# George Sykes






John Edward Swift Sykes of Market Street, Slaithwaite Born March 29th 1855 Died June 29th 1893 "Thy Will be Done"

Sgt George Sykes K, O.Y.L.I. who died March 11th 1918 from wounds received in Action aged 33 years

Alice Maud Walker died December 23rd 1934 aged 69 years

**Rank**: - Sergeant

**Number**: - 200585

**Regiment/Battalion**: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 1/4th Battalion

**Died of Pyaemia**: - 11th March 1918 at Leeds Infirmary aged 33

**Cemetery: -** Slaithwaite B 132

## Family Details

George was born at Blakestone, Slaithwaite on 16th October 1884 the son of John Edward Swift Sykes and his wife Alice Maud (nee Pashley). He was baptised at St. James, Slaithwaite on 5th July 1885 when his father was described as a manufacturer.

In 1891 the family was living at Market Place, Slaithwaite when his father said he was living on his own means. His brother Frank was born in July 1889 and the family had two generals live in servants. Jane Elizabeth was born in May 1891. Sadly, John died in June 1893 and his mother married a 21-year-old medical student, William Walter Walker on 6th November 1895. Their daughter, Mary Alice, was born in Slaithwaite on 30th May 1896.

Before 1901 the family had moved to Batley living in Purlwell Lane and William was described as a physician and surgeon. John was an addition to the family in 1901 and the family employed one domestic servant.

In 1911 the family was living at 63, Talbot Street where Dr. Walker had a practice. George was working as an upholsterer on his own account.

George was a member of Batley "Nomads" which was a popular rambling club and also the captain of Batley Rugby Football Club who played at Carlton Grange.

## Service Details

George joined the Duke of Wellington's, West Riding Territorial s on 1st July 1910 and became a sergeant. At the outbreak of war he joined the 1st/4th Kings' Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

The details of his early military records have survived and he was described as being a self-employed upholsterer, was 5 feet 6 inches tall, with good vision and good physical development. He did his week s annual training in September 1910, the first week in August 1911 at Ripon and at Strensall in July 1912. He was discharged from the Territorial Force on the 1st July 1914 after exactly four years' service. He re-joined into the 1/4th K.O.Y.L.I. at the outbreak of war.

He was in training with the battalion at Doncaster and Gainsborough before leaving for France on the 14th April 1915.

On Friday 19th February 1915 the soldiers were near four deep ponds or gymes near the River Trent and they were instructed to build a raft to carry themselves and their equipment to the other side. These were similar to a village duck pond. About 40 men in full kit boarded the raft and they punted free of the bank, some of the men laughing and waving. Within seconds and only a few feet from the bank the fragile raft capsized and about 25 men were plunged into the cold water. Men on the bank dragged wet and gasping men from the pond, others took off their kit and dived in to try to rescue their comrades. George Sykes was one of these men. Later he wrote: -

*"I got my pack and coat off, dived into the water and tried to save the poor chaps. It was awful!! We could not tell who was drowning or who was wanting help and we got two out just in time. We had a job to get them round, but we succeeded just in time."*

Nineteen-year-old Private Creighton from Batley was brought back to life by artificial respiration but seven KOYLI men were drowned local men being Edmund Battye aged 22 from Batley, John Myers from Dewsbury and William Dent from Churwell. Two others were from Wakefield, one from East Ardsley and the other from Harrogate.

Within days of the tragedy the KOYLI's were moved from Gainsborough to York.

The battalion landed at Boulogne-sur-Mer as part of the 3rd West Riding Brigade in the West Riding Division in April 1915.

The Division concentrated in the area of Estaires-Merville-Neuf Berquin. They took a minor part in the Battle of Auber's Ridge on 9th May and the defence of the first phosgene attack in December 1915.

In July 1916 they fought at the Battle of Albert, Bazentin Ridge (14-17th July) and the Battle of Pozieres Ridge which began on the 23rd July.This battle was in the area between the River Ancre and the village of Bazentin the Petit with the village of Bazentin in the middle of the line.

On 23rd July 1916, when his unit had penetrated the German second line, he was struck down on the battle field when a bomb exploded and after twice making attempts to walk, he was carried on the back of a fellow soldier who took him some way to safety. To add to his difficulties, he was struck by shell and suffered concussion, when being carried off the field, on a stretcher, for treatment. In all

probability the cigarette case he carried in his breast pocket helped to save him from serious chest injuries. A bullet went through the hinge of the case into the wall of the chest. He sustained compound fractures of his left leg and shrapnel wounds on his left leg, body and both hands. He was treated for a week at a Canadian Military Hospital in Etaples before being transferred to a Cambridge Military Hospital.

Dr. Walker, his step father, visited him in Cambridge and it was reported that he told him that the concussion had blown him and he thought his last moments had come. Dr. Walker found him in cheerful spirits, despite of great sufferings and lack of sleep; he had however hit quite a few of the enemy before he was hit. There were no fewer than 30 or 40 shot marks on his hands the result of being peppered by shrapnel. For a long time, he was in a critical condition but in February 1917 he was transferred to Beckett Park Hospital, Leeds where he stayed until September. He went home for three weeks in September 1917 before being admitted to Leeds Infirmary.

Following the wounds pyaemia or blood poisoning developed and although a strong and robust man George could not survive. He had a total of sixteen operations. He died on Monday, 11th March 1918 after haemorrhaging and was interred at Slaithwaite Cemetery three days later. The Vicar, Rev. W.H. Verity performed the ceremony.

His brother, Captain Frank Sykes R.A.M.C., who had been in France since 1st December 1914, was at this time in charge of an ambulance train.

George was awarded the 1914-1915 Star, British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at Batley War Memorial, Slaithwaite War Memorial and St. Andrew's Purlwell, Batley.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group