

THE BLEASDALE FALLEN OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

PRIVATE
JAMES MASON

c.1894 - 1917

3RD BATTALION KING'S OWN
ROYAL LANCASTER REGIMENT

ARMY NUMBER: 34652



(1ST WORLD WAR REGIMENTAL CAP BADGE OF THE KING'S OWN ROYAL LANCASTER REGIMENT KO628/26)

DIED OF ILLNESS ON 24TH OCTOBER 1917



REMEMBERED WITH HONOUR

PRIVATE JAMES MASON c.1894 - 1917
3rd Battalion King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment
Army Number: 34652

James Mason of Caton was the son of a blacksmith. He became a farm labourer and his last job before he enlisted in 1917 was with his uncle, who farmed at Lower Fairsnape, Bleasdale. He was sent to 3rd Battalion, King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment at Plymouth. He may already have been ill before he arrived at the barracks and died six months later in hospital, on 24th October 1917. His grave at Caton Churchyard is marked by a Commonwealth War Graves tombstone. He was 22 years old.

FAMILY AND UPBRINGING

James Mason (junior) was born in Caton in about 1894, the son of James and Isabella Mason. His father, James (senior), was brought up in Hornby and became a blacksmith. He married Isabella, the daughter of Thomas Brewer of Old Brow Top Farm, Quernmore. In 1891, the couple and their 3 older children were living at Dale Head Farm, Caton, with Isabella's older brother, John Brewer, a widower.

Ten years later James senior was working on his own account as a blacksmith at Ivy Cottages, Caton, near the Ship Inn on the main road through the village. By this time 8 out of James' and Isabella's 13 children had been born, among them, James junior. Some time before 1911, James senior moved his home and blacksmith's premises to the nearby 'Old Post Office'. Both houses have now been demolished. The 1911 Census shows that Mr. and Mrs. Mason, 10 of their surviving 12 children, (aged 1 year to 24 years old), an assistant blacksmith and a boarder lived in the 8 roomed house. Neither James junior nor his brother, Richard were recorded as living there.



The Ship Inn, Caton, today.

By the time he was 16, James junior had left his somewhat crowded home, adjacent to the smithy, to work as a farm servant for Samuel Jackson, farmer of Rowton Brook, Quernmore. His older brother, Richard was employed as a cowman at the neighbouring farm, Fell End.

James then moved to Lower Fairsnape Farm, Bleasdale to work for his uncle, Richard Brewer. The Brewers had farmed at Lower Moorhead, Quernmore for some years, but sometime before 1908 the family had moved to Lower Fairsnape. Their youngest son was admitted to Bleasdale School in February of that year at the age of 5.

It could be that James had never been a healthy child. If, as his death from emphysema at the age of 18 suggests, he had lung problems, he may have chosen to work outside in the fresh air, rather than in his father's smoky smithy or a dusty cotton or bobbin mill, the usual employment prospect for a Caton child. First he worked near his brother, and then lived in as a farm servant with his uncle until 1917. Was it a coincidence that he remained in close contact with members of his family? When he enlisted, he joined the 3rd Battalion, King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment which was a training battalion, not an overseas service one. It

may be he was not fit enough for active service. According to the press report in the Lancaster Guardian he was taken to hospital only three days after arriving in Plymouth.

ENLISTMENT AND DEATH

Karen McAulay writes:

‘James enlisted in Preston, possibly in April 1917, and was posted to 3rd Battalion King’s Own Royal Lancaster Regiment which was a training battalion. He appears to have been taken ill whilst at Fort Stamford, Plymouth and from here was taken to 4th Southern General Hospital, Plymouth where he died on 24th October 1917. The primary cause of death given on his death certificate was Emphysema, a secondary cause was shown as ‘Urcenia’ (?). This is difficult to decipher. The death certificate also noted ‘No P.M.’ which probably means that a post mortem was not held.’

AFTERMATH

His body was no doubt transported by train to Lancaster, and buried at Caton (St. Paul) Churchyard. A Commonwealth War Graves commission tombstone marks his grave. His father received a total of £6 7s 6d., owing to James at his death.

A report of James’ death appeared in the Lancaster Guardian of 27th October, 1917. The following year, in the Preston Guardian of 4th May 1918, he was remembered in the article about the death in action of Thomas George Brewer, son of Richard Brewer, James’ employer. It mentioned that James, and another of Mr. Brewer’s farm servants, presumably John Shaw, had also died in the War. He is commemorated on the Bleasdale War Memorial.

HIS BROTHER, PRIVATE RICHARD MASON

His brother, Private Richard Mason, who had joined the York and Lancaster Regiment was wounded on 9th October 1917, died on 18th September the following year and was buried at Steenwerck in France. Richard received the Victory and British medals.

Both James and Richard are commemorated on the Caton War Memorial.

References:

The Lancaster Guardian 27th October 1917 (microfilm, Community History Library, Lancaster):

The Preston Guardian 4th May 1918 (microfilm, Community History Library, Harris Library, Preston):

For other references etc., see the Acknowledgement Page.

