

Private William Wilfrid Thomas[©]

Regimental number: G/53527

1st/8th Battalion, Duke of Cambridge's Own (Middlesex) Regiment

born: 1894–died: 3 October 1918

Private William Wilfrid Thomas was born in 1894¹ in Norton, Herefordshire, the son of William and Fanny Thomas.² William Sr. married the former Arabella Fanny Cadwallader at the beginning of 1889 in Bromyard, Herefordshire. William was born in about 1866 in Ocle Pychard, Herefordshire, and Fanny in about 1863 in Liverpool, Lancashire.³

William Sr. was a police constable. Soon after their marriage, they were living in Leominster, Herefordshire,⁴ where their first child, Gwyn Henry, was born on 27 April 1890. (However, Gwyn was with his grandparents when the census was taken in 1891.⁵) They moved around quite a bit—likely because of William's job—as all their children were born in different towns, but all in Herefordshire and within 70 miles of Leominster. In addition to Gwyn and William, they had four more children:

- Louisa Sarah (born in 1891)⁶
- Gladys Arabella (born on 7 March 1895)⁷
- Edith Fanny Victoria (born in 1897)⁸
- Florence Alice Grace (known as Alice) (born in 1899)⁹

In 1901, William and his family were living at Broadleigh Cottage in Colwall.¹⁰ Ten years later the family was at 25 Nursery Road in Ross on Wye, Herefordshire, with three children, two of whom were in school. William, age 17, was out of school but not employed.¹¹ Two of William's sisters, Louisa and Gladys, were in domestic service. Louisa was a housemaid living at Brampton Lodge, Brampton Abbots, Ross, Herefordshire, in the home of Augustin Ley, a clergyman in the Church of England.¹² Gladys was a mother's help in the home of Sidney I. Dazeley, a reporter living at 1 Cawdor Villas, Ross on Wye.¹³

William was living in Trehafod, Glamorganshire,¹⁴ when he enlisted to serve in the Great War in about May 1917¹⁵ in Preston, Lancashire.¹⁶ He first served with the Manchester Regiment (regimental number 112350) and, at some point, transferred to the 1st/8th Battalion of the Duke of Cambridge's Own (Middlesex) Regiment.¹⁷

At the end of September 1918, William's battalion was stationed near Feuchy, just east of Arras in northern France.¹⁸ On 26 September, the battalion went into the Front Line to relieve the 7th Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment. On the 27th, his battalion began a push towards the Canal du Nord. The following day, a patrol was sent out to reconnoitre Palluel, on the northwest side of the canal. Few hours later, a report came back that Palluel had been occupied by one of the battalion's patrols and it had taken eight prisoners and two machine guns. The battalion was instructed to proceed to Arleux—2 kilometres north of Palluel—but it was unable to make progress because of enemy machine guns that were covering all approaches to the town. However, information from the prisoners captured in Palluel told the battalion that Arleux was only lightly held. Patrols from the regiment were sent forward and managed to secure the southern portion of the town. Another platoon then moved to Palluel. On 29 September, there was a heavy artillery barrage of gas and heavy explosives and machine gun fire; the troops were driven out of Arleux and back to Palluel.

The following day, the battalion was relieved in Palluel by the 2nd London Regiment. During the period of 27–30 September, 61 Other Ranks (non-officers) in the battalion were wounded.

It is not known how William was wounded, but on 30 September he was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station with gunshot wounds to his back and thigh and suffering from the effects of poison gas. He survived until 3 October, when he succumbed to his wounds and died at the CCS.¹⁹

A CCS was a military medical unit behind the front lines, usually located near transportation. Casualties who did not soon die or could not be adequately treated in the CCS were stabilized before being transported to a field or military hospital.²⁰

William was buried on 4 October 1918 in Duisans British Military Cemetery (Plot 7, Row B, Grave 1) with the Canadian chaplain W. Fisher presiding. Duisans British Military Cemetery is located in Étrun, near Arras, France. The first burials in the cemetery took place in March 1917.²¹ No. 1 CCCS arrived at the beginning of September 1918 and was stationed near Duisans for two months. As a result of the serious and urgent nature of the cases admitted to No. 1 CCCS, the death rate was high in October—a total of 83 deaths occurred during the month.²²

A letter was sent to William's next of kin—his wife Mary, who was living at 4 Ael-y-Bryn, Trehafod, in Pontypridd, Wales. She was probably the former Mary Evans and had married William in Pontypridd in 1915. They may have had children, but it was not possible to confirm this.

William was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).²³ His wife received the monies owing to him from the army upon his death.²⁴

William's older brother Gwyn also served in, but survived, the Great War. He joined the army several years before the outbreak of the war and, in 1911, he was a private in the infantry—in the 2nd Battalion of the Kings Shropshire Light Infantry, serving in India.²⁵ During the war, he served as a driver in the Royal Fusiliers (regimental number 4543).²⁶ He married Madge Evans in 1916 in St. Asaph, Flintshire, Wales,²⁷ and when he enlisted was living in Ferndale, Wales.²⁸ In 1939, he and Madge were living at 13 Mortimer Road in Hereford, Herefordshire, where Gwyn was an automobile engineer.²⁹ He died in 1974 in Hereford.³⁰

Little is known about William's other siblings, except for Gladys, who married Wilfred J. Smith in Ledbury, Herefordshire, in 1916.³¹ In 1939, she and Wilfred were living at 16 Oatleys Road in Ledbury, where Wilfred was a council workman.³² Gladys died in Ledbury in November 1987.³³

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¹ "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 July 2020), entry for Thomas, William Wilfrid, Registration district: Bromyard, Volume 06A, Page 517

² "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 19 June 2020), entry for William Thomas, Registration district: Ledbury, Sub-registration district: Ledbury, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 4, Piece: 2470, Folio: 49, Page: 30, Household schedule number: 188

³ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 5 January 2020), entry for William Thomas, Registration district: Ross, Registration district number: 336, Sub-registration district: Ross, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 01, Piece: 15641

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- ⁴ "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 2 July 2020), entry for Fanny Thomas
Registration district: Leominster, Sub-registration district: Leominster, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 11, Piece: 2072, Folio: 124
- ⁵ "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 2 July 2020), entry for Gwyn Henry Thomas, Registration district: Bromyard, Sub-registration district: Bishops Frome, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 12, Piece: 2070, Folio: 127
- ⁶ "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 July 2020), entry for Thomas, Louisa Sarah, Registration district: Bromyard, Volume 06A, Page 507
- ⁷ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 July 2020), entry for Gladys Arabella Smith, Registration district: Ledbury, Inferred county: Hereford and Worcester, Volume: 29, Page: 608; "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 July 2020), entry for Thomas, Gladys Arabella, Registration district: Bromyard, Volume 06A, Page 511
- ⁸ "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 July 2020), entry for Thomas, Edith Fanny Victoria, Registration district: Bromyard, Volume 06A, Page 515
- ⁹ "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 July 2020), entry for Thomas, Florence Alice Grace, Registration district: Ledbury, Volume 06A, Page 473
- ¹⁰ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry*, entry for William Thomas
- ¹¹ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry*, entry for William Thomas
- ¹² "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 July 2020), entry for Louisa Sarah Thomas, Registration district: Ross, Registration district number: 336, Sub-registration district: Sollershope, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 01, Piece: 15632
- ¹³ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 July 2020), entry for Gladys A. Thomas, Registration district: Ross, Registration district number: 336, Sub-registration district: Ross, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 01, Piece: 15641
- ¹⁴ "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 19 June 2020), entry for William Wilfred [*sic*] Thomas
- ¹⁵ Based on "War Gratuity Calculator" (<https://wargratiuity.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/gratuity-calculator/>: accessed 18 May 2017); "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 19 January 2020), entry for William Wilfred [*sic*] Thomas
- ¹⁶ "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919," *Ancestry*, entry for William Wilfred [*sic*] Thomas
- ¹⁷ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 19 June 2020), entry for William W. Thomas
- ¹⁸ "1/8 Battalion Middlesex Regiment war diary," *The National Archives* (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk: accessed 3 July 2020), Catalogue reference: WO 95/2950/2
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²⁷ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916–2005," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 July 2020), entry for Gwyn Thomas, Registration district: St. Asaph, Inferred county: Flintshire, Volume: 11b, Page: 554

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³² "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry*, entry for Gladys A. Smith

³³ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry*, entry for Gladys Arabella Smith