



William Astbury **c.1893 – 1915**

William was born in Liverpool around 1893. He was an orphan who was adopted by Walter and Ada Walton after 1901. Walter Walton was born in Ravensthorpe in 1879 and died in 1948; he was a Coal Miner (Hewer) at the Mirfield Colliery Company. His wife Ada (nee Sheard) was born in Staincliffe in 1877 and died in 1953. They were married at St. Peter's Church, Birstall on 8th October 1898 and had two daughters; Martha Elizabeth, born in 1899, and Louisa, born in 1904.

An article appeared in the Dewsbury Reporter on 26th June 1915 which told much about William. He came to Mr. and Mrs. Walton on license from the Holy Trinity Certified Industrial Schools at 77, Grafton Street, Liverpool. When the Walton family lived in Norristhorpe, William attended the Congregational Sunday schools, where he was very well regarded and received a number of awards; he was also a member of the cricket club and in 1913 received a medal for the best bowling average. When the family moved to 4, Craven Street, Ravensthorpe in 1914, he joined the Ravensthorpe Congregational Sunday schools. When he died, the ministers at both churches spoke well about him in their services.

On the 1901 and 1911 Census Records, the family lived at Norristhorpe Lane; William's occupation was given as a Coal Miner (Hurrier), although the newspaper report after his death described him as a Labourer.

Having been a pre-war Territorial, he enlisted on 14th December 1914 serving as Private 5/5398 in the 1st/5th Battalion Duke of Wellington's (West Riding Regiment) and was sent to the Western Front on 14th April 1915. He was shot in the head whilst on sentry duty on 16th June 1915 near Fleurbaix, France and was buried in Rue-David Military Cemetery, Fleurbaix, Pas-de-Calais, France. William was awarded the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

The newspaper report went on to state that William wrote regularly to his adopted parents. In one letter, he spoke about a bombardment close to their position, '*... what with the shells and the bullets ... we had a devil of a time.*' Then he continued, '*... and as long as I can keep dodging the 'iron rations' – that is the name we give for the shells – I don't mind much.*' William asked his parents to send him a copy of the weekly newspaper. A Lieutenant Sykes wrote to Mr and Mrs Walton to inform them that: "*Pte. Astbury died that morning – June 16th – having been shot in the head whilst on sentry duty. He was buried along with another officer, by his comrades, in a nice little grave near one of the trenches.*"

Fleurbaix is a village about 5 kilometres south-west of Armentieres. Rue-David Military Cemetery lies to the south-east of the village. The cemetery was begun by the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers in December 1914 and closed in December 1917. At the Armistice it contained 220 graves but was greatly enlarged post-war. There are now 898 Commonwealth burials and commemorations of the First World War in the cemetery. 429 of the burials are unidentified.

William is commemorated on the Dewsbury Cenotaph in Crow Nest Park and in the Dewsbury Roll of Honour kept in Dewsbury Central Library and on the Ravensthorpe War Memorial in St. Saviour's Church.

In Memory of

Private

W Astbury

3598, 5th Bn., Duke of Wellington's (West Riding Regiment) who died on 16 June 1915

Remembered with Honour

Rue-David Military Cemetery, Fleurbaix



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission



Headstone photograph by courtesy of Ms. Danielle Roubroeks, Antwerp, Belgium.