

## 58: Thomas Lewis

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: T. Lewis

Rank: Private

Battalion / Regiment: 16th Bn. Cheshire Regiment

Service Number: 241584

Date of Death: 22 October 1917

Age at Death: 30

Buried / Commemorated at: Tyne Cot Memorial, Zonnebeke, West Flanders, Belgium

Additional information given by CWGC: The son of John and Mary Ann Lewis, of 6, Liverpool Road, Neston

Thomas Lewis was the eldest child of John (described in census returns as a 'hunterman') and Mary Ann Lewis and the older brother of William Lewis who had been killed in the Gallipoli campaign on 7 October 1915 [See entry [59: William Lewis](#), following].

John Lewis was a younger son of agricultural labourer Thomas and Martha Lewis of Bridge Street, Neston and the younger brother of James Lewis whose own son, also named Thomas, was killed on 23 March 1918 in France [See entry [57: Thomas Lewis](#)]. The relationships within the Lewis family are shown on the simplified family tree at the end of entry [59: William Lewis](#).

John Lewis married Mary Ann Jane Sudlow of Neston at Our Lady & St Nicholas & St Anne ('The Sailors' Church'), Liverpool Parish Church, in July / September 1886; Mary appears to have been a daughter of Neston fisherman Thomas and Margaret Sudlow (both of whom had been born in Liverpool but who, in 1881, were living on Brook Street) and in the 1881 census Mary was recorded as being a general servant in the household of Parkgate grocer Thomas and Elizabeth Nelson.

Thomas Lewis was baptised at Neston parish church on 8 July 1887 when his father was recorded, as at all other baptisms, as a labourer.

However, in the 1891 census - when the family was living in the centre of Neston, just off High Street - John seems to have been employed by a butcher (although the entry in the census is indistinct):

NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON. DITION as to Marriage	AGE last Birthday or Date of Birth	PROFESSION or OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN
John Lewis	Head	On	25	Butcher's Labourer	Neston, Cheshire
Mary Ann	Wife	On	24		Leighton
Thomas	Son		3		Neston
Albert	Son		2		Neston

1891 census (extract) – Pyke's Weint, Neston

John Lewis	25	butcher's (?) labourer	born Neston
Mary Ann	24		born Leighton
Thomas	3		born Neston
Albert	2		born Neston

By 1901 the family, now enlarged, had moved to Town Lane in Little Neston:

Administrative County		The undermentioned Houses are situate within the boundaries of the															Page 30	
Civil Parish		Ecclesiastical Parish		County Borough, Municipal Borough or Urban District		Ward of Municipal Borough or Urban District		Rural District		Parliamentary Borough or Division		Town or Village or Hamlet						
of <u>Little Neston</u>		of <u>St Mary &amp; St Helen</u>		of <u>Little Neston</u>		of <u>Little Neston</u>		of <u>Little Neston</u>		of <u>Mersey</u>		of <u>Mersey</u>						
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10		11		12		13		14		15		16		17				
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#### 1901 census (extract) - Town Lane, Little Neston

John Lewis	38	huntsman (groom)	born Neston
Mary A.	34		born Neston
Thomas	13		born Neston
Albert	11		born Neston
Joseph	9		born Neston
William	7		born Neston
John	6		born Neston
Martha	4 months		born Neston
Robert	39	brother, single, farm labourer	born Neston

The dates of births and baptism of Thomas's siblings at Neston were:

Thomas	- baptised 8 July 1887	
Albert	- born 3 April 1889	baptised 14 June 1889
Joseph	- born 16 October 1891	baptised 30 October 1891
William	- born about 20 March 1894	baptised 30 March 1894
John	- born 10 May 1897	baptised 18 June 1897
Martha	- baptised 14 December 1900	
Bertha	- born 19 July 1904	
Percy	- born 26 March 1909	



By the time of the 1911 census the family had moved yet again, from Little Neston to the Rock Cottages on Bridson's Hill (where the road crosses the Neston Brook), on Bridge Street:

The Rock Cottages (left) were demolished in 1914.

View looking down Bridson's Hill, towards Burton. The road to the left is Station Road and, in the distance, the chimney of the brickworks located at the junction of present-day Marshlands Road and Burton Road can be seen. A different view of the area is shown in [59: William Lewis](#).



# CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Number of Schedule 144  
(To be filled up by the Enumerator after collection.)

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.

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.
			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.) Children born alive to previous Marriage has lasted. If less than one year write "under one year". Total Children Born Alive. Children still Living. Children who have Died.	Personal Occupation. The reply should show the precise branch of Profession, Trade, Manufacture, &c. 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 Servants in private employment. If employed by a public body (Municipal, Hospital, etc.) state what body. (See Instruction 9 and Examples on back of Schedule.)				
1. <u>John Lewis</u>	<u>head</u>	<u>48</u>	<u>married</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>huntsman</u>	<u>General Labourer</u>	<u>Neston</u>	<u>Cheshire</u>	
2. <u>Mary Ann J. Lewis</u>	<u>wife</u>	<u>46</u>	<u>married</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>General Labourer</u>	<u>Neston</u>	<u>Cheshire</u>	
3. <u>Thomas Lewis</u>	<u>son</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>single</u>			<u>Labourer (contractor)</u>	<u>"</u>	<u>"</u>	
4. <u>Joseph Lewis</u>	<u>son</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>single</u>			<u>Labourer</u>	<u>"</u>	<u>"</u>	
5. <u>William Lewis</u>	<u>son</u>	<u>16</u>				<u>Labourer</u>	<u>"</u>	<u>"</u>	
6. <u>John Lewis</u>	<u>son</u>	<u>14</u>					<u>"</u>	<u>"</u>	
7. <u>Martha Lewis</u>	<u>daughter</u>	<u>10</u>				<u>School</u>	<u>"</u>	<u>"</u>	
8. <u>Bertha Lewis</u>	<u>daughter</u>	<u>7</u>					<u>"</u>	<u>"</u>	
9. <u>Percy</u>	<u>son</u>	<u>2</u>					<u>"</u>	<u>"</u>	
10. <u>Robert Lewis</u>	<u>lodger</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>single</u>			<u>Labourer. Builder</u>	<u>"</u>	<u>"</u>	

(To be filled up by the Enumerator.)

I certify that—  
(1) All the persons on this Schedule are entered in the proper sex columns.  
(2) I have entered 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 corrections I have compared all entries on the Schedule which appeared in the definitions, and have corrected such as appeared to be in error.

Initials of Enumerator PLS

Total.	
Males	Females
<u>7</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>10</u>	

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

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

Signature John Lewis  
Postal Address Rock Cottage Neston.

## 1911 census (condensed) - Rock Cottages, Bridge Street, Neston

John Lewis	48	huntsman 'Thomas' has been crossed through (crossed through & 'general labourer' overwritten)	born Neston
Mary Ann J.	46		born Neston
Thomas	24	labourer (contractor) [Killed: 22 October 1917, aged 30]	born Neston
Joseph	20	labourer (contractor)	born Neston
William	16	labourer (contractor) [Killed: 7 October 1915]	born Neston
John	14		born Neston
Martha	10		born Neston
Bertha	7		born Neston
Percy	2		born Neston
Robert Lewis	35	lodger, single, labourer builder	born Neston

John and Mary had been married for 26 years and all eight of their children had survived.

The only child not present in the household at the time of the 1911 census was Alfred; he would have been 21 but has not been traced in the census. The Robert Lewis, shown as a lodger in this census return, is too young to have been the brother of John Lewis snr unless (as is probable) his age has been mis-recorded.

Thomas Lewis had enlisted at Neston and had been officially listed as missing on 11 December 1917. The circumstances of his death are far from clear as, although his 'official' date of death is recorded as 22 October 1917 he wasn't declared as being 'missing' until some 7 weeks later and his parents weren't notified of his death until the end of August 1918; this was 45 weeks after his supposed death.



If Thomas Lewis really was killed on 22 October - his body was never recovered - it is probable that he died in one of the actions of The Battle of Passchendaele (The Third Battle of Ypres) in which the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion Cheshire Regiment was involved:

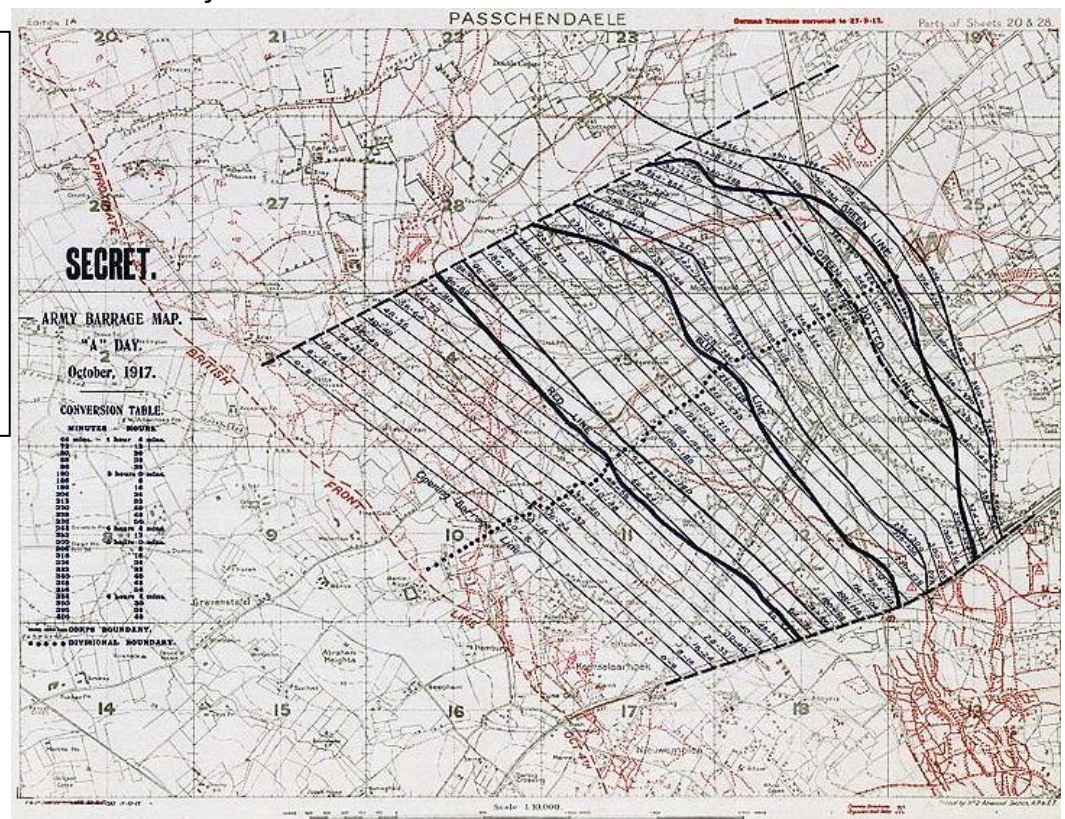
*The 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Battalions, in the 105<sup>th</sup> Brigade, attacked on the 22<sup>nd</sup> on the British left, their objective being the road running west from Colombo Ho., the 16<sup>th</sup> under Colonel B.C. Dent, and the 15<sup>th</sup> under Colonel H. P. G. Cochrane. The 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion was in the front line of the Brigade and the 15<sup>th</sup> in Reserve. The night of the 21<sup>st</sup>/22<sup>nd</sup> was bitterly cold and rain fell heavily. The men were perished. Unfortunately, rum and tea, which had been provided, did not reach the Battalion. The enemy kept up a strong barrage fire all night. At 5.30am the advance started. The state of the ground can be imagined when it is learnt that the pace of the barrage was 100 yards in eight minutes. The whole ground was one mass of shell holes, each containing about a foot of water. Even at this slow pace, the troops had the greatest difficulty in keeping up with the barrage. Still, the objectives were reached. Then began a long day's struggle, dealing first with unconquered pill-boxes – concrete machine gun posts – and enemy counter attacks. However, most of the original gains were successfully held, and the Battalion was relieved by the 15<sup>th</sup>. This Battalion had to deal with more counter-attacks and was very much harassed by low-flying aircraft. But they held on to their line and repulsed all attempts to drive them back. The 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion lost 22 killed and 75 wounded and the 16<sup>th</sup> a total of 9 officers and 327 men.*

[The History of the Cheshire Regiment in the Great War, 1914-1918 : Vol. 1 A. Crookenden, Colonel of the Regiment W.H. Evans, Sons & Co. Ltd. (1938)]

The War Diary of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion gives further details and notes, for the night before the advance on 22 October, that ‘...the men underwent extreme discomfort and were wet through and perished with cold before zero hour arrived....’ - not the best conditions to start one of the major conflicts of the war.

1:10000 (original scale)  
army artillery barrage  
map from The First  
Battle of Passchendaele  
during The Third Battle  
of Ypres. [Probably 12  
October 1917]

(Field Survey Company,  
Royal Engineers)



The War Diary entry for the 19 - early 23 DAY October 1917 is reproduced on the following pages:



Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information												
ELVERDINGHE	19/10/17		<p>Took over front line SOUTH of MOUTHURST FOREST from 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade</p> <p>X Coy in front line - W Coy (Support) MONTMIRAIL Fm. Z Coy (Support) WIDJENDRIET. Y Coy (Support) GRUYTERSZALE Fm.</p>												
SOUTH of MOUTHURST FOREST.	21/22/17		<p>Height of 21/22 moved up into position for the attack. - Report hereunder on Attack</p> <p>Carried out on morning of 22<sup>nd</sup>.</p> <p>Reference Map Sheet 203 W. 4 1/10000</p> <p>Position of Battalion at 5 pm 21<sup>st</sup> October 1917</p> <p>HQ at VEE BEND</p> <p>X Coy Holding front line from U6 d 10.90 to U6 d 25.75.</p> <p>W Coy in Shelters in U 15 d</p> <p>Y Coy in Shell holes 200<sup>+</sup> S.E. of GRUYTERSZALE Fm</p> <p>Z Coy in Shelters at WIDJENDRIET and near MONTMIRAIL Fm.</p> <p>Moved to position of Assembly.</p> <p>The Battalion started to move into position at 5.30 pm 21/10/17. Y Coy went via VEE BEND, EGYPT HOUSE and LES 5 CHEMINS and were followed by Headquarters signallers and runners. W and Z Coys moved up along CHARGES STREET and NORTH of SUEZ Fm - Casualties as under were sustained while moving up to Assembly</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Y Coy.</td><td>1 Officer</td><td>12 O.A.</td></tr> <tr> <td>W</td><td></td><td>1</td></tr> <tr> <td>Z</td><td></td><td>1</td></tr> <tr> <td>Bn HQ</td><td></td><td>6.</td></tr> </table> <p>A70921. Wt. W12329/311228. 750,000. 1/17. D.D. &amp; L., Ltd. Forms/C2118/14.</p>	Y Coy.	1 Officer	12 O.A.	W		1	Z		1	Bn HQ		6.
Y Coy.	1 Officer	12 O.A.													
W		1													
Z		1													
Bn HQ		6.													
SOUTH of MOUTHURST FOREST	22/10/17		<p>Forming up.</p> <p>The operation of forming up as laid down in B.O.C. No 51 was carried out expeditiously and quietly and was concluded by 9.36 pm. The arrangements made by Captain H.R. MARIN - O.C. X Coy - for marking out the frontages as pointed out to him the previous evening and for meeting the other Companies with guides worked most satisfactorily. The night was bitterly cold and there were heavy showers after midnight, the men underwent extreme discomfort and were wet through and brushed with cold before two hours arrived - The tea and rum provided by the Brigade did not reach VEE BEND -</p> <p>The enemy kept a steady barrage of varying intensity from N.E. and E along LES 5 CHEMINS - LOUVOIS Fm. throughout the night - This barrage was most intense at 12 midnight and 2 AM and from 4 AM onwards. About 5 AM it shifted northwards and took in the area of our front line and position of assembly and casualties occurred.</p> <p>The Attack.</p> <p>The Battalion advanced at ZERO hour against the objective following our barrage closely. Though the barrage only went forward at the rate of 100<sup>+</sup> every 8 minutes, owing to the state of the ground which was a mass of new shell holes containing at least a foot of water the troops needed the</p> <p>A70921. Wt. W12329/311228. 750,000. 1/17. D.D. &amp; L., Ltd. Forms/C2118/14.</p>												
SOUTH of MOUTHURST FOREST	22/10/17		<p>utmost effort and experienced the greatest difficulty in keeping up with the barrage.</p> <p>At 6.20 AM - Y Coy 15<sup>th</sup> Bn. SHEERWOODS began to arrive to hold our original front line and about the same time some slightly wounded men passed Bn. HQ with about 20 prisoners and gave information that the attack was proceeding satisfactorily.</p> <p>At 6.50 AM Captain BURNETT came to Bn HQ and reported that Z Coy had gained their objective MARECHAL Fm. and premises and were consolidating, but that the Centre and left were held up about U6 a 5.5, that most of the rifles were useless owing to mud and that the losses were very heavy. Lt Col sent up and held our original front line. Lt Col then sent forward with CAPTAIN BURNETT to U6 a 5.5 collecting some stragglers en route and at the</p>												



SE Edge of wood U6a 55.55. From here, parties were organised to try to outflank concrete pill box at U6a 55.70. which the enemy eventually evacuated; but any further advance was held up by rifle fire from trenches immediately north and from a pill box at U6a 40.95.

A7022. Wt. 1128g/1128g 750,000. 1/17. D. D. & L., Ltd. Form/Cat18/14.

South of  
Houlthurst  
Forest

22/10/17

Lieut Col Dent then moved to COLONBO HOUSE Fm. where he saw Capt Hillington H.C. & C. Coy and Lieut Sherlock of the Machine Gun Coy, who had got a Vickers gun up to that point, all that remained of COLONBO Fm. was a concrete pill-box. When capturing this point X Coy had killed six Germans and captured a Machine Gun X Coy 16<sup>th</sup> Cheshire Regt were consolidating about 50<sup>yds</sup> in front of COLONBO HOUSE. Captain Hillington pointed out his dispositions at MARECHAL Fm and informed Lt. Col Dent that he was reduced to two platoons - He was then reinforced by X Coy - strength about two platoons and a message was sent to O.C. 15<sup>th</sup> Sherwoods to move his W Coy from our original front line to COLONBO HOUSE. - Lieut Sherlock H.C. was ordered to send a Vickers Gun to MARECHAL Fm, which was done, but two of the men taking it up were hit by snipers and the barrel casing of the gun was punctured by a bullet. Upon hearing from the Adjutant that reinforcements of 15<sup>th</sup> Cheshire Regt were being sent up Lieut Col Dent returned to Bait H.Q. about 11.30 A.M. At 1.00 pm Y Coy 15<sup>th</sup> Cheshires took over our original front line. Captain and Adjutant GORDON PLYFER went forward to clear the situation at about 1.00 pm. and returned about 2.30 pm. reporting that remnants of W. X. and Y. Coys were held up and consolidating on the line U6a 6.6 - U6a 4.7.

A7022. Wt. 1128g/1128g 750,000. 1/17. D. D. & L., Ltd. Form/Cat18/14.

SOUTH OF  
Houlthurst  
Forest

22/10/17

and were in touch with 14<sup>th</sup> Glosters on our left - He also went to the right and saw Captain Hillington at COLONBO HOUSE. The situation remained unchanged till about 4.30 pm, when the enemy counterattacked the left from about U6a 3.9 in some force and under cover of an intense barrage and broke through. Finding themselves fired on from three sides the remnants of W. X. Y. Coys 16<sup>th</sup> Cheshires and Y. Coy 15<sup>th</sup> Sherwoods fell back out of the wood and took up a position for some time about U6a 6.4, but eventually fell back to our own line. The withdrawal of this flank allowed the enemy to bring reverse H.G. fire on the left of Captain Hillington's Command holding MARECHAL Fm. and his left withdrew to COLONBO HOUSE - MARECHAL Fm road and faced WEST. - On seeing Captain HILLINGTON'S left fall back the 17<sup>th</sup> Lancs too on our right fell back to line of road and Captain Hillington's men to north of them were isolated, so he withdrew them to COLONBO HOUSE Fm. The position at 7.30 pm was as above, the Glosters having refused their right flank to keep touch with us.

SOUTH OF  
Houlthurst  
Forest.

22/10/17

Our relief by 15<sup>th</sup> Cheshire Regt, started soon after midnight. X Coy of that Battalion taking over COLONBO HOUSE and forming up then Y Coy right of our original front line. - W Coy - 15<sup>th</sup> Cheshires were to prolong to the West on our original front line and connect with the Glosters. No news was received during the night that they had done so though as a matter of fact they had. Consequently during the night there was anxiety about our left and at about 3 A.M. 4 A.M. on 23<sup>rd</sup> inst surmising from the nature and density of the enemy barrage and from the fire of our own guns that the enemy were attacking, the O.C. 17<sup>th</sup> West Yorks



was asked to move two of his Companies up to line EGYPT HOUSE - BEZ 74 - this he did, but our Artillery and 15<sup>th</sup> Cheshire Rifle fire stopped the attack.

About 9 a.m. - Col Cochran had arrived from LOUVOIS Fm and he learnt that W Coy 15<sup>th</sup> Cheshires had been in position some time on the left of our original front line - Col Cochran being satisfied with the position sent Lt Dent handed over about 10 a.m. 29/10 and left with the Adjutant - Cavalries 9 officers 227 other ranks.

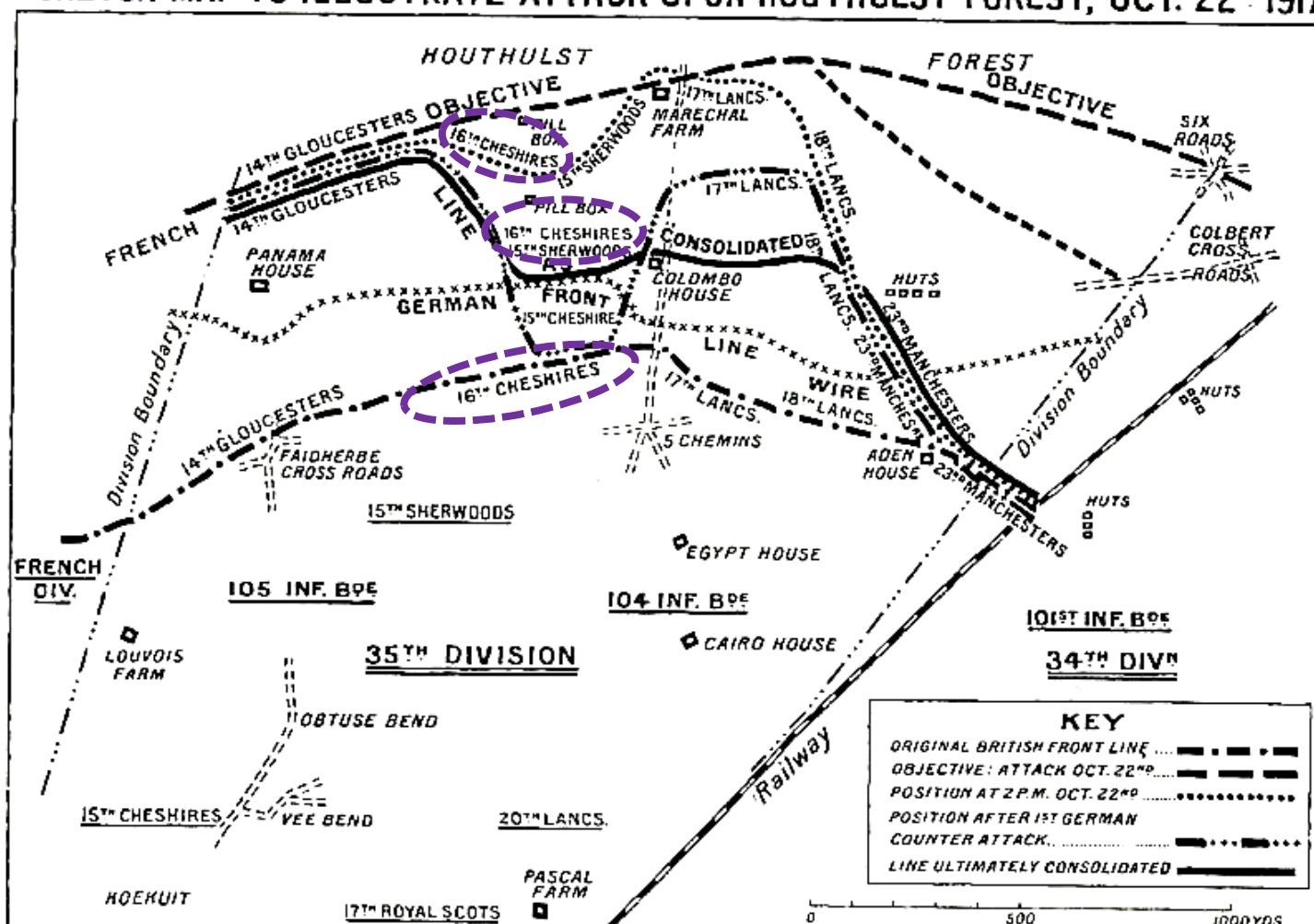
South of Houthulst Forest 23/10/17

The Battalion was relieved in the early hours by 15<sup>th</sup> Cheshire Regt and proceeded to WIDEN DRIFT - About 9 a.m. they moved to Wood 15 where the brigade supplied cocoa etc. At 1 p.m. the Battalion marched to BOESINGHE and proceeded to EVERDINGHE by train and from there marched to ENNIE CAMP.

War Diary, 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion Cheshire Regiment, 22 – 23 October 1917 (continued from previous page)

The War Diary notes that the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion Cheshire Regiment was south of the 600-acre Houthulst Forest (recorded incorrectly as *Houlthurst*) north of Poelcapelle and around 5 miles north-west of Passchendaele; the sketch map notes the position of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion (encircled in purple) on 22 October (the date recorded for the death of Thomas Lewis) both before and after their advance northwards together with the projected and actual lines of advance of the troops:

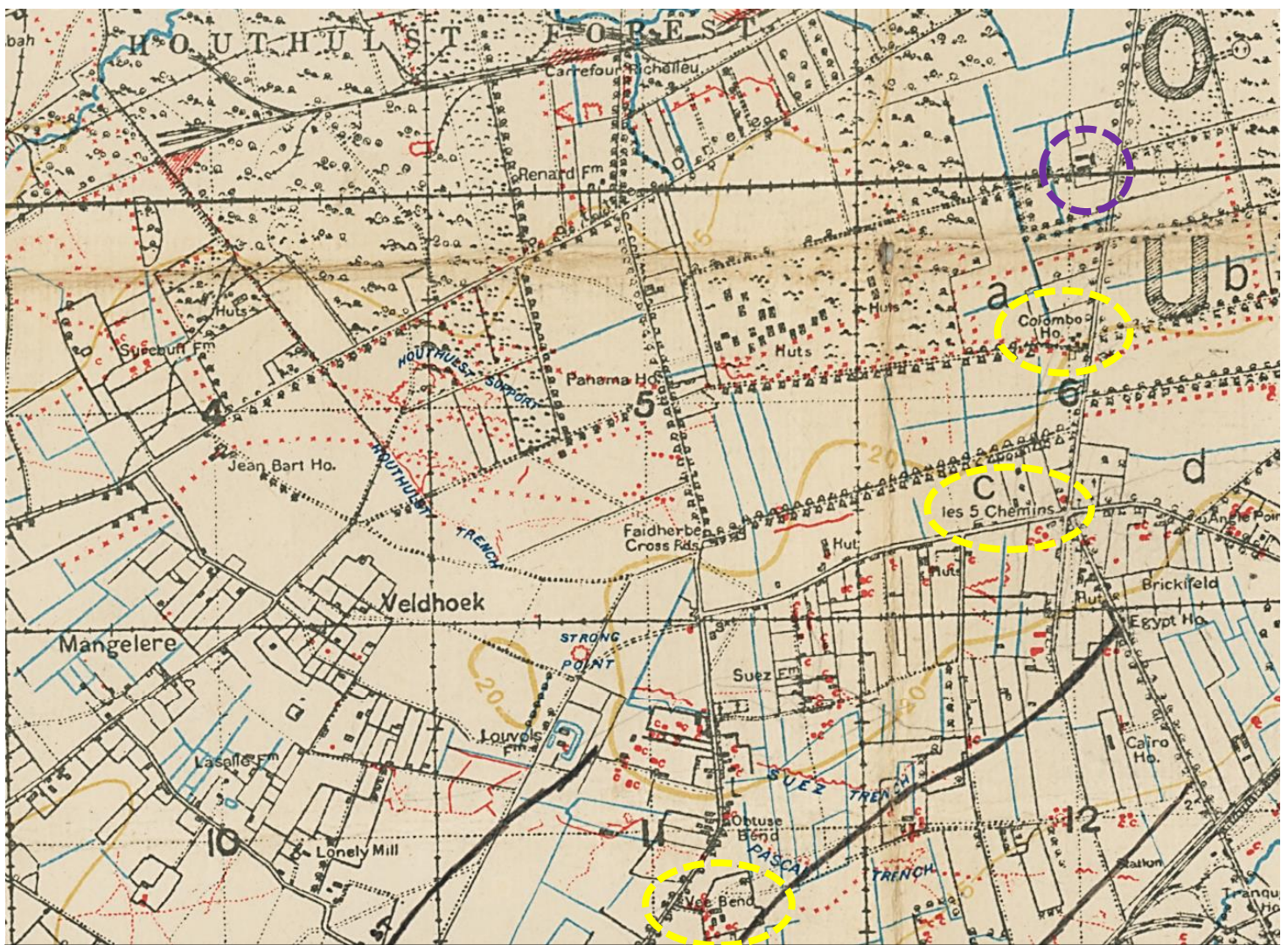
### SKETCH MAP TO ILLUSTRATE ATTACK UPON HOUTHULST FOREST, OCT. 22<sup>ND</sup> 1917



The map shows several of the locations recorded in the War Diary extract: Vee Bend (SW sector), Louvois Farm (W), Les 5 Chemins and Egypt House (center) and Colombo House and Marechal Farm (N).

[Source: [http://www.ossett.net/WW1/David\\_Butterfield.html](http://www.ossett.net/WW1/David_Butterfield.html)]





The military map of 17 October 1917 showing the area immediately south of Houthulst Forest. The trench position of Vee Bend, Colombo House and Les 5 Chemins have been encircled in yellow in order that this map may be compared to the previous sketch map. Marechal Farm, unnamed on this map, has been encircled in purple.

[Source :

<http://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/index.cfm#zoom=16&lat=50.9480&lon=2.9323&layers=101464861&b=1>]

Stephen McGreal (Cheshire Bantams : 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> Battalions of the Cheshire Regiment) gives some additional information of the conflict and the conditions under which it was fought:

Wiser counsel would have realised that the imminent attack stood little chance of success, for the rain had conspired with the defenders of the 600 acres of mangled tree stumps known as Houthulst Forest, where the surface was nearly pure clay. In fair weather it would have posed a hard nut to crack, yet men were now expected to flounder through the mud hampering all rapid movement as they advanced towards pill boxes spitting flame; the advancing infantry never knew if they were about to step into a muddy puddle or a several foot deep flooded shell hole, considering the shortage of fighting material this action was virtually guaranteed to deplete human resources further for no great military gain. In his classic account of the Flanders' campaign Leon Wolff *In Flanders Fields* sums up this diversionary feint thus: 'On the 22nd there followed a curious, half hearted attack by the French and elements of the Fifth Army, in which almost 1,000 allied troops were lost. A few yards were gained, some of which were retaken later in the day by enemy counter attacks. It is a rare mention



of this forgotten or overlooked engagement.'

On the eve of the attack 21/22 October the weather was extremely cold, practically everyone was sniffing and sneezing due to the common cold and instances of influenza were extremely prevalent. After midnight heavy showers saturated the miserable legion of men heading towards the assembly points. As the 16th Cheshires moved forward Y Company went via Vee Bend, past the collection of small pill boxes named Egypt House and Les 5 Chemins. W and Z Companies moved up along the duckboards of Clarges Street and north of Suez Farm. During this movement the following casualties were suffered:

Y Company, one officer and twelve O.R.s.

Battalion H.Q., six O.R.s.

Z and W company each had one casualty.

The Poilus of the 1st French Division were on the extreme right of their frontage, alongside them were 105 Infantry Brigade with 104 Brigade on their right flank, facing the attacking force was a landscape that looked like an alien world. Fading away into the distance was a sea of mud liberally pockmarked with a mass of putrid water-filled shell holes. For the attack the 16th Cheshires were positioned on the right front, 14th Glosters were on the left front, the 15th Sherwood Foresters were in support on the line Strong Point, while the 15th Cheshires were held in reserve in the locality of Wijdendrift.

The enemy guns laid down a barrage of varying intensity throughout the night along the line of Les 5 Chemins to Louvois Farm, shortly before dawn the barrage spread northwards and rained down on the 16th Cheshires' front line position and assembly point incurring casualties. At 5-30 a.m. on the 22 October our barrage began, components of the Division including the 16th Cheshires advanced. The poor state of the boggy ground can be imagined when it is learnt that the pace of the barrage was timed to allow the infantry eight minutes to advance 100 yards. Despite the slow creeping barrage the thick mud made it extremely difficult for the attackers to keep pace with the barrage. The high water table made the terrain unsuitable for trenches, the Teutonic defenders' solution was a system of concrete pill boxes arranged in a chess board pattern, each affording covering fire to its neighbour; they dominated the boggy landscape. These redoubts were fashioned in reinforced concrete with sides up to ten feet thick, capable of surviving all but a direct hit by a heavy shell.

Shortly before 7 a.m. Captain Burnett proudly reported at Battalion H.Q. that Z Company had taken Marechal Farm, to their left the 14th Gloucesters had gained ground and now occupied Panama House. Less welcome news was that the centre and left attacking force's were held up by fire from block-houses in the wood approximately 500 yards north-west of Colombo House. Most of the attacking forces rifles were useless as they were clogged with mud, and casualties were heavy. Upon hearing this Lieutenant Colonel Dent (Commander of the 16th Cheshires) arranged with Major Morton the Commander of the 15th Sherwoods for Y Company to advance further forward, their vacant position to be occupied by W Company of the Sherwoods. As



the situation was becoming critical Lieutenant Colonel Dent went forward to assess the situation accompanied by Captain Burnett, en route they collected some stragglers near the south edge of a wood. These men were ordered to outflank one of the numerous pill boxes; despite the low odds they succeeded in forcing the enemy to abandon the pill box. Any further advance was delayed owing to rifle fire and harassing fire from another pill box. Throughout this attack enemy aircraft flew a couple of hundred feet over the British positions with their machine guns blazing. Artillery shells rained down everywhere; one shell landed in the midst of a group of H.Q. signallers and runners, six of them were badly wounded including Private Austin. The twenty-eight year old runner was severely wounded in both legs, he was carried by stretcher to a dressing station where he succumbed to his wounds.

Lieutenant Colonel Dent then headed for the concrete pill box at the ruined Colombo House Farm, where Captain Millington M.C. and his Z Company men had captured the pillbox complete with its machine gun, its crew lay dead on the ground. 57865 Private W.A. Johnson, a former Bedford Territorial, had on his own initiative dashed forward, shot the machine gunner and captured the weapon. For this he was awarded the D.C.M. He was killed in action 23 March while serving with the 15th Cheshires. Fifty yards forward of this position the remnants of X Company were also consolidating their position, due to the heavy casualties sustained X and Z companies were at half their fighting strength and were now merged into one company. At 2-15 p.m. a company of the 15th Sherwoods moved up to Colombo House and occupied the original front line. Y Company of the 15th Cheshires acting under orders of Lieutenant Colonel Dent (16th Ches.) moved up in artillery formation attracting heavy shell fire from the Vee Bend area, the survivors relieved 15th Sherwoods in the old British line.

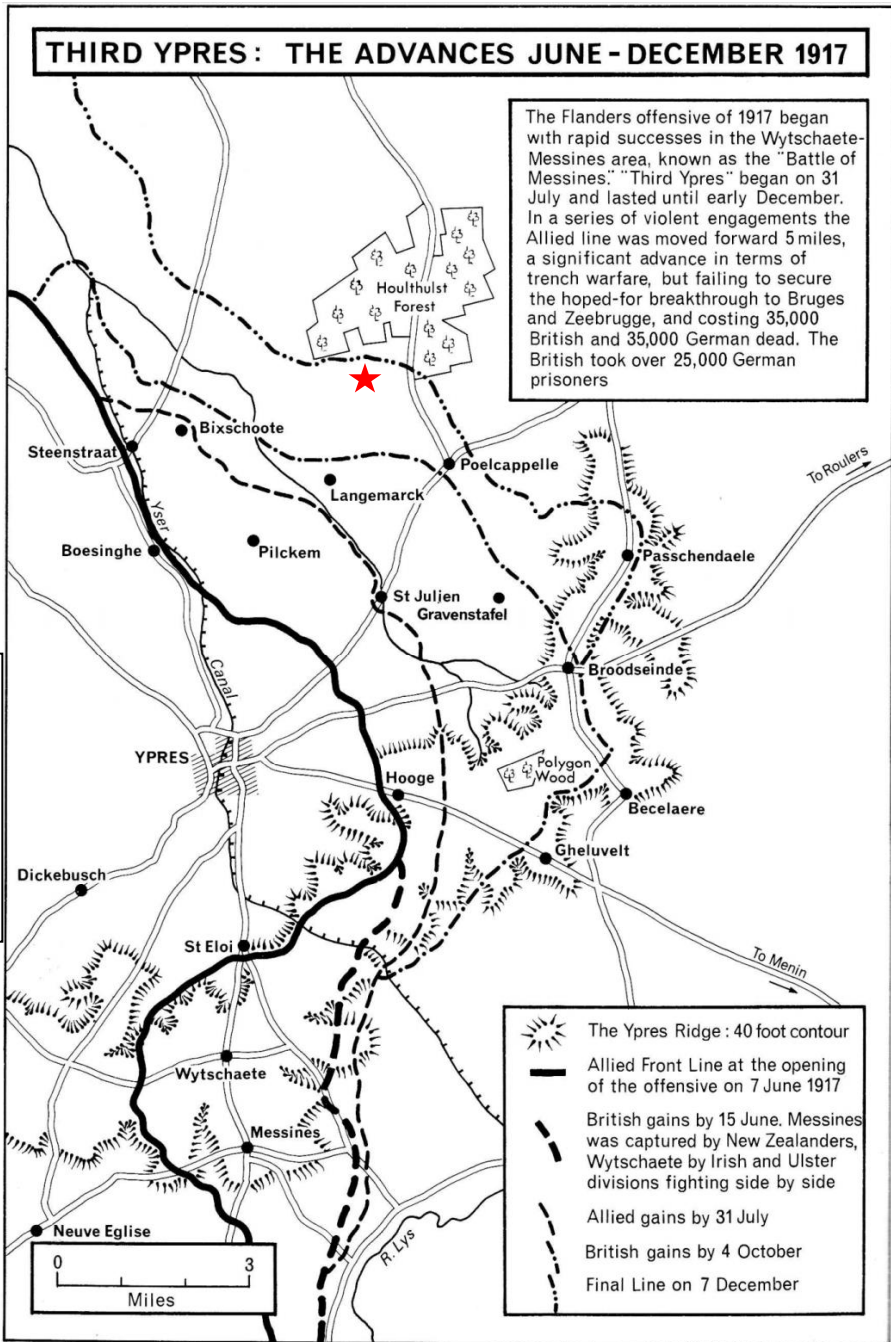
With the situation under control and the imminent arrival of reinforcements from Y Company 15th Cheshires who formed a defensive flank to Colombo House, Lieutenant Colonel Dent returned to Battalion H.Q. Meanwhile the advance of W, X and Y Companies of the 16th Cheshires was held up until around 4-30 p.m. when a strong enemy counter attack accompanied by an intense barrage was launched against the left frontage. The enemy broke through the line and was then able to fire on the wood held by the remnants of W, X, Y Companies 16th Cheshires and Y Company 15th Sherwoods with an enfilade of fire, before withdrawing 100 yards to another position but were forced back to our original front line. The withdrawal of this flank allowed the enemy to bring reverse machine gun fire on the left of Captain Millington's position at Marechal Farm; to prevent even heavier casualties his left withdrew to Colombo House – Marechal Farm road and faced west. The 17th Lancashire Fusiliers on the right of Captain Millington's force then withdrew to the line of the road, this withdrew to Colombo House Farm. The 18th Lancashire Fusiliers continued the line on the right flank while the 14th Gloster's retained their original objective. While these events were occurring the 17th and 18th Lancashire Fusiliers had repulsed an enemy counter attack with heavy losses. This was the general situation by 7-30 p.m. that evening; no further action occurred on the 22nd.



On the day that Thomas Lewis died, 22 October 1917, 127 men of the Cheshire Regiment are known to have died - and 123 of these were from the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion. All but 11 of these men are commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial as their bodies were never recovered.

The map shows (red star) the approximate location of the site, south of Houthulst Forest, where Thomas Lewis died on 22 October 1917  
Source: The Routledge Atlas of the First World War Martin Gilbert Routledge 2003

Postcard (date unknown) showing the remnants of Houthulst Forest and the remains of a French aircraft. [Source: <http://www.100-jahre-erster-weltkrieg.eu/en/downloads/bilddokumente-englisch.html>]



Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regt. No.
LEWIS	Ches. R.	Pte	241584
Thomas.			
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	J/2/101 B28.9641		
BARRIS	do - do		
Star			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

K. 1390

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920



## Another Neston Soldier Falls.

Official notification has been received by Mrs. J. Lewis, Liverpool-road, Neston, of the death of her son, Pte. Thomas Lewis, who was reported missing in October last year. He was a brother of Pte. William Lewis, one of the first of our local soldiers to lay down his life for his country at Gallipoli three years ago. Touching references were made by the vicar, the Rev. C. Brooke-Gwynne, at the Parish Church on Sunday morning to the deaths of four of our soldiers, viz., Colonel C. Bushell, V.C., recently killed in action; Pte. Jonathan Robinson, drowned while being conveyed to hospital in this country on the "Warilda"; Lance-Corpl. Pemberton Swift, died of heat in Basra; and Lieut. Norman Hughes, M.C., died of wounds in France on August 2nd. Many of the bereaved relatives were present, and the "Dead March" was played by the organist. Mr. T. Arden, at the close of the service.

*Birkenhead News* – Saturday 31 August 1918

## Casualties to Neston Soldiers.

Official intimation has been received by Mr. and Mrs. Lewis, of Liverpool-road, Neston, that their eldest son, Pte. Thomas Lewis, of the Cheshire Regt. has been missing since October 22nd. He has been in action on the Western front, and further information is being anxiously awaited. Pte. Joseph Robinson, Little Neston, and Pte. Thomas Jones, Colliery, are reported wounded while serving with their regiment in Palestine. The injuries are not of a serious nature, and they are making satisfactory progress.

*Birkenhead News* – Saturday 1 December 1917

736925	8/12/56	Leino Thomas	16 <sup>th</sup> Chechnie Pte 2415884	own since Chechnie 22.10.14 pre: dead	3 15 8	17.5.19/1	Mr. Mary A Mrs. Joseph John Percy Mrs. Thomas Lester	— — — — — —	12 12 12 12 12 12	8 8 8 8 8 8	710
					6	16.12.19	Mr. Mary A.	6			

Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929 (extract)

In July 1919 the army made payments to the family; £3 15s 8d was payable as Thomas' final wages and a £6 War Gratuity was paid to his mother, Mary. Mary also received 12s 8d unpaid wages, as did brother Joseph, and brothers John and Percy each received 12s 7d and his sisters Martha and Bertha received the same.

Although it was determined that Thomas Lewis had died on 22 October 1917 this form records his death as being 'on or since 22:10:17 pres. dead'.

The 12s 7d received is approximately equivalent to a *labour value* (ie wages) of £95 in 2016. The £6 War Gratuity has a *labour value* equivalent of about £460.

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Details of Thomas's siblings, as known, are given towards the end of the account **59: William Lewis** of this work and are not replicated here. Relationships within the Lewis family are given in the chart at the end of the **59: William Lewis** entry.