Willie Holmes Preston





Rank: - Private

Number: - 242069

Regiment: - King's Own (Royal Lancaster Regiment) 2/5th Battalion

Killed in Action: - 05/07/1917 Age: 29 years

Cemetery: - Rue-David Military Cemetery, Fleurbaix 1.G.21

Batley News, 14 Jul 1917 (photo)

Family Details

Willie was born in Batley in c.1887 the son Susannah Preston nee Hodgson who married John George Preston in 1869, registered Dewsbury. George born 1870 died June 1871 aged 11 months, Emily Ann was born in 1872 followed by Mary 1875, Hannah 1878 and Charles 1880. Walter had died aged 5 weeks in May 1877, Charles died in October 1881 aged 17 months and John George died in December 1881.

John George was a woollen cloth finisher and in early 1881 he was living with his family in Cobden Street, Batley.

After John George died Susannah lived with James Holmes and in 1891 was living at Howley Mill, Soothill with him and children Hannah aged 13 years and Sarah Holmes 1885, Willie, and Martha 1890. Herbert Holmes Preston was born in 1883 but sadly died in November 1888 when the family lived at Timothy Lane, Batley. Scott Holmes Preston was born in 1892 but sadly died aged 6 months in September 1892. Harriett Holmes Preston was born in 1894 and died 1895.

James was at one time a coal miner but at the time of his death in November 1897 at Dewsbury Infirmary he was described as a quarryman.

Susannah became a charwoman to support her family and moved to Clerk Green, Batley before 1901. By 1911 there was only Willie left at home with his mother and they were living at Ivy Dene Cottage, Field Hill, Batley and with them were a married couple and their child as boarders. Willie was working as a rag picker. She later moved to live at Cobden Street (1917) and 4, Warwick Mount, Batley Carr.

Willie attended Park Road Council School and Zion Sunday School, Batley. As a lad he became a caddie at Howley Hall golf links and became a professional there. He was appointed to a similar post at Smith Hills, near Bolton and left there to join the Army. It is said that as a caddie his services were keenly sought after especially in matches and competitions because of he was quiet but had something in his nature that won everyone's respect. He studied the golfers whose bags he carried and those who realised his worth never hesitated to use the club he chose, especially at a critical stage in the game. He was always willing to render a service and did it in a most cheerful way.

Service Details

Willie enlisted at Bolton and went to France in March 1917.

His Company Officer wrote to his mother who lived in Cobden Street: -

"*Your son was killed whilst on duty in the trenches. He was hit in the chest by a piece of shrapnel and died almost immediately without suffering any pain. He will be very much missed by all of us—officers, NCO's and men. He was extremely popular with everybody and the expressions of the men of his Company when they heard of his death showed the respect, they had for him. This may be some comfort to you in your terrible loss. As his Company officer I found your son an excellent soldier and always cheery and bright. We have lost a friend and tender to you our deepest sympathy."*

His platoon officer wrote: -

"*He always proved a most useful and willing member and one in whom everyone had the greatest confidence."*

His sergeant gave the following tribute: -

"*No one will miss him more than I. He was a splendid soldier and always did his duty."*

Willie Holmes Preston was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group