Thomas Erskine Kershaw



Rank: - Gunner

Number: - 58691

Regiment: - Royal Garrison Artillery

Killed in Action when Battery hit by enemy shellfire at Ypres.: - 19/10/1917
Age: 24 years

Cemetery: - Canada Farm Cemetery, Belgium III. E. 4.

"KINDLE THY HOPE PUT ALL THY FEARS AWAY LIVE DAY BY DAY"

Batley News, 27 Oct 1917, 3 Nov 1917 (photo)

Family Details

Thomas Erskine was born in Blarney, County Cork in c.1893 the son of Thomas and Mary Ellen Kershaw nee Freeman who had married in the Wigan area in 1886.

Thomas, who was a power loom tuner, was born in Scotland, Mary Ellen was born in Canada but married in Lancashire and their daughter Lily Isabel was born in Morley, Yorkshire in c.1886. The family was living at 17, Belvedere Road, Mount Pleasant, Batley in 1901. Before 1911 the family had moved to live in a four roomed home at 8, Alfred Street, Mount Pleasant, Batley.

Thomas Erskine attended Heckmondwike Grammar School and from there went as a pupil teacher to Birstall Central Schools afterwards serving on the staff at Mill Lane School, Hanging Heaton. At the outbreak of war he was studying at Leeds Training College.

He was well known at Hanover Street Congregational Church and was a former secretary of the primary department.

His father died 23rd November 1918.

Service Details

Thomas attested at Batley on the 20th September 1915 giving his age as 22 years and 7 months. He was 6 feet tall which was unusual at this time. He was posted to Depot on the 18th October and went overseas on the 18th November 1915. He served in France coming home on leave in the summer of 1916.

His Major wrote: -

"He *was killed instantly with an enemy shell on the 9th inst. and has been buried in a military cemetery, the location of which I shall be able to tell you later on."*

His pal Private A.V. Cookman who he shared his dugout with wrote: -

"I am writing on behalf of the battery commander's staff and Tommy's very many friends in the battery, to convey to you and to Mrs. Kershaw our deep sense of your loss and while I am doing it, I should like, if I may. To express to you my

indebtedness to Tommy. Everyone owed something to his finely-tempered spirit, and I, who shared his dug-out and perhaps knew him more intimately than almost anyone else, find, now that he is gone, that more than half my own power of endurance is gone too. Most of the courage I ever had was really his, communicated to me by him, in the same splendid way that he did everything and when we need to make light of difficulties and set ourselves to enjoy rather than to endure them, I did not fully realise, as I do now, how absolutely he initiated our attitude.

As I owed so much to him and feel so sharply his untimely going, I feel you will forgive me if I speak of him freely and as I knew him. Somehow, I always think of him as a very Greek. He treated life as just a big adventure and lived always so vigorously and went so boldly forward upon any, however hazardous duty that he took others with him comfortably unaware of the risks which, I suspect, his own imagination saw perfectly. That at any rate was how he impressed me, and it must how he must have seemed to many others who lived and worked with him. I should like you to know so much that had he lived under other conditions he would have done big things, just as he did big things out here.

He will probably have told you something of what happened on September 19th but he will not have told you how, through a night unimaginably awful, he tried by himself until morning, to establish communications on a wire which was hopelessly broken and how near he came to doing the impossible, or how the next day when the battery had left the position he remained with a small guard and two other telephonists in charge of a telephone. They were shelled incessantly through the night, but in the early evening he received a message that two of the three telephonists might return to the rear position. Without suggesting that they should decide as to which of them should go he told the other two that they had definitely ordered by name to report themselves at the rear position and he himself stayed through the night. There are dozens of other instances of the same spirit and tradition. He was always the same with me. Tommy never had any fear except for you at home. And though he took risks it was not through taking risks that he met his death. He was on duty at the battery when a shell struck his dug-out. He and six others died instantly."

Thomas was awarded the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour on the Irish War Memorial, Batley Congregational Sunday School (Young Men's Class) Hanover Street and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group