



Robert Henry Boon

Robert Henry Boon was born in Gretton in 1889. His father was Joseph Boon, his mother Eliza Boon both of Gretton.

Family History

In the 1891 Census, Joseph and Eliza and their children Alice, Robert Henry and Evelyn were living in The Nook, Gretton. Joseph is employed as an ironstone labourer.

By the 1901 Census, Joseph is detailed as working as a railway labourer. His daughter Alice as a machinist in a clothing factory. Robert, now 11, has another sister (Annie) and a brother (Joseph Stanger).

Robert's mother, Eliza Boon died on 24th November 1901. Her death is recorded in a local newspaper although the circumstances are not detailed. Eliza was 37 years of age.

By 1911, widower Joseph is again working as an ironstone labourer. Robert is also working as an ironstone labourer, in Corby. Alice is acting as housekeeper, with Annie employed as a tailoress. Also in the household are Joseph Stanger (now 11) and George Alfred (9).

Military History

It is recorded that Robert Henry Boon served as a Private (14082) in the 7th (Service) Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment. He enlisted in Kettering on 7th September 1914. The battalion was formed in Northampton in September 1914. This was the battalion which included the former rugby player Edgar Mobbs, who was eventually to serve as the Battalion's Lieutenant Colonel.

According to Gretton Local History Society research, Robert Henry Boon was one of 15 Gretton men to enlist at the same time. He was to serve alongside Jonathan Spendlove of Gretton (who himself was killed 27.09.15).

From September 1914 until 31st August 1915, Private Robert Boon was stationed in the UK. He travelled to France/Flanders in August 1915 and served with B Company. Private Boon arrived in France (Boulogne) on 1st September 1915 with the British Expeditionary Force. The battalion found itself involved early in the



hostilities during the Battle of Loos, which commenced on the 25th September 1915. The battalion suffered heavy losses.

The 7th (Service) Battalion was stationed at St. Eloi near Ypres, Belgium in November 1915.

The Grantham Journal on 27th November 1915 records the details released regarding Private Boon's death –

Pte. R. H. Boon, 7th Northants

Another Gretton soldier has unfortunately been killed at the Western front. Mr. Jos. Boon, The Nook, Gretton, has received a letter, dated November 14th, from the Officer Commanding "B" Company 7th Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment, as follows:- "I am extremely sorry to have to write to tell you of the death of your son, R. Boon, of my Company. He died yesterday, a few hours after he was shot when directing some stretcher-bearers to the dressing station. If you have lost a noble son, we have lost one of the very best soldiers of our Company. He was always cheerful and willing to help anyone, and it was while helping others that he gave up his own life. I offer you my very deepest sympathy in your sorrow, which must, however, be mitigated by the knowledge that he died a noble death in this noblest cause. P.B. – He was to be buried today in a military cemetery in which we have now a place for our 7th Battalion." Writing to a sister of the deceased, on November 16th, Pte. R. Tee Boon, 15948, 7th Northamptons, says: - "I know you will be anxious to know how your dear brother Bob was killed. Me and "Cony" (Pte. Cornelius Jinks) were close to, and saw it happen, and I never felt down so much in my life to see the best pal I ever had, and ever shall have again, go down. It was about ten o'clock on Saturday morning when the West Kent stretcher-bearers, with a wounded chap out of their regiment, came up to our trenches, lost their way, and wanted to know the best way out. Of course, we told them, and poor Bob, who was just coming by to fetch some grease to rub some of our feet, that were frost-bitten, asked them where they were going. Bob said, "I will show you the way." Poor old boy! He had not got twenty yards; he turned around to see if they were following him, and started to go again, when he was shot in the back by a sniper. "Cony" ran for our stretcher-bearers, while one or two of us opened fire on the enemy to make them keep their heads down while they could get to him. Or they would have been shot. But they could not do much for him – only ease the pain and make him comfortable. He had to lay there while dark. He was conscious to the last; he passed away about four o'clock. I am sure he died without any pain, and he will be buried in military style. Everybody said



that he was the best-hearted chap in the Company, and would do anything for anybody. I am sure the Gretton chaps feel it very much. We were being relieved the same night as this happened, and only the night before we were talking together about the time we would have when we got home again.” Pte. C. Jinks, 7th Northants. Regiment, a cousin of the deceased, in a letter to his uncle, says – “He was respected by everybody in the Company. Poor old Bob, he did his duty and died a hero’s death. We shall all miss him very much. I saw him when he died. He was shot straight through the back... We have just come out of the trenches; have been in six days, and now we are having a rest.” The deceased, who was motherless, and the eldest of a family of six, on August 3rd attained his 26th birthday. When he enlisted early in September 1914, with many other Gretton young men, in Kitchener’s Army, he was at the time employed at the Corby ironstone works. He was a member of the Gretton Brass Band, another member of which has been missing some weeks, and it is conjectured that he too is numbered with the killed. An impressive memorial service, conducted at the Baptist Chapel by the Rev. M. Winnard on Sunday night, closed with the Brass Band playing “Days and moments quickly flying” and the “Dead March” in “Saul.”

Private Robert Henry Boon is commemorated on Gretton War Memorial and buried at the Voormezeele Enclosure No.3.

The Grantham Journal of 27th November 1915 also reported:-

Gretton Baptist Chapel – On Sunday evening, a memorial service was held, two old Sunday scholars and choir boys, having recently passed away. One was Harry Tee, whose father was for many years a deacon and School teacher, who died in London after undergoing a painful operation. The other was Robert Boon, a brave soldier. Both young men belonged to the village brass band. A most impressive sermon was preached by the Rev. M. Winnard (pastor), on the text, “I have fought a good fight” &c. The congregation was large.

The Voormezeele Enclosures (at one time there were a total of four, but now reduced to three) were originally regimental groups of graves, begun very early in the First World War and gradually increased until the village and the cemeteries were captured by the Germans after very heavy fighting on 29 April 1918.

Voormezeele Enclosure No.3, the largest of these burial grounds, was begun by the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in February 1915. Their graves are in Plot III, the other Plots from I to IX are the work of other units, or pairs of units, and



include a few graves of October 1918. Plots X and XII are of a more general character. Plots XIII to XVI were made after the Armistice when graves were brought in from isolated sites and smaller cemeteries to replace the French graves (of April and September 1918) that were removed to a French cemetery. These concentrated graves cover the months from January 1915 to October 1918, and they include those of many men of the 15th Hampshires and other units who recaptured this ground early in September 1918.

There are now 1,611 Commonwealth servicemen of the First World War buried or commemorated in Voormezele Enclosure No.3. Six hundred and nine of the burials are unidentified but there are special memorials to 15 casualties known or believed to be buried among them. Other special memorials record the names of five casualties whose graves in Pheasant Wood Cemetery could not be found.

The cemetery was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens.

Reference

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Gretton Local History Society

Grantham Journal

Lest We Forget

Robert Henry Boon
of the Northamptonshire Regiment

d. 13th November 1915

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