

William Victor CLARKE

William Victor was the second of three sons of William CLARKE of Hunston (abt 1865 to abt Jul 1940) who worked as a horseman on a farm and Margaretta PARR of Norton (abt Jul 1861 to abt Apr 1941). His brothers were Frederick George and Henry Bertram, who also is named on the Memorial at Hunston.

William's Prisoner of War record from Schneidemuhl shows that he was born in Hunston on 10th May 1887.

In 1891 William was 4 and the family was living in Buckles Yard, Hunston. By 1901 William aged 14 was working as a yard boy on a farm. They were living in The Street close to William Treherne HEIGHAM, the son of Clement John Henry HEIGHAM the Chief Constable of Suffolk. William Heigham was living in The Cottage and is shown as a farmer. It is probable that William Clarke, his brother Henry and his father were employed by William Heigham as these locations apparently refer to The Yard which is next door to Hunston House (Cottage). In 1911 the family is shown as living at Great Yard, Hunston and William was working as a game keeper.

In the second quarter of 1915 William married Minnie Ethel WATTS in the Warwick Registration District. Minnie was the daughter of Algien Adolphus WATTS, the game keeper on the Stowlangtoft Estate. Their son William Victor was born on 14th January 1916 in Little Cressingham, Norfolk.

William enlisted as Private 31009 in the 4th Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment, reputedly at Norwich.

"The battalion was based at Bedford when war broke out on the 4th August 1914, and were moved to Felixstowe to provide home defence around Harwich as well as drafts for the front line battalions. After the disaster on the Somme in July 1916, the 4th Battalion, along with the equivalent units from other regiments, was mobilised and sent to the Western Front. They landed in France on the 25th July 1916 and were formed - with other similar battalions - into the 190th Brigade of the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division, where they would remain until the end of hostilities."

<http://www.bedfordregiment.org.uk/4thbn/4thbattalion.html> accessed 17th November 2014

The War Diary at <http://www.bedfordregiment.org.uk/4thbn/4thbtn1917diary.html> shows that the 4th Battalion was in the Somme, Picardie, France and that between 4th and 6th February was route marched to the north bank of the Ancre and on to the trenches near Beaumont-Hamel.

This newspaper report from The Press, (Canterbury New Zealand) Volume LIII, Issue 15822, Page 8 dated 10th February 1917 which can be found at <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz> describes the situation:

"In the meantime, news from the Somme front continues to be highly encouraging. The British forces have followed up the capture of Grandcourt with further attacks on both sides of the river Ancre, and have made further progress. In this area we have in the last few weeks advanced nearly three-quarters of a mile on a three-mile front, which may be considered a very considerable gain in view of the fact that it has been made in mid-winter. The capture of an important enemy position on the Sailly-

Saillisel Hill, and the occupation, after a night attack, of Baillescourt farm, on the Beaucourt- Miramont road, are further satisfactory features of the news from this front. All these successes are, of course, small things in themselves, but they serve to emphasise the fact, stressed in the House of Commons by Mr Bonar Law, that our troops are now vastly superior in morale to those of the enemy, and also to give an indication of what may be expected when the big offensive commences in a few weeks' time."

On 11th February 1917 the Prisoners of the First World War records available to view in the International Committee of the Red Cross historical archives at <http://grandeguerre.icrc.org> show that William was captured at Beaucourt, Somme, registered at Limburg an der Lahn and subsequently held as a Prisoner of War at Altdamm and then at Schneidemuhl, (now Pila in northern Poland).

Extracts from the diary of Charles Green a POW at Schneidemuhl can be read at <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=90587> and a report of an inspection of Schneidemuhl by M Mussard, Dr Meier and Dr Ferratges, (Rapports de divers délégués en Allemagne, Russie, Pologne, Bohême, Hongrie et Roumaine décembre 1918 - juin 1919, Chapter 23, pages 62 to 64) can be downloaded from the ICRC web site. The inspection took place on 14th January 1919 only a few weeks after William died at Schneidemuhl on 6th December 1919:

"The physical condition of the prisoners is the same here as in the other camps: insufficiently nourished, poorly dressed, poorly housed, this because of the lack of room in several barracks, often anaemic, physically and morally sick, they present us with an unhappy sight, a picture of the miseries experienced. Many of the barracks are uninhabitable; however most are in a tolerable state. The bathing facilities are closed and abandoned, unlike those I saw at Stargard and Altdamm."

William died less than a month after the Armistice and presumably would have been buried in the Schneidemuhl Prisoners Of War Cemetery, in Posen, West Prussia which contained the graves of 76 soldiers from the United Kingdom but he was then re-buried at Berlin South Western Cemetery, Stahnsdorf, Potsdam-Mittelmarker Landkreis, Brandenburg, Germany in about 1925 as part of the concentration of the graves of Commonwealth servicemen.

Documents available on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission web site show that his wife Minnie, shown as resident in Hunston in February 1925, paid £1:1s, which was, by comparison with others, an unusually large amount, for the following inscription to be added to William's headstone:

THE PEACE OF GOD, WHICH
PASSETH ALL UNDERSTANDING
FROM WIFE AND LITTLE SONNY
UNTIL WE MEET

William is remembered on the War Memorials at St Michael's Church, Hunston, Suffolk and at St Andrew's Church, Little Cressingham, Norfolk.