Willie Phelps





Rank: - Private

Number: - 2664

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

Killed in Action, shot through head during night operations: - 25/05/1915
Age: 25 years

Cemetery: - White City Cemetery, Bois-Grenier D.16

Batley News, 5 Jun 1915 (photo)

Family Details

Willie was born in Birstall in 1889 the son of Tom and Rachel Phelps nee Oldroyd who had married on the 15th February 1885 at St. Peter's Church, Birstall.

In 1891 the Birstall born couple was living with their children Percy 1885, Charley 1887, who were both in Batley and Willie at Leeds Road, Howden Clough.

Albert was born in 1892 followed by Ivy 1894, Doris 1898 and twins Annie and Nellie in 1900. Nellie sadly died in November 1900 aged 2 months and Annie died in April 1903.

In 1901 Tom was described as a woollen dyer's labourer but by 1911 he was a coal miner's deputy. In 1911 Willie was working as a coal miner hewer living at 175, Leeds Road, Howden Clough.

Willie was an accomplished, well known bowler for the Howden Clough team where he accomplished some fine performances.

Before he enlisted, he worked at Woodlesford Colliery.

Service Details

Willie and his brother enlisted in the local Territorial Force 1/4th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry just after war broke out.

The Regiment on mobilisation moved to Doncaster and in November 1914 to Gainsborough going to York in February 1915. At Easter 1915 on 12th April they landed at Boulogne and from the 15th May became 148th Brigade in 49th (West Riding) Division.

On the 9th May they took part in the Battle of Aubers Ridge.

On the Saturday his parents, who were highly respected in the district, had received a cheerful letter from him explaining he was doing his duty with a good heart and might be one of the lucky ones to escape from the toil the terrible war was exacting from the brave men at the Front. A few hours later they received the news from a comrade that he had been killed in action. The letter explained that just before he was shot, he was joking with him. He was the life and soul of the platoon to which he was attached.

Mrs. Haselgrave, wife of Col. Haselgrave wrote to his parents: -

"I was most grieved to hear from my husband that your son lost his life during night operations this week. Colonel Haselgrave is proud of the way his men behaved and much regrets the loss of your son. Do let me know if I can be of any assistance. "

His brother John William Phelps was killed in action on the 31st July 1917.

Willie was awarded the 1914-15 Star. The British War Medal, Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at St Saviour's Brownhill; Howden Clough Methodist Church; Birstall and Batley War Memorials.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group