

Members of the Chorley Pals



War Memorials Trust

This sheet gives some information about the men who joined the original Chorley Company in 1914. They are all commemorated on the Chorley Pals memorial in the town, information about which is given on the accompanying information sheet.

This information does not cover all the original Pals, nor is it a complete biography of those who are included. It is intended to be a guide for pupils to what might be discovered through some initial research using easily available online and local resources, and will hopefully encourage them to find out more about those commemorated, both in Chorley and other local areas. War Memorials Trust's resources on researching names on war memorials, available on our learning website www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org, can be used to guide this research further.

Using this sheet as a guide to what can be found out, pupils could research the names of other Chorley Pals or those named on another war memorial more local to them, to find out who served and died in World War I (both during the Somme and other battles) from their community. Finding out about the people involved in the war helps us understand the personal impact it had on the community.

Private Thomas Berry: Private Berry (15526) enlisted with the East Lancashire Regiment in 1914 and was killed on 1st July 1916. At the time he was reported missing and was only declared dead in 1917. Because he has no known grave he is commemorated on the Thiepval memorial.

The above information can be found on the CWGC website (www.cwgc.org) where a commemorative certificate is available. Local records also tell us about his personal life: he was one of nine children and the 1911 census shows him living in Chorley. He married, and had a daughter, in 1914.

Lance Corporal John Blackstone: L/Cpl Blackstone (16057) was one of the Chorley Pals to be buried by his fellow soldiers in the few days immediately following the first day of the Battle of the Somme. He enlisted with the Pals in 1914 and was shot as he left the trenches on 1st July 1916. He was buried in Euston Road cemetery. He was 23 when he died.

The CWGC website lists his date of death as either the 1st or 2nd July 1916, suggesting he may have been wounded and not killed outright. The website also lists details of his family: his parents were Thomas and Mary Ellen and the family lived at 30 Grape Lane, Croston. Somewhat unusually, the website also holds details of the personal inscription on Blackstone's grave chosen by his family ('Greater love hath no man than this for he laid down his life for his friends').

Local research also tells us that Blackstone worked as a gardener on the Croston estate and that by the time of the 1911 census no longer lived at the family home. This could lead to further research about where he did live between that time and the start of the war.

Private James Dickinson: Private Dickinson (15957) was the youngest Chorley Pal to die in World War I. He was 17 when he was killed at Serre on 1st July 1916, having been just 15 years old when he enlisted in 1914. Like many of his fellow Pals he has no known grave and is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme. His parents, Thomas and Margaret, were not aware of what had happened to their son immediately and sought information through appeals in the local paper, the *Chorley Guardian*.

Private Harry Hardman: Private Hardman (15855) was the oldest Chorley Pal to die in the war. He was 41 when he was killed at Serre on 1st July 1916. He is buried in Euston Road Cemetery just two graves away from his fellow Pal John Blackstone (see above). The CWGC also holds information about Hardman's grave inscription (the original document lists both his and Blackstone's grave details on the same page, separated by the grave of an unknown soldier). Hardman's grave reads 'Thy will be done O Lord.'

Local research tells us that Hardman was born in Bolton and by 1901 lived with his parents in Chorley and worked at Dacca Floor Cloth Works. In 1911 he was lodging with a local family in Chorley.

The Woods brothers: Alfred (Corporal, 15546), James Henry (Sergeant, 15684) and Stephen (Private, 15547) were three brothers who all served in the Chorley Pals. Their consecutive service numbers could suggest that Alfred and Stephen enlisted together. Stephen (the eldest, born 1883) is known to have enlisted on 19th September 1914; their brother James Henry had enlisted five days previously.

Alfred and James Henry both survived the war but Stephen was killed in January 1917 (he had also served with the Pals at Serre where he was wounded). The inscription on his grave, according to CWGC records, reads 'I've found a friend. Oh such a friend.' Stephen was married and had a son but they both died prior to the war starting. The brothers' mother had also died before the war and in 1911 Stephen was living with his widowed father, John. The brothers also had five other siblings.

Several members of the same family serving was not uncommon; it shows the nature of the Pals Battalions and there are several other examples of brothers serving in the Chorley Pals. Examples like these, and the stories of other Pals who left families behind, give us some insight into what the impact of events like the Somme had on families and communities back at home. In a small community where over 200 men left to fight and 34 of them never came back (with another 59 being wounded) the losses would have been felt keenly and communities left devastated. These losses explain the massive drive to create war memorials in the aftermath of the war; those memorials are now one of the few links we have to those who served.

War Memorials Trust 14 Buckingham Palace Road London SW1W 0QP

Telephone: 020 7834 0200 / 0300 123 0764

Email: learning@warmemorials.org **Website:** www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org

Registered Charity Number: 1062255

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