

Bury Choral Society concert, 6th November, 2018 – *The Great War: Armistice*

Pte William Roberts, 2nd/5th Lancashire Fusiliers

William Roberts' experience of the war was similar to that of tens of thousands of other men. But his decision to enlist at all was, at least from our perspective, extraordinary.

William, or Willie Roberts lived at 18 Rhode Street, Tottington. He was employed at Burrs Bleach Works and was associated with St Anne's Church, the Sunday School and Football Club. He was also a member of Tottington Conservative Club.

He enlisted on 19th September 1915, before conscription was introduced, joining the 2nd/5th Battalion of The Lancashire Fusiliers. Consider this: Willie Roberts was 36 years old when he enlisted, married and with five children, all under the age of 10. Why enlist with such responsibilities and ties and no obligation, at that time, to join up? Perhaps he believed it was his duty to protect his country, like so many others, or the fact that he had two brothers, one who was serving in the Gallipoli campaign which was in full, deadly progress when Willie enlisted, and the other who was serving in France.

After a period at Bury Barracks and then Southport, Willie Roberts went to France, joining his battalion on the Somme. Trench warfare had established itself by this time and he served on the frontline and in reserve in common with most infantry soldiers. During May 1916 he was home on leave and then returned to the Front, to the Battle of the Somme which commenced on 1st July.

At the beginning of August 1916, the 2nd/5th were in the reserve trenches at Trones Wood and endured several days of heavy shelling. At 3.30am on 8th August three companies were called up from the reserve to advance to the support trenches. Two of the companies moved along the "sunken road" and were heavily shelled. Later that morning the third company suffered the same fate. Private William Roberts was recorded as missing,

presumed dead – his body was never found. His name is recorded on the great monument at Thiepval along with the names of 73,000 other men who have no known resting place. The flag at Tottington Conservative Club was flown at half-mast.



The story of Willie Roberts was one of four stories of local Bury people, or enlisted men in the Lancashire Fusiliers, presented as part of Bury Choral Society's concert. Willies' grandson, Glyn Roberts, and great, great grandson, Jack Roberts, attended the concert.