

7: Thomas Henry Bell

Basic Information [as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC]

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: Thomas Bell

Rank: Private

Battalion / Regiment: 5th Bn. Cheshire Regiment

Service Number: 2307

Date of Death: 10 April 1915

Age at Death: 29

Buried / Commemorated at: Ramparts Cemetery - Lille Gate, Ypres (Ieper), West Flanders, Belgium

Additional information given by CWGC: Husband of Ann Elizabeth Snelson (formerly Bell), of 46, Cornwall St., Chester.

Thomas Bell was, probably, the fourth child / third son of Neston blacksmith James and Martha Bell. James Bell, a blacksmith from a young age, appears to have been raised by his widowed mother, Ann, and he married Martha Barlow in West Derby in April/June 1878 and settled in Gayton where their first two children were born. By late 1883 the family had moved to Neston - Edward Walter, their third child, was baptised here on 9 October 1883. By the time of the 1891 census they were living on Liverpool Road:

Liverpool Rd 1	James Bell	Head	39	Blacksmith	Martha	Wife	36	Schooler	12	Daughter	10	Daughter	7	Daughter	5	Daughter	3	Daughter	1
	Martha	Do	36	Do	James	Do	10	Do	7	Do	5	Do	3	Do	1	Do		Do	
	Margaret	Do	12	Do	James	Do	10	Do	7	Do	5	Do	3	Do	1	Do		Do	
	James	Do	10	Do	Walter	Do	7	Do	5	Do	3	Do	1	Do		Do		Do	
	Thomas	Do	6	Do	William	Do	5	Do	3	Do	1	Do		Do		Do		Do	
	William	Do	5	Do	Elizabeth	Do	4	Do		Do		Do		Do		Do		Do	
	Elizabeth	Do	4	Do															

1891 census (extract) – Liverpool Road, Neston

James Bell	39	blacksmith	born Liverpool
Martha	36		born Heswall
Margaret	12		born Gayton
James	10		born Gayton
Walter	7		born Neston
Thomas	6		born Neston
William	5		born Neston
Elizabeth	4		born Neston

There is no record of a baptism for Thomas, born in July/September 1885, at the parish church or for either William or Elizabeth. However, Amelia Bell was baptised 10 July 1890 but died soon afterwards. A son, George Bell, was baptised at Neston 24 November 1891 but was buried, aged 1 year 3 months, on 16 December 1892. Another daughter, Martha, was baptised 12 February 1893 and she survived. Three further children were born, each baptised privately (suggesting that they may have been weak or sickly and were baptised at home) and two of these died:

Sarah Emma	baptised 7 July 1894	survived (known as Emily)
Hannah	baptised 3 September 1897	buried 6 September 1897 aged 9 months
Mary	baptised 3 September 1899	buried 8 September 1899 aged 11 days

James Bell, Thomas' older brother, was killed in France on 22 March 1918 whilst serving with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers [See [116: James Bell](#)].

At the time of the 1901 census the family had moved to the Golden Lion Yard in the centre of Neston (behind the present-day Concept Interiors opposite the Town Hall):

James Bell	Head	M	48	Blacksmith	Worker	Cheshire	England
Martha Is	Wife	M	43			Do	Do
James Is	Son	M	19	Railway Porter	Worker	Do	Do
Walter Is	Son	M	17	Farm Labourer	Do	Do	Do
Thomas Is	Son	M	15	Telegraph Messenger	Do	Do	Do
William Is	Son	M	14			Do	Do
Elizabeth Is	Daughter	F	13			Do	Do
Martha Is	Daughter	F	9			Do	Do
Emily Is	Daughter	F	7			Do	Do
John Is	Son	M	6			Do	Do

1901 census (extract) – Golden Lion Yard, Neston

James Bell	48	blacksmith	born Cheshire
Martha	43		born Cheshire
James	19	railway porter	born Cheshire
Walter	17	farm labourer	born Cheshire
Thomas	15	telegraph messenger	born Cheshire
William	14		born Cheshire
Elizabeth	13		born Cheshire
Martha	9		born Cheshire
Emily	7		born Cheshire
John	6		born Cheshire

It is most probable that James Bell was a domestic, possibly agricultural, blacksmith and was not involved in work at the colliery.

According to the newspaper reports, Thomas joined the Post Office on leaving school and in the 1901 census was recorded as a telegraph messenger. It appears that he progressed to be a postman in Neston before being transferred to Chester.

Thomas Henry Bell married Ann Elizabeth Dolphin at the Wesley Methodist Church, St John Street, Chester in April / June 1910. Ann was a daughter of sawyer Joseph and Mary Ann Dolphin; although the family originated from the Staffordshire / Shropshire border they had moved to Chester by about 1894 and at the time of the 1901 census were living at 7 Louise Street, a very small terraced property.

Ann Elizabeth Dolphin had been born in the small Staffordshire village of Gnosall, approximately half-way between the towns of Newport (in Shropshire) and Stafford and in the 1901 census she was recorded as a dressmaker.

At the time of the 1911 census Thomas and Ann were living at 29 Cornwall Street in Chester (the street of terraced houses still exists, west of Chester Railway Station, although that side of the road has been redeveloped) and Ann was expecting their first child - Margaret Bell was born in April / June of that year:

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.

The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, as in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.

Number of Schedules 247
(To be filled up by the Enumerator after collection.)

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family	AGE (last Birthday) and SEX	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE	PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of Persons aged ten years and upwards	BIRTHPLACE of every person	NATIONALITY of every Person born in a Foreign Country	INFIRMITY		
of every Person, whether Member of Family, Visitor, Boarder, or Servant, who	State whether "Head" or "Wife," "Son," "Daughter," or other Relative, "Visitor," "Boarder," or "Servant."	For Infants under one year state the age in months as "one month," etc.	State, for each Married Woman entered on this Schedule, the number of — Children born alive to present Marriage. (If no children born alive write "None" in Column 7.)	Personal Occupation. The reply should show the precise branch of Profession, Trade, Manufacture, etc. If engaged in any Trade or Manufacture, the particular kind of work done, and the Article made or Material worked or dealt in should be clearly indicated. (See Instructions 1 to 8 and Examples on back of Schedule.)	Industry or Service with which worker is connected. This question should generally be answered by stating the business carried on by the employer. If this is clearly shown in Col. 10 the question need not be answered here. No entry needed for Domestic Service in private employments. If employed by a public body (Government, Municipal, etc.) state what body (See Instruction 9 and Examples on back of Schedule.)	Whether Employer, Worker, or Working on Own Account. Write opposite the name of each person engaged in any Trade or Industry: (1) "Employer" (that is employing persons other than domestic servants); or (2) "Worker" (that is working for an employer), or (3) "Own Account" (that is neither employing others nor working for a trade employer).	Whether Working at Home. Write the words "At Home" opposite the name of each person working at home.	(1) If born in the United Kingdom, write the name of the County, and Town or Parish. (2) If born in any other part of the British Empire, write the name of the Dependency, Colony, etc., and of the Province or State. (3) If born in a Foreign Country, write the name of the Country. (4) If born at sea, write "At Sea." NOTE—In the case of persons born elsewhere than in England or Wales, state whether "Resident" or "Visitor" in this Country.	State whether:— (1) "British subject by parentage." (2) "Naturalized British subject," giving year of naturalisation. (3) If of foreign nationality, state whether "French," "German," "Russian," etc. If any person included in this Schedule is:— (1) "Totally Deaf" or "Deaf and Dumb," (2) "Totally Blind," (3) "Imbecile," or "Feeble-minded," state the infirmity opposite that person's name, and the age at which he or she became afflicted.
1	Thomas Henry Bell	Head	25	Married	Postman 403	Worker	At Home	Cheshire, Neston	120
2	Ann Elizabeth Bell	Wife	26	Married				Staffordshire, Gnosall	100

(To be filled up by the Enumerator.)

I certify that:—
(1) All the ages on this Schedule are entered in the proper sex columns.
(2) I have counted the males and females in columns 3 and 4 separately, and have compared their sum with the total number of persons.
(3) After making the necessary enquiries I have compared all entries on this Schedule which appeared to be defective, and have corrected such as appeared to be erroneous.

Initials of Enumerator: *THB*

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling.)

Write below the Number of Rooms in this Dwelling (Kitchens, Tenements, or Apartments). Count the kitchen as a room but do not count cellars, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom; nor warehouse, office, shop.

4 Rooms

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature: *Thomas Henry Bell*

Postal Address: *29 Cornwall St Chester*

1911 census (condensed) – 29 Cornwall Street, Chester

Thomas Henry Bell	25	postman	born Neston
Ann Elizabeth	26		born Gnosall, Staffordshire

Thomas and Ann had been married for less than one year.

A second child, Joseph P. Bell, was born in April / June 1913 and no further children are known.

In 1911 James' parents and unmarried siblings were still living at Lion's Yard in the centre of Neston:

1	James Bell	Husband	58	Married	Blacksmith	own account	Liverpool, Lancashire
2	Martha Bell	Wife	53	Married			Heswall, Cheshire
3	James Bell	Son	29	single	general labourer		Heswall, Cheshire
4	William Bell	Son	24	single	general labourer		Neston, Cheshire
5	John Bell	Son	17	single	apprentice blacksmith		Neston, Cheshire
6	Martha Bell	Daughter	18	single			Neston, Cheshire

1911 census (extract) – Golden Lion Yard, Neston

James Bell	58	blacksmith (own account)	born Liverpool
Martha	53		born Heswall
James	29	general labourer	born Heswall
William	24	general labourer	born Neston
John	17	apprentice blacksmith	born Neston
		(assisting in the business)	
Martha	18		born Neston

James and Martha had been married for 34 years and nine of their fourteen children had survived.

According to the newspaper reports Thomas Bell joined the 1/5th (Earl of Chester's) Battalion Territorial Force on the outbreak of war and '...had been about seven weeks at the front when he was shot in the back by a German sniper whilst digging in a trench.'

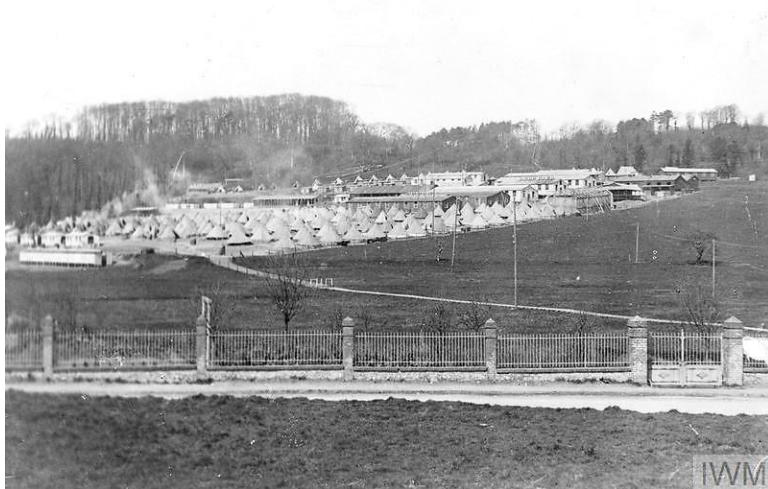
The 1/5th (Earl of Chester's) Battalion, a Territorial Battalion, was formed in Chester on 4 August 1914 as part of the Cheshire Brigade, Welsh Division, and was stationed at Volunteer Street, south of Pepper Street, in the city. It is known that Thomas enlisted in Chester and he is listed as a member of 'C' Company led by Captain C A Price and Captain G W C Hartley.

On mobilisation they moved to Shrewsbury and Church Stretton but by the end of August 1914 had moved to Northampton. In December 1914 they moved again, now to Cambridge. On 14 February 1915 the Battalion left Cambridge in three trains for Southampton where they embarked on three ships which, in early evening, moved to Southampton Water to join a large convoy of other troop ships. The convoy, with a

naval escort, crossed the Channel that night and early the following morning

On 15 February 1915 they formally left the Welsh Division and landed at Le Havre and moved, in very cold weather, to a large tented rest camp overlooking the town. Over the next days they remained at the camp where the men were issued with their equipment and heavy goatskin jerkins.

Orders were received to move on 17 February and after lunch the Battalion marched to the railway station and boarded trains (these appear to have been cattle waggons) at 6.40pm, although their destination was then unknown to the men.



The British Army camp at Rouelles near Le Havre, March 1916 [Imperial War Museum photo]
[Source: www.longlongtrail.co.uk/battlefields/gazetteer-of-the-western-front/gazetteer-of-the-western-front-le-havre-and-harfleur-base/]

On Thursday 18 February, at 5.30pm, the train arrived at Bailleul where the men were billeted in glasshouses which had been used for vine cultivation.

The following day, 19 February, they joined the 14th Infantry Brigade of the 5th Division, under the command of Major-General Sir Thomas Lethbridge Napier Morland ¹ and marched to Neuve Eglise, via Dranoutre, in continual rain. They stayed in billets at Neuve Eglise until 23 March and, using the derelict trenches on the lower slopes of the Messines Ridge to the east, received training in trench warfare. However, Neuve Eglise was shelled regularly during the daytime so training was removed to the outlying farms and, on 23 March, the 1/5th Battalion moved northwards to replace the Royal Irish Rifles in the poorly-maintained trenches to the east of Kemmel.

¹ This was in the 2nd Corps (commanded by General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien) of the 2nd Army (which was under the command of General Sir Herbert Plumer). Other than the 1/5th Cheshire Regiment, the 14th Infantry Brigade contained the 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment, the 1st East Surrey Regiment, the 1st Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry and the 2nd Manchester Regiment.

On 5 April - Easter Monday - the Battalion was relieved by the 2nd Battalion Royal Scots and the troops moved to billets in huts near Dickebusch and, on 7 April to Ypres where both 'C' and 'D' Companies were kept in reserve.

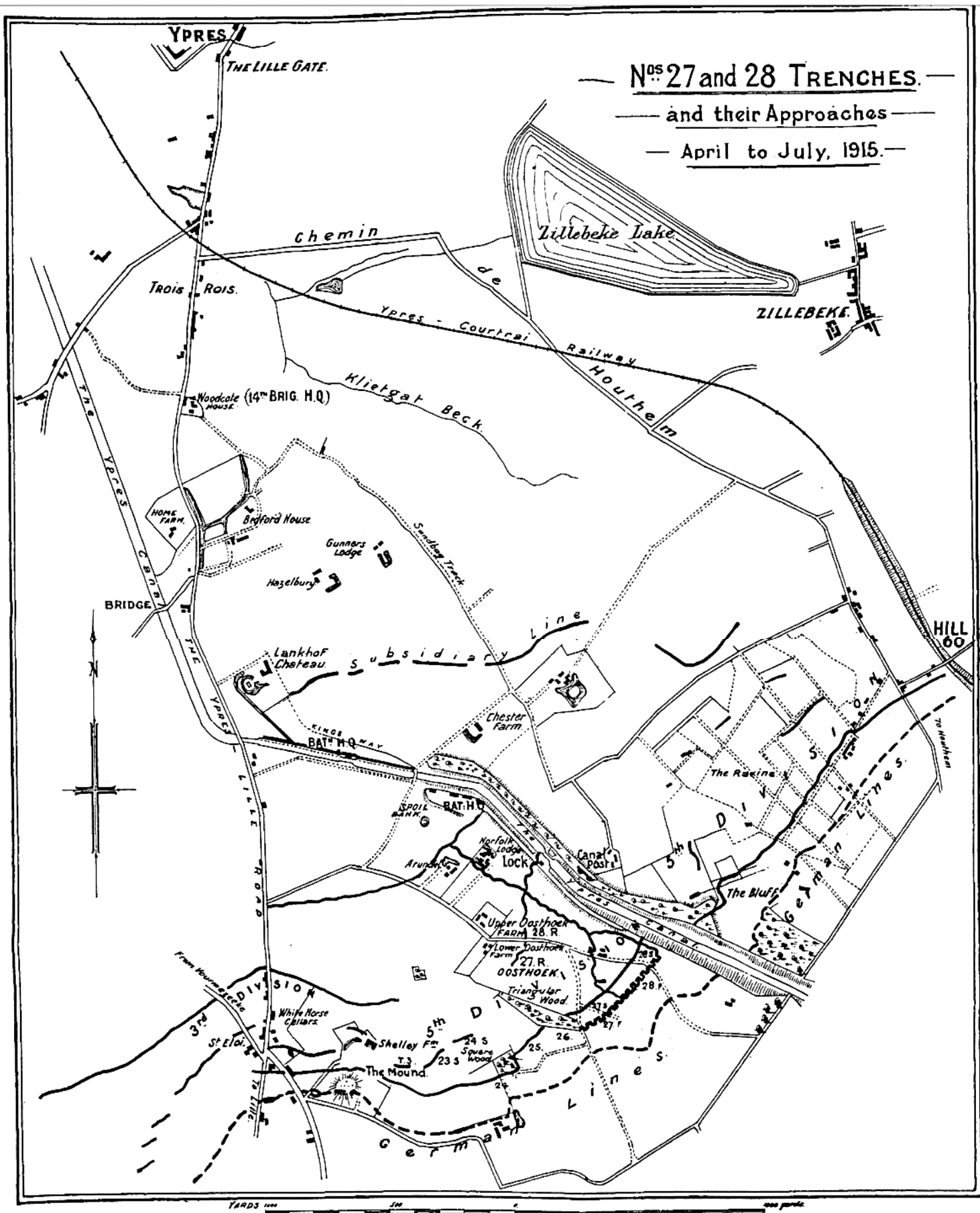
The route from Ypres to the trenches ran along a dreary stretch of road to Chateau Lankhof, which had a great reputation for "overs," and thence along the Canal Bank to Spoilbank, which was a cutting through which the Ypres-Commines Canal ran, with high and well-wooded banks on either side. Here was accommodation for Battalion Head Quarters and one Company in support, in rather uncomfortable shelters excavated in the bank, the Battalion Dressing Station being at Chester Farm, on the opposite side of the Canal. The trenches were about three-quarters of a mile in front. No. 27 when first taken over was more of the nature of a sandbag breast work, with little trench or parados, the distance to the German trenches varying from 60 to 100 yards. The German trenches were on the crest of the hill, and ours on the up slope, and it was evident that they had been gradually constructed where a battle had ended. There were a number of dead men buried very lightly in the trenches, which made any improvements in many parts almost impossible. There were practically no shelters, and those that did exist merely gave cover from weather and not from fire. Reliefs were worked by two companies going into the line and two companies resting at Ypres in reserve. On April 17th a great mine was exploded by the British, followed by an attack on Hill 60, a little to the north, the Companies in the line assisting in the scheme of attack by vigorous supporting fire on the enemy trenches in front.

At this period Ypres was being heavily shelled day and night with high explosive and incendiary shells, and the Cavalry Barracks had to be evacuated. The Companies at Ypres moved to bivouacs near the Canal, and set up trench bivouac sheets, but in consequence of the shelling spreading, these also had to be evacuated, and a move was made to a Factory on the outskirts of the town, and later further out still to bivouacs at Kruisstraat.

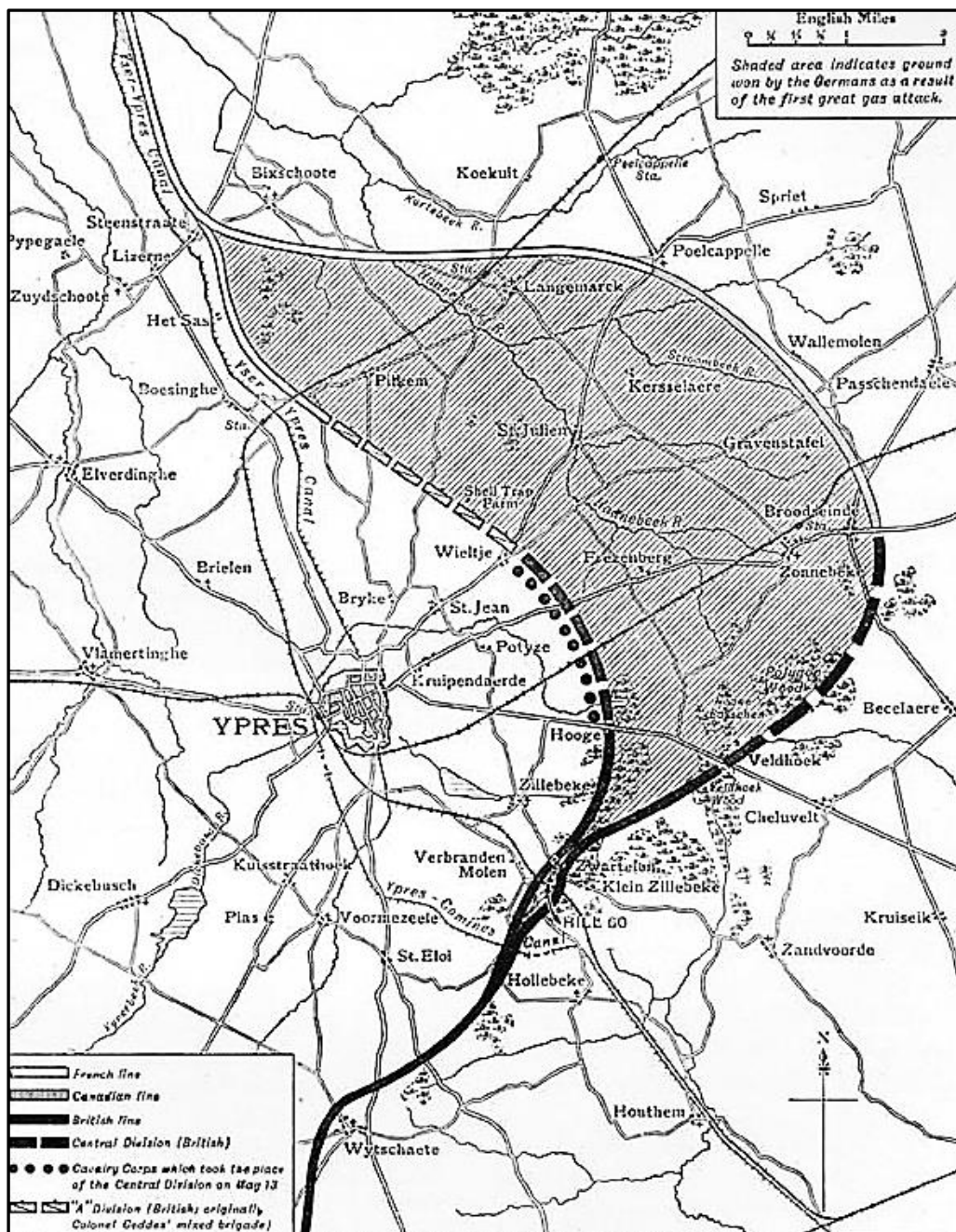
The War Record of the 1/5th (Earl of Chester's) Battalion, The Cheshire Regiment

Lieut.-Col. W. A. V. Churton DSO, TD The Naval & Military Press Ltd 2009 (original pub 1920)

The first encounters involving the 1/5th Battalion were the opening battles at Ypres, The Battle of Gravenstafel (23 - 24 April) and The Battle of St Julien (24 April - 4 May) and the preparations described above were in readiness for these actions; it was here, within the Ypres Salient, that Thomas Bell was shot in the back by a sniper on 10 April 1915 when he was returning from digging trenches.



The War Record of the 1/5th (Earl of Chester's) Battalion, The Cheshire Regiment
 Lieut.-Col. W. A. V. Churton DSO, TD The Naval & Military Press Ltd 2009 (original pub 1920)



The Ypres Salient before and after the Second Battle of Ypres, April - May 1915.

[Source:
<http://www.19141918.net/maps.htm>]

From January 1915 a stalemate situation existed between the Allied and the German armies. The Allies sat firm in a defensive semi-circular Front Line running from the northeast, east and southeast of Ypres. The occupation of this ground east of Ypres pushed a bulge, called a "salient" in military terms, into the German Front Line here. To the advantage of the Allies it forced the Germans to provide extra manpower to hold a

longer section of Front Line. However, a serious Allied disadvantage here was that the Germans had knowingly secured relatively good positions along the edges of this salient. From the south of Ypres there is a naturally occurring spur of high ground which continues around the eastern side of the town of Ypres. It runs generally in a north-easterly direction creating a ridge of slightly higher ground from Messines in the south to Passchendaele in the north. [<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/ypres-salient/battles-ypres-salient.htm>*]*

The newspaper reports in 1915 record that Thomas and family were living on Talbot Street in Chester (there is some discrepancy between the house numbers given) when he was killed - this row of small terraced housing is only a very short distance from Cornwall Street where they were living in 1911.

Following his death Thomas's widow, Ann Elizabeth Bell, remarried and continued to live in Chester (46, Cornwall Street), just a short distance from where she was living with Thomas in 1911. Ann married Thomas E. Snelson, at Chester, in April / June 1921 and their first, and only, child - William A. Snelson - was born at the end of the year.

Thomas Edward Snelson was recorded, in the 1911 census, as being a gunner with the 56th Company Royal Garrison Artillery, then based in Curepipe, Mauritius. Born in Chester, he was then aged 21.



Birkenhead Advertiser – Saturday 24 April 1915

NESTON MAN KILLED.

VICTIM OF SNIPER.

Mr. James Bell, of Golden Lion Yard, High-street, has received notice that his third son, Thomas Henry Bell, has been killed in action in France. Private Bell, who was 29 years of age, was in the 5th Cheshires, which he joined shortly after the outbreak of the war. So far as can be learned, he was killed by a sniper when returning from trench digging. He had only been in France a short time. On leaving school Private Bell was employed in the Neston Post Office for a considerable length of time. Later on he was transferred to Chester Post Office, where he was employed at the time he enlisted. He resided at No. 40, Talbot-street, Chester, and leaves a widow and two children.



Thomas Bell's grave at Ramparts Cemetery - Lille Gate, Ypres, Belgium [CWGC photo]

Neston Soldier Falls.

SNIPED IN THE TRENCHES.

News has just been received in Neston that Private Thomas Henry Bell, of Golden Lion Yard, High-street, has been killed in action. Private Bell, who was the third son of Mr. James Bell, a very old Nestonian, joined the 5th Cheshires immediately after the outbreak of the war. He was only drafted to France a few weeks ago, but fell a victim to a sniper soon after his arrival there. It is understood that he was shot whilst returning from a spell at trench-digging.

Private Bell was connected with the Neston Post Office for some time after leaving school, and was subsequently promoted to the general office at Chester. It was from this latter office that he enlisted. He lived at No. 2, Talbot-street, Chester, was about 30 years of age, and leaves a widow and two children.

Birkenhead News – Monday 26 April 1915

Of Thomas's other siblings,

- Margaret - nothing is known after 1891 when she was aged 12.
- Walter - baptised as Edward Walter Bell on 9 October 1883 he was recorded, in the 1911 census, as a police constable in the police station at Colne, Lancashire. He was single, aged 27. He died, on Wirral, in early 1938 aged 54; it is not known whether he married.
- Elizabeth - in 1911, aged 22, she was a domestic housemaid in the home of Alfred Eugene Mathewson, the managing director of an engineering company at Hale, Cheshire. Nothing further is known of her.
- Martha - nothing further is known of her.
- Emily (Sarah Emma) - in 1911 she was a general domestic servant at the Shrewsbury Arms (in 2018 the Hinderton Arms), Hinderton Road. In early 1923 she married Walter Wentworth Gates (born 23 March 1899). Walter died in the Birkenhead area in mid-1975 but nothing further is known of Emily.

The 1939 Register records that Ann Snelson, Thomas Bell's widow (born 11 May 1884) was still living at 46 Cornwall Street, Chester. Her husband, Thomas . Snelson (born 23 September 1889) was recorded as 'ganger, railway engineering maintenance staff.' Ann died, aged 71 in Chester, in early 1956 and Thomas Snelson died, aged 55 in Chester, in early 1945.

James Bell, Thomas's father died in April / June 1929, aged 77. Martha, Thomas's mother, died in July / September 1938 aged 80.

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regt. No.
BELL.	Ches. B.	Pte.	2307.
Thomas Henry.			

Medal.	Roll	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	8/2/10127 ^B	9242	Lt. in A. 10.4.15.
BRITISH	20	20	
15 STAR	8/2/5B ³	1391	
Theatre of War first served in	(1) France		
Date of entry therein	15.2.15.		

K. 1380.

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920