

Private Benjamin Crossley

(1869 – 31st January 1927)

This ex-soldier was buried in the unmarked plot, P82, - it is positioned roughly where indicated in the image below - in St. Matthew's churchyard, Lightcliffe on 3rd February 1927 with three members of a unrelated Wolfenden family. Why?



Benjamin Crossley was the son of another Benjamin Crossley and his wife Mary Gregory. They had married in Bolton Lancashire in Q1 1855 when Mary's surname was recorded as Gregson. Subsequent records suggest that it should have been Gregory. At first, they lived in Little Lever, Bolton, Lancashire where their first three children were born. But sometime before the 1871 census they moved to Clifton, Brighouse which was where Benjamin Crossley junior and other younger siblings was born.

1871 census

Benjamin Crosley	Head	40	Coal Miner
Mary Crosley	Wife	40	
Martha Crosley	Dau	15	Cotton Worker
John Crosley	Son	13	Coal Hower
Elizabeth A Crosley	Dau	11	Cotton Piecer
Betsy Crosley	Dau	9	
Mary Ellen Crosley	Dau	6	Scholar
Benjamin Crosley	Son	1	

Address Clifton, Brighouse

But then, 20 months later, 41-year-old Benjamin Crossley died. He was interred at St. John's, Clifton on 31st December 1872.

Widow Mary Crossley, daughter of William Gregory, then married a local farmer John Drake on 10th March 1877 in Dewsbury.

West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1813-1935 for Mary Crossley
Dewsbury, All Saints > 1877

18 ⁷⁷ . Marriage solemnized at the <i>Parish Church</i> in the <i>Parish of Dewsbury</i> in the County of <i>York</i> .								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
310	March 10 th 18 ⁷⁷ .	John Drake	50	Bachelor	Farmer	Dewsbury	Thomas Drake	Weaver
		Mary Crossley	16	Widow	—	Dewsbury	William Gregory	Clothmaker
Married in the <i>Parish Church</i> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by <i>Alfred Grote</i> or after <i>Banns</i> by me,								
This Marriage was solemnized between us, <i>John Drake</i> & <i>Mary Crossley her X mark</i>			in the Presence of us, <i>John Rusty</i> & <i>Joseph Hutchinson Ward</i>			<i>Alfred Grote</i> Minister		

For the 1881 census the Crossley children, still living with their mother, were understandably transcribed with the surname Drake and not Crossley after the enumerator 'dittoed' all the surnames under their stepfather John Drake.

1881 census

John Drake	Head	55	Sexton at Clifton Church
Mary ditto	Wife	50	
John ditto	Son	23	Mason's Labourer
Benjamin ditto	Son	12	Coal Miner
Elizabeth A. ditto	Dau	22	Silk Dresser
Mary. E. ditto	Dau	17	ditto ditto
Emma ditto	Dau	10	Scholar
Mary A. Briggs	Grnddau	5	ditto

Address Clifton Rd., Hartshead,

Before the next census, on 20th May 1890, 20-year-old Benjamin Crossley enlisted with the West Riding Regiment. A year later, for the 1891 census, he was at the Fulford Barracks in York.



on 3 70

Questions to be put to the Recruit before Enlistment.

1. What is your Name? Benjamin Crossley

2. In or near what Parish or Town were you born? Clifton in or near the Town of Brighouse in the County of Yorks

3. Are you a British Subject? Yes

4. What is your Age? 20 Years 10 Months

5. What is your Trade or Calling? Labourer

6. Have you resided out of your Father's house for three years continuously in the same place, or occupied a house or land of the yearly value of £10 for one year, and paid rates for the same, and, in either case, if so, state where? No

You are hereby warned that if after enlistment it is found that you have given a wilfully false answer to any of the following eight questions, you will be liable to a punishment of two years imprisonment with hard labour.

7. Are you, or have you been, an Apprentice? if so, where? to whom? and for what period? No

8. Are you Married? No

9. Have you ever been sentenced to Imprisonment by the Civil Power? No

10. Do you now belong to Her Majesty's Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, the Royal Navy, the Volunteers, the Yeomanry, the Naval Artillery Volunteers, the Army Reserve, or the Naval Reserve Force? If so, to what Corps? Yes (1st Col 13th West Rid Regt)

11. Have you ever served in Her Majesty's Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, or the Royal Navy? If so, state which and cause of discharge No

12. Have you ever been discharged from any part of Her Majesty's Forces, with Ignominy, or as Incorrigible and Worthless, or on account of conviction of felony, or of a sentence of penal servitude, or have you been dismissed with disgrace from the Navy? No

13. Have you truly stated the whole, if any, of your previous Service? Yes

14. Have you ever been rejected as unfit for Her Majesty's Service? If so, on what grounds? Yes

15. Are you willing to be vaccinated or re-vaccinated? Yes

16. For what Corps are you willing to be enlisted, or are you willing to be enlisted for General Service? West Riding Regiment

17. Did you receive a Notice, and do you understand its meaning, and who gave it to you? Yes (Name of Recruit's next of kin) (Corps 13th West Rid Regt)

18. Are you willing to serve upon the following conditions provided Her Majesty should so long require your service? Yes

His military record confirms his parish and town and what his trade or calling was. It also notes below that his next of kin was his mother, Mary Drake, of Clifton, Nr Brighouse Yorks

and annuities ..

10. Deferred Pay issued .. (1) On first transfer to Reserve £ s. d. (2) On second transfer to Reserve £ s. d. (3) On Discharge £ s. d.

11. Deferred Pay refunded .. (1) On rejoining the Colors £ s. d. (2) On (Credited to the public in the Accounts of to) £ s. d. (Credited to the public in the Accounts of to)

12. Name and Address of next of kin .. Mother Clifton - Mary Drake - Nr Brighouse - Yorks

13. Particulars as to Marriages (a) Christian and Surname of Woman to whom married and whether spinster or widow, (b) place and date of marriage, (c) name of officiating Minister or Registrar, and (d) names of two witnesses

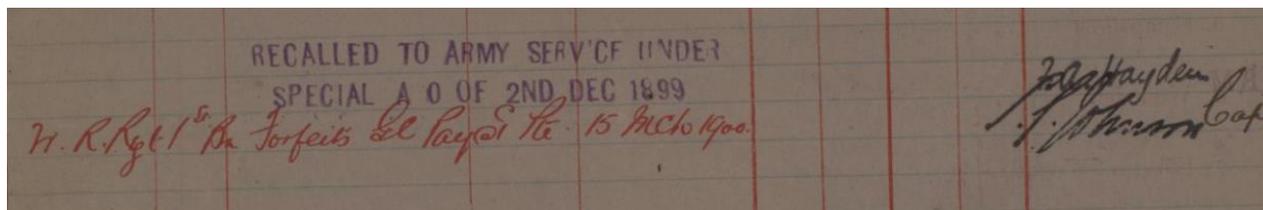
14. Particulars as to Children Christian Names Date and Place of Birth Date and Place of Baptism, and Name of officiating Minister

Single

Wife Mary Drake

The next part of Benjamin Crossley's Military History Sheet – see later - lists where he served and the dates he served there. It makes for interesting reading.

After training, this Clifton born lad travelled to Barbados in November 1891, then on to Jamaica and from there to South Africa in 1893 for a long - nearly five year - spell. He returned to the UK in March 1898 and seems to have been discharged. But then he was recalled to the Army on 2nd December 1899 and travelled to the Cape four weeks later presumably to take part in the Boer War.



During this time the *Brighouse News* sometimes printed copies of letters that the soldiers sent back home from South Africa.

Ben Crossley was one of them and he also got a mention in part of another letter sent from a J. GOODYEAR, Field Force, South Africa.

Brighouse News 30 March 1900

THE FOOD SUPPLIED AT THE FRONT
BISCUITS TOO HARD TO BREAK
WITH TEETH

Private Ben Crossley has written to his sister at Gooder-lane, Rastrick, and we have pleasure in reproducing his letter below :-

Modder River, Feb, 8th, 1900

Dear Sister, -- I now take this pleasure of writing you these few lines, hoping they will find you all well, as it leaves me at present. We are right up at the front here, being only six miles from the Boers at Modder River. It is very hard work out here, we are out watching them night and day. We expect a sudden rush every day, because they are getting short of food and water. You will have seen by the papers that we have captured four days' supply of food of theirs. It is four days now since we had a wash, as the rivers are dry here as far as

we have got up yet. We are 750 miles from Capetown, I expect we shall make a night attack on them when the moon goes down. I think that is what we are waiting for. I wish they would make a night attack on something else, so that we can get our clothes and boots off. We have not had them off for a week; but we are all in good health as far as health goes. It would break a man's heart to look at what we have to eat – hard biscuits you can't break with your teeth. I don't think it will last long now, because when we make a start, we shall make a proper one. There are 46,000 of us here, and we have some out getting to know all their tricks. But I think we shall have to put the better foot first when we start and see what we can do. You must excuse me not writing sooner, as we have been very busy so I think that is all at present from your brother.

B. CROSSLEY

Ben Crossley's sister living in Gooder Lane, Rastrick has not been positively identified but it could be his sister Elizabeth Ann Crossley who lived with their mother.

Brighouse News 27 April 1900

Part of a letter home from J.GOODYEAR

Field Force, South Africa

... We leave here on Tuesday next for Bloemfontein to join the regiment there. I have seen two of the Brighouse reserves, one of whom has been wounded, but is nearly all right again now, and the other is Ben Crossley of Rastrick. We are joined to the "D" section reserves and I expect I shall see a few more Brighouse men at the next place we go to....

Brighouse News 11 May 1900

A TRAMP OF 250 MILES

In a letter to his sister, received the other day, Pte. Ben Crossley, states that although he is enjoying the best of health, he has lately taken part in a tramp of 250 miles, and is at present (or was) at Bloemfontein. He further states that the marching is so very fatiguing that he is hoping to be left behind as one to guard the place in preference of embarking on a march of 300 miles further on.

MILITARY HISTORY SHEET.

1. Service at Home and Abroad (including former service of re-enlisted men, when allowed to reckon towards G. C. Pay or Pension.)

COUNTRY	FROM	TO	YEARS	DAYS
Home	30. 5. 90	13. 11. 91	1	168
Barbados	14. 11. 91	7. 3. 92		114
Jamaica	8. 3. 92	2. 4. 93	1	26
South Africa	3. 4. 93	3. 3. 98	4	335
Home	4. 3. 98	29. 12. 99	1	301
Cape	30. 12. 99	8. 3. 01	1	69
Home	4. 3. 01	9. 5. 01		58
			10	346

N.B.—The Country only to be shown—it is not necessary to show separately the service in the different stations of same country. England, Scotland and Ireland to be shown under the general term "Home."
For mode of computing Service Abroad, see Sec. XXII., Part II., Queen's Regulations, 1889.

2. Educated at ... { Royal Military Asylum } no
 { Royal Hibernian Military School } no

3. Certificates of Education ... no

4. Passed Classes of Instruction ... no

5. Campaigns ... South African

6. Wounded ... Severely - Amputated Right Leg - Africa 29. 11. 00

7. Effects of Wounds ... lame right leg

Initials of Officer making the entry
 J. H. M. Major
 29/11/00

A year later Private Benjamin Crossley returned home having been 'severely' wounded; the 'Effects of Wounds' being a 'Lame right(t) leg'. He was discharged from the Army in early May 1901. This probably explains why he has not been found in the 1901 census taken on 31st March 1901.

There are two *Brighouse Echo* reports of an ex-soldier, Ben Crossley, being drunk and disorderly which may well be this Boer War soldier. In 1902 a Ben Crossley was described as a labourer of Brighouse. Then in March 1908 Ben Crossley, a Rastrick teamer, was brought before magistrates after an argument over retrieving his army pension papers from an address in Goodyer Lane, Rastrick. The mayor (Ald. A.O.Stocks J.P.) commented that :-

A man who had been in the Army ought not to have sunk so low. When his (defendant's) pension day had come he seemed to have spent the money in drink. He would be bound over for six months in the sum of £5 and would have to pay costs amounting to 10s 6s.

Ben(jamin) Crossley has not been found in the 1911 census nor in any other newspaper article. His immediate family have not been thoroughly traced but he does not appear to have resided with any of them. His 82-year-old mother Mary Drake formerly Crossley née Gregory died Q1 1913 probably at the family home of her other son John Crossley in Brighouse.

The next record that Benjamin Crossley appears in is the 1921 census after the Great War.

1921 census

Sarah Wolfenden	Mother Female	1871	49	Home Duties	-
Ernest Wolfenden	Son Male	1900	20	Brick Yard Labourer	Wilkinsons Elland Brick Makers
George Wolfenden	Son Male	1910	10	-	-
James Wolfenden	Son Male	1914	7	-	-
Benjamin Crossley	Lodger Male	1869	51	Horse Man	Pearson Marsden General Carter

Address 172, Halifax Road, Brighouse, Yorkshire (West Riding), England

By then the Wolfendens had lost three family members to influenza / Spanish flu within days of one another at the end of October 1918 and another son in 1923. Read more in

The WW1 Wolfenden soldiers

There is no way of knowing how long Benjamin Crossley had been lodging with the Wolfenden family or whether he knew Lance Corporal James Wolfenden – they were about the same age – or his sons.

What is certain is that after he died on 31st January 1927. He was buried in the unmarked Wolfenden plot, P82, along with father James Wolfenden and his sons, 23-year-old Ernest and 10-year-old Frank on 3rd February 1927. Unfortunately, our Lightcliffe burial records do not state who owned the grave plot at the time, but they do record that the grave was, not surprisingly, full. By then three former soldiers and a 10-year-old boy were buried there.

D.M.Barker
March 2023