Abraham Arthur Preston





Rank: - Private

Number: - 30246

Regiment/Battalion: - Royal Welsh Fusiliers 8th Battalion
(Formerly 27160 K.O.Y.L.I.)

Died of Disease: - 10th August 1916 aged 22

Cemetery: - Basra War Cemetery, Iraq. 111. N. 5

Family Details:

Abraham Arthur was born in the 2nd Quarter 1894, the son of Frank Preston and Martha (nee Gledhill). The couple were both Batley born and they were married at Cross Bank Wesleyan Chapel. On 15th June 1891 they had a daughter, Ada, who was baptised at St. John's, Carlinghow on 28 June 1891, but unfortunately, she died aged two months.

In 1901 the family lived at 8, Lobley Buildings, Bradford Road West, Batley. Frank was a fancy rug carpet weaver. Although Abraham Arthur was an only surviving child, many of his cousins lived nearby and he came from a very close family. A decade later they had moved to a three roomed home at 68, Robinson Buildings, Bradford Road, Batley. Frank was a fireman at a fabric printers and Abraham Arthur was also working at a fabric printer as a warehouse boy. This would have been Messrs. Dewhirst print works, Brookroyd where many people from the Carlinghow area worked.

He attended Park Road School and was associated with Zion Chapel and Sunday school. The Batley News report confirmed that he had worked at Messrs. Dewhirst, print works, Brookroyd, for 9 years, before enlisting.



Photo as a boy with his parents

Service Details:

Abraham Arthur enlisted in January 1916 in the K.O.Y.L.I. but later transferred to the Welsh Fusiliers.

The 8th Battalion was a service battalion and they went to Mudros in 1915 followed by Egypt and Mesopotamia where Abraham Arthur would have joined them in July 1916. It was part of 40th Brigade, 13th (Western) Division.

On 12th February 1916 the Division began to move to Mesopotamia from Port Said, to strengthen the force being assembled for the relief of the besieged garrison at Kut al Sa'ad and came under the orders of the Tigris Corps. It then took part in the attempts to relieve Kut, but after these efforts failed and Kut fell, the British force in the area was built up and reorganised.

Abraham Arthur left England in May 1916 for the long sea voyage to Mesopotamia. He wrote home on a regular basis. In his last letter dated July 12th he wrote: -

"We *have landed at last after nearly --- weeks on the water. We are at the base now. I don't know how long we shall be here. I am sticking the heat very well – better than I thought I should. It is very hot here during the day, but it comes in very cool at night. Tobacco and cigs are very cheap, and we can get a good cigar for a penny. There is a Y.M.C.A. here too, and they had moving pictures there last night. I have come across a lot of chaps round here from Batley and towns round about. We do nothing during the day, due to the heat. We go on parade for drills at 6 a.m. for about half an hour while it is cool and then we usually have rifle inspection at 6 p.m. Then after that we have a bathe. We camp near a river."*

A letter to his parents arrived on Wednesday August saying he had died at an undisclosed place on 10th August of disease.

Abraham Arthur was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour on St. John's Church, Carlinghow, Cross Bank Wesleyan Chapel, Batley War Memorial and Basra War Cemetery.

His father died in November 1919 and his mother, Martha, married her neighbour James Colbeck in 1924. He had also lost a son, Ernest Colbeck in 1917 and his wife in 1920.

During the First World War, Basra was occupied by the 6th (Poona) Division in November 1914, from which date the town became the base of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force. A number of cemeteries were used by the MEF in and around Basra; Makina Masul Old Cemetery was used from December 1914 to October 1916 and the Makina Masul New Extension was begun alongside the old cemetery in August 1917. These two sites, enlarged later when more than 1,000 graves were brought in from other burial grounds, now form Basra War Cemetery.

The cemetery now contains 2,551 burials of the First World War, 74 of them unidentified. The headstones marking these graves were removed in 1935 when it was discovered that salts in the soil were causing them to deteriorate. The names of those buried in the graves affected are now recorded on a screen wall.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group