

THE BLEASDALE FALLEN OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

PRIVATE
JOHN SHAW

1894 - 1916

1ST BATTALION LOYAL NORTH LANCASHIRE REGIMENT

ARMY NUMBER: 19003



KILLED IN ACTION 18TH AUGUST 1916



REMEMBERED WITH HONOUR

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John Shaw was brought up in Melling, in the Lune Valley. When War broke out in August 1914, he was working as a farm labourer in the Bleasdale area. He and three fellow farm workers soon went to Garstang to enlist in the Army. Only one of them returned home. They probably all fought and survived the Battle of Loos in September 1915, and then took part in the Battle of the Somme which started on 1st July 1916. John Shaw was killed on 18th August, just a month after his friend, John Cragg. He was 22 years old.

FAMILY BACKGROUND AND UPBRINGING



John Shaw was born on 7th March 1894 at Hornby, the oldest son of Robert Shaw, an agricultural labourer and his wife Ann. By 1901 the family was living in Melling. Robert died in that year and was buried at St. Wilfred's Church on 9th September.

His mother's life seems to have been a tragic one, losing her husband and three of her four children. The 1911 Census showed that the Shaws had had 4 children, of whom 2 had died. Only Robert, aged 9, was living with her. From the records it would seem he must have been born after his father's death. In 1911, Ann was supporting herself by running a small shop in the village selling silks, small-wares and sweets, presumably for its owner, as she was described as a 'worker'.

WORKING AS A FARM LABOURER

In 1911, John was 17 and had left home to work as an agricultural labourer for Mr. Thomas Gardner at Higher Foxholes Farm, Bay Horse (Forton) and presumably had to support his mother and little brother out of his wages. Did he perhaps find the position at the Hiring fair?

By 1914 he had left Mr. Gardner's employment and moved to Bleasdale to work for Mr. Richard Brewer at Lower Fairsnape Farm. The 1911 Census showed that Mr. Brewer kept sheep, dairy cows and horses for agricultural work, as one of his sons was described as a 'teamsman'. No doubt John Shaw worked alongside Richard Brewer and his sons in all the tasks on the farm.

ENLISTMENT AND EARLY DAYS AT THE FRONT

He enlisted in late 1914 at the same time as Lucien Farrar and John Cragg (both killed in action) and Thomas George Parker who returned. Lucien Farrar and John Cragg were like himself, living away from home, working as farm labourers in the Bleasdale area. Their decision to do so also gives an insight into the social lives of these young men who must have met together and planned to go on what in the Autumn of 1914 might have seemed to them an adventure. They all went to Garstang where they queued together to enlist in 1st Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment. The four received consecutive army numbers. After training, the four went out to France together, arriving in early June 1915. If as is likely, he stayed in the same Company as John Cragg and Lucien Farrar, John Shaw would have fought at the Battle of Loos in September of that year. In the following April, he and John Cragg came home on leave, shortly before the start of the Battle of the Somme.

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

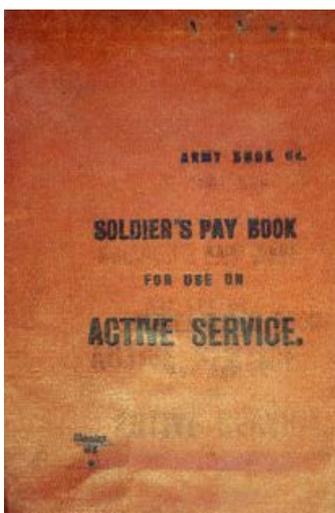
Karen Macaulay writes of the 1st Battalion, L.N.L.'s involvement at the Somme in which John Shaw lost his life a month after John Cragg, the first two men from Bleasdale to be killed at the Front:

'In early summer 1916 the battalion moved to the Somme and fought in the area around Bazentin-le-Petit on 14th /15th July, the action in which John Cragg was killed and Lucien Farrar wounded.

'A month later the battalion was in action again. On 17th August the battalion relieved the 2nd Royal Sussex Regiment in the front line near High Wood. Zero hour was 2.45 p.m. on 18th August, when the two companies were to assault the enemy line on the north west edge of High Wood. The right company left its trenches and advanced too soon, and was seen to advance into our own bombardment. The remainder appear to have followed too quickly and suffered the same awful fate. The left company delayed its assault and advanced close behind the British barrage. They managed to occupy their objective and eventually managed to consolidate the position. The War Diary reported approximate casualties of 8 officers killed or wounded, 30 other ranks killed, 110 wounded and 50 missing.' John Shaw was among the missing.'

AFTERMATH OF JOHN'S DEATH

It was over a fortnight before John's mother heard that he was missing in action. She reacted as many parents did by asking through the local newspaper for assistance in finding out what



had had happened to her son. In fact, it was the Vicar of Melling who contacted the Red Cross for information. They were able to tell him that Private Bruce, a fellow soldier, had given them a report of the casualties in the action of 16th August, which was reported in the Lancaster Guardian of 4th November:

'Shaw was my chum. He and two or three others got buried by a shell. I was wounded myself in the same do, but as no prisoners were taken it was the general belief that the others were dead.'

It may be however that his body was found in the shell hole, but not recovered, as his Will was found. Soldiers were required to

make a brief form of Will which they were supposed to keep in their paybook and keep it with them at all times. In the event of their death, the Will was to be sent back to the War Office. John Shaw's Will survived so either it was found on his body or he had left it behind with his kit. He left all his effects to his mother.

His mother received from the War Office a total of £11 0s 3d., the money owing to her son at his death.

By 1916, Ann Shaw had lost a husband in 1901, 2 out of her 4 children by 1911 and her son John on the battlefield in 1916.

John is commemorated on the Bleasdale War Memorial, the Melling War Memorial and the Thiepval Memorial, Somme (Pier and face 11A). Another man who came to work in Bleasdale before the War, Herman Fletcher, of the 7th Battalion, Loyal North Lancashires is also remembered at Thiepval .

John Shaw was awarded the Victory and British Medals and the 15 Star.



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References:

The Preston Guardian 13th February 1915 (microfilm, Community History Library, Harris Library, Preston).

The Lancaster Guardian 9th September 1916 and 4th November 1916 (microfilm, Community History Library, Lancaster).

For other references etc., see the Acknowledgement Page.