

Private Thomas William Apps©
Regimental number: G/5453
8th Queen's Own (Royal West Kent) Regiment

born: November 1880–died: 8 April 1916

Thomas William Apps came from rural Kentish stock. His roots were particularly deep in West Wickham, Kent, where he was born: his mother's family, the Durlings, had lived there since at least 1795.¹ Born in November 1880² to James Palmer Apps and his wife Matilda, who were married in Bromley, Kent, in the summer of 1870,³ Thomas was the sixth of their nine children. The others were: Sarah (born as Sarah Ann Durling about 1868),⁴ Letitia Maria (born in 1871),⁵ James Palmer (born in 1873),⁶ Minnie Alice (born in 1874),⁷ Jessie Ada (born in 1877),⁸ Elizabeth (born in 1883)⁹, Mary Emily (born in 1887)¹⁰ and Frederick Durling (born in 1891).¹¹ Whether James Apps was Sarah's father is not known.

As a child, Thomas and his family lived with his grandfather, Thomas Durling, at Rowes Wood Cottage; Thomas Durling was a game keeper, and James Apps was an agricultural labourer.¹² After the grandfather's death in 1889,¹³ the family lived at Rowes Farm, where Thomas worked as a carter.¹⁴ In the summer of 1906, he married Mabel Marden.¹⁵ They had no children.

Rowes Farm was still Thomas's home address when he enlisted on 9 January 1915. Thomas was 5 feet 9 inches tall, weighed 140 pounds and was in good physical health, according to his service record. After his enlistment, he was sent to the Queen's Own (Royal West Kent) regimental depot at Maidstone and almost immediately assigned to the 8th (Service) Battalion, then at Worthing,¹⁶ not far from Brighton on the south coast of England. (A service battalion was one created only for the duration of hostilities.)

Thomas sailed to France with the battalion, landing at Le Havre on 30 August 1915. After three weeks additional training, the battalion moved forward to Beuvry,¹⁷ a commune in the Pas-de-Calais department in the Hauts-de-France region of northern France¹⁸ on 25 September.

It was the first day of the Battle of Loos, considered the first large-scale British offensive of the war. As night fell, the British First Army headquarters assessed the situation as best they could with inadequate information regarding their own losses and the numbers of German reinforcements. Believing erroneously that they had achieved a significant breakthrough, they decided to push forward with reserves to exploit this perceived advantage.

According to *The Long, Long Trail*, a website created by a freelance military historian, "The various orders to deploy battalions piecemeal, together with the defence against counterattacks, has reduced what was intended to be an attack by 24 battalions to just 6 . . . The advance of 72nd Brigade, composed now of 8/Royal West Kents and 9/East Surreys, together with half of 2/Welch [*sic*], came under severe enfilade and frontal fire which included point-blank artillery. These units also reported British shellfire falling among them. 8/Buffs, 8/Queen's, 11/Essex and 9/Suffolks were all pushed into this murderous area. [The first three units named all lost their commanding officers, killed in action here.] Only a thin line reached the virtually undamaged German wire by about 1.00 p.m. All attempts to cut the wire failed with heavy casualties, and the remaining men took cover in long grass. At a shouted order to retire, men withdrew – many being hit by machine-gun fire as they did so."¹⁹ Though they fought for only a single day of the battle that lasted from 25

September to 15 October, the 8th Battalion of the Royal West Kent Regiment lost more men than almost any other unit: 580 men, including 24 officers.²⁰

After the Battle of Loos, the battalion withdrew to Molinghem, France, to reorganize and re-equip. As soon as 4 October they moved forward again, this time to the Poperinge, about 10 kilometres west of Ypres, Belgium. The battalion remained in this general area, advancing as far as St. Eloi. Sometimes the men were in the front lines, sometimes in support or reserve positions until about the middle of November, when they moved in stages to Bonningues-les-Ardres, France, almost 113 kilometres from the Front. They remained in Bonningues from 25 November until 5 January 1916, when the battalion was sent forward again, this time to Ouderdom, Belgium, still in the area just west of Ypres. In February and early March, they were in and out of the Ypres Salient's Railway Wood and Sanctuary Wood trenches. By 19 March, the battalion was back in Poperinge, before moving southwest to Berthen, France, where it relieved the 4th Canadian Battalion on the night of 27 March.

At the beginning of April, the 8th Battalion of the Royal West Kents was once again in Belgium, at Wulverghem. At 5:20 a.m. on 8 April, while the battalion was in reserve near Wulverghem, a shell from a German field howitzer hit one of its encampments, killing eight men and wounding five more.²¹ Private Thomas William Apps, who had survived the devastation of Loos and subsequent horrors in the trenches around Ypres, was one of the eight. He died with a letter to his wife in his pocket.²² He is buried in the Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension (Plot II, D 211), in the Pas-de-Calais region of northern France.²³



Private T. W. App's headstone
Source: FindaGrave.com

Thomas was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theater) and the 1914/15 Star (for service between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).²⁴ These three medals were sometimes irreverently referred to as Pip, Squeak and Wilfred: Pip represented either the 1914 or the 1914–15 Star, only one of which could be awarded to a soldier; Squeak represented the British War Medal; and Wilfred represented the Victory Medal. The names were those of the characters in a popular British comic strip from the period.²⁵

A number of Thomas's family predeceased him. His sister **Minnie**, who married Arthur Roker in 1897²⁶ and had a son,²⁷ died in January 1899.²⁸ Thomas's younger brother **Frederick** died in June 1904²⁹ and their mother in December of the same year.³⁰ His sister **Jessie**, who married Albert David Nicholas in 1900,³¹ died in 1907,³² leaving behind three daughters aged about 6, 4 and 2.³³

Thomas's father passed away early in 1922.³⁴

Of Thomas's surviving siblings, his sisters **Sarah** and **Letitia** both went into domestic service^{35,36} and never married; Letitia died in 1954,³⁷ Sarah in 1959.³⁸ His brother, **James** married Hannah Eliza Lewington in 1893.³⁹ In the 1911 Census, James's occupation is described as a "Cowman";⁴⁰ he and Hannah had ten children.⁴¹ The couple never moved far away; their deaths were both registered in Bromley, Kent: James in 1929,⁴² and Hannah in 1962.⁴³ Thomas's sister **Elizabeth** married Albert William Wilkins in 1904⁴⁴ and had four children.⁴⁵ Albert died in 1969;⁴⁶ Elizabeth passed away in 1974.⁴⁷ Thomas's youngest sister, **Mary**, married Charles William Freakes in 1908.⁴⁸

Charles served as a private and then a sergeant in France with the Army Veterinary Corps.⁴⁹ He and Mary had two daughters.^{50,51} Charles died in 1958⁵² and Mary died in 1964.⁵³

Thomas's widow **Mabel** remarried in late 1916.⁵⁴ Her second husband, Reginald Bovill, enlisted in the East Surrey Regiment on 28 August 1914; however, he was discharged almost immediately as medically unfit for service.⁵⁵ Mabel and Reginald had one child, a daughter, in 1919.⁵⁶ Mabel died in 1962,⁵⁷ and Reginald in 1964.⁵⁸

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¹ "Bert Durling's Family Tree," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 16 April 2020), entry for Mary Durling

² "British Army WWI Service Records, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 15 April 2020), entry for Thomas William Apps. Notes: When Thomas enlisted in January 1915, he was 34 years and two months old; his birth month was calculated on this basis. Unless otherwise specified, all information about his military service comes from this source.

³ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 15 April 2020), entry for James Palmer Apps, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 485

⁴ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for Sarah Ann Durling, Registration district: Camberwell, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 1D, Page: 654

⁵ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for Latitia Maria Apps, Registration district; Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 328

⁶ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for James Palmer Apps, Registration district; Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 355

⁷ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for Minnie Alice Apps, Registration district; Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 345

⁸ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for Jessie Ada Apps, Registration district; Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 384

⁹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for Elizabeth Apps, Registration district; Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 710a

¹⁰ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for Mary Emily Apps, Registration district; Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 404

¹¹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for Frederick Durling Apps, Registration district; Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 399

¹² "1881 England Census," *Ancestry*, entry for Thomas W. Apps

¹³ "England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 16 April 2020), entry for Thomas Durling

¹⁴ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry*, entry for Thomas Apps

¹⁵ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 15 April 2020), entry for Thomas William Apps, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 1183

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- ¹⁶ "8th Battalion, Royal West Kent Regiment," *The Wartime Memories Project* (www.wartimememoriesproject.com: accessed 16 April 2020)
- ¹⁷ "8 Battalion Queen's Own (Royal West Kent Regiment) War Diaries," *The National Archives* (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk: accessed 8 May 2020), Date: 1915 Aug–1919 Apr, Reference: WO 95/1616/2. Note: All further references to the battalion's movements come from this source.
- ¹⁸ "Beuvry," *Wikipedia* (www.wikipedia.org: accessed 8 May 2020)
- ¹⁹ "The Battle of Loos," *The Long, Long, Trail* (www.longlongtrail.co.uk: accessed 16 April 2020)
- ²⁰ Ibid. Note: Among the 50 battalions which lost more than 300 men (when the typical attacking strength of a battalion was 650–750 men) the 8th Battalion of the Royal West Kent Regiment lost the seventh largest number.
- ²¹ "8 Battalion Queen's Own (Royal West Kent Regiment) War Diaries," *The National Archives*
- ²² "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 15 April 2020), entry for Apps, T. W.
- ²³ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 2 April 2020), entry for Apps, T W, Service No: G/5453
- ²⁴ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 15 April 2020), entry for Thomas Wm Apps
- ²⁵ "Pip, Squeak and Wilfred - The 1914–1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medals," *Badwell Ash Heritage* (www.badwellashheritage.co.uk: accessed 17 April 2020)
- ²⁶ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 20 April 2020), entry for Minnie Alice Apps, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 899
- ²⁷ "England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538–1975," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 20 April 2020), entry for Thomas Arthur Roker, FHL film number: 1835916, Reference ID: item 5 p 149
- ²⁸ "England, Select Deaths and Burials, 1538–1991," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 20 April 2020), entry for Minnie Alice Roker, FHL film number: 1835916, Reference ID: item 5 p 60
- ²⁹ "England, Select Deaths and Burials, 1538–1991," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 20 April 2020), entry for Frederick Darling Apps, FHL film number: 1835916, Reference ID: item 5 p 72-73. Note: Frederick's middle name was actually Durling, his mother's maiden name.
- ³⁰ "England, Select Deaths and Burials, 1538–1991," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 20 April 2020), entry for Matilda Apps, FHL film number: 1835916, Reference ID: item 5 p 73–74
- ³¹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 20 April 2020), entry for Jessie Ada Apps, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 637
- ³² "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 20 April 2020), entry for Jessie Nicholas, Registration district: Mildenhall, Inferred county: Sussex, Volume: 4a, Page: 471
- ³³ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 20 April 2020), entry for Albert Nicholas, Registration district: Mildenhall, Registration district number: 208, Sub-registration district: Mildenhall, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 11, Piece: 10660
- ³⁴ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 20 April 2020), entry for James P Apps, Registration district: Sevenoaks, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 1215
- ³⁵ "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 30 April 2020), entry for Sarah Ann Apps, Registration district: Bromley, Sub-registration district: Bromley, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 38, Piece: 631, Folio: 106
- ³⁶ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 30 April 2020), entry for Letilia [*sic*] Apps, Registration district: Malton, Registration district number: 528, Sub-registration district: Westow, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 01, Piece: 28980

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- ³⁷ "England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 30 April 2020), entry for Letitia Maria Apps
- ³⁸ "England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 30 April 2020), entry for Sarah Ann Durling Apps
- ³⁹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 30 April 2020), entry for James Palmer Apps, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 820
- ⁴⁰ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 30 April 2020), entry for Hannah Eliza Apps, Registration district: Bromley, Registration district number: 42, Sub-registration district: Orpington, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 09, Piece: 3696
- ⁴¹ "White Family Tree," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 30 April 2020), entry for James Palmer Apps
- ⁴² "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 30 April 2020), entry for James P Apps, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 708
- ⁴³ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 30 April 2020), entry for Hannah E. Apps, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 5b, Page: 212
- ⁴⁴ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 30 April 2020), entry for Elizabeth Hannah Apps, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 1137
- ⁴⁵ "Kellie Welsh Family Tree," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 30 April 2020), entry for Elizabeth Hannah Apps
- ⁴⁶ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 30 April 2020), entry for Albert William Wilkins, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred county: Greater London, Volume: 5a, Page: 1049
- ⁴⁷ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 30 April 2020), entry for Elizabeth Hannah Wilkins, Registration district: Bridport, Inferred county: Dorset, Volume: 23, Page: 0438
- ⁴⁸ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 30 April 2020), entry for Mary Emily Apps, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 1049
- ⁴⁹ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 May 2020), entry for Chas W Freakes
- ⁵⁰ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 May 2020), entry for Violet N. Freakes, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 538
- ⁵¹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 May 2020), entry for Peggy E Freakes, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred county: Greater London, Volume: 2a, Page: 1005
- ⁵² "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 May 2020), entry for Charles W Freakes, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 5b, Page: 139
- ⁵³ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 May 2020), entry for Mary E Freakes, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 5b, Page: 106
- ⁵⁴ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 May 2020), entry for Mabel Apps, Registration district: Croydon, Inferred county: Surrey, Volume: 2a, Page: 765
- ⁵⁵ "British Army WWI Pension Records 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 May 2020), entry for Reginald Bovill, Regimental number: 10975, Form title: Short Service Attestation

⁵⁶ "1939 England Wales Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 May 2020), entry for Mabel Bovill Junr, Schedule number: 312, Sub-schedule number: 3, Enumeration district: CLLB, Registration district: 39-2

⁵⁷ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 May 2020), entry for Mabel Bovill, Registration district: Croydon, Inferred county: Surrey, Volume: 5g, Page: 8

⁵⁸ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 May 2020), entry for Reginald B Bovill, Registration district: Croydon, Inferred county: Surrey, Volume: 5g, Page: 124