Joseph “Joe” Woodhead





Rank: - Private

Number: - 3/697

Regiment: - King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 2nd Battalion

Missing, presumed Killed in Action: - 7th May 1915 aged 22

Memorial: - Ypres (Menin Gate), West Vlaanderen, Belgium Panel 47

Batley News, 26 Feb 1916 (photo). Batley Reporter, 28 May 1915

Family Details

Joe was born in Charlton Brook, Ecclesfield in c 1891 the son of John and Elizabeth Woodhead (nee Myers). The couple had married at Kirkburton on the 22nd August 1874. John came from Huddersfield and Elizabeth from Ecclesfield.

In 1901 his family which comprised of John, Mary (1874), James (1879), Fanny (1883), Herbert (1888), Samuel (1890) Joe, Priscilla (1893) and nephew John (1898) was living at 1, yard 2, Dark Lane, Batley.

There had been other siblings, Annie died in March 1877 aged 2 years Wilfred died January 1882 aged 1 year 5 months and John in 1882 aged 6 weeks. Elizabeth also had a son John Vincent Myers in 1873 before her marriage.

Elizabeth, his mother, died in December 1898 at 10, Harrisons Yard, Dark Lane, Batley. His father was a coal hewer.

Fanny married Arthur Henry Hodgson in 1906 and in 1911 John, Mary, Priscilla and nephew John were living with the couple and their 4-year-old son Jack in a tree roomed home at 48A Dark Lane, Batley.

Joe, James and Herbert were lodging with their aunt Ada Myers, the wife of John Vincent, in Ecclesfield in 1911 and were all miners.

John died in September 1914 at 9, New Street, Batley.

Joe at one time attended Hick Lane Chapel but his brothers James and Herbert attended Purlwell Wesleyan Chapel. All three, according to the Batley News, were formerly miners at Soothill.

It would appear that the family never lost Elizabeth's ties with Ecclesfield and often returned to Charlton Bank although Batley was their permanent home.

Service Details

Joe had finished seven years' service the weekend war broke out in August 1914. The 2nd Battalion was part of 13th Brigade in 5th Division and were at Dublin when war broke out. The landed at Le Havre on the 14th August 1914. They were temporarily under the command of 28th Division between 23rd February and 7th April 1915.

The battalion fought at the Battles of Mons, Le Cateau, Marne, Aisne, Les Bassee, Messines and the 1st Battle of Ypres in 1914.

Joe Woodhead enlisted at Wakefield and disembarked on the 11th of November 1914. James and Herbert also enlisted, James with the K.O.Y.L.I. and Herbert with the North Lancashire Regiment. Herbert served in the Dardanelles.

Herbert wrote home to their sister Mary Woodhead with tales of Turkish women snipers and the fact that the Turks could have many wives. One day his company heard a lark for the first time and they stopped to listen to it.

The brothers were referred to in the local press as, 'A worthy family of warriors', as several other close relatives were also involved in the fight for King and Country.

Early in the campaign Joe had his horse shot from under him and also sustained a slight wound to his nose but quickly recovered and returned to duties.

In 1915 they fought at the 2nd Battle of Ypres and the Capture of Hill 60. This battle was fought between 22nd April and 25th May for the strategic town of Ypres.

On April 22, 1915, the Germans launched their first and only offensive of the year. Now referred to as the Second Battle of Ypres, the offensive began with the usual artillery bombardment of the enemy's line. When the shelling died down, the Allied defenders waited for the first wave of German attack troops but instead were thrown into panic when chlorine gas wafted across no-man's land and down into their trenches. The Germans targeted four miles of the front with the wind-blown poison gas, decimating two divisions of French and Algerian colonial troops. The Germans, perhaps as shocked as the Allies by the devastating effects of the poison gas, failed to take full advantage, and the Allies managed to hold most of their positions.

A second gas attack, against a Canadian division, on April 24, pushed the Allies further back, and by May they had retreated to the town of Ypres.

A friend Private G.W. Kirk wrote to his family: -

"I am very sorry to hear my old pal, Joe, is missing. We went together nearly the whole way then I fell in a hole and when I got out, I started to shout for Joe, but no Joe came. When we had a roll call, he was not there to answer to his name. I

have asked everyone who knew him, but they all say the same thing- they had not seen him. The things we have done together this past four months are enough to drive anyone mad and the sooner it is over the better for everyone."

Joe's family did not give up hope that he would be found until Miss Mary Woodhead received a letter in February 1916 from the Infantry Record Office in York: -

"*It is my painful duty to inform you that no further news having been received relative to No. 3/967 Pte. Joe Woodhead, 2nd K.O.Y.L.I. who has been missing since May 7th 1915, the Army Council have been regretfully constrained to conclude that he is dead and that his death took place on May 7th 1915(or since) . I am to express the sympathy of the Army Council in your loss. Any articles of private property left by missing soldiers which are found are forwarded to this office."*

A letter had also been received from Lord Kitchener with an expression of sympathy from the King and Queen.

In an exclusive interview with the Batley News it was reported at this time that his brother James was in training at Nottinghamshire with the K.O.Y.L.I. battalion, Herbert was with the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment in the Near East, John Vincent and Bombardier A.H. Hodgson who had been in the Boer War and had emigrated to Canada and his nephew Stoker John Woodhead was in khaki or navy blue.

Joe was awarded the 1914 Star with clasp, British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

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



Researched by members of
Batley History Group