

Private Belfred Ward[©]
Regimental number: 11262
72nd Company, Machine Gun Corps (Infantry)

born: 31 August 1891 – died: 30 April 1916

Private Belfred Ward, the son of George and Elizabeth Ward, was born in 1895 in Pontefract, Yorkshire.¹ Both his parents were also born in Pontefract: George in about 1856 and his mother in about 1858.² George and Elizabeth (nee Miller) were married on 21 July 1877 in the parish church in Pontefract³ and had 12 children:



LEEDS CLUB'S NEW THREE-QUARTER.
FOUR PONTEFRACT BROTHERS ALL PLAYING FOOTBALL.
 Good judges Pontefract way congratulate the Leeds Northern Union Club on a smart stroke of business in signing on Belf Ward, a centre three-quarter, of Pontefract.
 This player, who recently joined the Featherstone club, and has been transferred by them, comes of a famous football family. He is one of four brothers, all of whom are still playing football. They are Tom Ward (the once famous Hull Kingston and Pontefract

B. WARD. Photo: Empire Studios.
 (centre), "Bob" Ward (a former Leeds half-back), George Ward, and Belfred.
 He is 18 years old and began the Northern Union game this year with the Pontefract "A" team. After a few matches with them he was transferred to the first team and has played some fine games with them. He weighs 11st. 1lb., and stands 5ft. 11in.
 He was expected to turn out against York "A" today with his new club. His brother Tom, who is a competent judge, expresses the opinion that the youngster will be the "star" of the family.

- Thomas (born in about 1878),⁴
- Robert (born in about 1880),⁵
- Henry (born in about 1882),⁶
- Emma (born on 12 December 1884),⁷
- George (born on 15 May 1887),⁸
- Elizabeth (born in about 1889),⁹
- Polly (born in about 1892),¹⁰
- Belfred (also known as Belf or Belph),
- Janet (born in about 1897 died soon after birth),¹¹
- Charles (born in about 1899),¹²
- Walter (born in about 1901)¹³ and
- Arthur (born in about 1904).¹⁴

In 1881, George and Elizabeth were living in Horsefair, Pontefract, where George was a general labourer. Ten years later, they were still living in Horsefair and had six children, but George was now a collier—an occupation that he would retain for at least two decades. In 1901, George had become a colliery deputy and was living with his nine children. Elizabeth was not with the family at the time of the census, but she was there ten years later. In 1911, there were only six children still living at home—including Belfred, who had followed in his father's footsteps and become a hewer at the coal mine¹⁵ at the Prince of Wales Colliery in Pontefract.¹⁶

Rugby played a big part in the life of the Ward family—Belfred and three of his brothers Thomas (called Tom), Robert (called Bob) and George were all rugby players. Tom was a centre with the Hull Kingston and Pontefract team, before becoming a judge, and Bob a half-back with Leeds. Belfred played with the Featherstone Rovers, until the Leeds Northern Union Club paid £76 for his transfer to that club as a centre three-quarter in 1914. He began with the Pontefract "A" team but, after a few games, was

"Leeds Club's New Three-Quarter," *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 21 February 1914

Source: *Findmypast*

transferred to the first team. Tom was convinced that his brother was going to be the star of the family. Unfortunately, he only had one successful season with the team before enlisting.¹⁷

Belph enlisted as a private (regimental number 23510) in the Yorkshire Regiment in Pontefract.¹⁸ He probably did not join the British Expeditionary Force in France until early 1916.¹⁹ At some point, he transferred to the Machine Gun Corps (Infantry). He was in the 72nd Company when he died. The 72nd Machine Gun Company was formed from the machine gun sections of 72nd Brigade, 24th Division on 14 March 1916.²⁰ "In 1916, they suffered in the German gas attack at Wulverghem. . ."²¹ Belfred died on 30 April at No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station of wounds on his right side and gas poisoning.²² The effects of the gas attacks were also felt at No. 1 CCCS., stationed near Bailleul,²³ which was just six miles from Wulverghem. Fifteen patients died the same day as Belfred, many apparently from gas poisoning.

Belph was a member of the Church of England²⁴ and was buried in the Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord (Plot II, Row D, Grave 122).²⁵ Bailleul is in France, close to the Belgian border. It was occupied on 14 October 1914 and became an important railhead, air depot and hospital centre. Several casualty clearing stations, including No. 1 CCCS, were quartered there for considerable periods. The earliest Commonwealth burials at Bailleul were made in April 1915. An extension was built and burials continued until April 1918, and occurred again in September and after the Armistice, when remains were brought in from the neighbouring battlefields.²⁶

The chaplains' journal indicates that a letter was sent to his mother at Horsefair, Pontefract,²⁷ and the monies owing to him by the army upon his death were sent to his mother and father.²⁸

Belph was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).²⁹

Belph's older brother Harry also tried to enlist at the beginning of the Great War. He enlisted in the West Yorkshire Regiment on 8 September 1914 but, on 28 October of the same year, he was discharged as being "medically unfit for further service." He had married Florrie Bennet in October 1908 at the parish church in Pontefract³⁰ and, by the beginning of the war, he had two children—a son, Harry, born in 1909, and a daughter, Emily, born in 1912.³¹ It is not known if any of Belph's other brothers served in the Great War.

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Thanks are extended to Jane Roberts, who provided additional information that enabled a significant correction and update to this biography. Jane and Chris Roberts have researched the lives of players in the North Union Rugby League who lost their lives in the Great War (see <https://pasttopresentgenealogy.wordpress.com/>).

¹ "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 14 October 2018), entry for Ward Belferd [*sic*], Registration district: Pontefract, Volume 09C, Page 127

² "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 14 October 2018), entry for George Ward, Sub-registration district: Pontefract, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 12, Piece: 3760, Folio: 120

³ "England & Wales Marriages 1837–2005," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 14 October 2018), entry for George Ward, District: Pontefract, County: Yorkshire, Volume: 9C, Page: 131

⁴ "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 14 October 2018), entry for Ward Thomas, Registration district: Pontefract, Volume 09C, Page 122

⁵ "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 14 October 2018), entry for Ward, Robert, Registration district: Pontefract, Volume 09C, Page 123

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- ⁶ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 14 October 2018), entry for Ward, Henry, Registration district: Pontefract, Volume 09C, Page 116
- ⁷ “England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538–1975,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 14 October 2018), entry for Emma Ward, FHL film number: 1542096
- ⁸ “England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538–1975,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 14 October 2018), entry for George Ward, FHL film number: 1542096
- ⁹ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 14 October 2018), entry for Ward, Elizabeth, Registration district: Pontefract, Volume 09C, Page 110
- ¹⁰ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 14 October 2018), entry for Ward, Polly, Registration district: Pontefract, Volume 09C, Page 120
- ¹¹ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 14 October 2018), entry for Ward, Janet, Registration district: Pontefract, Volume 09C, Page 121; “England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 16 October 2018), entry for Janet Ward, Registration district: Pontefract, Inferred county: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9c, Page: 68
- ¹² “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 14 October 2018), entry for Ward, Charles, Registration district: Pontefract, Volume 09C, Page 114
- ¹³ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 14 October 2018), entry for Ward, Walter, Registration district: Pontefract, Volume 09C, Page 133
- ¹⁴ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 14 October 2018), entry for Ward, Arthur, Registration district: Pontefract, Volume 09C, Page 120
- ¹⁵ “1911 England, Wales & Scotland Census,” *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 8 May 2018), entry for Belph Ward [*sic*], Registration district: Pontefract, Registration district number: 505, Enumeration district: 4, District number: 4, Sub-district: Pontefract, Sub-district number: 3, Piece: 27464
- ¹⁶ “Leeds Footballer Killed,” *Leeds Mercury*, 13 May 1916, in “British Newspapers,” *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 16 October 2018)
- ¹⁷ “Leeds Club’s New Three-Quarter,” *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 21 February 1914, and “Fate of Some North Country Soldiers,” *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 13 May 1916, in “British Newspapers,” *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 16 October 2018)
- ¹⁸ “UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 2 September 2015), entry for Belfred Ward
- ¹⁹ He was not awarded the 1914–15 Star, which was for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915. “British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 2 September 2015), entry for Bedlfred Ward
- ²⁰ “72nd Machine Gun Company,” *The Wartime Memories Project - The Great War* (<http://www.wartimememoriesproject.com>: accessed 2 September 2015)
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 20 August 2016), entry for Ward, B.
- ²³ “War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31,” *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca>: accessed 17 June 2015)
- ²⁴ “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 20 August 2016), entry for Ward, B.
- ²⁵ “Commonwealth War Graves Commission,” www.cwgc.org: accessed 2 September 2015), entry for Ward, B., Service No: 11262
- ²⁶ “Bailleul Communal Cemetery, Nord,” *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/>: accessed 5 August 2015)
- ²⁷ “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 20 August 2016), entry for Ward, B.

²⁸ "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 2 September 2015), entry for Belford Ward [*sic*]

²⁹ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 20 August 2016), entry for Bedlfred Ward [*sic*]

³⁰ "West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1910," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 14 October 2018), entry for Harry Ward

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