

THOMAS THACKRAY



29th July 1916

1894-1916 Age 21



Private 26127 16th (Service) Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, 1st Bradford 'Pals', attached 9th (Service) Battalion Cheshire Regiment.

Thomas Thackray was born in 1894 in Clayton, Bradford. His parents were Andrew Thackray and Eliza Ann Roper. They had eight children, of whom three died in infancy. Thomas was the youngest to survive, with two older sisters and two brothers. Their grandfather was a quarry owner, however as a younger son Andrew was apprenticed as a teenager to a wool-spinner. As his career prospered he became a spinning mill manager and cashier, and his three sons followed him into the wool industry, establishing the company of Thackray Brothers, manufacturers, of Swaine Street, Bradford.

Thomas was only at Bradford Grammar School very briefly, in 1908. In the one or two terms he was at the school he showed aptitude in several subjects, coming first in History, second in Physics and third in Chemistry. He had left by the time he was fourteen, and he went to work with his brothers Charles and Percy for the family business. In his spare time, Thomas was an active sportsman. He played Association Football for Clayton, and subsequently for Queensbury, with whom he also played cricket in the first XI. He was also active with the local Wesleyan Methodist Chapel Sunday School, which his family attended.

Neither Thomas nor his brothers volunteered when war broke out. The two younger brothers waited until the end of 1915 when the government began to move towards compulsory military service. The elder brother Percy's service record tells us that he attested in December 1915, but was not mobilized until October 1916. He served with the Army Service Corps Motor Transport and he survived the war. Thomas enlisted with the Bradford Pals in the early part of 1916 and was sent to France with only a few

months training. Although he arrived in France in May, he was lucky not to be posted to the front in time for 1st July. Thus he avoided the disaster which befell the 1st Bradford Pals at Serre on that day. The scale of casualties became so great that it was no longer possible to send replacements to their 'home' battalions. When Thackray was posted to the front, it was with a draft of 306 men drawn from twelve different battalions who joined the 9th Battalion Cheshire Regiment on 11th July. Of these men, eighty-seven were rejected as unfit.

On 21st July the 9th Cheshires moved up into Mametz Wood, which had recently been captured. The War Diary describes a scene of utter devastation, of shell craters and shattered trees, devoid of life and the smell of dead bodies all pervading. They bivouacked there for a week while providing carrying parties for the battalions in the front line. A small number of men were lost to enemy shells while performing these duties. On 29th July, Thomas Thackray was one of three men from the 16th West Yorkshire Regiment who were killed and were buried together. Following the war their bodies were exhumed and re-buried in Caterpillar Valley Cemetery, at Longueval.



Acknowledgements:

The photo of Thackray is from the O.B.A. Roll of Honour. Thomas's family was researched using the records available on Ancestry.com. His B.G.S. record is in the Annual Class List for Midsummer 1908. There is further information about his service in the Bradford Daily Telegraph, 7th August 1916 (accessed on microfilm at the West Yorkshire Local Studies Library, Bradford). There is also a short biography of him at <http://e-voice.org.uk/claytonhistorygroup/clayton-and-the-somme-ii/>. His brother Percy's service record is available on Ancestry.com. The Graves Registration Report Form for Thomas can be found on the CWGC website.

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