

Pte. Robert CLEASBY (1886 – 1914)

(West Yorkshire Regiment - Prince of Wales Own)



Robert Cleasby was born in 1886 in Hanging Heaton. He was the son of Charles and Harriet (nee Newsome).

In 1891 he lived with his parents, four brothers and one sister, Beatrice, in Ambler Street, Batley. Robert had a difficult childhood. His father Charles had a drink problem and served several prison sentences for cruelty to his children and neglecting his family. He was always in debt and the children had to fend for themselves.

The oldest boy, James Henry, was a deserter from the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and was sent to prison twice for debts. Another brother, Richard Cleasby, was sent to Calder Farm Reformatory in Sands Lane, Mirfield in 1895, aged 14 years. The school was run on a strict military style basis. He had stolen money and food and had been sleeping rough to avoid his drunken father. He was given four years in the Reformatory but died there only two years later.

In 1897 the mother of the family, Harriet, also died and the two youngest brothers, Robert and Charles Henry, were sent to the Boys Industrial School in York where they appear on the 1901 Census.

The school was associated with the Rowntree Foundation and the boys would have received a good education and be taught Quaker values. The routine and regular meals would have been a far cry from their life in Batley.

By 1911 Robert was a drummer in the Army and stationed in India, having joined in York in 1906 at the age of 19. He served three years in India.

In 1913 Robert married Eva Brown at Christ Church, Staincliffe. She too had known much upheaval in her young life as she lost both her parents when she was only one year old and had lived with several different relatives. At the time of their marriage they were living at Common Road, Staincliffe. Robert was employed at Messrs. John Illingworth and Sons, White Lee.

Robert was reported missing after the Battle of Mons and the authorities wrote to Eva fearing that he now must be regarded as killed in action on the 22nd September 1914.

Eva remarried in 1917 at Broomhill Chapel to Newton Lodge but never had any children. Robert's father, Charles, spent many years in Dewsbury Workhouse where he died in 1919.

Private Robert Cleasby 7602, 1st Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of Wales's Own), is Remembered with Honour at La Ferte-Sous-Jouarre Memorial, France.

Researcher

Susan White, Batley History Group, May 2014