

Remembering Tom Chapman.



In 1885 the headmaster of the non-conformist British School in Embsay noted in his log book that all 5 schoolboys from the Chapman family stuttered so badly he could not enter them in the reading exams. He also recorded that their stuttering worsened "when under excitement." Tom, who was five years old, was the 2nd youngest of these boys. This was a large family of 11 children. The oldest of the 7 boys, Herbert, was already working as a cotton weaver (and by 1901 was married and living in Sutton, near Keighley); Edward had died a couple of years earlier at the age of 3), & there were 4 girls (including twins). The youngest child, Jinnie, was born three years after the log book entry was made.

Their parents were William and Elizabeth Chapman who lived at Cragg View. Elizabeth was Embsay born and bred, while William, who had been born at Kilnsey, came to live in Embsay as a child when his parents moved here. As an adult he worked at the limestone quarry.

The Chapman children re-appeared in the school log book when an epidemic of scarlet fever hit the parish in 1896. Tom was so badly affected he had been admitted to hospital and the rest of the family was quarantined at home. It was five months before Tom was well enough to return to school.

He left school at the earliest age possible, 14, to become a coal merchant's carter in 1900, while his siblings went into the cotton and tobacco mills. He was 17 when his mother died (no doubt exhausted!) at the age of 52. Soon afterwards Tom went to work at Bolton Abbey as a boot cleaner in the Devonshire Hotel. He was there for 10 years before returning to live in Embsay after his father died in January 1916. Tom joined the Embsay Allotment Holders' Association, and was apparently a keen gardener. At the Embsay Flower and Vegetable Show in September 1916, he won several 3rd prize places with his cucumbers, potatoes and savoy cabbages, and 2nd prizes for his sweet peas and montbretias. He even won a special prize in the "Miscellaneous" category (Unfortunately the Craven Herald fails to go into further detail!). He was working for the grocer, Arthur Davy, when conscription was introduced in May 1916, but managed to avoid being called up for almost a year (perhaps because his employer argued that Tom was an essential worker). Tom was drafted initially into the West Yorkshire Regiment in June 1917. By October 1917 he was posted to France, and was soon transferred to the North Staffordshire Regiment (12th Battalion) to be a despatch messenger. Perhaps he had overcome his stutter by this time? His unit were behind the lines by 14th September 1917, but Tom died of wounds on 27 September, 1918, so he would have been in hospital for at least a fortnight. It was left to his youngest sister, Jinnie, who lived at Elm Tree Cottages, to choose the inscription for his war grave at Trois Arbres Cemetery. She chose the simple phrase "Rest in Peace". Tom was 33 years old.

2 of his brothers served in the war. Jack survived, returning to his wife and 2 children in Embsay; Another brother, Dick, also survived the war, and married a Nottinghamshire girl, Elsie, who he brought back to Embsay in 1921.

Tom's brothers and sisters paid tributes to him over the next 4 years, publishing a memorial in the local paper on each anniversary of his death, in which they reiterated the theme of "rest in peace" alongside "Ever remembered", and "He laid his richest gift on the altar of duty."

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