Percy Thewlis





Rank: - Private

Number: - 35363

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 8th Battalion

Killed in Action: - 28th September 1917 aged 20

Memorial: - Tyne Cot, West Vlaanderen, Belgium L.D.5

Family Details

Percy was born in Batley on the 26th April 1897 the son of Sam and Lucy Thewlis nee Whitley. He was baptised at Batley Parish Church on 3rd March 1909 when the family lived at 63, Wellington Street, Batley which was a bakers and confectioners shop.

In 1901 he was living with his parents at 9, Suffolk Street, Batley and his father was described as a Journeyman baker (bread maker).

His grandfather, also called Sam, who was born in Upperthong near Holmfirth had followed six of his brothers to live in Batley but he became a baker rather than working in the mills. Sam followed his father into this trade and when Sam (senior) died in 1903 the family moved to live in Wellington Street, Batley.

Percy had a brother, John, who was born in 26th September 1900 but died 2 days later. His brother Norman was born on the 7th April 1905.

In 1911 Percy and his family including his paternal grandmother were living at 63, Wellington Street and Percy and his mother were assisting his father in the business. Later this business moved to Henrietta Street, Batley.

Percy attended Batley Parish Church Day Schools and afterwards assisted his father as a baker. He was actively connected to Purlwell Wesleyan Chapel, was a Sunday school teacher and also a former Lieutenant in the Purlwell Boys' Brigade.

Service Details

Percy enlisted in June 1916 and went to the Front in August 1916. The 8th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry came under the orders of 70th Brigade in 23rd Division. The Division fought at the Battle of Pozieres in 1916 followed by the Battles of Flers-Courcelette, Morval and Transloy in which the Division played a major part in the capture of Le Sars.

Between 7th -14th June 1917 they fought the Battle of Messines which was a *brilliantly planned and executed attack that resulted in the capture of the Wytschaete-Messines ridge south of Ypres, a feature that had given the British problems since 1914 and which was important to hold for future offensive operations in Flanders. It commenced with one of the heaviest artillery bombardments of the war and the explosion of nineteen enormous and long-prepared underground mines.*

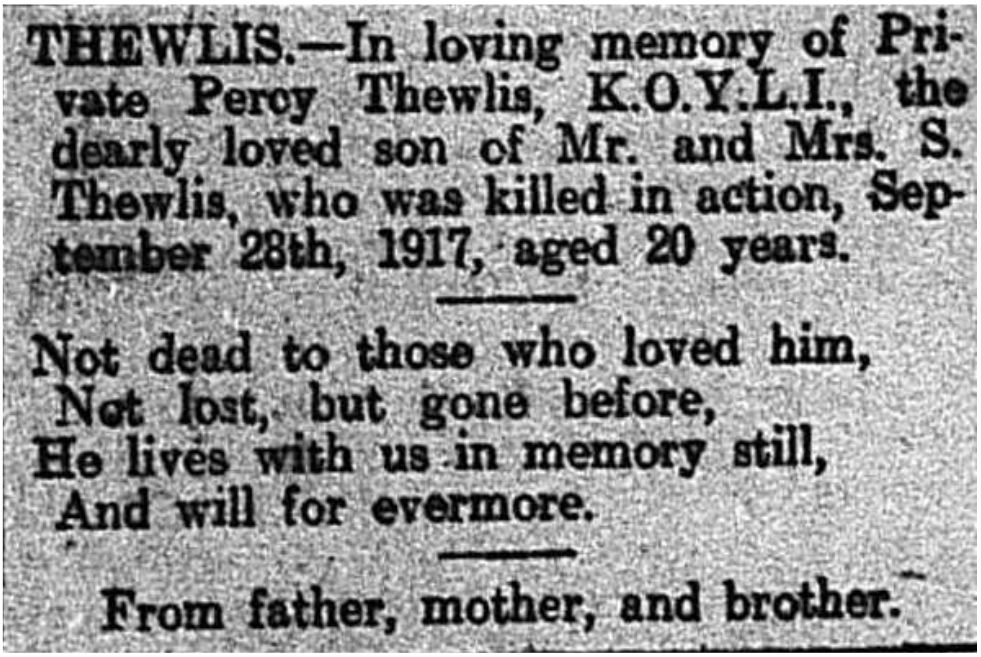
On 31st July the British finally got what they had wanted since 1914, the opportunity to attack at Ypres and breakout of the confines of the salient of trenches around it. Often known as the Third Battle of Ypres or Passchendaele, the offensive began with encouraging gains but terrible summer weather soon bogged it down. By August the offensive was clearly failing in its objectives and had descended into attritional fighting. New techniques by both sides led to agonisingly slow forward movement for the British, at enormous cost in casualties to both sides. Percy was wounded once during all these battles.

Percy would have taken part in the Battle of the Menin Road which started on the 20th September and was a phase of the above Battles of Ypres. This lasted until the 25th September.

His parents received a letter from an officer which said:-

"*Your son was killed in action at about 5.30 am during a counter attack by the Germans. He was a Lewis gunner and was firing his gun when a shell dropped close and killed him. His death was instantaneous. He was one of the very best machine gunners and was extremely popular with both the officers and men of his section."*

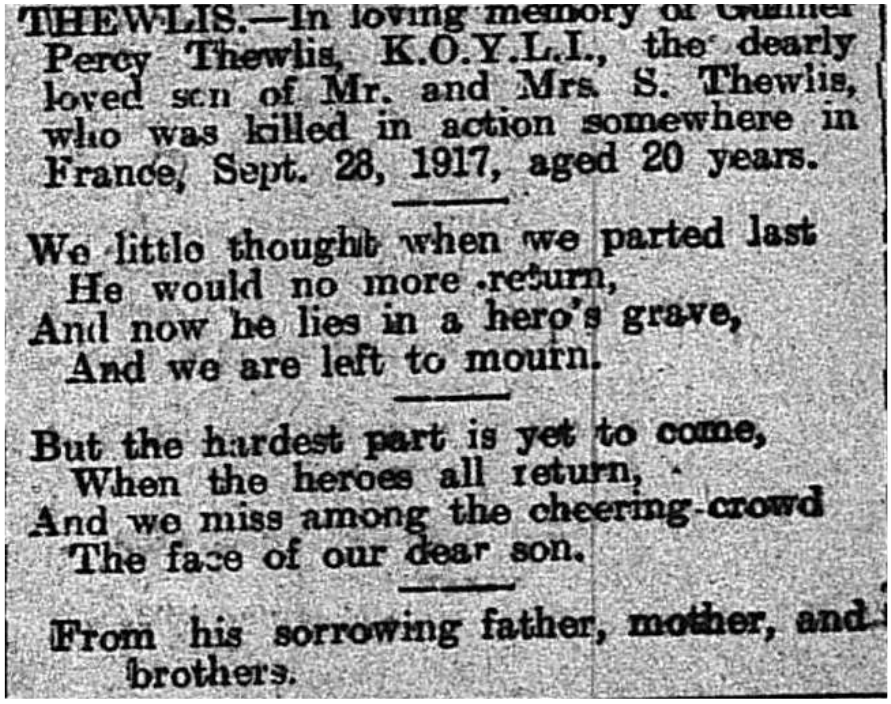
The following appeared in the Batley News on 27th October 1917.



THEWLIS.—In loving memory of Private Percy Thewlis, K.O.Y.L.I., the dearly loved son of Mr. and Mrs. S. Thewlis, who was killed in action, September 28th, 1917, aged 20 years.

Not dead to those who loved him,
Not lost, but gone before,
He lives with us in memory still,
And will for evermore.

From father, mother, and brother.



THEWLIS.—In loving memory of Gunner Percy Thewlis, K.O.Y.L.I., the dearly loved son of Mr. and Mrs. S. Thewlis, who was killed in action somewhere in France, Sept. 28, 1917, aged 20 years.

We little thought when we parted last
He would no more return,
And now he lies in a hero's grave,
And we are left to mourn.

But the hardest part is yet to come,
When the heroes all return,
And we miss among the cheering crowd
The face of our dear son.

From his sorrowing father, mother, and brothers.

Batley News 27th September 1918

Percy was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at Batley War Memorial and Purlwell Wesleyan Chapel.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group