

Pte Edmund BATTYE (1892 – 1915)
(King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry)



Edmund Battye was born at Bruntcliffe, Morley in 1892. His birth, however, is registered as Batty. His parents were John Battye and Margaret Fitzpatrick.

The Census details of 1911 show the family living in two rooms at Sheard's Fold in the Ward's Hill area of Batley. John Battye was a rag sorter as was his wife and eldest daughter Nellie. Edmund was a hurrier at Howley Park Colliery and his younger brother Ben was a labourer. The youngest daughter, Ruth, was still at school. Edmund also had a half-brother, John Fitzpatrick.

Edmund was in the Territorial Army before the commencement of WW1. On Saturday 2nd August 1914, 4th KOYLI set off with other local TA battalions to their annual camp in Whitby. Edmund, as a hurrier, worked long hours with low pay and the chance to go to the coast would have been the highlight of his year. The following day it became clearer that there was to be a war with Germany. On Monday the 4th of August orders were received to return to Wakefield in order to be mobilised. From there they moved to Doncaster and by September they were in Sandbeck Park, near Rotherham.

In November they moved to Gainsborough to undertake coastal defence duties in case of a German invasion. Whilst stationed there a tragic incident occurred on Friday 19th February, 1915.

At Morton, near Gainsborough, there were four gyms or deep pools. These pools adjoined the embankment of the River Trent. As part of an exercise to gain experience in bridge building it was decided it would be worthwhile to practice the construction of rafts. About 25 men boarded a raft but the load was too heavy and the movement caused it to capsize. The men were wearing heavy boots and so some were unable to make it to the shore. Seven men drowned, including Edmund Battye.

An inquest was heard the following afternoon where Captain Harold Hirst, the son of G. H. Hirst a Dewsbury factory owner, was questioned at length. He had led the men but due to both his inexperience and that of his men the Coroner concluded it had been a tragic accident. The Coroner also said that the young men may not have died on the battlefield but they had died the death of soldiers in the service of their country.

Edmund was buried in Batley cemetery with full military honours. Thousands assembled to pay their respects. The cortege left the home of his half-brother John Fitzpatrick, (also a serving soldier) who lived at 22 New Street, Batley. Members of the Batley K.O.Y.L.I. marched under the command of Second Lieutenant J. C. Jubb. Other officers from Gainsborough represented Colonel Haslegrave and Surgeon W. H. H. Bennett was also present.

Edmund's coffin was enveloped in the Union Jack and covered with floral tributes. It was carried shoulder high by comrades from Gainsborough and Batley. Sergeant E. Hirst was in charge of the firing party and Father Lea of St Mary's Roman Catholic Church conducted the burial service. The mourners were led by his father John Battye who was now a widower (Margaret, his mother, had died in 1913). At the conclusion of the burial the firing party discharged three volleys and the buglers sounded the 'Last Post'.

Private Edmund Battye 2067, 1st/4th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry is also remembered on the Roll of Honour at St Mary's R.C. Church, Cross Bank, Batley.

Researcher:

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