

Frank Thompson
Rifleman
17th (British Empire League) Battalion,
Kings Royal Rifles
 Service no. **R/37781**



Date of birth	Date KIA	Age
Jan-March 1882	12 November 1917	35yrs

Background: Frank Thompson

Frank was the son of George Thompson, a butcher, and Sarah Elisabeth (née Brown), who had moved to Collingham around 1885 from South Scarle, where Frank and his sister Charlotte, were born. They lived at 160 High Street (where Chinese Take Away is). In 1891 the family consisted of:

George Thompson	36yrs	Butcher	b. Torksey 1854 d 1930
Sarah E. Thompson	43yrs		b. South Clifton (1858 - 1934)
Frank	9yrs		b. South Scarle b 1882
Charlotte	7yrs		b. South Scarle 1884
Ralph	2yrs		b. North Collingham 1889 ¹
(not on census: Albert b N Collingham 1895 d 1968)			

Frank was educated at the Magnus Grammar School, Newark. In the **1901 Census**, 19-year old Frank had left home and was working for the 'General Post Office (GPO) and boarding in Islington, London.

The **1911 Census** records 29-year old Frank living with his 28-year old wife, Mary Elizabeth (née Greenfield b. Kingston Blound Oxford). Their address was 31, Burma Road. Stoke Newington. London. Frank was a letter sorter at the GPO. They had no children.

See page 6 for further information about the Thompsons of Collingham

¹ Frank's brothers, Ralph and Albert, also served in the war.

Military History: Rifleman Frank Thompson

There does not appear to be an attestation paper for Frank Thompson online to check his date of enlistment. His medal index card² does not give a date for when he was sent to the Western Front nor his battalion. As he was not awarded the 1914-15 Star it is presumed he was not mobilised until late 1915 or he may have been conscripted in 1916.



The King's Royal Rifles (1756-1966) 17th (British Empire League) Battalion Kings Royal Rifles³

Raised in London on 16 May 1915 as one of their service battalions. In July, after their initial training, they joined, the 117th Brigade, 39th Division with whom they received their final training before embarking for Le Havre on 8th March 1916, forming up near Blaringhem near Bethune, France.

Their major actions included:

1916

- An attack near to Richebourg l'Avoue (30th June) - where they suffered heavy casualties.
- 'on the' Ancre,
- Thiepval Ridge,
- Ancre Heights including the capture of Stuff Trench and the Scwabben Redoubt
- 'of the' Ancre

1917

- Pilkem Ridge
- Langemarck
- Menin Road Bridge
- Polygon Wood (26th September – 3rd October 1917) "Much of the woodland had been destroyed by the huge quantity of shellfire from both sides since 16 July and the area had changed hands several times. A continued the series of British general attacks with limited objectives which were led by lines of skirmishers, followed by small infantry columns organised in depth. They had a vastly increased amount of artillery support, the infantry advancing behind five layers of creeping bombardment.
- 2nd Battle of Passchendaele (26th October – 10 November 1917)
Local operations continued after 10th November. German air activity and artillery fire remained intense and the British continued to attract German attention.

After being involved in possibly all of the above, Frank Thompson was shot by a sniper on 12th November 1917.

² Available to view via Ancestry.co.uk (military section)

³ F Thompson's medal form lists him in the 16th Battalion. However, CWG states 17th, as in Jeremy Lodge's research.

From the Newark Advertiser*:

'Saturday 24 November 1917: Frank Thompson's wife Mary Elizabeth received a wonderful letter from his officer to inform her of his death in the trenches: "He was the type of man I, as his commander, felt honoured to have had. Owing to his great ability in the use of the Lewis gun, he was sent to a school to receive additional instruction. While there, he won great admiration from his instructors ... On his return he took command of my platoon gun and subsequently gave every possible satisfaction ... The plain facts are that he was sniped through the head whilst standing in the front-line trench.'

Source: T Frecknall 'Collingham in the Great War.'

*Thompson's entry in the Nottinghamshire County Council Roll of Honour database uses the same quote and cites it to the Magnus School's Newark Diary of the Great War, which Trevor Frecknall also used.

Rifleman F Thompson is remembered on:

- 🕒 Tyne Cot Memorial Panel 115 - 119A
- 🕒 Newark - St Mary's Church - Magnus Grammar School War Memorial as **F THOMPSON**
- 🕒 North Collingham - All Saint's Church - Cross War Memorial as **Frank THOMPSON Rfln. K.R.R**
- 🕒 North Collingham - All Saint's Church - Parishioners War Memorial as **Frank THOMPSON**
- 🕒 London East Central District Sorting Office Staff War Memorial as **Thompson F**

Sources:

www.cwg.org

<http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/rollofhonour/People/Details/2306>

<http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/rollofhonour/People/Details/23339>

http://www.ournottinghamshire.org.uk/page_id__829_path__0p4p98p8p12p.aspx

<http://www.wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/allied/kingsroyalriflecrops17-gw.php>

<http://www.1914-1918.net/39div.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Polygon_Wood

http://battlefields1418.50megs.com/boars_head.htm

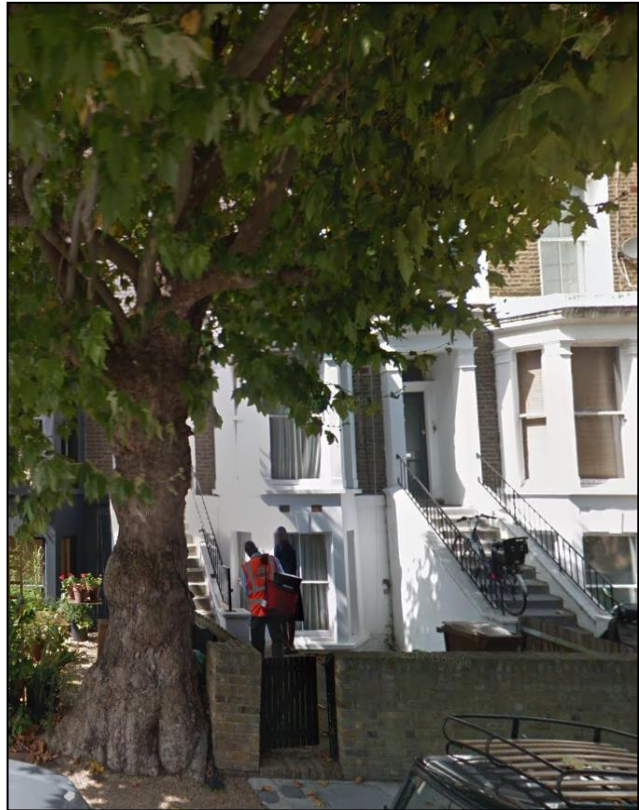
http://www.royalmailmemorials.com/gallery?field_names_value=thompson&field_full_address_value=london&body_value=&field_campaign_tid=1

Jeremy Lodge: Date: 26/09/2014 with additions (below) 2018

Additional Information

Frank Thompson appears to have left home to join the GPO soon after leaving the Magnus School. He settled in London and married Mary Greenfield in 1908. Burma Road, his last known address, was an elegant early Victorian terrace of houses separated into flats. Number 31 was divided into 2 flats in which Frank and Mary had four rooms on one floor.

Right: A recent image of 31 Burma Road, Stoke Newington. Poignantly, it shows a postman delivering letters to one of the flats.



WAR SERVICE: Machine Gunners

As a Lewis Machine Gunner, Frank Thompson was literally in the front line, as this extract shows:

'Those who joined a Lewis machine gun team were given a 'LG' badge to wear on a sleeve. To those in the trenches the badge was nicknamed the 'suicide badge' as it was believed by the infantry that if the Germans captured you, you would be shot out of hand because of the terrible casualties caused by the Lewis

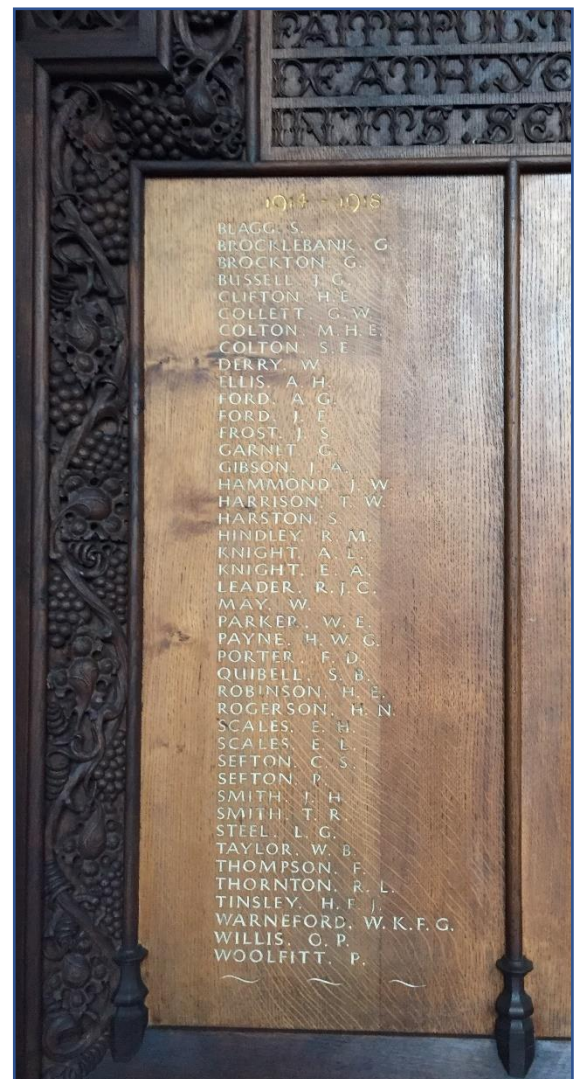


Above: A Lewis Gun photo Marco Ernst 2016 (creative commons usage)

gun. The Numbers 1 and 2 of Lewis machine gun crews (those who carried the gun and spare parts) were also required to hand over their Lee Enfield rifles, as these would have hindered ease of movement. Instead, they were issued with a Webley revolver. Lewis crews had a Number 1 who was in charge and carried the machine gun around from post to post. The Number 2 carried the spare parts that accompanied the gun. Each man carried in the region of three stones in extra weight as a result – one of the reasons why they did not need to be encumbered by a rifle. It was up to the Number 1 as to where a Lewis gun was placed. However, the five-man crew moved with a degree of frequency during a German attack, as

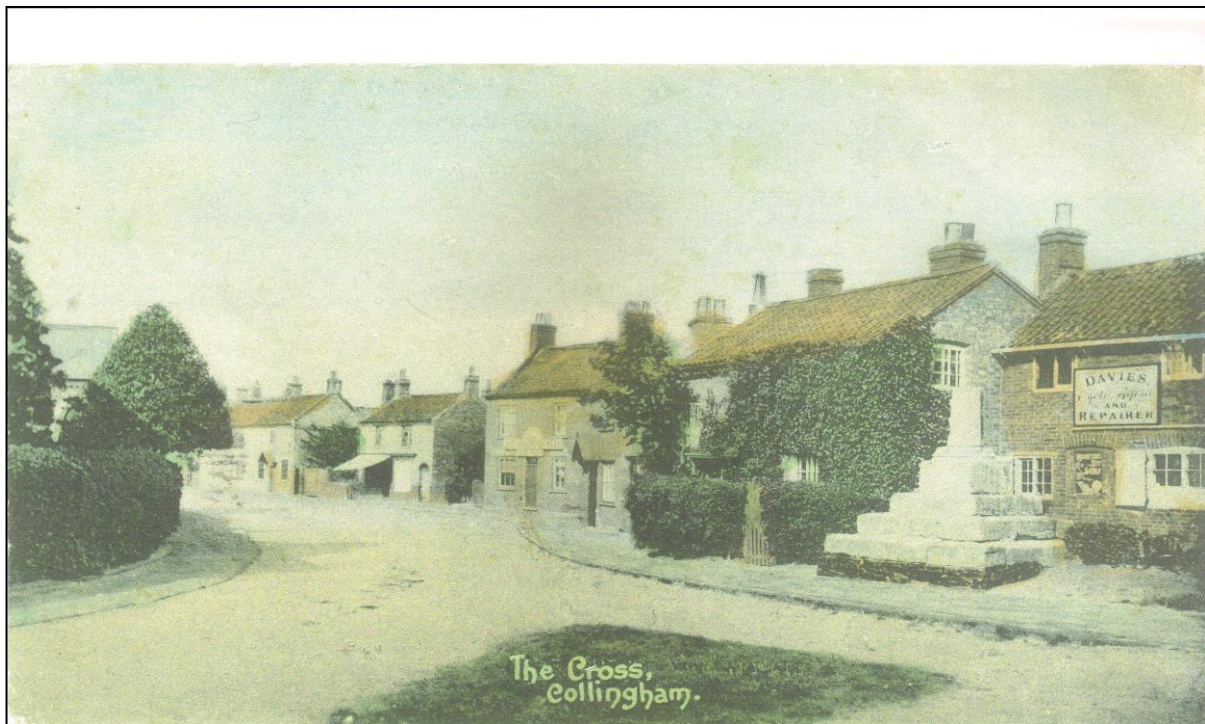
they knew that the Germans would quickly establish where a Lewis machine gun was placed and artillery would home in on it.'

- extracted from C N Trueman's History Learning Website 'Life in the Infantry.'



Above: The Magnus Grammar School Roll of Honour in St Mary Magdalene Church, Newark. Frank Thompson's name appears 6th from the bottom on the left-hand side of the scroll. Photo 2017 HP For more about the Magnus Grammar School Roll of Honour see sources on p8.

Thompsons of Collingham



Above: George Thompson's butcher's shop c 1905. The shop is shown with the white awning, second from the left. To its left was Arthur Willis's bakery (now One Stop) and to the right The Crown Inn (now Crown House). Note the ancient cross is in its original position.

Image from a post-card c/o Collingham & District Local History Society, Jubilee Room, Collingham.

Although Frank Thompson left home at 19, the Thompson family were part of the fabric of the village for well over a century. The Thompsons ran a butcher's business at 160 High in North Collingham from 1886 – 1958, with Frank's brother Ralph taking over from his father George (1854 – 1930). George had previously worked on his father Abraham's 190 acres of land at Eagle Hall but appears to have taken up butchery soon after the 1881 census was taken. He married 23-year-old farmer's daughter Sarah Brown at St Helena's Church, South Scarle, the same year.

Frank's brother Ralph (1889 – 1961) retired from the shop in 1958 owing to ill-health.⁴ It is thought that the Thompson's also owned the building known as 'Tin Town', now the Vicarage Close estate. Of interest is the following research form Sue Clayton about 160 High Street and other land owned/rented:

1910-1955 George Thompson & Sons, High St, Nth C. In 1910/11 George owned a butcher's shop attached to a sitting room (with a square bay), a scullery and pantry. The house had been extended in 1909. Upstairs were two bedrooms and a box room with a further bedroom above that. Outside were various stables and barns, with a slaughter house which included a penning shed and loft. This cost £92 and was in 'very good condition'.

⁴ See letter from Ralph Thompson to customers in CDLHS archives (BU or EF/AA/THO)

*Thompson rented land in 1910/11 as follows: six acres (two good grass fields near the South Scarle Road) from Gerard Thompson of Stoke Newington for which he paid £12 p.a.; six acres of grassland (worth £338) from Frank Broadbent, Old Hall, North Collingham. Thompson owned a 'good grassfield' of just over two acres near Queens Street which was worth £250.**

*(*IR58/49870 nos. 313, 319, 321, 142) In 1955 his pork sausage was deficient in meat – he was described as a manufacturer rather than a butcher – but was this a son perhaps.⁵*

*Right: 160 High Street, Collingham, the property once owned by Thompson's butcher's
Photo: 27th September 2017*



NB: It would be interesting to see if there was a link between Gerald Thompson of Stoke Newington and the fact that Frank worked in Stoke Newington as a GPO sorter.

Newark Rural Tribunals 1916-1918

George Thompson was called before the Newark Rural Tribunals, held in the Coffee Palace, Newark (now Zizzi's on Beastmarket) several times. These tribunals were held to enquire why any able-bodied men still in the area had not enlisted. The need for men on the Front increased in 1916/17 after the huge losses on the Somme and the panel became more zealous in their recruitment drive.

Extracts from T Frecknell's book:

30th March, 1916

'...then the Tribunal got down to business and decides butcher George Thompson at North Collingham can have until 1 May to find someone – the Tribunal suggests his daughter⁶ – to replace his son Ralph, 21, as slaughterhouseman and delivery man round the surrounding villages ...'

Tuesday 12 September 1916:

'Newark Rural Tribunal decided Norman E Cook, who would be 18 on 12 November, could stay until 1 January working for butcher George Thompson of North Collingham High Street, who pleaded he was the only male labourer left since his two sons joined the Yeomanry.'

16th January 1917: 'Norman E Cook⁷, 19, slaughterman and butcher for G E Thompson, Collingham, was given temporary exemption for two months to carry out substitution of Albert Thompson of the Sherwood Rangers ...'

⁵ Sue Clayton 'Village Shops in Nottinghamshire' 2012 PhD research notes

⁶ Charlotte Thompson (1884-1945) buried in N Coll

⁷ Norman Cook lived with his family on Besthorpe Road. Died 1928, aged 30.

Additional Sources 2018 Research:

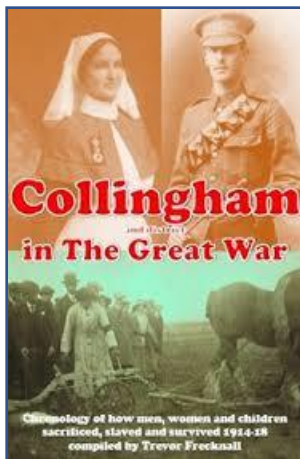
🔴 The Magnus Grammar School in the First World War.

The school had been re-sited from the original building on Appleton Gate to more modern premises Earp Avenue in 1909. However, Frank Thompson would not have benefitted from this and would have attended the old grammar school which had been condemned as unfit for purpose. There's a comprehensive history by Margaret Granger here:

<http://nlha.org.uk/news/thomas-earp-co-founder-newark-magnus-grammar-school/>

Trevor Frecknall's piece on the ex-pupils who died in action can be read on the 'Our Nottinghamshire' community website here:

http://www.ournottinghamshire.org.uk/page/the_magnus_grammar_school



- Ancestry.co.uk
- History Learning Website: www.historylearningsite.co.uk
- East Trent Genealogy database
- Collingham and District Local History Society archives, Jubilee Room, Swinderby Road, Collingham. The archive includes an original Thompson pie dish (Map Chest 1/Shops drawer)
- Trevor Frecknall's book 'Collingham and District during The Great War' including permission to use the photograph of Frank Thompson p 103

Visit:

- 🔴 St Mary Magdalene Church, Newark. This houses the roll of honour for The Magnus Grammar School as well as having a chapel dedicated to the 2/8th Sherwood Foresters and Newark Roll of Honour.
- 🔴 The King's Royal Rifles Association HQ on 52 Davies, Street, London, appears to have closed. Their website is www.krrcassociation.com



HP 1/4/2018