

## **JOHN THOMAS PRIOR**

**Private**

**2nd Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment**

**Service No: 9847**

**Died 15 March 1915, aged 22**

Thomas John Prior was born on 15th March 1893 at Burghfield, the son of William and Annie Prior (nee Kent) and also appears to have been also known as John Thomas Prior. By 1901, William (from Pamber Heath), aged 36 and a carter on a farm, was living with Annie (from Burghfield) together with their children Alice 10, Thomas 9 (recorded as John in the census), Elsie 5 and Edith 1. Their address is given as St. Mary's College, Woolhampton, a school which subsequently merged with that of the incoming Benedictine community and who moved from Douai in June 1903. Although shown in both the 1901 and 1911 census as being born in Burghfield, Thomas' birth was registered in Bradfield in the second quarter of 1893, being the registration centre for the civil parish of Beenham between 1837 and 1937. In 1911 Thomas (now aged 18), was the eldest of nine children having been joined by Charles 9, Annie 7, Ernest 6, Frederick 3, Arthur 1 and Edward 10 months all born in Beenham and now living on The Green, where Thomas is described as an unmarried farm labourer.

It appears that Thomas enlisted on 15th October 1912 at Reading in the 2nd Battalion, Princess Charlotte of Wales's (Royal Berkshire) Regiment. The 2nd Battalion was serving at Jhansi, India, when war was declared and embarked at Bombay on the troopship SS Dongala on the 27th September 1914 reaching Liverpool on the 23rd October. After a brief stop-over at Winchester where they joined the 25th Brigade, 8th Division they set out for France and arrived at Le Havre on the 5th November with 30 officers and 978 other ranks. From other records it appears that Thomas did not reach France until 27th December although why he was delayed is not clear. Their first job was to relieve the 1st East Surreys in trenches at Fauquissart where they suffered terribly from trench foot and other illnesses caused by the abrupt change of climate. The next three months were spent in and out of trenches including Christmas day when they took part in the Christmas Truce.

By March 1915 they were in action at a British offensive known as The Battle of Neuve Chapelle (10th -13th). The Regimental diary for 15th March reads "France, Neuve Chapelle. Remained in trenches. Casualties: 2 killed, 10 wounded, 2 men from hospital." One can only speculate that Private John Thomas Prior was one of the men killed. It is poignant to note that the 15<sup>th</sup> March was John Thomas' 22nd birthday.

On 1st November 1919, Private John Thomas Prior was posthumously awarded the 1914-1915 Star. Interestingly his date of death is given as 14th March 1915 and not the 15th as recorded on the war memorial and other official records. The 1914-15 Star was approved in 1918, for issue to officers and men of British and Imperial forces who served in any theatre of the War between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915. Recipients of this medal also received the British War Medal and Victory Medal - it was never awarded singly.

Private John Thomas Prior is commemorated on the Le Touret Memorial, Nord-Pas-de-Calais Panel 30 and the cemetery records the names of the officers and men whose graves are not known. Thomas was survived by his siblings Alice (who married John Hinde), Elsie, Edith (who married Richard William Phillips), Charles (who married Florence E.G. Warner), Annie (who married W.G. Cox), Ernest (who married Mary Pinchers), Frederick (who married Rosie Eastwood) and Edward J (who married Violet M. Messenger).