Ernest Preston Nelson





Rank: - Private

Number: - 29916

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 1/4th Battalion

Missing, presumed Killed in Action: - 13th April 1918 aged 32 years

Memorial: - Tyne Cot Memorial, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium Panels 108to 111

Batley News, 29 Jun 1918 (photo). Batley Reporter, 25 Jul 1919

Family Details

Ernest Preston Nelson was born in Batley on the 24th May 1886 the son of Sam and Florence Nelson nee Preston who married on 27th Jun 1886 at All Saints Church, Batley. He was baptised at Batley Parish Church on 4th August 1886 when Sam gave his occupation as a stone mason.

In 1891 the family with the addition of Agnes born 18th January 1889 was living at Newgate Street, Hanging Heaton. Harry was born on 25th April 1891followed by George in 1893 and Alice on 17th February 1898. Before 1901 the family was living at 25, Kirkgate, Hanging Heaton and the census shows that 14-year-old Ernest was working as a cloth finisher in a woollen mill. Sam was working as a stone mason for the London & North Western Railway Company. Agnes died March 1907.

Within the next decade Ernest had changed his occupation to become a cloth fuller and worked at Messrs. J.T. & J. Taylor's, Blakeridge Mills, Batley.

Service Details

Ernest joined up on 24th May 1916 and went to France on March 15th 1917.

He was wounded twice and was invalided home to England but returned to France on February 1st 1918.

The 49th Division in which the 1/4th KOYLI was part was in Flanders in early 1918 and the fought at the Battle of Estaires (9-11 April) Battle of Messines (10-11 April) and the Baileull in which the Division defended Neuve Elise.

On the 12th April the whole area was subjected to persistent enemy shelling and as the afternoon wore on the Germans could be seen massing to the right of the brigade's positions. At 4.40 pm the bombardment intensified but was successfully driven off by rifle and machine-gun fire. At 9.30 pm the enemy attacked again concentrating their efforts on the junction between the KOYLI and York and Lancs and at 7 am 13 April the Germans penetrated the line and advanced along the Nieppe road entering the south side of the village. The KOYLI, York and Lancs and Worcesters counter attacked and successfully cleared the village although 2 officers were killed and 3 wounded one of them being Major Chadwick.

Captain J.C. Burrows replaced Major Chadwick and reported at 5 pm that his positions were being strongly attacked and the enemy was slowly driving his men back. “X” company mounted a counter attack and the enemy was pushed back about 170 yards.

At about 8 pm the enemy was seen again in the village and Battalion HQ was moved down the Kemmel Road and the battalion took up a position on the railway embankment about 150 yards north of Neuve Eglise. The Germans managed to get some machine guns into the village and placed them at a crossroads and in strategic houses from where they were able to control most of the movements in the streets.

The day had cost the battalion 2 officers killed, 3 wounded, 24 men killed a further 2 dying of their wounds and an unknown number wounded and missing.

The 1/4th KOYLI diary reported that 17 prisoners had been captured by them in the YMCA.

A Hanging Heaton soldier Private Jack Wade who was killed shortly after wrote in one of his last letters home saying that Ernest had been killed. His parents were anxious but it was several weeks before any official news reached his parents to say he was missing. A letter from the War Office on July 4th 1919 stated that he was “presumed *missing, died of wounds on April 13th 1918 or since at Neuve Eglise.”*

At the time he went missing his brother George was in France with the R.A.M.C. and Harry had been discharged following wounds.

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

He is remembered with Honour at St. Paul’s Church, Hanging Heaton; Hanging Heaton War Memorial (St Paul’s); Batley Working Men’s Club and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group