

## **Rifleman Thomas Skipsey<sup>©</sup>**

**Regimental number: 305345 (previously 1958)**

**1st/8th Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of Wales's Own)**

**born: 1893 - died: 29 July 1917**

Rifleman Thomas Skipsey was born in 1893 in Leeds,<sup>1</sup> the youngest child of James Henry and Priscilla (née Thomas) Skipsey.<sup>2</sup> Both Thomas' parents were born in Leeds in about 1854<sup>3</sup> and married at the parish church there on 4 April 1874.<sup>4</sup> They had eleven children, six of whom survived to 1911.<sup>5</sup> The known children were: Henrietta (born in 1874)<sup>6</sup> John William (born in 1877)<sup>7</sup> Florry (born in 1879 died in 1890)<sup>8</sup> James (born in 1881)<sup>9</sup> Albert (born in 1883)<sup>10</sup> Herbert (born in 1886 died in 1890)<sup>11</sup> Maud (born in 1891)<sup>12</sup> and Thomas.

In 1901, the family was living at 3 Jameson Street in Leeds.<sup>13</sup> Ten years later, they had moved to 4 Penraevon Grove, still in Leeds.<sup>14</sup> Thomas' father worked in cloth trade as a willeyer—the person who “fed fibres into a “willeying” machine to separate and comb them for carding, often blending fibres in the process”<sup>15</sup>—and as a fettler, who either “cleaned mill machinery, removing accumulations of fibres, grease etc. and sharpened fustian cutters' knives [or was a] needle maker who filed the points.”<sup>16</sup> Thomas was in the same trade, as a leather fitter.

Thomas' brother John had married Lily Wray in 1903<sup>17</sup> and, in 1911, was a leather finisher and working for a tanner in Leeds.<sup>18</sup>

In 1915, Thomas married Mabel Ross in Leeds.<sup>19</sup> Mabel, born on 17 March 1892<sup>20</sup> in Leeds,<sup>21</sup> was the daughter of John Thomas and Ellen Janet Ross.<sup>22</sup> Before her marriage, Mabel had been working as a domestic servant on Burley Road in Leeds. Thomas and Mabel had a son, Thomas Henry, born on 29 April 1915.<sup>23</sup>

Thomas enlisted in the 8th Battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of Wales's Own) in Leeds<sup>24</sup> in August 1914<sup>25</sup> and joined the Front in France on 16 April 1915.<sup>26</sup> In July 1917, the 8th Battalion was stationed near Nieuport, Belgium and was subjected to heavy gas shelling.

On the night of the 21/22nd Nieuport was subjected to severe bombardments of gas shells mixed with H.E. [high explosive]. These bombardments took place at 9 pm and 11 pm on the 21st and again at 2 am on the 22nd, each bombardment lasting for half an hour. The wind was about 3 mph, warm and ideal for gas shells. On each occasion the gas shells were mixed with H.E. thus causing the gas shells to be mistaken for “duds” in the first bombardment. After the first bombardment the effects of the gas seems very slight. About midnight many men became sick and started vomiting, and in consequence could not keep their box respirators on. Undoubtedly many casualties were caused by the mixture of H.E. with gas shells, the latter being mistaken for “duds,” and by the smell being unfamiliar. The main symptoms were intense pain in the eyes, and conjunctivitis, vomiting of the seasick type, sometimes Diarrhoea and abdominal pain, skin – erythema. Later on it was found that Bronchitis developed in a number of cases, turning in some instances to Broncho-pneumonia. The shells appear to have been of the 77 m/m type with single copper driving band, shoulder painted a drab yellow, body painted blue with a small drab cross. The smell of the gas was that of mustard and slightly of garlic. About 7 am on the 22nd, the men's eyes became so affected the blindness came on. Every officer and man with the battalion in Nieuport was affected

and, with the exception of 4 officers and 40 men, had to be sent to hospital on the 22nd. The total casualties of the battalion up to the night of the 22.7.17 were 18 officers and 662 other ranks.<sup>27</sup>

Thomas was probably one of these wounded soldiers. He was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 22 July, where he died six days later of gas poisoning. At the end of July 1917, No. 1 CCCS was located in Adinkerke, Belgium.<sup>28</sup>

According to the journal maintained by the No. 1 CCCS chaplains, Thomas was buried on 28 July in Oosttaverne Wood Cemetery near Wijtschate, Belgium.<sup>29</sup> However, this cemetery is located six kilometres south of Ypres<sup>30</sup> and about 45 kilometres from Adinkerke. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records indicate that Thomas is buried in Coxyde Military Cemetery (Grave Reference: Plot II, Row L, Grave 10).<sup>31</sup> This cemetery (located near the village of Koksijde in Belgium) is located about 7 kilometres from Adinkerke. It was about 10 kilometres behind the front line in 1917. Commonwealth troops had relieved the French forces in the area and the village was used for rest billets. Although the village was occasionally shelled, the cemetery, which had been started by French troops, was reasonably safe. "It became the most important of the Commonwealth cemeteries on the Belgian coast and was used at night for the burial of the dead brought back from the front line."<sup>32</sup> There are now just over 1,500 Commonwealth graves from the Great War in the cemetery.

The monies owing to him from the army upon his death were sent to his wife.<sup>33</sup>

Thomas was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914–15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).<sup>34</sup>

Thomas' wife and son were still living in Leeds, at 29 St James Street, in 1939. Mabel was incapacitated.<sup>35</sup> She died in 1953 and is buried in Lawnswood X Cemetery in Leeds, with her father, John Thomas Ross, who died in 1951.<sup>36</sup> Thomas Henry married Edna M. Bingham in 1939.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 July 2017) entry for Skipsey, Thomas, Registration district: Leeds, Volume 09B, Page 539

<sup>2</sup> *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org): accessed 4 June 2017), entry for Skipsey, Tom, Service No: 305345

<sup>3</sup> "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 June 2017), entry for Thomas Skipsey, Registration district: Leeds, Registration district number: 500, Sub-registration district: West Leeds, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 32, Piece: 27013

<sup>4</sup> "West Yorkshire, England, Marriages and Banns, 1813–1935," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 4 June 2017), entry for James Henry Skipsey

<sup>5</sup> "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 June 2017), entry for Thomas Skipsey

<sup>6</sup> "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 July 2017) entry for Skipsey, Henrietta, Registration district: Leeds, Volume 09B, Page 477

<sup>7</sup> "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 July 2017) entry for Skipsey, John William, Registration district: Leeds, Volume 09B, Page 531

<sup>8</sup> "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 July 2017) entry for Skipsey, Flory, Registration district: Leeds, Volume 09B, Page 522; "Leeds, England, Beckett

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Street Cemetery, 1845–1987,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 July 2017), entry for Florence Skipsey [*sic*], Register type: Burials - Anglicans

<sup>9</sup> “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 July 2017) entry for Skipsey, James, Registration district: Leeds, Volume 09B, Page 498

<sup>10</sup> “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 July 2017) entry for Skipsey, Albert, Registration district: Leeds, Volume 09B, Page 453

<sup>11</sup> “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 July 2017) entry for Skipsey, Herbert, Registration district: Bramley, Volume 09B, Page 370; “England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 21 January 2017), entry for Herbert Skipsey, Registration district: Leeds, Inferred county: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9b, Page: 436; “Leeds, England, Beckett Street Cemetery, 1845–1987,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 June 2017), entry for Herbert Skipsey, Register type: Burials - Anglicans

<sup>12</sup> “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 July 2017) entry for Skipsey, Maud, Registration district: Leeds, Volume 09B, Page 548

<sup>13</sup> “1901 England Census,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 11 January 2017), entry for Tom Skipsey, Registration district: Leeds, Sub-registration district: West Leeds, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 44, Piece: 4234, Folio: 139, Page: 36, Household schedule number: 181

<sup>14</sup> “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 June 2017), entry for Thomas Skipsey

<sup>15</sup> *Hall Genealogy Website* (<http://rmhh.co.uk/occup/index.html>: accessed 6 June 2017)

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> “England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 26 November 2017), entry for John William Skipsey, Registration district: Leeds, Inferred county: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9b, Page: 973

<sup>18</sup> “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 June 2017), entry for John William Shipsey [*sic*], Registration district: Leeds, Registration district number: 500, Sub-registration district: West Leeds, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 14, Piece: 26995

<sup>19</sup> “England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 5 May 2017), entry for Mabel Ross, Registration district: Leeds, Inferred county: Yorkshire West Riding Volume: 9b, Page: 592

<sup>20</sup> “1939 Register,” *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 11 July 2017), entry for Thomas Henry Skipsey, Ref: Ref: RG101/3464C/015/14 Letter Code: KGON

<sup>21</sup> “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 June 2017), entry for Mabel Ross, Registration district: Leeds, Registration district number: 500, Sub-registration district: Kirkstall, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 20, Piece: 27073

<sup>22</sup> “West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813–1910,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 4 June 2017), entry for Mabel Ross

<sup>23</sup> “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 July 2017) entry for Skipsey, Thomas Henry, Registration district: Leeds, Volume 09B, Page 642; “1939 Register,” *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 11 July 2017), entry for Thomas Henry Skipsey

<sup>24</sup> “UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 4 June 2017), entry for Thomas Skipsey

<sup>25</sup> Based on “War Gratuity Calculator” (<https://wargratitude.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/gratuity-calculator/>: accessed 18 May 2017); “UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 4 June 2017), entry for Thomas Skipsey

<sup>26</sup> “British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 4 June 2017), entry for Thomas Skipsey

<sup>27</sup> “UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914–1920,” Source? Regiment or unit: Prince of Wales's Own (West Yorkshire) Regiment, Sub-unit: 1/8th Battalion, Division: 49th Division, Diary dates: 1915

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Apr - 1917 Dec, Piece description: Piece 2795/2: 1/8 Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (1915 Apr - 1917 Dec), Piece number: 2795

<sup>28</sup> "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 7 September 2014)

<sup>29</sup> "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* ([www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca): accessed 4 June 2017), entry for Skipsey, T.

<sup>30</sup> "Oostaverne Wood Cemetery," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org>: accessed 5 June 2017)

<sup>31</sup> *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org): accessed 4 June 2017), entry for Skipsey, Tom

<sup>32</sup> "Coxs Military Cemetery," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org): accessed 2 May 2017)

<sup>33</sup> "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 4 June 2017), entry for Thomas Skipsey

<sup>34</sup> "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 4 June 2017), entry for Thomas Skipsey

<sup>35</sup> "1939 Register," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 11 July 2017), entry for Thomas Henry Skipsey

<sup>36</sup> *Gravestone Photographic Resource* (<http://www.gravestonephotos.com/public/gravedetails.php?grave=106091&scrwidth=1258>: accessed 4 June 2017), entry for Mabel Skipse [sic]

<sup>37</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 11 July 2017), entry for Thomas Henry Skipsey, Registration district: Leeds, Inferred county: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9b, Page: 829