

Pte. James William BOOTH (1886 – 1917)

Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)



James William Booth was born on 5th April 1886. His father was John Booth and his mother Emma Booth (nee Ramsbottom). He was baptised at St Peters Church in Birstall on the 20th October 1886. The family was living at Carr Street, Birstall and John was working as a cloth weaver.

The Census of 1891 found the family living with Emma's widowed father, William Ramsbottom, at Back Carr Street, Gomersal. James was now 5 years old. John and Emma had had two further children, Bertha (3) and Thomas Taylor (2 months).

At the census of 1901, the family had moved to Batley. James was now 14 and working as a machine minder in a print works. His father had changed jobs and was now a 'fried fish fryer' in a fish and chip shop on Birstall High Street. Two further children had been born, Herbert (3) and Arthur (11 months).

James attended the Birstall Central Wesleyan School (now the Birstall Academy). He was working at the age of 14 (if not before), initially as a machine minder in a print works and at the time of his enlistment as a cloth raiser at Messrs. Brook, Jubb and Co. at the Union Mills. In-between he had worked at Messrs. R. Dewhurst and Co. fabric printing works.

James and his family had strong links with the Wesleyan faith. He had attended Birstall Wesleyan Sunday School as a child and later in life worshipped at Birstall Wesleyan Church or Chapel.

The 1911 census for John and his family showed the arrival of two further children, Emily (10) and Clifford who was 1 year old. There were now seven children – James William, Bertha, Thomas Taylor, Herbert, Arthur, Emily and Clifford.

By the census of 1911 James had his own family and were living at 7 Woolers Buildings, Upper Batley. At the age of 24 he married Martha Wood (aged 27). The wedding took place on the 14th May 1910, at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Castleford. James was a rag warehouseman, living at 36 Whitaker Street, Batley and Martha was a domestic servant, living at 14 Cliff Street Castleford.

James was now a calico printer's labourer at a fabric printers and he and Martha had had their first child Sarah Edith (11 months). They were later to have another child, John, born on the 15th December 1911.

James enlisted on the 12th August 1915 in the Kings Own Scottish Borderers (Service No: 21291). He was later to move to the 2nd Battalion Scottish Rifles (Cameronians) (Service Number: 40824). He disembarked in France on the 19th December 1915, presumably after a few months basic training. James was wounded once – his hand had been torn by barbed wire. On a visit home on leave he was said to have brought his children a toy bus filled with iced biscuits.

Sadly, James was 'killed in action' on the 31st July 1917, the first day of the third battle of Ypres. Initially reported as missing, he was eventually declared as killed in action. He was 31 when he died. Shortly before his death (July 16th 1917) he had written home, "We shall not be long before we are in action again, I hope it will not be long before this war is over."

He left behind a wife and two children. It must have been a difficult time for Martha and the children with very little support from the state. James' granddaughter Norma remembers stories of her grandmother taking on work to make ends meet, including helping to deliver babies and laying out people when they had died.

Two of James's brothers, Tom and Herbert (KOYLI), also served in World War One. Herbert was wounded by shrapnel but thankfully both survived the war and returned home.

James William Booth is 'Remembered with Honour' on plaques at Batley War Memorial, Birstall Wesleyan Chapel, Birstall Temperance Hall, Birstall Central Wesleyan School, and is also commemorated on the Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres.



An Abridged version of the full Soldier's Story researched and written by Stephen Walker for Project BUGLE.

Kenneth Fedzin for the Project BUGLE July Library Exhibition