

Thomas James Lowe

Private

11565

5th Battalion, Kings Shropshire Light Infantry



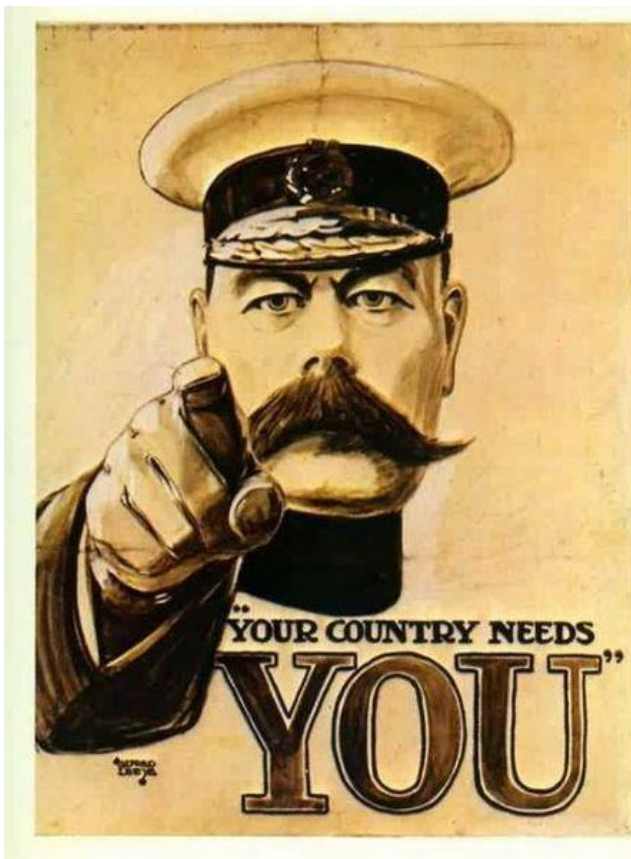
Amos Lowe was a gamekeeper by profession from Aymestrey in north Herefordshire who in 1887 married a young lady from Burrington called Sarah Jane Morris. The newlyweds set up home in Burrington and in 1889 their first child, George was born. The following year Sydney William arrived and in 1892 their first and only daughter, Annie Margaret made an appearance. And finally, the focus of this biography, Thomas James Lowe, was born in early 1893 in Pontsbury, a small village outside Shrewsbury. There are many large estates in the area and it is quite probable Amos had taken a new position and moved his family into the Pontsbury area. However, the 1901 census informs us that the family had again moved and were then living in Keepers Cottage, Woolhope, near Ledbury. Once again Amos is recorded as being a gamekeeper and it can be surmised this was upon the Wessington Estate, just outside Woolhope. By 1911 the family were on the move again and in the census of that year we discover the family living at Lower Bradnor, just outside Kington on the road to Walton. Amos maintains his profession of gamekeeper but it is unclear which estate he was employed by. By 1911 Thomas was a young man of eighteen who had followed his father in becoming a gamekeeper. He had moved out of the family home in Kington and was living in



Woodcote Hall, Newport, Salop c. 1900

the tiny hamlet of Woodcote, Pave Lane, just to the north of Telford and it is quite probable that he was employed on the Woodcote Hall estate as their gamekeeper. Sometime before the outbreak of war Thomas moved across the County from Woodcote and into the employ of one Major Charles Francis Kynaston Mainwaring of Oteley Hall, Ellesmere. Major Mainwaring, had served as High Sherriff of Salop in 1907 and previously in the 3rd Oxfordshire Light

Infantry and when called upon provide further military service in the Shropshire Light Infantry and Tank Corps during WW1. When war was declared in August 1914 Field Marshal Kitchener identified the need for a volunteer army to supplement the small



regular army. Following Kitchener's memorable call to arms we can envisage the Major's expectation that all men of fighting capacity should enlist at the earliest opportunity. This was very much the case for our Thomas. His obituary in the Kington Times hints as to him having enlisted in August 1914 as the call to arms reverberated around the country. Sadly, very few of Thomas's service records survive but from those which do, and consultation with the 5th KSLI war diary, we discover what tragedies beset our 21-year-old hero.

Upon Field Marshal Kitchener's call to arms thousands of men around the country flocked to enlist and Shropshire men were in the vanguard of the desire to serve their country. The first Service Battalion of the County Regiment was to be named the 5th Battalion the Kings Shropshire Light Infantry and Thomas,

who enlisted in Ellesmere, embarked upon a new adventure as Private 11565 Lowe. Once signed up Thomas and his cohorts were drafted down to Blackdown Camp in Aldershot where they received their basic training and as further drafts arrived so four Companies were established. Such had been the rush for men that initially they had no uniforms or rifles. Under clear blue skies the men were drilled and fashioned into fighting units and the record shows that these fit, keen men were all committed to throwing themselves into the fray. From Blackdown the battalion moved to Malplaquet Barracks at North Camp, Aldershot and on the 27th November marched sixteen miles to new billets at Chiddingfold in Surrey. As the men became more proficient, and their uniform and equipment materialised, inspections by dignitaries such as Kitchener and the Their Majesties the King and Queen were undertaken. By May 1915 the men were at a peak of preparedness and strangely for May it snowed. Expectation of being sent into battle was high, that was until an outbreak of measles within the battalion forced their embarkation for France to

be postponed. The whole battalion were forced into isolation and put under canvas until the outbreak was under control. However, such was the demand for men, we learn that on the 20th May they were given the all clear and again put onto a war footing. The battalion entrained, en masse to Folkstone, where they embarked for Boulogne. The 5th Kings Shropshire Light Infantry first touched foreign soil in the early hours of 21st May 1915 and Thomas's fight for survival had begun.

The 5th KSLI came under the command of the 42nd Brigade, 14th Division and saw their first action on the 31st May at Ypres. They spent their whole war on the Western Front and saw some of the worse of the fighting on the Ypres Salient particularly at Bellewaerde and Hooze. They were involved in the Battle of the Somme and distinguished themselves at Delville Wood and Flers-Courcelette. They were involved the Battle of Arras and took part in the attack on Vimy Ridge in the April of 1917. In August 1917, they returned to the Ypres Salient where they prepared for the 3rd Battle of Ypres which became renown for the much-vaunted horrors of Passchendaele. It is now three years since Thomas enlisted and I have skirted over his battle honour's during those years. But Thomas's life was soon to be cut short and it is to the war diary I now turn in an attempt at discovering how this tragic event unfolded.

In mid-August the battalion were billeted around the town of Caestre which lies between Hazebrouck and Poperinge. Behind the lines, here they could rest, regroup and prepare for the next onslaught. On 15th of August 1917 the battalion left the Caestre area and moved back onto the Ypres Salient arriving at Ouderdom that evening. The following day they marched to Dickebusch to the South West of Ypres. On the 17th they found themselves near Zillebeke sheltering in trenches and dugouts at Halfway House, about 1.5 miles south east of Ypres. The diary reports that on the 19th they were heavily shelled even though they were behind the front lines, sadly a common occurrence. On the 20th they advanced and relocated into frontline trenches around Hooze. That night and the following day was spent in the trenches where they were again heavily shelled. This bombardment resulted in five Other Ranks killed and nineteen wounded. But Thomas survived these horrors.



On the 22nd August, the 14th Division took part in an advance on the Stirling Castle / Glencorse Ridge to the east of Ypres. In the contemporary map on the previous page these two points can be seen on the right. The village of Hooze is located on the left and the road passing across the map is the road from Ypres. The 5th KSLI were at the center of this offensive and an expansive report of the day's events is included in the war diary which I will now precis. A and B Companies formed up in Jargon Trench facing Glencorse Woods and were the left and right advance Companies respectively with C and D supporting them. At 7am A and B Companies went over the top and advanced towards the enemy through Glencorse Woods. They came under heavy machine gun fire from their objective, Li Farm. Within five minutes all officers in B Company were shot down and became casualties, all but one junior officer in A Company were incapacitated. Officers from D Company were sent forward to regroup and prosecute the attack. As the two companies continued their advance they came across the enemy hiding in a sunken road and attacked them with rifle grenades. But such close combat and murderous machine gun fire took its toll. By mid-day 25% of the battalion were casualties and reserves from the Ox and Bucks Regiment were brought up to augment the 5th KSLI in the event of an enemy counter attack. The following day, the 23rd, at 4.30 in the morning the enemy did in fact counter attack, in strength. The war diary reports rather gruesomely that 'Lewis gunners were able to participate in repelling the advance, and considerable execution was done by them'. The battalion held their positions until they were relieved by the 5th Ox and Bucks on the night of 23rd and 24th. The advance on the Stirling Castle, Glencorse ridge cost the lives of two officers and nineteen other ranks killed. In addition, four officers and one hundred and seven other ranks were wounded. The battalion were relieved and steadily retired from the front. On the 28th they reach safe billets in the Thieushouk area about two miles from Caestre.

Thomas James Lowe was killed in action on the **22nd of August 1917**, in the initial advance onto the Stirling Castle/Glencorse Ridge, fighting in the 3rd Battle of Ypres, the prelude to Passchendaele. The following message was passed to the men of the 5th Battalion from the Divisional Headquarters.

"Despite difficulties of ground, bad weather and determined resistance of the enemy, they made valuable progress along the ridge on 22nd August, and maintained position in the face of heavy shellfire and repeated counter-attack, inflicting heavy losses. Division has maintained its high reputation in some of the heaviest fighting on this front".



Signed G.D. Bruce, Lt-Colonel,
14th (Light) Division

Thomas has no known grave. His name is recorded on the Tyne Cot Memorial, panels 112 & 113. Such was the death and destruction created during four years of war on the Ypres Salient that Tyne Cot is just one of four similar memorials to the missing. Broadly speaking, the Salient stretched from Langemarck in the north to the northern edge in Ploegsteert Wood in the south,

but it varied in area and shape throughout the war. The memorial forms the north-eastern boundary of TYNE COT CEMETERY, which was established around a captured German blockhouse or pill-box used as an advanced dressing station. The TYNE COT MEMORIAL bears the names of 34,949 officers and men whose graves are not known.

A footnote on Thomas's entry on the Commonwealth War Graves Website says that Amos and Sarah were living at The Old Plough public house in Wigmore at the time of Thomas's death. Whether they were living there or indeed were running the pub is unclear and since Amos was a gamekeeper through and through this seems unlikely. An inclusion in the Kington Times dated 15th December 1917 informs us that Thomas was 'killed in a splendid and victorious charge'. The obituary also informs that Thomas had a brother serving in the Gloucestershire Regiment. This was his brother Sidney who had joined the Herefordshire Regiment and transferred into the Gloucestershire Regiment in December 1916. Sidney ultimately ended up serving in the Guards Machine Gun Regiment. Living at Moseley Mere up the Kingswood road, Sidney was married to Margaret Anne Lowe and had two children, Arthur and Richard. Sidney survived the war and was demobed on the 26th September 1919. Amos Lowe died in 1929 at the age of 69. Sarah, she outlived her husband dying in 1946 aged 82 in Weobley.

For his long service and bravery Private Thomas James Lowe was awarded the 1915 Star and British War and Victory medals. He may not have lived in Kington for very long but his name will live on forever on Kington War Memorial.

