

The WW1 Wolfenden soldiers



Local War News

A TRAGIC WEEKEND.

TWO SOLDIERS DIE AT HOVE EDGE

Last week-end was a tragic period at the home of Mr. James Wolfenden, 172, Halifax Road, Hove Edge, Brighouse. On the previous Tuesday evening there had died from influenza and pneumonia, Gunner Walter Wolfenden, 23 years of age, R.F.A., and the interment took place on Saturday at Lightcliffe Church. The funeral was attended by the military, the coffin being conveyed on a gun carriage, and a firing party from the Halifax depot was present. The service at the house was conducted by the Rev. E.J.Toase (curate of St. Chad's), and at the burial ground by the Rev. H.L. Taylor (vicar). Gunner Wolfenden was, before the war, employed as a checker in the L. & N.W. goods yard, Huddersfield. He was one of the earliest men to enlist in the Brighouse Battery, and went with them to France at Christmas, 1915. After having had considerable service on the Western front he was badly gassed, and was for some months in hospital in England, being subsequently placed in the Army Reserve.

In the early hours of Sunday morning there died ex-Corpl James Wolfenden the father of the family, and at the same time there was dead in the house a ten years' old son, Frank, who had died on the Friday, both being victims of influenza. Father and son were buried together at Lightcliffe Church on Tuesday. Ex-Corpl. Wolfenden had had 27 years of military service. He was an old member of the Volunteers and Territorials, in which he served 25 years. He volunteered for service on the outbreak of war, and early on was sent over to France, continuing with the colours for two years until he was discharged in 1916.

Another son is at home, having been discharged from the Army after having lost an arm, and still another is training at Ripon. Two younger children are suffering seriously from influenza.

From *Brighouse Echo* 01 November 1918

As the article describes three members of this Wolfenden family died from influenza / Spanish flu within days of one another in October 1918. In the Lightcliffe burial records the three burials are listed consecutively. It would appear that we have two, possibly three, more WW1 soldiers buried in unmarked graves in Lightcliffe churchyard.



This is their story.

The Wolfenden family history begins in Rastrick where James Wolfenden was born about 1873 to parents John Wolfenden and Mary Hannah Armitage. They had married in Halifax on 13th June 1868. John Wolfenden was originally from Sowerby Bridge with Hannah Mary, as she was subsequently styled, from Brighouse.

1868. Marriage solemnized at		in the Parish of <i>Halifax</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.
322	<i>June 13.</i>	<i>John Wolfenden</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>Bachelor</i>	<i>John Singer</i>	<i>Rastrick</i>	<i>John Wolfenden</i>	<i>Brookmaker</i>
		<i>Mary Hannah Armitage</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>Spin</i>		<i>Rastrick</i>	<i>George Armitage</i>	<i>Mason</i>
Married in the <i>Parish Church</i> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by _____ or after <i>Banns</i> by me, <i>George Bagth</i>								
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		<i>John Wolfenden</i> <i>Min</i> <i>x</i> <i>Mark</i>			<i>John Spinnell</i>			
		<i>Mary Hannah Armitage</i> <i>Wife</i> <i>x</i> <i>Mark</i>			<i>Sydia Ann Brewster</i>			

Sons Crossley and George Wolfenden were born before the 1871 census and then three more sons including James were born before the 1881 census; although no baptism records have been found. Four-year-old Crossley Wolfenden died Q4 1874, his death being registered in the Halifax district.

By 1881 this Wolfenden family had moved to Hipperholme cum Brighthouse where daughter Fanny was born Q4 1884 .

1881 census

John Wolfenden Head 38 ?Tea Hawker?
 Hannah Mary Wolfenden Wife 34
 George Wolfenden Son 10
 James Wolfenden Son 8
 Ernest Wolfenden Son 6
 John W. Wolfenden Son 7m
 William Haigh Border 25 Wire Cleaner
 Address 5 Croft St., Hipperholme cum Brighthouse

1891 census

Hannah M Wolfenden Head 40 Widow
 Jonas Wolfenden Son 20 Silk Dresser
 Ernest Wolfenden Son 17 ditto
 John W Wolfenden Son 10 School boy
 Fanny Wolfenden Dau 7 School girl
 Address Waterloo Rd, Hipperholme cum
 Brighthouse

It looks as if John Wolfenden died in between censuses but no death or burial record has been found. In 1891 son George seems to have been recorded as Jonas and son James has not been located. He was probably in Rastrick, as this was his abode when he married Sarah Irving on 28th November later in the year.

1891. Marriage solemnized at <i>St. Andrew's Church</i> in the Parish of <i>St. Andrew</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.
118	<i>Nov 28/91</i>	<i>James Wolfenden</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>Bachelor</i>	<i>Silk Dresser</i>	<i>Rastrick</i>	<i>John Wolfenden deceased</i>	<i>Colon Spenser</i>
	<i>1891</i>	<i>Sarah Irving</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>Spinster</i>		<i>Brighthouse</i>	<i>John Irving deceased</i>	<i>Silk Weaver</i>
Married in the <i>Parish Church</i> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by <i>Banns</i> on after <i>Banns</i> by me.								
This Marriage was solemnized between us, <i>James Wolfenden</i> and <i>Sarah Irving</i>			in the Presence of us, <i>Henry Smith</i> and <i>Emily Bellamy</i>			by me, <i>F. Mearns</i>		

A year after the census widow Hannah Mary Wolfenden née Armitage married John Booth Q2 1892 in the Halifax district.

Willie, Walter, Elsie Victoria and Ernest Wolfenden were born in Q2 1892, on 14th January 1895, 7th June 1897 and 28th July 1900. Walter and his sister were baptised together at Brighthouse on 8th August 1897. Twenty-two-year-old Elsie Victoria died on 30th April 1899. She was buried in plot T30 in St. Matthew's churchyard, owned by her father James Wolfenden, on 3rd May 1899.

1901 census

James Wolfenden Head 31 Delver stone
 Sarah Wolfenden Wife 29
 Willie Wolfenden Son 8
 Walter Wolfenden Son 6
 Earnest Wolfenden son 8/12
 Elizabeth Marsden Sister 52
 Address Lydgate, Lightcliffe

Elizabeth Marsden was actually the aunt of Sarah Wolfenden née Irving. She seems to have looked after the Irving children after their parents died.

Although James Wolfenden was a 'Delver' he may already have signed up as a volunteer with the Duke of Wellington's West Yorkshire Regiment if his 25-year service record is correct.

Harold Wolfenden was born on 10th September 1902 and baptised with his older brother Ernest at St. Matthew's Church, Lightcliffe on 12th October 1902. Although, as the baptism record states, Ernest's name was initially recorded as "Walter". The vicar, the Rev. James Robert Hill, amended the baptism record stating that 'The name was an error on the part of the parents. The name should be Ernest. J.R.H.'

10 1902 Oct XII No. 1106	Walter <small>This name was an error on part of parent. The name should be Ernest. J.R.H.</small>	James & Sarah	Wolfenden	Park Place Lightcliffe	Delver	J.R.Hill
10 1902 Oct XII No. 1107	Harold	James & Sarah	Wolfenden	Park Place Lightcliffe	Delver	J.R.Hill

More sons John William, Frank and George were born in Q2 1906, Q2 1908 and 7th July 1910 but no baptism records have been found. Their grandmother Hannah Mary Booth formerly Wolfenden née Armitage died on 2nd November 1906 aged 54 and was buried with her little granddaughter in plot T30 on 6th November 1906. Less than two years later on 1st February 1908 they were joined by twenty-month-old John William who died on 30th January 1908.

TERRITORIAL FORCE.
SERVICE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM.

Attestation to be used only for Imperial Yeomanry or Volunteers, enlisted or enrolled before the 1st April, 1908, enlisting in the Force.

R 102 R 18

No. 252 Name James Wolfenden Corps 4th Bn West Riding Regt

Questions to be put to the Imperial Yeoman or Volunteer before Enlistment.

1. What is your Name? James Wolfenden
2. In or near what Parish or Town were you born? Rastrick in or near the Town of Greghouse in the County of Yorkshire
3. Are you a British Subject? Yes
4. What is your Age? 38 Years 0 Months
5. What is your Trade or Calling? Delver
6. In whose employ are you? Levras Robinson Crownest Park Lightcliffe
7. Where do you now reside? 38 Wellington Building, Bailiffe Bridge
8. Are you now an Apprentice? If so, please state particulars? No
9. Are you married? Yes
10. Do you now belong to the Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, the Imp. Yeomanry, the Territorial Force, the Royal Navy, the Volunteers, the Army Reserve (Regular or Special), or any Naval Yes. 1st Vol. West Riding Regiment

The military record above is dated 1908. It shows James Wolfenden, a 'Delver' of 38 Wellington Building, Bailiffe Bridge signing up for 1 year with the 4th Battalion West Riding Regiment after previously having served with the 1st Volunteer Battalion West Riding Regiment. He would sign up for an extra year every year until 1914.

1911 census

James Wolfenden Head 40 Delver
Sarah Wolfenden Wife 39
Willie Wolfenden Son 19 Coal Miner Hewer
Walter Wolfenden Son 16 Silk waste dresser
Ernest Wolfenden Son 10 School
Harold Wolfenden Son 7 School
Frank Wolfenden Son 2
George Wolfenden Son 8/12
Address Springfield Terrace, 38 Bradford Rd., Bailiffe Bridge

An eighth son James Wolfenden was born on 11th December 1913 but again no baptism record has been found.

And then the Great War started. But how many Wolfenden family members were involved? And who were they?

By 1914 father James Wolfenden was a Lance Corporal. On 1st December 1914 he signed a form

“to accept liability, in the event of a national emergency, to serve in any place outside the United Kingdom in accordance with the provisions of the section XII 2(a) of the Territorial and Reserve Forces Act, 1907”.

His military record goes on to say that he served at home from 5th August 1914 until 31st March 1916 which contradicts the report in the Brighouse Echo that he served in France. Lance Corporal James Wolfenden was discharged, aged 45 years, on 31st March 1916

“in consequence of *Being a timed expired soldier having served one year in excess of the period which he enlisted for; Para 302*”.

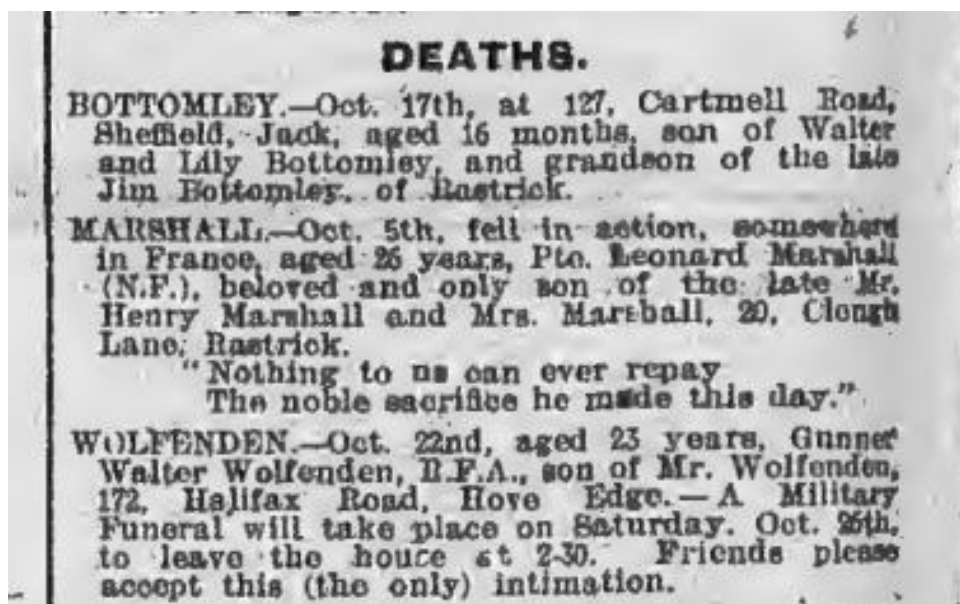
He gave his intended place of residence as 172, Halifax Road, Hove Edge, Lightcliffe.

It is difficult to tell whether or not eldest son Willie Wolfenden served. He may well have signed up with the West Riding Regiment in 1914 but there are too many Willie / William Wolfendens to be absolutely sure. Was he the arm amputee? Probably not. Was he training in Ripon? It is unlikely that an unmarried 26-year-old would be training so late on in the conflict in 1918. What is clear is that if Willie Wolfenden did serve then he survived.

However, his brother Gunner Walter Wolfenden did not survive as the newspaper article explains. The 20-year-old ‘Goods Porter’ signed up in June 1915. He was in France from 27th December 1915 until 16th December 1916 where he was apparently gassed. As the Brighouse Echo notes he was moved to the Army Reserve and then sent home to Lightcliffe. His military record concludes:-

<i>Phonetic 27/6 4 weeks from 2.8.8. 2km.</i>				
<i>5/6 to be reviewed in 122 weeks?</i>				
<i>Died at home address:-</i>				
<i>172 Halifax Rd. Lightcliffe</i>				
<i>from pneumonia on 22.10.18</i>				
<i>from pneumonia.</i>				
				<i>Colonel</i>
<i>1/c R.H. & R.F.A. RECORDS.</i>				

As the following death announcement explains, and the newspaper article confirms, he was given a military funeral.



Walter Wolfenden was buried on 26th October 1918 with his grandmother and young siblings in plot T30 (not S30). The plot is unmarked, in a position roughly in the middle of the image on page 2. It does seem strange that after a military funeral there is no CWGC headstone or indeed any headstone.

The influenza/Spanish flu was obviously in the household. His father James died the day after the military funeral and from the newspaper report 10-year-old Frank Wolfenden may have died the day before although both death dates were recorded as the 27th October 1918. Father and son were buried together in a new plot, P82, – presumably T30 was full – on 29th October 1918. Again, this is an unmarked grave.

The next son Ernest Wolfenden could be the E.WOLFENDEN remembered on the Bailiff Bridge war memorial: five from the bottom in the image below.



This raises a number of questions.

1. Is this Ernest Wolfenden, the son of the West Riding veteran James?
2. Did he work for T.F.Firth & Sons? No record has been found confirming this.
3. Did he live in Bailiffe Bridge? Probably not – see the 1921 census.
4. Was he the son at home who had lost an arm? Quite possibly. Read on!
5. Was he training in Ripon? Almost certainly not, as he would also have been too old.

Unsurprisingly, there are many E Wolfendens with military records from WW1, too many to search carefully through all of them. But two have been identified as enlisting in West Yorkshire into the Northumberland Fusiliers. An Ernest Wolfenden was a 'Dyer's Labourer' from Cleckheaton. He enlisted in 1914 and was killed in action on 25th September 1915. He is remembered on the Loos Memorial and is probably the T.F.Firth & Sons employee on the Bailiff Bridge memorial.

Then there is another Northumberland Fusilier E. Wolfenden on the *War Office Weekly Casualty List* for 27th November 1917. The report dated 21st November 1917 states that the address of the wounded man's next of kin was Halifax. The record below has also been found.

57652	"	Keys, W.	18-North'd Fus.	Myalgia
34936	"	Poulton, W.	20- do.	Gassed
40515	"	Wolfenden, E.	21- do.	Wounded
1/6932	"	Smith, R.	13-E. Yorks.	do.
14009	L/C.	Devine, J.E.	8-E. Yorks B.Co.	Sick Sl

Is this James and Sarah's son Ernest Wolfenden who lost his arm and was at home when influenza / Spanish flu struck the family October 1918? Who knows, but he seems to be the most likely candidate.

Son Harold Wolfenden, born 10th September 1902, would be too young to serve before October 1918 but he may have been the son training near Ripon. Harold Wolfenden appears on two transcribed Royal Air Force lists :-

Name: Harold Wolfenden	First Name: H
Gender: Male	Surname: Wolfenden
Age: 18	Information:
Birth Date: 10 Sep 1902	This person enlisted as a civilian into the Royal Air Force. They joined as an Aircrafthand between September 1919 and June 1925.
Birth Place: Lightcliffe, Lightcliffe, Yorkshire,	More Information:
Service Date: 16 Sep 1920	Appointed as a Class F Reservist
Service Number: 343374	Service Number: 343374
Father: J. Wolfenden	Service: Royal Air Force
Next of Kin: J. Wolfenden	Primary Unit: Royal Air Force
Relation to Airman: Father	Archive Reference: AIR 78 174 1

He clearly survived the conflict, if indeed he saw any action. Harold Wolfenden went on to have a career in the Royal Air Force.

That just leaves 7-year-old George and 4-year-old James Wolfenden, the two children at home mentioned in the newspaper article as “ suffering seriously from influenza.” But they recovered and were with their widowed mother and older brother Ernest on 19th June 1921. By then eldest son Willie Wolfenden had married Ida Smith in the Doncaster district Q4 1918 and Harold was in Kent with the R.A.F.

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	House Man	Pearson Marsden General Carter

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

1921 census

Willie	Wolfenden	Head	Male	1892	29	Lamplighter	Doncaster Corporation
Ida	Wolfenden	Wife	Female	1890	30	Home Duties	-

Address 17, Old Hexthorpe, Doncaster, Yorkshire (West Riding), England

1921 census

Harold Wolfenden 18y9m Male Single (born Halifax, Yorks.) Aircraftsman Air Force
Address Military Hospital, 11, Church Street, Folkestone, Folkestone, Kent, England

Was Ernest Wolfenden an able-bodied brick yard labourer in 1921 or did he manage to hold down this job despite a handicap. It is impossible to say. What is certain is that he died on 12th May 1924 and was buried with his father, James, and brother, Frank, in plot P82 in St.Matthew’s churchyard on 14th Mary 1924.

Benjamin Crossley was another ex-Duke of Wellington soldier, most likely a contemporary of Lance Corporal James Wolfenden, which probably explains why he was lodging with the Wolfenden family in 1921. He died aged 57 on 31st January 1927 and was buried with the Wolfendens in plot P82 – which was then declared full – on 3rd February 1927. His story will be told later.

Private Ben Crossley

Forty-six-year-old Willie Wolfenden died Q2 1939 in the Wakefield district just before the 1939 register was taken. By then his younger brothers had each married Alices. George married Alice Holten Q3 1936 in the Halifax district and James married Alice Pickles in the Calder district Q3 1938.

1939 register

Sarah	Wolfenden	28 Sept 1871	Female	Private Means	Widow
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Address 22 Clifton Arms Park Street, Brighouse, Brighouse M.B., Yorkshire (West Riding), England

1939 register

Ida	Wolfenden	03 Oct 1889	Female	Unpaid Domestic Duties	Widow
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2 closed records
Address 31 Shirley Road, Doncaster, Doncaster C.B., Yorkshire (West Riding), England

Widow Sarah Wolfenden née Irving died Q4 1940. Her death was registered in the Halifax district, but no record of her burial or cremation has been found.

Harold Wolfenden has not been found on the 1939 register. Neither has a marriage for him been positively identified. However, the 1986 death of a Harold Wolfenden in Blackpool and Fylde, Lancashire was him, as his correct birth date 10th September 1902 was recorded.

1939 register

George Wolfenden	07 Jul 1910	Male	Carpet Printer	Married	122	1
Alice Wolfenden	10 Apr 1911	Female	Inspector & Sorter Of Screws	Married	122	2

Address 103 Elland Road, Brighouse, Brighouse M.B., Yorkshire (West Riding), England

1939 register

James Wolfenden	11 Dec 1913	Male	General Labourer in Engineering	Married	37	1
Alice Wolfenden	27 Jun 1914	Female	Silk Spinner	Married	37	2

Address Riverside Cottage Cliffe Road, Brighouse, Brighouse M.B., Yorkshire (West Riding), England

As you can see the younger brothers were still in the Brighouse area in September 1939. George Wolfenden died on 15th June 1983 and was buried at Normanton, Wakefield. James appears to have remained in the Halifax area where he died in January 1993.

If the Ernest Wolfenden buried in the churchyard was the wounded Northumberland Fusilier, then there are three WW1 Wolfenden soldiers – as well as a Crossley - to add to our list of soldiers. The three Wolfendens and ex-soldier Benjamin Crossley were buried in unmarked plots, T30 and P82 in the middle section of the churchyard. In the image below plot P82 is roughly indicated near the wall by the new section.



D.M.Barker
March 2023