Great Ayton History Society
Notes on some of the men from Great Ayton who served in the Great War

Samuel Davies (1882-1915)

1  A mystery

The name of Samuel Davies appears on the Christ Church War Memorial and the Roll of Honour, yet Samuel Davies has no known connection with Great Ayton.

2  Early days

Samuel Davies was born in 1882 at Marske.  His father, Joseph Davies, was born in Wales in 1843 but moved to Yorkshire.  He married the widow Hannah White from Hunmanby in 1872 and the couple had three children before Hannah died.  Joseph then married Elizabeth Bird from Norfolk in 1878 and they had six children; Elizabeth also had a son Charles Bird who was born before her marriage to Joseph.  Elizabeth died, leaving Joseph a widower.

In the 1991 census Joseph Davies was living at Charltons and working as an ironstone miner.  In his house were three children from his marriage to Hannah White (the two boys both working in the ironstone mines), four of the children from his marriage to Elizabeth Bird (who were at school), and Charles Bird.

The family then moved to Iron Houses, Guisborough, and Samuel started working as a horse driver in the mines.  Samuel then moved in with Charles Bird, at 48 Bolckow Street Guisborough.

3  Joining the Green Howards

Although Samuel Davies's service records have been lost, it is possible to piece together his likely service career.  He probably joined the 3rd Battalion (Special Reserve) of the Yorkshire Regiment (the Green Howards) at the start of the war.  The 3rd Battalion was used to make good losses suffered by the regular soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, and the 2nd Battalion suffered heavy losses in the First Battle of Ypres.  Drafts of men from the 3rd Battalion arrived in France on 16 November, 2 December and 23 December.  Private Samuel Davies 3/8769 would have been in one of these drafts.

4  The front line at Neuve Chapelle

On 7 March 1915 the Battalion moved into billets at Laventie, in preparation for the Battle of Neuve Chapelle.  On 10 March they assembled in the reserve trenches before moving into the support trenches immediately behind the front line at 9:00am.  There was some machine gun fire from the German positions, but few casualties.  The initial British attack was successful, and Samuel may have been in the group sent to occupy trenches vacated by the advance of the front line.  However the Germans quickly recovered and the problems of maintaining an isolated advanced position soon became apparent.  The Battalion suffered significant losses from a flanking German redoubt which had not been taken, and from artillery fire.  They were relieved in the early hours of 13 March.
During the three days the battalion suffered 93 known fatalities and 193 missing. Overall, the battle had no strategic effect.

4 The fate of Private Samuel Davies

Samuel Davies was one of those missing. His body was never found, but his death is recorded on the Register of Soldiers’ Effects as on 12 March at Neuve Chapelle. He is commemorated on panel 12 of the Le Touret Memorial on the road between Béthune and Armentières.

Samuel Davies appears on the Guisborough War Memorial. His name is on the Great Ayton War Memorial and the Roll of Honour inside Christ Church. The Roll of Honour has a completely incorrect date of his death (given as 10 March 1916), a significant error and perhaps supporting the view that Samuel had no direct connection with the village.

Joseph Davies, one of the sons of Joseph senior’s first marriage (to Hannah White) died of wounds received in action on 22 December 1915.

Acknowledgements

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