John Willie Key





Rank: - Private

Number: - 301777

Regiment: - Durham Light Infantry. (Formerly 6121, 29862 KOYLI, 42288 Northumberland Fusiliers) 1/8th Battalion

Missing, presumed Killed in Action: - 5th November 1916 aged 25 years

Memorial: - Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France Pier and Face 14 A and 15 C.

Batley News, 23 Jun 1917 (photo), 17 Mar 1917.

Family Details

John Willie was born in Batley in c.1891 the youngest son of Thomas Ellis and Sarah Key nee Smith.

Thomas Ellis came from Oxnead, Norfolk and was a woollen spinner. He had married his Batley born wife Sarah Smith at St. Peter's Church, Birstall on 25th June 1876.

Henry was born in 1877 followed by Ada 1880, Mary Elizabeth 1882, Rachel Ann born in 1885 and twins Amy born 1887 who died shortly after birth and Emma who sadly died in late 1889.

In 1901 John Willie was living at 19, Dewsbury Gate Road, Staincliffe with his parents and siblings Henry. Ada and Mary and his father gave his employment as a card cleaner. A decade later he was still living at the same address which was a three roomed home with his mother and married sister Ada and her husband.

John Willie attended Staincliffe Church Schools. He was employed by Messrs S. Milnes & Sons, paper merchants, Bradford Road, Dewsbury as a traveller, for 12 years, before he enlisted. He was a member of Staincliffe Liberal Club and was connected with Upper Independent Chapel, Heckmondwike.

Thomas Ellis died on 23rd December 1908, Sarah died in 1913 and John Willie continued to live in Dewsbury Gate Road with his sister Ada Crawshaw and her husband, Henry who had married in 1910.

Service Details

John Willie was called up under the Derby Scheme in May 1916 and had been at the Front for only one month when he went missing.

The Battalion fought in the Battle of the Transloy Ridges in October 1916.

They were still in the Somme region when John Willie went missing, presumed killed in action.

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

John Willie is remembered with Honour at Christ Church, Staincliffe, Staincliffe Liberal Club and Upper Chapel, Heckmondwike and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group