Reginald Roberts



Rank: - Private

Number: - 7890

Regiment: - Bedfordshire Regiment, 1st Bn.

Killed in Action: - 9/11/1914 Age: 30 years

Cemetery: - Le Touret Memorial, Pas de Calais, France, Panel 10 & 11

Batley Reporter, 18 Dec 1914

Family Details

Reginald was born in Clophill, Bedfordshire the son of Amos and Charlotte Roberts nee Odell who had married in 1880. Charlotte was Amos' second wife, his first wife Ellen Whittamore died in 1877, only five years after their marriage. The 1911 census indicates there were seven children born alive Reginald, Helena 1880, Harold 1882, Abel 1887, Maurice 1891 and Roger 1897 with the possibility of the other being Emily. Clophill is a rural village midway between Luton and Bedford.

In 1881 Amos and Charlotte along with daughter Helena were living at Jaques Lane, Clophill where the predominant industry for the men in the village was agriculture whilst most of the women worked as straw plaiters. Amos worked as an agricultural engine driver (thrashing machine). This was a piece of farm machinery used to separate grain from the straw and the chaff. Charlotte worked as a straw-hat sewer.

The Roberts family was still in Clophill ten years later and Reginald along with Helena, Harold and Abel were amongst this attending Clophill Sunday School, as confirmed in their records. He also attended the Day Schools and in 1893 was amongst the Mixed School Standard 1 prize winners.

In 1897 the family was living over the county boundary in Hertfordshire and Roger was born in the tiny hamlet of Childwickbury. Looking at the Clophill Sunday School records the move took place probably in 1893/4. In 1901 the Roberts family was living at Kenneth House, 58, Hatfield Road, St. Albans. Amos was working as a general labourer but no employment or schooling was recorded for 15-year-old Reginald.

In 1911 Amos and Charlotte are still living in their nine roomed dwelling at Hatfield Road but all the children had now left but they had three boarders with professional occupations. Amos was working as a general labourer employed by the Co-operative stores in Luton. Reginald married Catherine Connelly in Batley in 1909 and in 1911 they were living at Back Richmond Street, Batley. He was working as a teamer for a railway company and she was a rag picker in a woollen mill. In private life Reginald was a highly esteemed member of the Batley Trades and Friendly Club.

Later that year they moved to New Street and in October 1911 their first child, John, was born but sadly died three months later and was buried in Batley cemetery on 16 January 1912. The couple's second son, Maurice, was born on 2 March 1914.

Service Details

Reginald had served for three years as a Regular soldier and was a Reservist when war broke out. He went to France in early 1914 disembarking on 16 August and serving with the 1st Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment.

The 1st Bedfordshires were engaged at the Battle of Mons in August 1914 and also fought during the stand at Le Cateau. After service during the battles of the Marne and Aisne they were rushed north to Flanders and were also involved in the Battle of La Bassee, followed by the First Battle of Ypres. It was in the course of this latter battle that Reginald died.

On 4 September, in a letter which was delayed in transit, Reginald wrote: -

We have been having it very rough this last week or two, but I think things are quietening down now. We are having splendid weather out here...It is a shame to see the people moving from their houses leaving everything behind, so that they can get to a place of safety before they are attacked...The only acquaintance that I have seen since I came out here is one of John Trainer's lads, who is in the York Regiment. I saw him after we had that big battle on the 25th. It was awful to witness. But I think we shall not be long before we get back to old England.

The Batley Reporter and Guardian in their 16 October 1914 edition published a further letter from him to Catherine: -

We have moved again from those trenches in which we have been lying for three or four weeks, but where we are going none of us know, for everything is kept very secret. Anyone who wants to see sights should come to this part of the world. We are getting some very cold nights and I don't care how soon this job is over. We have been in five or six tight corners up to the present, but, thank God, we have pulled through. How did you enjoy the feast? We had ours in the trenches for eight days, so you can bet we enjoyed it.

The 1st Bedfordshire's Unit War Diary records that at 5 pm on the 6 November 1914 the Battalion moved by foot via Ypres and Hooge to trenches in wood south of the road. They relieved the 2nd Bedfordshires in the firing line. Reginald was killed in action on the 9 November 1914.

The Unit War Diary for the 9 November states that:

Sergt. Mart, assisted by Corporal Cyster succeeded in creeping up to a trench occupied by the enemy where 2 machine guns had been previously lost. Found only about 1 German actually with the guns, though adjoining trench, a few yards away in prolongation, was occupied. Sergt. Mart shot the German and guns were safely brought back. A wounded

soldier was found in the trench also. He was brought back by Mart assisted by 2nd Lt. Garrod and others. Mart & Garrod in turns facing enemy to keep their heads down by accurate fire at a few yards range. Battalion thanked in wire from Corps Commander.

The Diary concludes events of the day by saying that about 17 were killed and seven wounded. Subsequent Commonwealth War Grave Commission records show that Reginald was one of 27 with the 1st Bedfordshire Regiment to die on that day.

In December Catherine received confirmation of her husband's death. In November 1917 Reginald's brother Maurice was killed and within days of the Armistice in 1918 her brother John Thomas Connolly was to pay the ultimate sacrifice. Catherine re-married in 1919. Her new husband was John William Gannon and they went on to have two daughters Catherine (known as Kathleen) in 1920 and Mary in 1923.

Reginald was awarded the 1914 Bar with Clasp, Victory and British War Medal. He is remembered at Batley War Memorial, and also three at St. Albans—the Citizens Memorial, the Town Hall (old) Memorial and the Fleetville Memorial (Hatfield Road Cemetery). He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Le Touret Memorial, Pas de Calais, France.

Reginald Roberts did not feature on the St. Mary's War Memorial, but parish priest Father Lee stated in a letter, dated 20 July 1922, that he was one of four men who had died in the War who were husbands of Catholics in the parish.



Researched by Jane Roberts and for further details and acknowledgements please see www.pasttopresentgenealogy.co.uk