

John Shadrack Thomas

Gunner

347548

Royal Garrison Artillery



John Shadrack Thomas was one of four sons raised by John and Matilda Thomas. Born in 1895 Kington, John went through life preferring to be called Jack and was sibling to Albert (1889), George (1892) and a younger brother Ralph (1898). John senior was a carpenter and joiner from Market Drayton who, on 20th February 1889, married dressmaker Matilda Morris. Matilda had spent most of her life in Kington where her father, Shadrack Morris, was landlord of the Queens Head public house in Bridge Street. His forename, was destined to become Jack's middle name. In 1891 the fledgling family were living at 19 Sunset Road but by 1901, with the family growing further, they had moved to No1. Victoria Road. The census of 1911 reveals they had moved again, this time to 37 Bridge Street, where the whole family were still intact and ensconced together. By that time Jack, then seventeen, was employed as a Butchers Assistant. Regrettably very little of Jack's formative years have been documented, but some of his service records survive and from these we can gain insight into his wartime experiences.

Jack attested in Ripon on 27th October 1916. He had just turned twenty-one and declared a desire to be in the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA). Clearly this young man had no intention of going into the infantry. Initially posted to No.4 Depot RGA, on 28th October he was installed as Gunner 37325 Thomas of the 2/4th Company, Royal Garrison Artillery. At the end of the year, 30th December to be precise, he was transferred into his first regular unit, the 311th Siege Battery. Siege Batteries were the heavy calibre units of the RGA which fired high explosive shells in high trajectories, to create what was known as plunging fire. Their destructive power was used to destroy their counterpart artillery batteries as well as targeting enemy



8" Howitzer in operation, WWI

strongpoints, munitions and storage dumps, roads, railways and any other strategic targets identified behind enemy lines. Batteries typically comprised 6-inch, 8-inch or 9.2-inch howitzers, however, some operated huge train or road mounted 12-inch howitzers. The 311th Siege Battery operated four 8-inch howitzers and Jack was with them when they left British shores and

arrived in France on 19th May 1917. Shortly after arrival the battery was disbanded, its guns and men dispersed to augment other siege batteries. On 1st June 1917 Jack joined 39th Siege Battery which operated six, 8-inch howitzers. His record shows he was granted two weeks home leave in July/August 1918. A search of marriage records explains why Jack was granted leave. He married his wartime sweetheart, miss Elsie Walker, in Stafford. But their marital bliss was short-lived and at the end of his brief leave, on 5th August 1918, he re-joined his unit. He remained with 39th Siege Battery until wars end in November 1918 and on 24th November was transferred to his Brigade Base Depot in France. Three weeks later he joined the 219th Siege Battery only to be transferred again on 20th March 1919, this time to the 354th Siege Battery. Finally, on 24th September 1919, Jack had returned to Britain and joined Prees Heath Dispersal Centre, a large collection point for demobilization just south of Whitchurch in Shropshire. A month later on 24th October Jack was officially demobilized, he had done his bit for King and Country and was demobbed. Jack Shadrack Thomas had served for three years in the Kings army and with relief returned to the family home at 37 Bridge Street, Kington. We should not be surprised to learn that nine months later Brenda M Thomas arrived into the post-war world. But Jack was not a well man.

Sadly, this picture of family contentment was not to last. The 28th July 1928 edition of the Kington Times reported the demise of Jack.

We regret to record the death of Mr Jack Shadrack Thomas of Duke Street who passed away on Friday last, at the early age of 33. Deceased, who was the 3rd son of Mr and Mrs JF Thomas of Bridge Street, leaves a wife and one child. Much sympathy is felt for his untimely end.

Mr Thomas was an ex-serviceman, serving during the war with the 84th Siege Battery of the RGA. He was keenly interested in all forms of sport and during last season was a member of the KT Football Club Committee. He

had been in ill health for some years, but his last illness was of short duration.

His death is greatly regretted by his many friends and the respect and esteem in which he was held were shown by the gathering of members of the British Legion, which followed the body to its last resting place.

The funeral took place at Kington Cemetery; Mourners: Mrs E Thomas (widow), Mr JF Thomas (father), Mr Albert Thomas (brother), Mr and Mrs RV Thomas (brother/sister-in-law).

Jack died on **20th July 1928** his death partially attributed to war service. He was buried in Kington Cemetery, plot 2303, where sadly no headstone has been placed to mark his passing. His name has been immortalised on Kington War Memorial and in recognition of his military service he was awarded the Victory and British War medals. Jack Shadrack Thomas may not have died during the war but his death is no less poignant. Long may he rest in peace.

