Herbert Priestley



Rank: - Private

Number: - 9976

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 1st Battalion

Killed in Action: - 08/05/1915 Age: 22 years

Memorial: - Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium Panel 47

Batley News, 5 June 1915

Family Details

Herbert was born in Hanging Heaton, Batley, c.1893 the son of Thongsbridge born Harry and Gawthorpe born Martha Priestley nee Broadhead who had married on the 8th May 1886 at All Saints Church, Batley. He had an older sister Annie Elizabeth born on 28th October 1886. Mary Emma was born in November 1890 but sadly died aged 13 months in December 1891. His mother died in July 1895 and his father who was a joiner married Sarah Braime on 4th July 1896 at Batley Parish Church. Henry was born on 30th May 1897 who sadly died January 1904 followed by Frederick who died August 1902.

When the 1901 census was taken Herbert and his sister were living with their father at Common side, Hanging Heaton whilst his step mother was staying with her parents and two children at New Street, Batley.

Herbert was associated with Hick Lane Chapel.

Service Details

Herbert enlisted into the 1st Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry in c. 1908 and served in Singapore and China before the outbreak of war. In August 1914 they were stationed in Singapore and embarked for England on the 27th September and landed at Southampton on 9 November 1914. On 9th November 1914 they moved to Hursley Park and on to Harwich on 18 November returning to Hursley Park on the 17th December 1914 and came under command of 83rd Brigade in 28th Division.

On the 16th January 1915 they landed at Le Havre.

Herbert came home for a few days in January 1915 and once in France sent regular reports to his family.

The first major battle they took part in was the Second Battle of Ypres (22nd April-25th May 1915)

He wrote one to his uncle Mr. J. Priestley of Batley: -

"We have only just come out of the trenches after six days hard fighting. Now we are having five days rest and I can tell we need it, for all the regiment is about half dead, but they did their best when fighting. First of all we had to march about 10 miles before we got to the trenches. The worst part is getting into the trenches, as the Germans are only about a hundred yards from us. We lost five

men going into the trenches, bullets flying in all directions. The Germans have a "starlight" which they send up and they can see everything. What we have to do is keep still and then they might take us for trees. Well, when we get into the trenches it is quite safe if we keep our heads down and keep a good look out before firing. We were in the trenches 24 hours and it was very cold. We were over the boot tops in water. After 24 hours we get 24 hours rest in the back trenches and another regiment takes our place in the firing trenches. Well, the regiment that relieved us lost the firing trenches in the night, so that instead of getting 24 hours rest we had to go and help to get the trenches back. We had set off at about three o'clock in the afternoon and got into a wood until it was dark before we could make a move to the lost trenches. While we were waiting in the wood the Germans got to know our whereabouts and stated shelling us and then we had a fine time. One of the shells dropped just about ten yards from my company. It killed one and wounded about six, so you can tell what we are like. However, we got the trenches alright and when we got into them there were about ten dead Germans there. We had to hold the trenches another three days and lost a number of men. I have seen more this last week than in all the previous years of my life. I could not tell you what it is like. I don't think anyone could realise it without coming out and seeing for themselves—first one getting killed and then another."

He concluded that he was in the best of health. Newspaper reports suggest that Herbert had been wounded and been at a base hospital in France before this battle but had re-joined his regiment. His father, who at the time lived in Broom Street, received the news from the Infantry Record Office at York that Herbert had been killed in action on May 8th 1915. He also received a letter of sympathy from Lord Kitchener.

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

He is remembered with Honour at Hanging Heaton War Memorial (St Paul's) and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of Batley History Group