William Henry Smith





Rank: - Private

Number: - 15221

Regiment: - Duke of Wellington's (West Riding Regiment) 10th Battalion

Killed in Action by shellfire whilst on a night time working party: - 4th August 1916 aged 37 years

Memorial: - Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France Pier and Face 6 A and 6 B.

Family Details

William Henry was born in c.1877- in Kidderminster the son of Benjamin and Sarah Smith nee Hall who married on 8th September 1867. Emily Ellen was born in 1868 followed by Sarah Ann 1870, John Thomas 1871, Alice 1874, William Henry, Benjamin 1879 and Joseph James in 1881.

In 1881 the family lived at 2, Pleasant Harbour, Kidderminster very near his widowed maternal grandmother 72- year- old Eleanor Hall, a baker living at 56, Stourbridge Street. Benjamin worked as a worsted rug weaver and Emily Ellen was an assistant. Eleanor died in 1882 and within the next decade the family moved to live at 41, Willow Street, Skircoat, Sowerby Bridge, Yorkshire. Benjamin and John Thomas were working as weavers but 15- year- old William, aka, Harry was a printer's assistant. The family was still living in Willow Street a decade later, but William had changed his occupation to become a carpet weaver like his father.

In around 1903 he seems to have been living with Beatrice Alice Darroch. She was also born in Kidderminster, but probably lived in the Batley/ Dewsbury area because a daughter Florence was born in the summer of 1904 in Dewsbury Registration District. Florence sadly died in the summer of 1907, probably in Sowerby Bridge because the death was registered in Halifax. William Henry was born early 1908, but died about a year later both events taking place in the Halifax Registration District.

Leonard Ronald was born on the 27th February 1909 in the Halifax District but before 1911 he had moved with his parents to live at 1, Jerusalem Walk, Kidderminster. William was now employed as a rug weaver for a carpet manufacturer. Bertram was born on the 12th June 1911 in Kidderminster but the birth of another son, Stanley, was registered in the 1st Quarter of 1913 at Dewsbury.

William Henry married Beatrice Alice on 31st August 1912 at Dewsbury Parish Church when they both gave their address as 19, Eastwood's Yard, Granville Street, Dewsbury and his occupation was a weaver.

Before he enlisted, he lived at 136, Halifax Road, Batley and worked for Messrs. Porritt as a rag grinder.

Service Details

William Henry enlisted at Halifax and disembarked in France on the 26th August 1915. The 10th Battalion, Duke of Wellington's (West Riding Regiment) was part of 69th Brigade in 23rd Division and in 1916 they were involved in: -

The Battle of Albert, in which the Division played a part in the capture of Contalmaison (1st July-13th July);

The Battle of Bazentin Ridge (14th -17th July) and
The Battle of Pozieres (23rd July -3rd September)

These were all engagements in the overall Battle of the Somme.

The intimation of his death was in a letter from his Company Sergeant Major saying he had been killed on 3rd August. A field card came through written on that date after this so it was presumed, he had gone into battle immediately after it had been written. The Sergeant wrote: -

"It is with the deepest regret that I write to inform you that your husband was killed in action on the night of the 3rd August. He was one of a number of men from my Company who had to go on a working party that night and they had three casualties before they got back. He was one of them, but as yet I do not know full particulars."

Second Lieutenant Redington who was a nephew of Mr. & Mrs. E.H. Crow of Staincliffe wrote: -

"The unpleasant task of informing you of the death of your husband falls to me as his platoon commander. On the night of August 3rd, he was one of a working party of 100 men who had gone up into the trenches to improve one of our captured positions. Whilst there a shell landed in the trench. Immediately it had burst some of our men rushed to see what had happened. Your husband was buried but the party soon dug him out. He was quite dead, having been hit by some of the shell. It was impossible to get his body out of the trenches and he was buried near the spot where he was killed. Private Smith was one of the best men in my company. For a man of his age he often surprised me with the amount of energy he possessed. He completed nearly a year of active service and during the last month he survived no fewer than three attacks in the Great Push. He

was always a willing worker, and he was a man on whom I could rely. His loss to us although great, cannot be nearly so hard as for you and I wish to convey to you, his family and his relatives my sincere sympathy in your bereavement. You will have some little consolation in knowing that he was well thought of by the officers and N.C.O.'s in this Company and that he gave his life for his country in a great cause."

His brother's- in- law were also in the forces, Driver Ernest Cooke was with the Royal Field Artillery and Lance Corporal Arthur Cooke was with the Royal Engineers. Their mother also lived in Halifax Road, Batley.

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

His death is officially recorded by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission as taking place on the 4th August 1916.

He is remembered with Honour at Christ Church Staincliffe; Staincliffe C. of E. Junior School and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group

STAINCLIFFE MAN BURIED.

After Surviving Three Attacks in the Great "Push."

The Price of Improving our Captured Positions.

Private Wm. Henry Smith, Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment, of 136, Halifax Road, Staincliffe, is reported dead. He was 37 years of age and leaves three children. Before enlisting last January he was employed by Messrs. Porritt as a rag-grinder. The first intimation of his death was a letter from his Company-Sergt.-Major, saying he had been killed on August 3rd. A field card written on that date has since come through, so it is presumed that Private Smith went into action immediately after he had written the card, and was killed. The Sergeant wrote:—"It is with the deepest regret that I write to inform you that your husband was killed in action on the night of August 3rd. He was one of a number of men from my Company who had to go on a working party that night, and they had three casualties before they got back. He was one of them, but as yet I do not know full particulars."

Second-Lieut. Redington, who happens to be a nephew of Mr. and Mrs. E. H. Crow, of Staincliffe, writes:—"The unpleasant task of informing you of the death of your husband falls to me, as his platoon commander. On the night of 3rd August he was one of a working party of 100 men who had gone up into the trenches to improve one of our captured positions. Whilst there a shell landed in the trench. Immediately it had burst some of our men rushed to see what had happened. Your husband was buried, but the party soon dug him out. He was then quite dead, having been hit by some of the shell. It was impossible to get his body out of the trenches, and he was buried near the spot where he was killed. Private Smith was one of the best men in my company. For a man of his age he often surprised me with the amount of energy he possessed. He completed nearly a year of active service, and during the last month he survivied no fewer than three attacks in the Great Push. He was always a willing worker, and was a man on whom I could rely. His loss to us, although great, cannot be nearly so hard as for you, and I wish to convey to you, his family, and his relatives my sincere sympathy in your bereavement. You will have some little consolation in knowing that he was well thought of by the officers and N.C.O.'s in this Company, and that he gave his life for his country in a great cause."

Private Smith's widow has also two brothers in the forces, Driver Ernest Cooke of the R.F.A., and Lance Corpl. Arthur Cooke of the Royal Engineers, sons of Mrs. Cooke, of Halifax Road, Staincliffe.