

John Edward Keys 1888-1916

John (known as 'Jack') Edward Keys was born in Nottingham in 1888, second child of John and Jane Keays.

Six generations of the Keays family (spellings include Keays, Keys, Kaeyes.....) have lived in Upper Broughton at some point in their lives. Some lived at Greystone Cottage, now the home of the Parkinson family, the last Keys to live in the village were living at Rose Cottage, now part of the Village Hall.

Jack had an older sister, Mabel who was six years his senior. In 1891, they were living with their parents at 15, Mansfield St, in Basford, Nottingham. By 1901, the family had moved to 379, Alfred St North in Nottingham.

In 1905 Mabel married Oskar Eric Freudenberg, who had been born in Germany in 1865. Nothing is known about Oskar Freudenberg after the birth of their son in 1906.

By 1915, Jack was living at 3, Hedley Villas, Beech Avenue, Sherwood Rise and working at the



Midland Electric Picture Palace (pictured right in 2015) on Queens Road in Nottingham. The Picture Palace had opened in 1911 and it is believed that Jack was employed as an electrician.

He volunteered for the Army but was not accepted by the Royal Flying Corps as an electrician.

He was recruited at the Mechanics' Institute in Nottingham and joined the third Battalion the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, with the service number 22049. 3 DCLI was a Reserve Battalion stationed in the UK throughout the war and provided drafts to other DCLI Battalions abroad. He appears to have undergone training at Golden Hill, Freshwater, Isle of Wight and then Machine Gun training as a member of the DCLI at Belton Park, Grantham, being transferred to the newly-formed Machine Gun Corps early in 1916 with the service number 10349.

He joined No2 Machine Gun Company in about March 1916 and was allocated to "A" Section.



No 2 Machine Gun Company

(Extracts from the Unit's War Diary held at the National Archives, Kew)

No 2 Machine Gun Company was formed in France on 26 January 1916, originally the Machine Gun Company of 2 Brigade, itself part of I Division, Initially it was commanded by Capt E A Pearson of 2 Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps. "A" Section was the Machine Gun Section attached to the 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regt.

In April 1916, the company was based at Les Brebis, Grenay, Erquinghem and Fleurbaix in the Ypres area. It was inspected by General Douglas Haig on 27 April.



The Somme Offensive began on 1 July 1916. Between the 3rd and 17th July, the Company marched through Haillicourt, Bruay, Lillers, Candas, Flesselles, Frechencourt and Bresle to the Maxse Redoubt on the Somme and moved into the Line on 18th July.

On 26th July they marched to Franvillers and on the 30th to Henencourt Wood.

On the 13 August, the Company moved to Maxse Redoubt and then on 14 August into the line at Mametz Wood.

On the 18 August the Company's War Diary reveals that:

"The Company's guns supported an attack by 2 Inf Bde on the enemy intermediate line. The attack was partially successful, and the machine guns inflicted heavy losses on the enemy.

Casualties: 3 Officers wounded

8 OR killed

11 OR wounded."

Private John Keys was "killed by shellfire near High Wood" on 18 August 1916 according to OC "A" Section, Lt FJA Webdin(?) and Sgt W Webb. He was buried just behind the trench by his comrades at a position officially recorded as "200 yards from windmill, just E of Bazentin-le-Petit, 4 miles NW of Combles".

Sometime later he was re-interred at Caterpillar Valley Cemetery, near Longueval, a site only re-taken from German hands in August 1918, and which houses the



graves of some 5500 soldiers, taken from several other cemeteries in the area.

Jack's parents were living in Upper Broughton during the war, as were his grandparents.



Caterpillar Valley Cemetery, 2017

Keays Family Tree

