

Pte. John William FIRTH (1893 – 1914)
(King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry)



John William Firth was born in Tong, near Bradford in 1893. His father Joseph Firth was also born in Tong in 1870 and his mother, Elizabeth Graham, was born at Wakefield Road, Bowling, Bradford in 1876.

In 1911 the family are living at Robinson's Yard, Earlsheaton. Joseph is a Miner and John William and his younger brother Walter (b.1897) are both Hurriers. They have 4 younger siblings, Rennie (b.1900), Sarah Ann (b.1904), Harold (b.1907) and Dora (b.1909). Their father, Joseph, had a serious drink problem and at some point between 1911 and 1913 he threw his family out. Elizabeth was granted a Separation Order and took her children to live at 48 Dale Street, Batley Carr. She looked after a Mrs Thrippleton who was an invalid.

Rennie, who was only 12 years old in 1913, had endured harsh treatment by his father and started to mix with the 'wrong' boys. On the 22nd September 1913 he was sent to the local Reformatory at Sands Lane, Mirfield for larceny and received a sentence of five years.

When war broke out John William Firth enlisted at Dewsbury and disembarked on the 1st September 1914. Two months later, on the 1st November, he was killed in action. He was 20 years old. Elizabeth received a letter from King George and Queen Mary expressing their sympathy.

By 1919 Rennie Firth had turned his life round and he too joined the Army. The family were connected with the Salvation Army at Batley, Dewsbury and Birstall.

After the war the Salvation Army at Batley decided to build a new Penitent Form (Mercy Seat), something that would be a memorial to those who had died as a result of the Great War. In August 1925, 233 people attended the unveiling and dedication of the new Memorial Penitent Form.

Private John William Firth 11043, 2nd Battalion, King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry is Remembered with Honour at Le Touret Memorial, Richebourg L' Avoue, near Bethune, Pas de Calais, France.

Researcher

Susan White, Batley History Group, July 2014