

Private BENJAMIN CLARKE

1st Battalion, Norfolk Regiment. Died 14th May 1917 aged 29



Benjamin Clarke was born in Shotesham and baptised at All Saints Church in August 1887. His father George was a Horse Teamster on a Farm. Benjamin's mother, Hannah, died in 1893 aged 44 and George married again to Agnes Elizabeth Hindle.

In 1891 the family were living with their 7 children at Shotesham Road, Shotesham All Saints. Benjamin was their 6th child.

Benjamin enlisted in Norwich, into the Norfolk Regiment early during WW1, being awarded the 14-15 Star. He entered France on 12th May 1915. He served with the 1st Battalion Norfolk Regiment, which was originally comprised of Regular Soldiers, many of whom died at the start of the War.

He was injured in the neck in September 1915, as recorded in the very large Casualties book at the Norfolk Regimental Museum and then continued to serve throughout the Battle of the Somme with his Battalion.

During this Battle, he was proposed for an award, for his courage at Longueval, being mentioned in The Officers Recommendation for Awards Book, which was indexed also at the Museum.

Fred Clarke, his much younger half-brother, told me (RG) of the day that he walked to Brooke with Benjamin. Benjamin was about to catch the bus back to join his Regiment. He told Fred that he did not think that he would be coming home again.

Benjamin was serving in the Battalion with another Shotesham man, Harry George Mayhew, so would have survived the day when Harry George was killed, 23rd April 1917. Sadly, on 14th May 1917, just a few weeks later Benjamin was reported as having died on or since that date.

The 1st Battalion have a rather strange tradition, to civilian eyes, of recording deaths as Departures and reinforcements as Arrivals. After months of hardship and courage, Benjamin is just recorded, unnamed, as one of three people Missing in the Battalion War Diary of that day.

At the Orchard Dump Cemetery in Arleux-en-Gohelle are graves of unknown Norfolk Regiment soldiers (see below). Benjamin was in Arleux at this time. Benjamin's name is commemorated at The Arras Memorial, France.

