

Sapper William McMANUS (1884-1916)
(132062, 252nd Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers)

William McManus was born in Batley in May 1884 to parents Thomas and Mary. The family were recorded as McMANNIS on the 1891 Census and were living in a one room house at 88, New Street, Batley. At this time six year old William had siblings Sarah aged 11, Thomas 3 and John 9 months. Their father was working as a Coal Miner.

By the 1901 Census they had moved to a three room house at 38, Peel Street, Batley as there were now another two siblings, James aged 9 and Marguerite 2. Sixteen years old William was now working as a Hewer in a coal mine.

Unfortunately, in June 1907, William served 10 days in prison after being sentenced at Dewsbury County Court for a debt offence.

His family were still living at 38, Peel Street at the time of the 1911 Census, but William was no longer residing there.

William was working as a miner at Mitchell Main Colliery in Darfield, near Barnsley when he enlisted (in Darfield) on 22 September 1915 and he gave his address as 26, Sealdale Road, Darfield. The following day a character reference written from the colliery (where he had been working for two years) in support of his enlistment application states, "... we have always found him to be a good worker & thoroughly used to any pit work he took in hand."



Sapper 132062 William McManus, 252nd Tunnelling Company.

Photo courtesy Barnsley War Memorial Projects.

From the Darfield Main Colliery WW1 Memorial
in Darfield Village Working Men's Club.

On enlisting William was 31yrs and 4 months of age, measured 5ft 6¼ins, weighed 148lbs and had brown hair. He enlisted as a Tunneller's Mate at 2s 2d per day and named his father, Thomas, of 38, Peel Street, Batley as Next of Kin.

He embarked on 4 October 1915 and on 9 October was transferred to 252 Tunnelling Company. On 6 November he was designated Remustered Tunneller and Sapper with the Royal Engineers.

In early November 1915, 252nd Tunnelling Company arrived in the Beaumont Hamel Sector of the Somme region of France, approx. 3 miles from the town of Albert, to commence operations. For a number of months William was engaged in the dangerous work of digging tunnels under enemy lines through the chalk sub-strata. German soldiers were also similarly engaged and huge mines were regularly exploded to destroy opposing tunnels and positions.

On 1 March 1916 at 11.57am the enemy detonated a large underground chamber destroying 62 feet of a 252 Company gallery. Sapper William McManus and two colleagues were working at the face and were buried by the explosion. Their bodies were eventually brought out and were buried at Auchonvillers Military Cemetery, Somme.

A memo from the War Office in London dated 9 June 1916 to Royal Engineers, Chatham, requested, "... any articles of personal property now in your possession belonging to 132062 Sapper William McManus, 252nd Company Royal Engineers, should be dispatched to Mr Thomas McManus, 38 Peel Street, Batley, Yorkshire. Any medals granted to the deceased should be sent to the same person."

Sapper 132062 William McManus of 252nd Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers, is Remembered with Honour at Auchonvillers Military Cemetery, Auchonvillers, Somme, France.

His name also appears on WW1 Memorials in Darfield All Saints Church, Darfield Village WMC and Darfield Main Colliery.

Researcher:

Kenneth Fedzin for Project Bugle. January 1916.