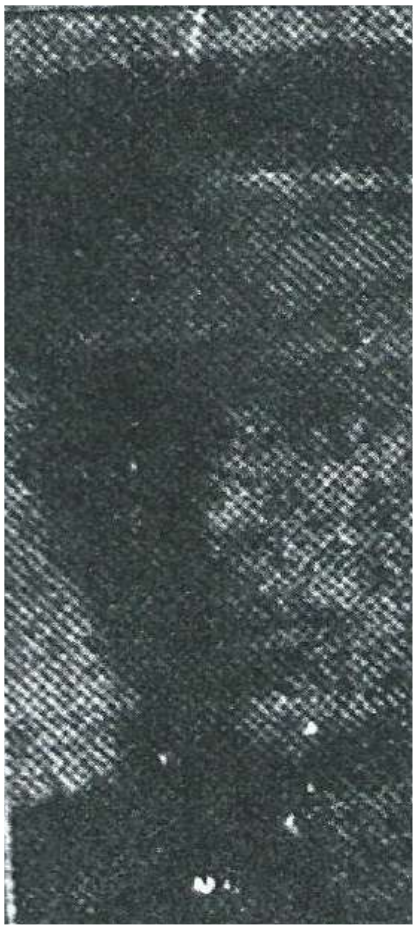
Robert Pearce





Rank: - Private

Number: - 11310

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 6th Battalion

Killed in Action: - 19th August 1916 aged 31

Remembered with Honour: - Thiepval Memorial, France Pier and Face 11C&12A

Family Details:

Robert was born in Morley in 1883, the son of Thomas and Alice Pearce (nee Chappell).

Thomas was a coal miner, born at Daw Green and he married Ossett born Alice Chappell on 21st July 1872 at Dewsbury Parish Church. Their eldest daughter Nancy E was born 1877 in Ossett but the family moved to Barnsley where Emily A (1878) and Frederick (1881- 1885) were born. Sarah Ann was born in Little Hemsworth in 1881 before the family moved to Morley where Robert (1883) was born, followed by Willie (1885), Joseph (1886) and Alice (1887).

Alice died in September 1884 and Thomas married her sister Mercy at Batley Parish Church on 2nd March 1889. Agnes was born in 1892 but died aged 7 months, Harry was born in February 1895 but died 6 months later and Tom (1900) completed the family. The family were living in Scotchman Lane, Morley in 1891 and had moved to 17, Fell Fold, Carlinghow a decade later. In 1911 Thomas and Mercy were living at 14, Birch Street, Carlinghow, and Batley.

Robert served in the Militia and during the South African War served in Malta.

When he returned to civilian life, he worked at Haughton nr. Barnsley as a miner. On 11th August 1906 at St John's Church, Carlinghow, Batley he married Sarah Elizabeth Gittos, who had been born in Chesterfield.

Charlotte was born in 1907 followed by Mary Jane (1908) and George Harry (1910). The family were living at 99, High Street, Hanging Heaton at the time of the 1911 census but moved to White Lee, Batley before 1916. Another son Robert was born in January 1913 but died shortly after his birth.

Service Details:

Robert enrolled at Dewsbury in December 1914 and disembarked on 15th May 1915.

He served in the 6th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry which came under the command of 43rd Brigade in 14th (Light) Division.

Although initially this division was without equipment or arms of any kind, the troops appeared ready by May 1915. In 1915 the Division took part in the Action

at Hooge, in which it had the misfortune to be the first to be attacked by the flamethrower, and the Second Attack of Bellewaarde 24th -25th May.

The Battles of the Somme started on 1st July 1916 and was a series of engagements of which the Battle of Delville Wood was one of them and started on the 15th July 1916 continuing until 3rd September 1916.

Delville Wood (Bois d'Elville), was a thick tangle of trees, chiefly oak and birch, with dense hazel thickets, intersected by grassy rides, east of Longueval part of a general offensive starting on 14th July, which became known as the Battle of Bazentin Ridge (14th-17th July), General Douglas Haigh, Commander of the

British Expeditionary Force intended to capture the German second position between Delville Wood and Bazentin le Petit.

The 1st South African Infantry Brigade made its Western Front début as part of the 9th (Scottish) Division and captured Delville Wood on 15th July. The South Africans held the wood until 19th July, at a cost in casualties similar to those of many British brigades on 1st July. When captured, the village and wood formed a salient, which could be fired on by German artillery from three sides. The ground rose from Bernafay and Trônes woods to the middle of the village and neither the village or the wood could be held without the other.

After the Battle of Bazentin Ridge, the British tried to advance on both flanks to straighten the salient at Delville Wood, to reach good jumping off positions for a general attack. The Germans tried to eliminate the salient and to retain the ground, which shielded German positions from view and overlooked British positions. For the rest of July and August, both sides fought for control of the wood and village but struggled to maintain the tempo of operation's, ammunition shortages, high casualties and wet weather, reduced visibility and made the movement of troops and supplies much more difficult. Both sides were reduced to piecemeal attacks and piecemeal defence on narrow fronts, except for a small number of bigger and wider-front attacks, until early September.

Casualty lists of the killed, missing and wounded were issued on a regular basis.

Robert 's name was on one of these casualties lists as having been killed but no official notification was at first received. His parents made enquiries to his regimental Officers and a Sergeant Major replied in October that it was true he

had met a soldier's death. He had been at the front for 17 months and was wounded the previous July. He had been killed in action on 19th August 1916.

At the time of Robert's death brother Sapper Tom Pearce who lived at Shaw Cross and an adopted brother Driver Sam Mitchell R.F.A. were also on active service.

Robert is commemorated on Batley War Memorial, Batley Parish Church, St. John's Church, Carlinghow and Thiepval Memorial along with another 158 killed or missing on the same day.

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



Researched by members of
Batley History Group