



Willie Beckett

1891 – 1915

Willie was born in Dewsbury on 21st August 1891. His father was Walter Beckett, a Teamster in a chemical works born in Thornhill Lees in 1861 and died in 1925. His mother was Sarah Ann (nee Baxter) born in Hunslet, Leeds in 1864 and died in 1936. They were married at Holy Innocents Church, Thornhill Lees on 25th May 1889.

Their other children were; Charles Edward, born in 1893 and Mary Alice, born in 1900.

On the 1901 Census the family lived at Back Albion Street, Ravensthorpe and in 1911 at 450, Huddersfield Road, Ravensthorpe.

Willie was a single man who worked as a Carpet Cleaner for Messrs Jas. Smith and Sons, Dyers and Dry Cleaners in Ravensthorpe.

He enlisted in Mirfield on 16th November 1914 into the 1st/5th Battalion Duke of Wellington's (West Riding Regiment) serving as Private 3450 and was sent to the Western Front on 19th August 1915. His mother received a telegram on 14th December 1915, stating that he was dangerously ill from a gunshot wound to the head, after being shot on 7th December whilst on sentry duty. He was taken to the 14th General Hospital at Wimereux, just north of Boulogne. Sister M. Philips wrote to Willie's parents on 12 December, saying that his condition was very serious. She wrote again the next day to say, *'I am sorry ... your son is worse. He has had several fits and it has been found necessary to operate on his head. There was no improvement.'* He died of his wounds on 17th December 1915, when Sister Philips wrote again to his parents, *'I am sorry indeed to have to tell you that your son died today at 1.10pm. He was quite unconscious and I don't think he suffered any pain ...'* He was buried in Wimereux Communal Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France. Willie was awarded the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Wimereux is a small town situated approximately 5 kilometres north of Boulogne. Wimereux was the headquarters of the Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps during the First World War and in 1919 it became the General Headquarters of the British Army. From October 1914 onwards, Boulogne and Wimereux formed an important hospital centre and until June 1918, the medical units at Wimereux used the communal cemetery for burials, the south-eastern half having been set aside for Commonwealth graves, although a few burials were also made among the civilian graves. Because of the sandy nature of the soil, the headstones lie flat upon the graves. Wimereux Communal Cemetery contains 2,847, Commonwealth burials of the First World War, two of them unidentified. Buried among them is Lt.-Col. John McCrae, author of the poem "In Flanders Fields."

Willie 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 and on the War Memorial in Ravensthorpe United Methodist Church.

In Memory of
Private
Willie Beckett

3450, 1st/5th Bn., Duke of Wellington's (West Riding Regiment) who died on 17 December 1915 Age 24

Son of Walter and Sarah Ann Beckett, of Ravensthorpe, Dewsbury, Yorks.

Remembered with Honour
Wimereux Communal Cemetery



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission



Headstone photograph by courtesy of Tony Emptage.