

Intrepid Widow visits wounded soldier son in France

Elizabeth Singleton was the wife of George Singleton, a stone dresser of Round Close, Hade Edge. In 1911 the couple were living at 2 Arrunden Lane in Holmfirth with four of their children: daughter Mary, aged 26, was a weaver as was their son John aged 24; son Harry, aged 22, was a willyer* and the youngest, Willie, aged 17, was an errand boy for a chemist's shop. George Singleton died in 1915 leaving Elizabeth a widow.



John Singleton

In due course, the First World War resulted in all three sons joining the colours with mixed fortunes. John was the first to suffer having been seriously wounded whilst serving with the Northumberland Fusiliers. He was taken to a hospital not far from Boulogne where the intrepid widow, his mother, visited him in person. The local paper reported that she “found him quite bright and cheerful. Indeed, he was able to give his mother an account of how he had become incapacitated. He said a number of them were laid in a reserve trench waiting for daylight – he himself was asleep at the time - when an enemy shell burst amongst them with severe results. Of the twenty lads who were there, ten were killed and five were wounded. Still, the young man appeared to be confident that he would pull through all right, and when she returned home she fully expected he would ere long be invalided home. This was what the lad himself was looking forward to. Mrs Singleton was gratefully impressed by the attention which was being bestowed upon her son by the YMCA authorities.”

However, it was not to be. The newspaper report continued: “Writing on June 29th, the matron at the hospital said: ‘I regret very much to have to tell you the very sad news that your son, Pte John Singleton passed away last night. He had been gradually sinking and seemed quite happy. He spoke most affectionately of you. He will be buried in the cemetery here at Dimereux (*sic*).’” John was 31 years old.

* A willyer operated a willy, a machine for cleaning wool.



Harry Singleton

Sadly there was more bad news in store. The following year on 22 March 1918, his younger brother Harry, serving with the Yorkshire and Lancaster Regiment, was reported missing. He had, in fact, been captured by the Germans and was able to write home to tell his wife that he was getting on satisfactorily after an operation to remove his right arm. He told her "I shall come home and we shall be re-united". However, he subsequently died on 20 April 1918. He was 29 years old.

The youngest brother Willie survived the war.

Photos courtesy of Huddersfield Examiner