

Pte. Willie PHELPS (1890 - 1915)
(King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry)



Willie Phelps was born in 1890 at Howden Clough, Birstall. His parents, Tom Phelps and Rachel Oldroyd, had married at St Peter's, Birstall in 1885. At the time of his marriage Tom was a cloth printer.

Willie had two older brothers Percy (1884), Charlie (1886) and a younger brother Albert (1892). The youngest three in the family were his sisters Ivy (1895) Doris (1899) and Annie (1900). Annie died in 1903. The family lived at the ABC Row in Howden Clough.

Willie's oldest brother Percy married Bertha Mortimer in 1907 and the 1911 Census shows the couple also living at the ABC Row with their two children Edith (1907) and George Arthur (1909).



ABC Row, Howden Clough

Willie Phelps enlisted at Batley in September 1914. He disembarked on the 13th April 1915 and was 'Killed in Action' on the 25th May, 1915. He had been shot through the head during night operations. The following was reported in the Batley News:

"A Howden Clough soldier who has given his life for his country is Private Willie Phelps (25), son of Mr and Mrs Tom Phelps, 175 Leeds Road, who enlisted with his brother after the outbreak of war. He was a well known bowler and accomplished some fine performances for the Howden Clough cricket team, of which he was a popular member. Before his enlistment he was employed at a Woodlesford Colliery. So recently as last Saturday Mr and Mrs Phelps, who are highly respected in the district, received a cheerful letter from their gallant son who explained that he was doing his duty with a good heart, and might be one of the lucky ones to escape from the toll that this terrible war is exacting from our brave men at the Front. A few hours later, however, came the distressing news that he had been 'Killed in Action'. He was ever a cheerful soul and was the life of the platoon to which he was attached. A comrade writes that just before he was shot the deceased was joking with him."

A Mrs Haslegrave, of Holmefield, Wakefield, wife of Colonel Haslegrave (Commander of Private Phelps' battalion) wrote to Mr and Mrs Phelps as follow: "I am most grieved to hear from my husband that your son has lost his life during night operations this last week. Colonel Haslegrave is proud of the way his men behaved and much regrets the loss of your son. Do let me know if I can be of any assistance.

All four of the Phelps brothers took part in WW1 but Percy, Charlie and Albert returned home safely.

Private Willie Phelps 2664, 1st/4th Battalion, King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry is Remembered with Honour at White City Cemetery, Bois-Grenier, France. His name also appears on the Roll of Honour at St Peter's Parish Church, Birstall.

Researcher:

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