

Benjamin Thornton Smith

(1890 – 1967)

Benjamin Thornton Smith was from a Farnhill family who lived in Starkey Lane. His father was a milk dealer and Benjamin himself was a wheelwright.

Before joining the Royal Army Service Corps, where he rose to the rank of Sergeant, he was active in village life and had, for a short time, served with Bradford City Police.

He married in 1921 and he and his wife had one child – a daughter, Winifred. Known as Winnie, she never married and was well known in Farnhill and Kildwick, where she lived all her life.

Benjamin Smith died in 1967.

No Photo Available

Pre-war life

Benjamin Thornton Smith was born on the 21st November 1890 and was baptised in St. Andrew's Church, Kildwick, two months later.

He was the only child of Charles and Sarah (nee Barritt), who had married in 1884. This was Charles' second marriage and he already had a daughter, Sarah Hannah, born to his first marriage in 1873.

The 1891 census recorded Charles Smith, milk dealer, and his family living in Starkey Lane. The 1901 census included a little more information and recorded their income being supplemented by Sarah Hannah who was working as a self-employed dressmaker. It also includes Charles' grand-daughter, Annie Smith – almost certainly the illegitimate daughter of Sarah Hannah.

Civil Parish of <i>Farnhill</i>		Ecclesiastical Parish of <i>Kildwick</i>		County Borough, Municipal Borough, or Urban District of <i>Bradford</i>		Ward of Municipal Borough or of Urban District of <i>St. Andrew</i>		Rural District of <i>St. Andrew</i>		Parliamentary Borough or Division of <i>St. Andrew</i>		Town of <i>St. Andrew</i>			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
No. of Inhabitants	ROAD, STREET, &c. and No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES Uninhabited	HOUSES Inhabited	HOUSES Inhabited	HOUSES Inhabited	Name and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	Age last Birthday of	Qualification as to Marriage	Profession or Occupation	Employer, Worker, or Own account	If Working at Home	WHERE BORN		
	No. of Inhabitants	No. of Inhabitants	No. of Inhabitants	No. of Inhabitants	Males										
148	<i>Starkey Lane</i> <i>- 34 -</i>		1	1	1	<i>Charles Smith</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>33</i>		<i>Milk Dealer</i>	<i>Own Account</i>	<i>At Home</i>	<i>Do. Farnhill</i>		
						<i>Sarah Do</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>50</i>					<i>Do. Do.</i>		
						<i>Sarah H. Do</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>27</i>		<i>Dressmaker</i>	<i>Own Account</i>	<i>At Home</i>	<i>Do. Do.</i>		
						<i>Benjamin T. Do</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>10</i>					<i>Do. Do.</i>		
						<i>Annie Do</i>	<i>Granddaughter</i>	<i>1</i>					<i>Do. Do.</i>		

Extract from the 1901 census return for Starkey Lane, Farnhill
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The 1911 census recorded Benjamin, aged 20, as being employed as a wheelwright.

On 21st November 1911 Benjamin celebrated his 21st birthday. His cousin, W.B. Whitham, recorded in his diary "Ben T Smith 21 give him umbrella".

It may have been around this time that Benjamin became a member of Kildwick and Farnhill Institute and, in particular, the Institute's branch of the St. John Ambulance Association.

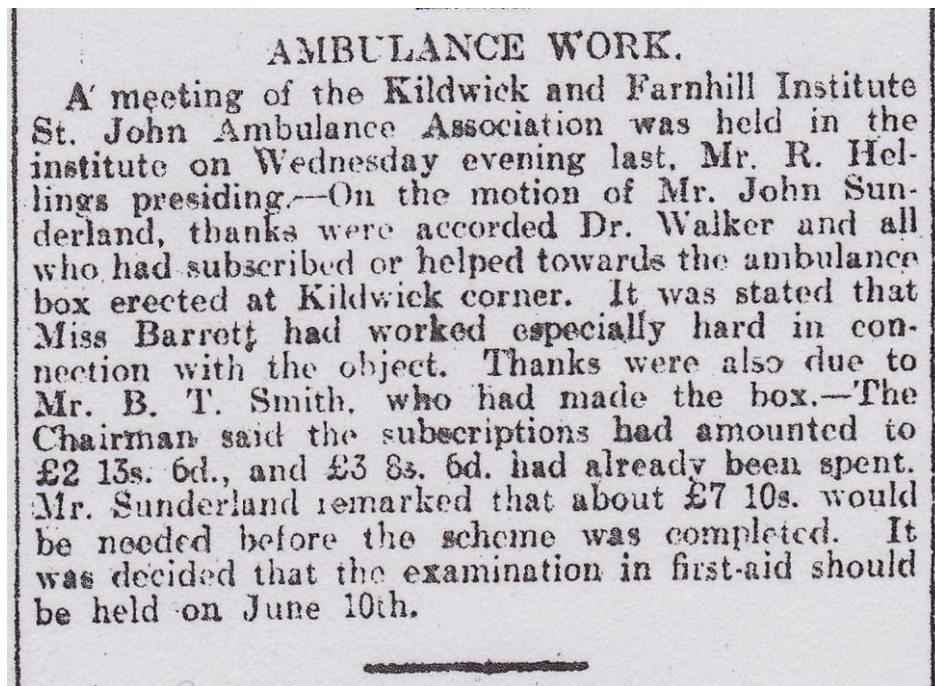
On 6th February 1914 the West Yorkshire Pioneer reported the results of examinations in home nursing taken by members of the Farnhill St. John Ambulance Association. Benjamin's name is included amongst the candidates – all of whom passed.

ST. JOHN AMBULANCE ASSOCIATION.
—The results of the examination held December 28th, of the Kildwick and Farnhill Institute St. John Ambulance Association are to hand. Dr. A. H. Robinson (Low Moor) was the examining officer. The subject was home nursing, and eighteen candidates presented themselves, and all passed:—Misses E. Brown, E. Darby, M. L. Springham, B. Hill, M. Hargreaves, B. Lindsay, Mrs. Thirkhill, Mrs. C. Hill, Mrs. W. Green, Mrs. J. Mosley, Messrs. A. L. Backhouse, R. Hillings, P.C. Goodman (Cononley), P.C. Maddison (Kildwick), J. Sunderland, B. T. Smith, W. Taylor and J. S. Whitham. Miss E. Brown was successful in gaining the nurse's wallet given by Mr. J. J. Briggs, to the lady who gained the highest points. Mr. A. L. Backhouse won the medal offered by Mr. H. Birdsall (Crosshills) to the man who gained the highest points. Mr. W. Taylor was a good second. Following the presentation, which took place on Wednesday evening last at the Institute in the Reading Room, Mr. John Sunderland presided and offered the thanks of the branch to Doctor Walker for his valuable services so cheerfully given to the class during the last three months. They were very fortunate in having so good a lecturer. Dr. Walker had taken a great interest in the class at a great sacrifice to himself. The examination results have shown the good results of his lectures. Miss M. L. Springham seconded the resolution. Miss B. Barrett presented Dr. Walker in the name of the class with a framed certificate, which is awarded by the Executive Committee, London, thanking Dr. Walker for his services to Kildwick branch, also informing him that the executive had placed him on the roll of honorary life members. Dr. Walker responded and said the services given had been a pleasure to him.

Examination results for Farnhill St. John Ambulance Association
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Note: Amongst the other candidates were two other men who would become Farnhill WW1 Volunteers: John Sunderland and Benjamin's cousin, John Spencer Whitham – who would be a stretcher-bearer.

Benjamin was in the news again, a few months later, in connection with the Ambulance Association – when he was thanked for constructing an ambulance box which was placed at Kildwick Corner (Keighley News, 30/5/1914).



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WW1 service

Benjamin Thornton Smith's WW1 service records do not appear to have survived (over 70% of these records were destroyed in a fire during the WW2 London blitz). However a fragmentary account of his WW1 service can be constructed from other sources – mostly the diary of W.B. Whitham.

The diary records that on the 27th February 1915 Benjamin "tested for Bradford City Police" and on 22nd March he started in the police force in Bradford.

However less than a month later, on 12th April, W.B. Whitham reported "Ben Smith leaves Police Force and joins Army Service Corp as a Wheelwright"; then on the 17th "Ben home in uniform"; and on the 15th May 1915 "I go see Ben Smith at Bolton Lodge Bradford".

That Benjamin had joined the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC) is confirmed by a WW1 medal card in the name of B(enjamin) T. Smith and a similar entry in the RASC medal roll. Both give his service number as T4/083486 and indicate that he started as a Driver but rose to the rank of Sergeant.

Note: The role of the RASC was to provide logistical support to the fighting troops and it seems a logical unit in which a professional wheelwright, such as Benjamin, might serve.

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
SMITH B.T. Benjamin	A.S.C.	Avr Whitham	T4/083486
	—	* Sgt.	—
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY *	RASC 10/B58.	5865	Class Z: 15-6-19.
BRITISH	—	—	
15 STAR	RASC 4/B8	3295	
Theatre of War first served in	(3) Egypt		
Date of entry therein	11.7.15.		

K. 1380.

Ben Thornton Smith's WW1 Medal Card
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The medal card also confirms the information provided by W. B. Whitham regarding the next stage of Benjamin's military career. His diary recorded:

- 28th June 1915: Ben Smith leaves Bradford for Devonport
- 30th: Ben Smith sails for Egypt on ship Howraka

The medal card records that he entered service in the Egypt theatre of operations on 11th July 1915.

The next reference to Benjamin in W.B. Whitham's diary, dated 8th September 1916, indicates that he has been moved from Egypt to Salonika – on the Macedonian Front. The timing of this suggests that Benjamin may have been taken part in the Allied counter-attack against Bulgarian forces invading Greece.

After being given three weeks home leave in August and September 1918, Benjamin was finally left the army and transferred to the Class Z reserves on 15th June 1919.

Post-war life

After the war Benjamin returned to Farnhill and lived for a while with his parents.

On 15th December 1920 Benjamin witnessed the marriage of Leo Spencer (one of the Farnhill WW1 Volunteers) to Annie Smith, the daughter of his half-sister, at Kildwick Church.

A few months later he was at another wedding, this time as the groom.

On 26th March 1921 Benjamin Thornton Smith, a 30-year old bachelor and wheelwright by trade married Edith Telford, a 34-year old spinster from Adwalton near Drighlington. The ceremony took place in Drighlington Parish Church; W.B. Whitham was best man and signed the register.

The 1921 census records the couple living with Benjamin's parents and half-sister at Prospect Houses, Farnhill. Benjamin was working for a company in Crosshills.

Not long afterwards - on 13th October 1921 – Benjamin and Edith moved to 64 Starkey Lane, which would be his home for the rest of his life. Their only child, Winifred (known as Winnie), was born there on 15th November 1923.

Sarah Smith, Benjamin's mother, died on 12th June 1924. W.B. Whitham records that he stayed up with her all night on the 9th; he attended her funeral, at St. Andrew's Church Kildwick, on the 14th, and, with his brother Harold, witnessed Charles Smith's new will on the 20th.

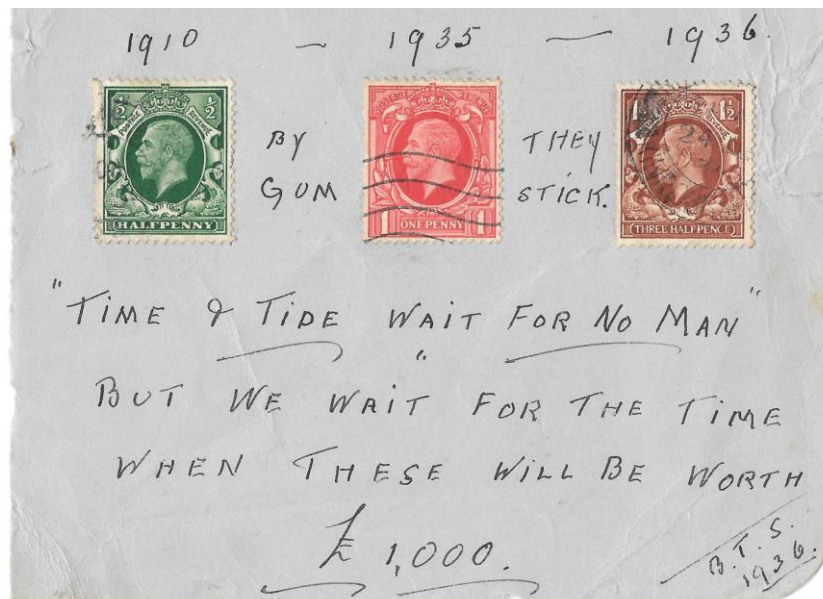
Charles himself died on 19th March 1927 and was buried at St. Andrew's Church Kildwick on the 22nd.

Benjamin and Edith's daughter, Winnie, who would subsequently become well known in the village, appeared on a 1933 class photograph taken at Kildwick school.



Kildwick school photograph, 1933. Winnie Smith is second row from back, far left.
Photograph given to Farnhill and Kildwick Local History Group by John Lofthouse.

Sometime in 1936 or '37, Benjamin Smith gave W.B. Whitham a piece of paper with three George V stamps.



A collection of George V stamps given to W.B. Whitham by Benjamin Smith (BTS)

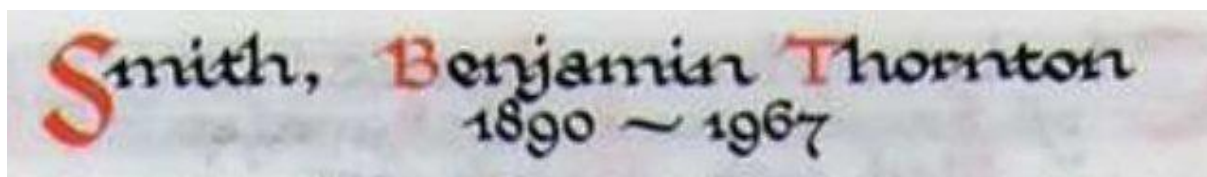
The years written above the stamps signify key dates in George V's reign (1910 – accession; 1935 – Silver Jubilee; 1936 – death).

Nothing further is known of the life of Benjamin Thornton Smith until his death from heart disease, in Victoria Hospital, Keighley, on 14th March 1967.

REGISTRATION DISTRICT					Worth Valley				
1967 DEATH in the Sub-district of Keighley					in the County of York (W.R.)				
No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
49	Fourteenth March 1967 Victoria Hospital Keighley	Benjamin Thornton SMITH	Male	76 years	of 64 Starkey Lane Kilwick Retired Wheelwright	I (a) Acute Left Ventricular Failure (b) Myocardial Infarction Certified by S K Mathur MB	W Smith Daughter 64 Starkey Lane Kilwick	Fifteenth March 1967	J Raby Registrar

Ben Thornton Smith's death certificate
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He was cremated at Waltonwrays, Skipton and is commemorated in the Book of Remembrance.



Postscript

It is not known when Benjamin's wife Edith died, though it is likely that it was shortly after her husband.

Benjamin and Edith's daughter, Winnie, moved from 64 Starkey Lane to 5 Kirkgate, Farnhill in 1969. She lived there for a number of years until just a few weeks prior to her death in 2015 at the age of 91. She remained unmarried.

Benjamin Thornton Smith – a life in summary

Born: 21/11/1890, Farnhill
Baptised: 11/1/1891, Kildwick
Died: 14/3/1967, Victoria Hospital, Keighley **Aged:** 76
Home address: 64 Starkey Lane, Farnhill

Parents

Father: Charles; b. 1847, Farnhill; d. 19/3/1927, Farnhill
Mother: Sarah (nee Barritt); b. 14/4/1850, Farnhill; bapt. 1/5/1850, Kildwick;
d. 12/6/1924, Farnhill; buried 14/6/1924, Kildwick
Married: 1884, Skipton (Registration district)

Charles had previously been married to Betty Spencer who died in September 1883, aged 38.

Siblings

Sarah Hannah (half-sister); b. 13/12/1873, Farnhill;
m. Tom Snowden, 1902, Skipton (Registration district); d. 9/4/1945, Cowling

WW1 service

Service period: 12/4/1915 to 15/6/1919
Regt./Unit: Royal Army Service Corps (Driver/Sgt. no. T4/083486)
Medals: 1915 Star, Victory Medal, British War Medal
Home address: 62 Starkey Lane, Farnhill

Relationship to other volunteers

John Spencer Whitham – they were cousins (Ben's father, Charles Smith, and John's mother, Elizabeth Smith, were siblings)

Ben Thornton Smith's half-sister, Sarah Hannah, was the mother of Leo Spencer's wife, Annie.

Marriage

Wife: Edith Telford; b. 8/12/1886, Drighlington
Date: 26/3/1921, at Drighlington Parish Church

Children

Winifred (Winnie); b. 15/11/1923, Farnhill; d. 22/5/2015, Threshfield Court, Grassington

