

THE BLEASDALE FALLEN OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

PRIVATE
ERNEST LEO WINDER

1895 - 1918

6TH BATTALION LOYAL NORTH LANCASHIRE REGIMENT
ARMY NUMBER: 24716



DIED OF ILLNESS ON 20TH NOVEMBER 1918
IN MESOPOTAMIA (IRAQ) AND BURIED AT BOMBAY (MUMBAI).



REMEMBERED WITH HONOUR

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Ernest Leo Winder was the son of Ellen Winder, the 17 year old daughter of John and Mary Winder of Blindhurst. Despite the circumstances of his birth, Leo always had a home at his widowed grandmother's farm, at least until 1911. The details of his service in the 6th Loyal North Lancashire Regiment are not known, other than that he would have been involved in fighting in Iraq in 1918. He died of illness on 20th November 1918. Alone of the Bleasdale men who fought in the War, Ernest Leo died outside the Western Front, and is commemorated in a cemetery near Mumbai, India. He was 23 years old.

FAMILY BACKGROUND AND UPBRINGING

Ernest Leo Winder was born on 14th June 1895 to Ellen Winder of Blindhurst, and baptised by the Vicar of Bleasdale the following August. Ellen was about 17, and a single mother. She was the eldest daughter of John and Mary Winder who were farmers. Ellen's father died before 1901, and her mother, Mary, carried on the farm on her own. In 1911 the household at Blindhurst consisted of Mary, her 24 year old son, John, her youngest daughter, Lily, her middle daughter Mary who was living on the farm with her husband and 5 year old son, and Ernest Leo.

Ernest Leo appears to have lived with his grandmother from birth. By 1911 he was described as 'working at home', presumably as a farm hand. His mother was not at the farm either in 1901 or 1911. In 1901 she was described as a 'visitor' at 2, Higher Brock Mill Cottages where Jane Lord, a widow, lived. In 1911 she was working as a housekeeper to Timothy Procter, a miller in Chipping. Five months later, Timothy and Ellen married at St. Eadmer's with Ellen's sister, Lily, acting as a witness. There is no evidence as to whether Ernest Leo remained at Blindhurst after the wedding.

Ernest had started school on 3rd September 1900 together with Walter Bartle Ward, who could have been the Bartle Ward on the Bleasdale 'Those Who Have Served' board. He may not have been a healthy child as he is recorded as having returned to Bleasdale School on 17th February 1903 'after a long illness'.

ENLISTMENT AND DEATH

Ernest enlisted sometime after 1915, as he was not awarded the '15 Star'. At some point he was posted to the 6th Battalion, Loyal North Lancashire Regiment. No details of his army career have survived. However, Karen Macaulay has explained how the battalion came to be in the Middle East and the situation in 1918:

'The 6th Loyal North Lancashire Regiment left England in June 1915 and took part in the operation on the Gallipoli Peninsula. This campaign was not a success and in January 1916 all troops were withdrawn. From here the 6th Loyals were sent to Egypt and after a brief period of duty on the Suez Defences went on to Mesopotamia taking part in operations to relieve Kut Al Imara. Following the capture of Kut the advance to Baghdad began and when Baghdad fell the Division was to take part in the push to Kirkuk. The 6th Loyals were to become one of the battalions which would make up the initial occupying force in this region.'

‘By the middle of 1918 the battalion was in camp at Khalis, moving in October to Abu Saida on the banks of the Diyala River. The War Diary reported in September that an outbreak of influenza had broken out and that there were about 100 cases. On 2nd November the War Diary noted:



“News received on 1st November of an armistice with Turkey. Hostilities cease. Rum issue of 2oz. per man sanctioned.”

British troops entering Kirkuk on 7th May 1918. Was Ernest Winder among them perhaps?

‘At 8.30 p.m. on 11th November the battalion received news that the armistice had been signed and the war was now over on all fronts.

‘Ernest Winder died nine days after the war ended, probably from some type of illness. Deaths from dysentery, malaria and other diseases were common on the front, and of course the influenza epidemic had now begun to take hold. He was 23.’

Ernest would have reached India after an overland journey through Iraq and then by sea to Mumbai (then Bombay), India. Presumably he died in a military hospital and was then buried in a local Mumbai cemetery. However, problems of maintaining the graves satisfactorily in the various cemeteries arose, so it was decided to commemorate the more than 1800 men interred in the area on the Kirkee 1914-18 Memorial instead of in separate graveyards.

On the last Sunday of December, 1918, Ernest’s family and friends arranged a memorial service for him at Bleasdale Church following the official announcement that he had died in India. This was the last time we know of that a memorial service was held in St. Eadmer’s Church for an individual soldier who had been killed in the First World War. It must have been a poignant moment whilst the congregation remembered the young man who had grown up on his grandmother’s farm at Blindhurst, Bleasdale, enlisting and dying ‘in a foreign field that is forever England’ over four thousand miles away.

His mother, Mary, received £37 4s 9d owing to him from the War Office.

He was awarded the Victory and British medals.



The Victory and British medals



References:

The Preston Guardian 4th January 1919 (microfilm, Community History Library, Harris Library, Preston).

For other references etc., see the Acknowledgement Page.