

Pte Ernest L. EASTWOOD (1886 – 1915)

(King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry)



Ernest appears on the Batley War Memorial twice, both as ERNEST L. EASTWOOD and ERNEST L. SPEIGHT. However, he started life as Ernest Speight Langley. He was born in Ravensthorpe in 1886 and was christened at the Parish Church there. It is believed that his father must have had the surname Speight.

His mother Hannah had married Charlesworth Langley in 1880. A daughter Ada Ann was born in 1881 but at some point in the mid/late 1880s Hannah was deserted by Charlesworth Langley. He was never seen or heard of again. Fortunately for Ada and Ernest their mother met Joe Eastwood. He was a kindly man who brought them up as his own. Ernest now took the name of his stepfather and he appears on the 1901 census as Ernest Eastwood. Another two daughters Mary Ann and Maud were born into the family.

The 1911 census shows the family living at 26 Brearley Street, Batley. Ernest has now reverted back to Ernest Langley and was a piecener in the local mill. Joe and Hannah and the two younger girls also worked in the mills. Ada, however, was a Sweet Maker.

Ernest enlisted in Dewsbury in 1914 as Ernest Langley Spaight (note the spelling). His details are given as Private No.3/1349 King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (A Company). He had previously been in the Batley Territorial Department.

Ernest wrote home to his family on a regular basis, but in early 1915 when the family hadn't received a letter for 5 weeks his Brother-in-Law, John William Pickles, wrote to the War Office for news of him. Sadly, they received a letter from the Infantry Record Office in York saying that he had been reported Killed-in-Action on the 2nd February 1915 in Wulverghem, Belgium.

Reports of the time state that in early January his battalion was still being rebuilt from the losses sustained at Ypres in late 1914. Even though it was under strength it had to play a part in occupying the trenches which, in this part of the front, were in an appalling and flooded condition throughout the winter months. On the 20th January 1915 the Battalion were in trenches at Wulverghem. The following day they moved to support billets in Dranouter but by the 23rd they were back in the trenches at Wulverghem. The following day they moved out to billets in Bailleul. On the 28th a draft of 1 officer and 121 other ranks joined his battalion. On the first day of February Ernest moved to the trenches south of Wulverghem (Messines Road) and the following day he was killed in action.

In his last letter home Ernest wrote in rather cheerful tones and was "anticipating a joyful reunion at the conclusion of hostilities". In the letter he said, "When I come home we will have a 'big do'. We will have all the friends there." He also spoke of the trenches and the poor state of his feet due to the cold and rain. He had been up to his knees in the wet and they had been only 50 yards from the German trenches. They were shelled constantly whilst in the trenches and he said he had been lucky as one was killed and several injured. He was hoping to go home on leave for 10 days. He had not previously been wounded despite the fact that he had been at the Front since the early days of the war.

Ernest was an old scholar of the Gospel Hall, Mount Pleasant and his name is on their Roll of Honour. He also appears as Ernest Eastwood on Batley Parish Roll of Honour. A year after his death his family placed a memorial for him in the Batley News; they referred to him as "A Man". In the early 1920s Ada and her husband, John William Pickles, along with their daughters and 'in-Laws' all emigrated to Toronto, Canada.

Ernest's great niece Mary Elders and her husband Joe have visited the area where he died and paid their respects at the Menin Gate at Ypres.

Researcher: Susan White, Batley History Group. (amended March 2015)