

26: Thomas Edward Downey

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: Thomas Edward Downey

Rank: Private

Battalion / Regiment: 16th Bn. Cheshire Regiment

Service Number: 202235 Date of Death: 09 September 1917 Age at Death: 24

Buried / Commemorated at: Villers-Faucon Communal Cemetery Extension, Departement de la Somme, Picardie, France & St Winefride's RC churchyard, Little Neston

Additional information given by CWGC: None

Thomas Edward Downey was born on 9 October 1890, the eldest child of Patrick and Mary Downey of Little Neston. Baptised at St Winefride's RC church on 9 November 1890 he was the brother of Joseph Laurence Downey who also died as a consequence of WW1 [see previous entry **25: Joseph Laurence Downey** which also gives census, gravestone and other details of the family, not repeated in this entry].

Thomas Edward Downey married Mary Elizabeth Smith at St Peter's C of E Church, Heswall, in April / June 1913 and it is believed that they had one child, Thomas H Downey who was born and died in early 1914. In the 1911 census, then unmarried, Thomas was recorded as a *teamsman for farmer*.

The newspaper announcements of Thomas Edward Downey's death record that he was 26 (as against 24 as recorded by CWGC - in fact he was exactly one month short of his 27th birthday), that he was killed in action and that he was the husband of Mary Elizabeth Downey of Little Neston. He enlisted in Birkenhead.

The 16th (Service) Battalion (2nd Birkenhead) Cheshire Regiment was formed at Birkenhead on 3 December 1914 by Alfred Bigland MP as a Bantam Battalion (so Thomas would have been under 5ft 3ins tall) and moved to Hoylake, training at Meols in 1915. Together with the 15th Battalion it came under the orders of the 105th Brigade in the 35th Division at Masham, Yorkshire, in June 1915 and in August it moved to Salisbury Plain. On mobilisation the troops landed at Le Havre in January 1916 and engaged in various actions on the Western Front including the Battle of Bazentin Ridge in 1916. Whilst Thomas's Service Record has not been found, the circumstances of his death on 9 September 1917 are known from the Battalion's War Diary account:



The 16th Bantam Battalion training on the sand dunes at Meols in early 1915.

[Source: Imperial War Museum]

WAR DIARY

or

INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

(Erase heading not required.)

September

105/35
Army Form C. 2118.

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs., Part II, and the Staff Manual respectively. Title pages will be prepared in manuscript.

16TH (SERVICE) BATT^N CHESHIRE REGT.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
AIZECOURT.	1/9/17		Battalion proceeded into Camp at ST. EMILIE as Brigade Reserve.	
ST. EMILIE	2/9/17		Two Companies supplied wiring parties working between GUILLEMONT FARM and ISLAND TRAVERSE.	
	5/9/17			
	6/9/17		Battalion relieved 14 th Bn. The Gloster Regt. in posts - CAT - GUILLEMONT - E.E.	
KEN LANE	7/9/17		Frontage quiet with exception of a few Heavy Hostile Trench Mortars.	
	9/9/17		W Company working party under 2 nd Lieut. Barber attempted a small raid on Enemy sap, but owing to wire being uncut found it necessary to withdraw about 4 AM. Later in the morning the farm was heavily bombarded with heavy Enemy Trench Mortar, one sap being completely blown in - eight other ranks being killed and three wounded. 2 nd Lieut. Barber was wounded in attempting to recover one of the bodies.	
	10/9/17		Battalion informed of following awards: - 2 nd Lieut. Barber - Military Cross - Capt. Brin - D.S.O. - Private Clarke - Private Turner - Private Walters, Lance Capt. Peake - Military Medal.	
	11/9/17		5 Officers & 10 O.R. proceeded to England on leave. Line quiet - Officers of 17 th Lancashire Shooliers recommended one separator to relief.	
	12/9/17		2 AM. CAT Post heavily shelled owing to operations by 24 th Division on night. 2 AM. CAT Post again heavily shelled - Counter attack by 24 th Division. Relief carried out without incident by 17 th Lancashire Shooliers.	

A70921. Wt. 112139/111298 750,000. 1/17. D. D. & L., Ltd. Forms/C2118/14.

War Diary extract 16th Battalion Cheshire Regiment 1 – 12 September 1917 Partial transcript

AIZECOURT 1/9/17 Battalion proceeded into camp at ST EMILIE as Brigade Reserve.

ST EMILIE 2/9/17 to 5/9/17 Two Companies supplied wiring parties working between GUILLEMONT FARM and ISLAND TRAVERSE.

6/10/17 Battalion relieved 14th Bn. The Gloster Regt. in posts CAT – GUILLEMONT – [?]

KEN LANE 7/9/17 Frontage quiet with exception of a few Heavy Hostile Trench Mortars.

9/9/17 W Company working party under 2nd Lieut. Barber attempted a small raid on Enemy sap; but owing to wire being uncut found it necessary to withdraw about 4AM. Later in the morning the farm was heavily bombarded with heavy Enemy Trench Mortar, one sap being completely blown in – eight other ranks being killed and three wounded. 2nd Lieut. Barber was wounded in attempting to recover one of the bodies.

Notes: A sap was a narrow trench, normally for communication, made by digging at an angle (normally 90°) from the existing trench. Another main trench could then be dug at 90° from the sap trench.

CAT was one of the military posts and Ken Lane was a sunken road lines with dugouts.

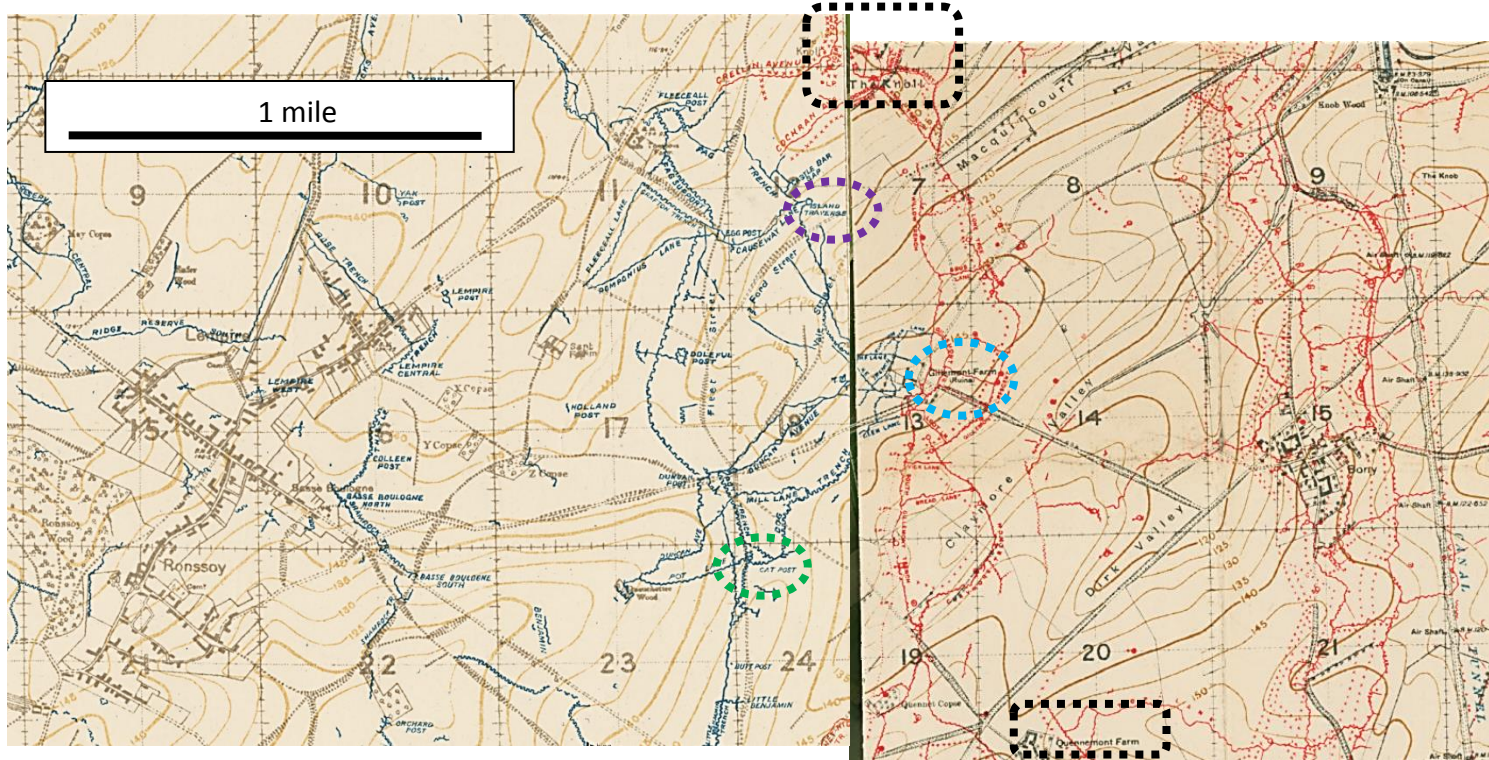
The War Diary records, incorrectly, *Guillemont Farm* (a common error) – the farm was, correctly, Gillemont Farm. The area is about 11 miles north of the town of Saint-Quentin, north of the River Somme.

[Source: <http://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/>]

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regt. No.
DOWNEY Thomas E.	Ches. R.	PTE.	202236
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	J/2/101324	90/3	
BRITISH	do	do	Returned (1743 K.R.) 81149/Ches.
STAR			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920

The notation Returned (1743 K.R.) refers to Kings Regulations (1912) Para 1743 and its amendment, indicating that the medals were returned to the issuing office either because of a problem with their delivery or because the inscription(s) were incorrect. Under KR 1743, if medals remained unclaimed for 10 years they were to be returned to the Deputy Director of Ordnance Stores, Royal Dockyard (Medal Branch) to be destroyed.



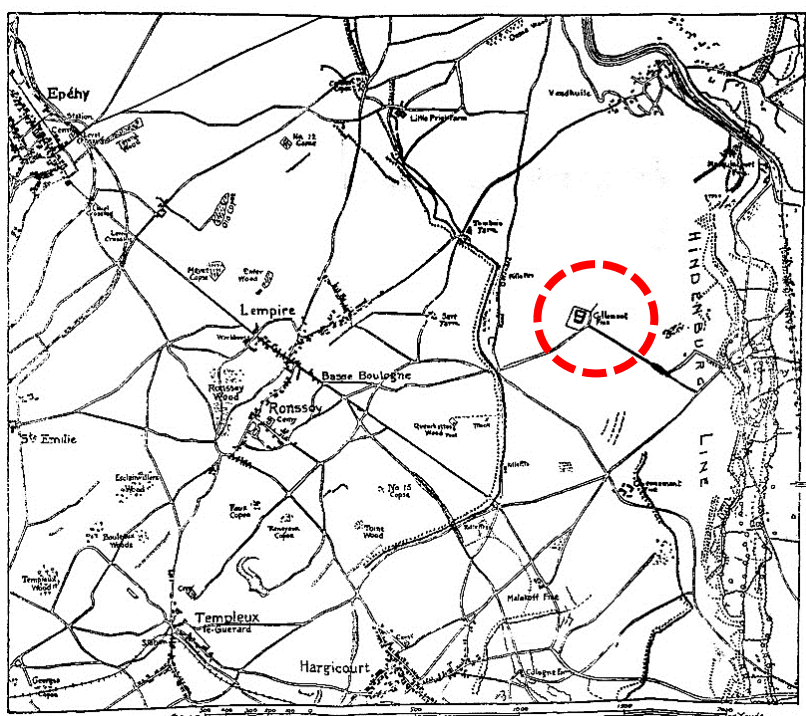
This composite map shows the area (between the small settlements of Lempire and Bony) in which Thomas Edward Downey was killed on 9 September 1917.

The two map sections show the trench positions on two different dates; the section to the west is dated 21 February 1918 and that to the east is dated 21 November 1917. Despite the difference in dates, and the fact that the two sections do not join seamlessly, the map shows clearly the relative Allied (blue) and German (red) positions together with the locations recorded in the 16th Battalion War Diary.

Key locations have been encircled: Island Traverse – purple ; Cat Post – green ; Gillemont Farm (ruins) – light blue

In addition to Gillemont Farm the map shows two other strategic positions, The Knoll (extreme north of map) and Quennemont Farm (extreme south). These two positions have been enclosed within black rectangles. Gillemont Farm and the other two strategic positions noted were important as, being elevated (up to 400 feet above the surrounding countryside), they commanded views over a considerable distance and over the Hindenburg Line.

[Source: <http://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/>]



The location of Gillemont Farm (circled) in relation to the Hindenburg Line (to the east) in April 1917



The location of Gillemont Farm on the ridge.

[Source:
<https://twitter.com/jbanningww1/status/>]

DOWNEY—September 9, killed in action, aged 26 years, Private Thomas Edward Downey, the dearly-beloved husband of Mary Elizabeth Downey, of Little Neston, Cheshire.

Liverpool Daily Post - Monday 24 September 1917.
 The same notification appeared in the *Chester Chronicle*, Saturday 29 September 1917 and the *Liverpool Echo* of Monday 24 September 1917.

Liverpool Echo - Monday 9 September 1918

tember 9, 1916.—Edie.
DOWNEY—In loving memory of my dear son, Private T. E. DOWNEY, aged 25 years, killed in action September 9, 1917.
 When last we saw his smiling face
 He looked so strong and brave;
 We little thought how soon he'd be
 Laid in a soldier's grave.
 Sadly missed by his widowed Mother and Family
 Town-lane, Little Neston.



The Director-General of Graves Registration and Enquiries

Begs to forward as requested a Photograph of
the Grave of:—

Name Downey
 Rank and Initials Private - T.
 Regiment 16th Cheshire Regiment
 Position of Grave Villers Faucon
Communal Cemetery
 Nearest Railway Station Villers Faucon

All communications respecting this Photograph should quote
the number (5.2/9/4022 and be addressed to:—

Director-General of Graves Registration and Enquiries,
 War Office,
 Winchester House,
 St. James's Square,
 London, S.W., 1.

Owing to the circumstances in which the photographic work is carried
on, the Director regrets that in some cases only rough Photographs can
be obtained.

"COPYRIGHT FULLY RESERVED."

The Graves Registration Commission was established in 1915 and received hundreds of requests from relatives for information or photographs of loved ones' graves - by 1917, 12,000 photographs had been dispatched to relatives. The GRC became the Director-General of Graves Registration and Enquiries in February 1916. It is believed that the original photographic plates have been lost.



HE whom this scroll commemorates was numbered among those who, at the call of King and Country, left all that was dear to them, endured hardness, faced danger, and finally passed out of the sight of men by the path of duty and self-sacrifice, giving up their own lives that others might live in freedom. Let those who come after see to it that his name be not forgotten.

202235, PRIVATE, Thomas Edward DOWNEY

16th Battalion.
Cheshire Regiment

Killed in action, France & Flanders, 09/09/17

Born: Little Neston, Ches., Enlisted: Birkenhead, Residence: Little Neston



After WW1 it was decided to issue a bronze Memorial Plaque, around 4½ inches in diameter and popularly known as the "Dead Man's Penny", to the next-of-kin of all British and Empire service personnel who were killed as a result of the war. Accompanying the plaque was a commemorative scroll from King George V.

The plaque shown here was not the one issued to the next-of-kin of Thomas Downey but was for a soldier not associated with Neston, Sidney George Hoar of the ASC, who died on Tuesday, 27 February 1917.



Thomas Downey's headstone at Villers-Faucon Communal Cemetery Extension.

[Attribution: my thanks go to Mrs D. Blunt of Parkgate for permission to use the photographs of the scroll and Thomas Downey's headstone on this page and the Director-General of Graves Registration and Enquiries document on the previous page]

On the day of Thomas Edward Downey's death, 9 September 1917, 11 men of the Cheshire Regiment died. Of these, nine were from the 16th Battalion and five of these were buried at the Villers-Faucon Communal Cemetery Extension.

There is no clear indication that Thomas's widow, Mary, remarried after his death.

For additional details of the Downey family see the previous entry, **25: Joseph Laurence Downey**.

579744	8/11/1917	Downey Thomas Edward.	16 th Bn Cheshire Pte	9.9.17	Stbury 11/17 no 2	= 18 5	18 5	NO. 12.17	27.12.17	Wid: Mary	= 18 5
			202105	Acton						6/11/19	3
						3	=			3	Smith 3

A. F. W. 5070 SENT
DATE 3.7.19

WAG 6/11/19
Effects 63 20 2
Transfer 21 28
Begd. Paper 2035
Serial No 21548

Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929

In Summer 1919 the army paid outstanding credits – mainly remaining wages – to soldiers or, in the case of those who had died, their family or nominated representatives. At the same time a War Gratuity was often paid.

Thomas Downey had accrued a credit of just 18s 5d and this was received by his widow Mary. Mary, here recorded as Mary Smith, her maiden name, received also the £3 War Gratuity in November 1919.

The total payment, £3 18s 5d, is approximately equivalent to a *labour value* (ie wages) of about £600 in 2016.

The War Gratuity was introduced in December 1918 as a payment to be made to those men who had served in WW1 for a period of 6 months or more home service or for any length of service if a man had served overseas. The rules governing the gratuity were implemented under Army Order 17 of 1919 but the amount paid was related to the length of war service.