacturers.

A weft foreman was a skilled position and could explain why James had not enlisted. In May 1917 James joined the army and went to France, landing at Le Havre on 4 October 1917.

Initially a Private, by January 1918 he was a Lance- Corporal. From the middle of that month the Battalion were operating out of Lagnicourt Camp, providing working parties. Towards the end of the month James had become so unwell he required urgent medical attention. On 28 January Elizabeth Ann received a telegram saying her husband was lying seriously ill in a Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) in France and could not be visited. This was followed by a second telegram on 1 February which informed Elizabeth Ann that her husband had, in fact, died on 28 January.

Elizabeth also received a letter from the sister in charge from 56 CCS which was based at Dernancourt, a village three kilometres south of Albert, which gave her more details. James had been admitted to the CCS in an unconscious condition. He never regained consciousness and died two days later peacefully and without any pain. The cause of death was Cerebrospinal Meningitis.

The sister added: -

"*He will be buried in the little British Cemetery besides this hospital, where lie so many brave lads who have given up their lives in this dreadful war.*"

His mother, Ellen, had been widowed in July 1916. Her husband, John, who was described as feeble and rather lame in one leg, had retired from mining. On Sunday 2 July 1916 he fell down the steps of the Batley Irish National League Club, when it was believed the ferrule of his walking stick had caught in one of the knots in the wooden stairs. He was carried home unconscious, and died the following day as a result of a huge fracture. The fracture extended from his skull base to his forehead, and caused a brain haemorrhage.

Whether the distress of the news of her son's death had an impact, but less than a week after receiving it, on 7 February 1918 Ellen Hughes died.

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

He is remembered with Honour at St. Mary's Church, St. John's, Carlinghow, Carlinghow Working Men's Club and Batley War Memorial.

Elizabeth Ann worked as a rag sorter and never moved from 17 Victoria Street where she died on 8 March 1947.



Thanks to Jane Roberts and for more details please see pasttopresentgenealogy.