

IN MEMORY OF MARGARET – A PERSONAL TRIBUTE

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My friendship with Margaret did not start until she and Alan joined one of my tours of the First World War battlefields in France and Belgium in 1985. There turned out to be two Margarets. First there was the quiet, contemplative lady who listened carefully to everything I had to say and was completely cooperative and helpful. What shone out above all, was the compassion she had for the individual soldiers who died on the Western Front in 1914–18, particularly for those who came from her native Yorkshire, a county that had no less than six regiments, each with many battalions, 15 of them being the iconic ‘Pals’ raised by local initiative and serving together – at least until casualties whittled down the numbers of original members.

However, the ‘after-dinner’ Margaret was a very different person. After our evening meals there was always a group who would gather either in our hotel, or at some bar not too far away. Serious conversation soon gave way to jokes and sometimes to song. Our daytime pilgrimage to the battlefields had been serious, as had the service in the trenches for the soldiers we were honouring been serious. But those soldiers when ‘out of the line’ had done exactly the same – egg and chips usually, then jokes and songs. Margaret was often the main contributor to these evening parties, with a swift and piercing sense of humour and contributing alternative wording for otherwise well known songs. We enjoyed these evenings as part of the ‘pilgrimage’ aspect of the tours; we were doing exactly what the soldiers of 1914–18 had done.

Later, usually working from home, she became a seriously skilled researcher and archivist, helping anyone who needed help with their own work. I benefitted myself from her skill many times. All of this was done for devotion to the memory of the war, nothing for personal gain.

It did not surprise me when I was shown the contents of this publication. It reflects diligence, skill and sheer hard work so that the County Borough of Huddersfield can have, not just a comprehensive list of the names of the men who died in the First World War, but personal details of where, and often how, they died, where they are buried or are commemorated. There are 3,439 such entries, a significant number of which are for men and one woman who, for various reasons, had not been commemorated on the War Memorial in Greenhead Park.

How sad that Margaret died before she could see this marvelous work published.

Mr Martin Middlebrook