

Pte. Joe WOODHEAD (1892 – 1915)

(King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry)



Joseph Woodhead (known as Joe) was born in Batley in 1892. His parents were John Woodhead and Elizabeth Myers who married at Kirkburton Parish Church in 1874. John was born in Huddersfield and Elizabeth originated from Ecclesfield.

Joe had a half brother John Vincent Myers (1873), two brothers James (1879) and Herbert (1888) and two sisters Mary (1875) and Fanny (1883). Elizabeth, their mother, died in 1898 aged 46 years.

The 1901 Census shows the family living at No.1, Yard 2, Dark Lane, Batley. John and his son James are coal hewers and Fanny, a woollen weaver. Mary now took on her mother's roll.

By 1911, Joe, James and Herbert were lodging with their Aunt, Ada Myers, in Ecclesfield and were all coal miners. Their father Joseph died in 1912. The three brothers moved back to New Street, in Batley before 1914 and were all working at Soothill Colliery. In their youth they had connections to local Sunday schools - Purlwell Methodist and Hick Lane Methodist.

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

He 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.

Joe had his horse shot from under him and sustained a slight wound but he recovered quickly and soon returned to his duties. However, Mary received a letter from Lord Kitchener with an expression of sympathy from the King and Queen to say that he had been killed in action at the Battle of Loos in May.

She also received a letter from Joe's friend, Private G W Kirk, which was printed in the local paper:

"I am very sorry but it is best you should know that my poor old pal Joe is missing. We were in a charge and me and Joe went together nearly all the way. Then I fell in a hole and when I got out again I started shouting for Joe, but no Joe came. When we came out again we had a roll call, but he was not there to answer to his name. I went to lie down at night but could not sleep for thinking about him and it is nearly sending me mad because we have been great pals all the time we have been out here. The parcel you sent was waiting for him for two days but when he did not come they gave it to me, but I would rather have had my Joe. If I hear anything further I will let you know at once and when you hear anything please let me know. I have asked everybody who knew him but they all say the same thing - they have not seen him. The things we have done this last four months are enough to drive anybody mad and the sooner it is over the better for everybody."

Private Joe Woodhead 3/697, 2nd Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, is Remembered with Honour at Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial. His name also appears on the Roll of Honour at Purlwell Methodist Church.

Researcher

Susan White, Batley History Group, March 2015