# William Daniel Keeley

Born Q3 1874 in Preston. Listed in the birth registrations as William Daniel Kealey with an ‘a’.

1881 census: His family live at 3 Watson Town, Dawdon, Seaham Harbour, County Durham. His father, Michael, is 45, a blast furnace weighman, born in Ireland. Mother Catherine (nee Galvin) is 40, born in Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire. James R, born Devonport Devonshire, is 15, a clerk chemical works. Ellen is 11, born in Woolwich, Kent. Michael is 9 and Winifred is 8, both born in Thornecliffe camp, Folkestone, Kent, William is 6, born in Preston, Lancs, and Thomas is 1, born in Seaham, Durham.

The different places the children were born in is explained by the fact that their father, Michael Keeley, was in the army, and there is a service discharge record on findmypast for Gunner Michael Keeley (also written Kealey in some places). He was in the Coast Brigade of the Royal Artillery, service number 5580, and servied for 21 years and 239 days, from 11 August 1858 up to 5th April 1880. He was born in Bray in the county of Wicklow and had earlier been a blacksmith, but signed up in Birmingham at the age of 23. He finished his service in Seaham aged 44 years and 7 months, so was born c Sep 1835

1891 census: William’s a boarder with the Burchell family in Westbourne Street, Everton, Liverpool. He’s 16, a clerk bookkeeper, born in Preston, Lancs. His parents live in Bishopwearmouth , Sunderland, where his father, 57, is a furnace stoker at “Birley Ships in ship yard”. Two of William’s brothers also live there: James, 25, is a probationary clerk with HM Customs, and Michael, 19, is a grocer’s assistant.

According to his service record on fmp, a militia attestation, William joined up first at Chester 28 June 1898. He was a clerk working for Mr Hicks in Tattenhall, Cheshire, and lived at Tattenhall House (of which more later). Service no 4570. Attested to 3rd Bn Cheshire regiment till 9 Aug 1898.

Then there’s a short service attestation as service number 5770 at Chester 10 Aug 1898. Born in Preston, Lancs. Is 21 yrs 2 months. 3rd Battn Cheshire Regt. 5’ 81/2 “, 118 lbs, Fresh compexion, hazel eyes, brown hair (though our other info says he was actually 24)

He initially did well in the army and was promoted from private to corporal in 1898 and then to lance corporal in 1899, but in 1900 he was convicted of being absent without leave and reduced to the ranks. This must have been terrible for him, coming from an army family. However he continued to serve until he was discharged as medically unfit for further service on 26 Aug 1902, aged 25 yrs 2 months (actually 28).

Certificates of education: 2nd class 9.9.1998, first class 31.10.1999, passed for promotion to corporal 8.3.99.

Campaigns: South African, 1900-1902, for which he got the South African medal.

He served at home 10 Aug 98 to 7 Jan 1900, South Africa 1 Jan 1900 to 1 Jul 1902, home 2 Jul 1902 to 26 Aug 1902. He gave his next of kin as his father Michael, 34 Tudor St Liverpool, mother Catherine, and brothers Thomas in Berks, James and John.

A year later, on July 29th 1903 when he was 28, he married Lucy Bellis, 31. He’s a clerk, at 30 Sutcliffe St Liverpool, son of Michael Keeley, and she’s living in West Kirby, daughter of John Bellis. They married at the parish church in West Kirby, Chester. His father died the following year in West Derby, Lancs.

1911 census: He’s superintendent of the St Hugh’s Boys’ Home for the Waifs and Strays Society in Lincoln. He’s 36 and his wife, Lucy, who’s 39, is the matron of the home. They’ve been married 7 years and have no children. She’s from Buckley, Flint. There’s a servant and 36 boys from all over the country. He has signed the census form as head of the household.

His brother Thomas is assistant master at the C of E Waifs and Strays home in Tattenhall House, Tattenhall, W Chester . The master of the home, who is an army pensioner, is James Hicks, whose wife Margaret is the matron. When William applied to join the army in 1898 he said he was a clerk to Mr Hicks and that he lived in Tattenhall House, so he had a long connection with the Waifs and Strays homes and was followed in this by his brother.

Also in the 1911 census, his mother, Catherine, now a widow, is living with his brother, Michael John (39), who’s a commissioned preventive officer of HM Customs and Excise in Harrier Road, Liverpool.

23 Feb 1912 Mr Davison is still superintendent of St Boniface’s in SP as he represents the home at a funeral (newspaper article). Also in July 1912 where he attends a money-raising fete.

The October 1912 edition of Waifs and Strays magazine gives an account of the journey of a number of boys, including 14 from Sampford Peverell, on ‘The Virginian’ to Canada. It goes into great detail of the journey from Euston to Liverpool, life on board, and arrival in Canada. On arrival “we were more than glad to note Mr Keeley, our own Inspecting Officer of Canadian boys, on the look-out for us, and his grip and words of welcome were good to have.” Paperwork had to be done and medical examinations, “but all this takes hours, and would have taken many hours more but for the experienced and valued help of Mr Keeley”. This is Thomas Keeley, William Keeley’s brother. He’s on emigration lists to and from Canada until 1933 as “inspector emigrated boys”, or with school boys as “in charge of above”.

The November 1912 edition of the magazine has this piece about ‘Our inspector in Canada’: “After a summer passed in doing most excellent work in Canada looking up our bouys, the link between their old life and their new, putting, where needed, a little more heart and vigour into them, adjusting here and there such little differences as will occasionally arise between employer and employed, however good a fellow each may be, Mr Keeley has returned, from all the freedom of the plains and from covering a mileage which is almost beyond grasp, to the monotony of a desk, and an office measured by mere cubic feet. And yet, when he is asked to expatiate on the immensities of life in the Far West, he cannot start on his task without a preliminary “puff” of his colleagues in his present surroundings! The encomium, however, is so spontaneous, and, as the Editor can himself vouch, so well deserved, that it is allowed to “pass”; but we shall expect Mr Keeley in a future issue to give us some further and fuller account of his Western experiences.” This he did, and there is a lot in the magazines about the boys who were sent to Canada, including a picture of the staff and emigrant party from St Boniface’s, which must include some of our WW1 men, but it’s pretty much just a black blur unfortunately.

Thomas Keeley later became the superintendent of the Gibbs Home for Waifs and Stray home in Sherbrooke, Quebec, and ran it until it closed in 1933, when he converted it into the Gibb’s Club to help the boys maintain contact with each other.

Jan 1913, Mr G W Davison is still superintendent of St Boniface’s as he and W H Norrish organize a supper and smoking concert at the home, attended by the men’s bible class, the ringers, and the Football Club. It was presided over by the Rector, the Rev J J Rees.

April 1913 edition of Waifs and Strays “The first of our emigration parties starts on April 25th, in charge of Mr Keely(sic).” Other detachments of boys sail on May 16th, May 30th and June 20th,” under the care of other named masters from various places.

May 1913 edition – report of more boys en route to Canada “Mr Keeley in command”. Another batch of 20 boys went in May 1914, including one from SP.

At some point after January 1913 William Keeley moved to Sampford Peverell because in the 1914 Kelly’s Directory it says that he is superintendent of St Boniface’s, when there were 75 boys in the school. He’s not mentioned in earlier or later directories. His wife, Lucy, was with him as we’ll see later, and became matron of the home.

11 Sep 1914 Western Times on the recruiting meeting at SP: “… the Boy Scouts from St Boniface Home with their bugle band under Assistant Scoutmaster P Bradfield, the Scoutmaster (Mr Keeley) having joined the Army.”

This was in the early days of the Scouts – Baden-Powell’s first camp on Brownsea Island was in 1907, and Scouting for Boys was first published in 1908. Judging by the Waifs and Strays magazine the Church Society quickly decided that scouting was good for the boys in the homes, but said it was up to each home whether or not to introduce it.

The October 1914 copy of Waifs and Strays lists Masters who, “as members of different Reserves, have been called out” including Keeley from Sampford Peverell.

His medal card gives the following info, which shows that he had several promotions and finished the war as an officer:

“8th Devons, labour corps

Service number 10388 as sergeant,

Promoted to Quarter Master Sergeant, service number 91902, then to 2nd Lieut, Lieut and Capt.

Entered theatre of war in France 26/7/1915.

Comm (commissioned?) 9.9.17

Extract from KE/852 22.11.20, E79/24/1/21\*, & 6.10.20

\*Address 224 Gt Clowes St., Broughton, Manchester.

Faint note 15.4.21 at top.”

08 Oct 1914 D&S news: “Mr W D Keeley, superintendent of the St Boniface Home, Sampford Peverell, has been promoted sergeant, and is training recruits for the Army at Aldershot. He saw service in the Boer war.”

21 Jan 1915, D&S news: “Mr Keeley, superintendent of St Boniface Home, Sampford Peverell, has recovered from an illness, and has rejoined his regiment at Farnham. Many boys who had been trained under the supervision of Mr Davison (formerly of St Boniface Home) and Mr Keeley have come over to England with the Canadian contingents.”

24 Jul 1915, news report on St Boniface’s: “The House Committee reported that Mr Keeley (Master) re-joined the Army shortly after the outbreak of the war, and that Mr Bradfield (the under-master) was appointed acting-master”.

01 Oct 1915 Western Times: Mrs Keeley, Matron of St Boniface Home for Waifs and Strays, Sampford Peverill (sic) has received the news that her husband, Sergt. Keeley, 8th Devons, has been wounded. Before volunteering for service Sergt. Keeley was Superintendent Master of St Boniface Home.

In November 1915 a letter from Sgt WDK appeared in the Waifs and Strays magazine: “Military Auxiliary Hospital. Dear Mr H --- I promised to write to you from France. At first there was nothing worth writing about, and when there was I was past it. On our arrival in France they taught us all that was necessary to take our place in the firing line. We had got quite used to the trenches when the rumours of the big attack spread. Our battalion was given a place of honour to lead the attack from our sector. We were short of officers, and I was chosen to lead a platoon in the advance. We thought the attack would be about 4.30 am, but at 4 am I received word it would not be until two hour later. I told my men, and what do you think they did – wrapped themselves in their waterproof sheets and went to sleep. About 6.30 am the signal was given, and like one man the battalion was over the top and making a bee line for the German trenches. After taking two lines of their trenches, I turned round to look for my platoon – for we had advanced under a storm of shrapnel …………. I went forward to join a company in front, but had not gone ten paces before I was struck in the back by a piece of shrapnel, and went to sleep. I awoke some hours afterwards to find I had had a fair allowance of gas and acquired acute neuritis in the right leg. With my equipment on I was unable to move, and I could not expect any help for at least twenty-four hours. To my joy I saw a ‘kiltie’ coming along the top of the captured trench. I called him and he came, took off my kit, dressed my wound, gave me water, and helped me over a deep trench. I don’t know his name, but I pray for him. It was two miles to a dressing station, and by making a special effort I did it in four hours. Within a week I was back in England. They are patching me up – getting me ready for another advance. I am in a Voluntary Aid Hospital. Everyone is kind and I feel at rest. Please excuse this scrawl, but I am feeling tired – Yours very faithfully, W.D.K (Sergt)”.

This was (as mentioned later) at the battle of Loos, between 25 Sep 1915 and 15 Oct 1915, and most probably 25th Sep which was when the British first used poison gas, which moved erratically and affected many British troops. The Long Long Trail website says “Heavy losses were incurred by the lead units of 20th Brigade in No Man’s Land from German shelling, which had been opened up to try to despel the gas and smoke cloud. The 8th Devonshires suffered heavy machine-gun casualties, the wire in front of their sector having been only partially cleared. However the 2nd Gordon Highlanders fared better and soon pushed past the German front line towards Gun Trench ahd Hulluch”. This all seems to tie in with William Keeley’s description. Sampford Peverell casualty Walter Gale was also gassed on 25th Sep in this battle, and survived. There are photos of the battle ground on 25th Sep on the Imperial War Museum site:

<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/search?query=battle+of+loos&items_per_page=10>

William Keeley is listed in the hospital records on the forces-war-records site, which says that he was admitted on 29 Sep 1915 with a gunshot wound to the right shoulder. He’d been serving for 1 year and 1 month, and had had 2 months ‘with field force’. Against ‘ward’ it says “quai’, which might just mean the quayside, and was transferred on 2nd Oct 1915 to “sick convoy”. An additional note under observations says “hospital ship Egypt” – this is the SS Egypt which was used as a hospital ship during WW1.

10 Feb 1916, news item on the tribunal about Percy Bradfield: “It was stated that the master, who was a reserve man, had been wounded at the Front. Mr New thought the proper course would be for the master to come back when he had recovered, and take charge of the Home, so that the younger man Bradfield could go. The Tribunal thought the committee should endeavour to get a man over military age, and meanwhile postponed Bradfield from group 7 to group 15”. In fact the master, William Keeley, didn’t come back, so the Waifs and Strays magazine of July 1916 mentions, in relation to a fund-raising Pound Day held in May: “One of the first useful bits of work by the newly-appointed Master has been to collect a sufficent sum, £13, to provide a good American organ for the Chapel” . Percy Bradfield enlisted later in 1916.

08 Jun 1916, D&S news: “Sergeant Keeley, formerly master of the St Boniface Home, Sampford Peverell, who joined up at the beginning of the war, was wounded at the battle of Loos last September, but has made a good recovery. He has been appointed regimental quartermaster sergeant, and will shortly be going abroad again on service.”

12 Oct 1917 London Gazette lists Actg Co Qr-Mr-Serjt W D Keeley amongst those NCOs in the Labour Corps to be promoted to temporary 2nd Lts.

17 Sep 1918, London Gazette, Temp 2nd Lt W D Keely to become actg Captain while commanding a company.

25 Apr 1919, London Gazette, in list of temp 2nd Lts to become temp Lts

18 Jul 1919, London Gazette, temp Lt W D Keeley relinquishes the actg rank of Capt on ceasing to comd a co from 30 June 1919.

His full service record as an officer can only be seen at the National Archives in Kew – I’ll go there sometime and photograph this and the service records of others of our officers which I know are held there, eg William Taylor, the vet.

It’s hard to find anything about him after the war – he didn’t return to St Boniface’s. His medal card gave an address in Broughton, Lancs, and he is almost certainly the William D Keeley who died in Horwich, Lancs, on 9th June 1940. 1940. He was buried in Hindley cemetery Lancs, as was his wife, Lucy Keeley, who died on 01 Sep 1945.