Edgar Whitaker





Rank: - Private

Number: - 58301

Regiment: - Machine Gun Corps (Infantry) (Formerly 29910 KOYLI) 231st Company

Killed in Action: - 23/11/1917 Age: 24 years

Memorial: - Cambrai Memorial, Louverval, Nord, France Panels 12 and 13

Batley News, 22 Dec 1917, 29 Dec 1917 (photo)

Family Details

Edgar was born in Sowerby Bridge on the 17th January 1893 the son of Sheard and Mary Whitaker nee Hopkin who had married at Christ Church, Staincliffe on the 14th December 1889. Edgar was baptised on the 5th April 1893 at Christ Church, Staincliffe although his Batley born parents were living at Sowerby Bridge at the time.

Sheard was a spring mattress maker and seemed to move around Yorkshire, he was living at 4, Cross Woodview Street, Hunslet Leeds with his wife and children Maud born 1891, Edgar, and Emma, 1896 when the 1901 census was taken. Annie had sadly died in April 1900 aged 20 months. Willie was born in Hunslet before the family returned to Batley to live at 1, Fox's Buildings, Staincliffe in a two roomed home. Sheard had become an oil extractor before 1911.

Edgar had attended Staincliffe Church Day Schools, according to the Batley News, and Staincliffe Baptist Church and Sunday School where he was a member of the Young Men's Bible Class. He was employed as a cloth miller at Messrs. J.T. & J. Taylor's Cheapside Mills and he was also a member of Staincliffe Tent of Rechabites.

Service Details

Edgar enlisted in May 1916 and went to Palestine in May 1917 according to reports in the Batley News.

The Batley News and some army sources record Private Edgar Whitaker serving in Egypt and Palestine with the 231st Machine Gun Corps (Infantry). This was part of the 234 Brigade of the 75th Division in the WWI Sinai and Palestine Campaign 1915-1918.

The Battle of Jerusalem was fought between the British Empire's Egyptian Expeditionary Force and the Ottoman Empire. Fighting for the city developed from 17 November 1917 and continued until Jerusalem until 30 December 1917. The City could only be secured if the British could attack and capture the outlying village of Nebi Samwill which was attacked between 17 and 24 November 1917.

The village was captured by the 234th Brigade on 21 November 1917 but it still had to be defended against Ottoman counter-attacks almost every day. Unsupported by their heavy weapons the British infantry could not break

through the main Ottoman defensive line and the attack failed to reach its objective Jerusalem. It would be another month before British troops captured Jerusalem.

It is probable that Edgar Whitaker was killed in the Battle of Nebi Samwill on 23 November 1917.

Soldiers effects for Edgar £6 17s 10d left to his father next of kin Sheard Whitaker. The record states he was killed in Palestine.

In these circumstances how can it be that Edgar Whitaker killed near Jerusalem is remembered on the Cambrai Memorial in France? The Battle of Cambrai raged in France between 20 November and 6 December 1917 at the same time as the British were fighting for Jerusalem. Both conflicts saw the deaths of many soldiers attached to Machine Gun Companies.

Evidence of original manuscript notes in the "burnt papers" collection (available on Find My Past) alphabetically lists six names of MGC men who were killed in action. All six men died in "F&F" (France and Flanders). The MGC company number is also shown and five of those men were serving in MGC companies which fought at Cambrai. The exception is Edgar Whitaker, of 231st company, which was fighting in Palestine and not France.

Thus, the author of that listing 100 years ago made a mistake which, had there been a body found, would not have been made.

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

He is remembered with Honour at Batley War Memorial.

Thanks to Alan Howe



Researched by members of
Batley History Group