Robert Wilkinson





Rank: - Able Seaman

Number: - Tyneside /Z/8181

Regiment: - Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve Drake Btn .R.N. Division

Killed in Action: - 30th December 1917 aged 28 years

Cemetery: - Marcoing British Cemetery, Nord, France. 11. F.1

Family Details

Robert was born in Batley in c.1889 the son of Nelson and Elizabeth Wilkinson (nee Ramm). Nelson had married Elizabeth Ramm in Norfolk in the last Qtr.of 1880.She came from Wells, Norfolk. In 1881 they were living at Victoria Street, Carlinghow and Nelson was described as an iron, coal and lime merchant.

George Leonard was born in Batley in 1881 followed by Beatrice Mary in 1882, Harry Sinclair 1883, Nelson Burrell 1884, Sarah Ellen in 1887 and Anne who died aged 3 weeks in July 1890.

Robert was the youngest surviving child of this couple and in 1891 the family was living at 10, Coal Pit Lane, Batley and Nelson was employed as a book keeper.

Joe was born in August 1891 but sadly died in July 1892 aged 11 months.

The family moved to Garden Street; Batley before Alfred Michael Wyndham was born in September 1892 but he died aged 8 weeks in late November 1892.

Elizabeth died in October 1892, and Nelson was left to bring up his young family and before 1901 he had taken them to live at 53, Carlinghow Lane, Batley where he was described as a woollen cloth merchant working on his own account.

Robert went to work as a domestic gardener and was a boarder at the home of John William Loyn of 25, Tordoff Place, Kirkstall, Leeds when the 1911 census was taken. His eldest brother, George Leonard had moved to Arnside, Westmorland where he was a fishmonger and poulterer working on his own account.

Before he enlisted, Robert went to work for his eldest brother George, in Westmoreland who was in business as a fishmonger and game dealer.

At the time of his son's death Nelson was living at 8, Crowther Street, Healey, Batley.

Service Details

Able seaman Robert enlisted in about 1915 and after going to sea went to France around July 1916.

At the time Robert enlisted the Division was taking part in the Gallipoli campaign but by the end very few men with sea service remained.

The Division transferred from the authority of the Admiralty to the War Office on 29 April 1916 in France. For the first time, the Royal Naval Division became a true Division with its own artillery and support services. The Royal Naval Division when under the command of the Admiralty observed naval traditions which contributed to tensions e.g. the RND used naval ranks, they flew the White Ensign and were allowed to grow beards and they remained seated during the toast to the King's Health.

It was re designated as the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division on 19 July 1916. The Division moved to France, arriving Marseilles 12-23 May 1916, after which it remained on the Western Front for the rest of the war and took part in the following engagements:

The Battle of the Ancre, a phase of the Battles of the Somme 1916 (13-18 November 1916), Operations on the Ancre (January-March 1917), Second Battle of the Scarpe (23-24 April 1917), in which the Division captured Gavrelle

The Battle of Arleux (28-29 April 1917), a phase of the Arras Offensive

The Second Battle of Passchendaele (26 October – 10 November 1917), a phase of the Third Battles of Ypres 1917.

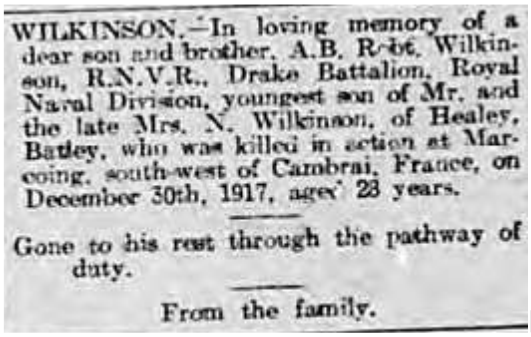
On November 6th the Canadians were finally to take the ruins of the village of Passchendaele. On November 10th an attempt to progress further was made but the Third Battle of Ypres was ended by Haig. The Royal Naval Division was withdrawn from the frontline.

After Ypres the Royal Naval Division was incorporated into the Third Army. On December 30th 1917 the division found itself west of Cambrai near Flesquieres on a ridge which became known as the Welsh Ridge, and did not get a peaceful New Year celebration there. The hill was a bulge in the British frontline, a part of the Hindenburg line taken from the Germans after the battle for Cambrai in late November 1917.

The Germans decided to straighten this vulnerable bulge so the Royal Naval Division was on the defensive for two days rather than on the attack. It was a localised trench battle which claimed many casualties.

They saw action of Welsh Ridge (30 December 1917), subsequent to the Cambrai operations and this is where Harry would have been killed.

At the time of his death Private Harry Wilkinson was serving in Italy, Gunner George Wilkinson R.F.A. and Cpl. Nelson Wilkinson was both stationed in England.



WILKINSON.—In loving memory of a dear son and brother, A.B. Robt. Wilkinson, R.N.V.R., Drake Battalion, Royal Naval Division, youngest son of Mr. and the late Mrs. N. Wilkinson, of Healey, Batley, who was killed in action at Marcoing, south-west of Cambrai, France, on December 30th, 1917, aged 23 years.

Gone to his rest through the pathway of duty.

From the family.

Batley News 4th January 1919.

He is remembered with Honour at Cross Bank Wesleyan Chapel, Christ Church, Staincliffe, Batley War Memorial and Marcoing British Cemetery, France.

Thanks to War Time Memories Project.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group