



Robert Henry Biggs 1890 – 1916

Robert was born in Dewsbury on 28th April 1890. His father was also Robert Biggs, a labourer born in Balsham, Cambridgeshire 1846 and died in 1923. His mother was Mary Sharp (née Lockwood formerly Ratcliffe) born in Kirkburton in 1852 and died in 1917. They were married on 25th December 1888 at St. John the Baptist Church, Dawgreen, Dewsbury.

They had two other children; Tom, born in 1894 and died in 1894 and Phoebe, born in 1895.

Robert Snr. was married on 21st December 1873 to Annie Eliza Guy (born in 1850, and died in 1885); they had three children. Mary was married on 24th November 1872 to James Ratcliffe (born in 1851 and died in 1888); they had four children.

Robert was educated at Boothroyd Lane Council School and after leaving he became a coalminer. He was also a keen footballer, playing with Boothroyd Clarence and later Moorlands Wesleyans. He was married to Hannah Mary Webster (born in 1891 and died in 1971) on 15th January 1910 at St. John the Evangelist, Church, Dewsbury Moor. On the 1911 Census they were boarding at the house of Robert's half-brother Abel Ratcliffe at 3, West Riding Square, Normanton, Yorkshire along with their daughter Lilian who was born earlier in 1911 but died in 1913. They also had two sons; Arthur, born in 1913 and died in 1914 and Robert Henry, born in 1915. They later lived at 104, Thornton Street, Dewsbury. Hannah was remarried in 1919 to Reuben Harpin (born in 1879 and died in 1928). They had two children; Frances Alice, born in 1920 and died in 1923 and Lucy, born in 1923 and died in 1924. She remarried again in 1951 to John Holdsworth Flathers (born in 1887 and died in 1971).

He enlisted in Dewsbury in February 1915 serving as Private 18255 in the 7th Battalion King's Own Scottish Borderers and was sent to the Western Front on 28th October 1915. On 28th March 1916 he was wounded in France, sustaining gunshot wounds to the left arm and leg and was confined to No. 2 Canadian Hospital at Le Treport on the French coast. He died of his wounds on 18th April 1916 and was buried in a joint grave at Le Treport Military Cemetery, Seine-Maritime, France. Robert was awarded the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Le Treport is a coastal town approximately 30 kilometres north-east of Dieppe. During the First World War, Le Treport was an important hospital centre. No.3 General Hospital was established there in November 1914, No.16 General Hospital in February 1915, No.2 Canadian General Hospital in March 1915, No.3 Convalescent Depot in June 1915 and Lady Murray's B.R.C.S. Hospital in July 1916. These hospitals contained nearly 10,000 beds. No.47 General Hospital arrived in March 1917. There are now 445 Commonwealth burials of the First World War in the cemetery, one of the first three Commission cemeteries to be built after the Armistice.

He wrote the following letter to his father. *"It was about one hour after we came out of the trenches for a month's rest when the Germans blew up two mines and then shelled our trenches for all they were worth. So I made tracks for my little dug-out, but as soon as I got there a shell 'lit' right in front of me and completely buried me, and it is a miracle that I am living at all. I think I have finished soldiering now, because my leg will never be right again".* Despite his ordeal he appeared to be recovering and in good spirits and was looking forward to being in England for his birthday. From his hospital bed he wrote to his wife on 11th April: *"I am taking great pleasure in writing this letter to you, and hope that it will find you and our Robert in the best of health. I am very pleased to tell you I am mending first class. The sisters and doctors are surprised because I am getting on so nicely. I think it must be because I have got good healing flesh. The doctor came in yesterday and started to talk about sending me to England.....so I don't think that I shall be here much longer.... I get eggs for my breakfast, chicken for dinner, and eggs for tea, so you can tell I am all right here. They dress my leg twice in the day and twice at night, so it ought to get on. I have plaster of Paris round my left leg from my hip to my toes. That is so that my leg will set. There are two great wounds just above the right knee, so you can tell they didn't forget to put me out of the war. But I am not sorry it happened, because it was so awful in the trenches. I will tell you a lot of things when we meet. I hope I shall get sent somewhere near, so that you will be able to come and see me. I am longing to see you. I think I shall go mad when I see you".*

Robert 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 Memorial Plaque from Moorlands Wesleyan Methodist Church, now stored in the Resource Centre at Batley Central Methodist Church.

In Memory of

Private

Robert Henry Biggs

18255, 7th Bn, King's Own Scottish Borderers who died on 18 April 1916 Age 26

Remembered with Honour
Le Treport Military Cemetery



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

