



John Thomas (Jack) Walker

1897 – 1916

John Thomas, known as Jack, was born in Dewsbury on 25th June 1897. His father was Ephraim Walker, a Mine Fireman born in Howden Clough in 1871 and died in 1947. His mother was Rachael (née Illingworth) born in Dewsbury in 1873 and died in 1908. They were married at St. Matthew's Church, Westtown, Dewsbury on 14th October 1894.

They also had two daughters; Clara, born in 1895 and Laura, born in 1901

In 1901 the family were living at Crofton near Wakefield, but by 1911 Ephraim has abandoned his children, for which he served three terms of imprisonment. Jack was living with his uncle and aunt, Edward and Ann (Annie) Eliza Leak, at Queen Street, Ravensthorpe. Newspapers at the time of Jack's death described Ann, who then lived at Sackville Street, as his adopted mother. Clara is recorded as an inmate of Dewsbury Workhouse and Laura is recorded as the adopted child of a widow, Sarah Ann Brooke at 3, Clarke's Buildings, Ossett.

After leaving school Jack worked as a Porter for the London and North Western Railways at Ravensthorpe and Thornhill station.

He enlisted under his full birth name of John Thomas Walker in the King's Royal Rifle Corps in November 1915 but was soon transferred to the Royal Engineers. He was sent to the Western Front in early 1916 serving as Pioneer 129993 with the 4th Battalion Special Brigade, Royal Engineers. The Special Brigade was formed as a reaction to the use of poison gas by the Germans on the Western Front from April 1915 onwards. These new British Army forces were developed to specialise in the use of sophisticated chemical weapons such as gas cylinders and shells, smoke bombs and flame throwers. He died on 28th June 1916 in the 37th Casualty Clearing Station at Avesnes-le-Comte, France from the effects of gas poisoning, probably from his own front lines and may have blown back when the wind changed direction. He was buried in Avesnes-le-Comte Communal Cemetery Extension, Pas-de-Calais, France. Jack was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

His sister, Clara, who was now in service at De Grey Villa, Grosvenor Road, Batley, was the first family member to receive the news. His aunt Annie was named as his sole beneficiary in the Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects.

Avesnes-le-Comte is a large village in the Department of the Pas-de-Calais, approximately 20 Kms west of Arras and 18 Kms south-east of St. Pol. The village was for some time the VI Corps headquarters. The 37th and 30th Casualty Clearing Stations were there from April 1916, the 42nd in June 1916, and the 41st in January 1917. The communal cemetery contains 2 Commonwealth burials of the First World War, both made in April 1916. Thereafter, burials were made in the extension, which contains 333 graves, 4 of which are unidentified. Most of these were from the 37th CCS which stayed in the village until July 1917.

Jack is commemorated as Jack Walker 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. Saviours Church.

In Memory of
Pioneer

John Thomas Walker

129993, 4th Bn. Special Bde., Royal Engineers who died on 28 June 1916 Age 19

Son of the late Ephraim and Rachel Walker, of Dewsbury, Yorks.

Remembered with Honour
Avesnes-Le-Comte Communal Cemetery Extension



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission



Headstone photograph by courtesy of Richard Houghton.