74: John Richardson

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: John Richardson

Rank: Private

Battalion / Regiment: 5th Bn. Machine Gun Corps (Infantry)

Service Number: 115240 Date of Death: 14 April 1918 Age at Death: 20

Buried / Commemorated at: Ploegsteert Memorial, Comines-Warneton, Hainaut, Belgium

Additional information given by CWGC: The son of Thomas and Mary Richardson of Bowling Green

Cottages, Leighton, Neston

John Richardson (known also as 'Jack' or Thomas John Richardson) was the eldest child of traction engine driver Henry George Thomas Richardson and Mary Jane of Leighton and he was baptised at Neston Parish Church on 14 November 1897.

Henry George Thomas Richardson, 23, married Mary Jane Hamilton, also 23, at Neston Parish Church on 14 October 1896. Thomas Richardson was a widower, born in Surrey, although nothing is known of his first wife, and it was recorded that he was an engine driver living at Leighton. Mary Jane was a daughter of agricultural labourer William and Elizabeth Hamilton of Thornton Hough.

In 1901 the family was living at Leighton although, as their second child was born at Acton Heath (just outside Nantwich) they may have lived there briefly:

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1901 census (extract) - Leighton	, Neston		usion seam. Ones
Thomas Richardson	27	traction engine driver	born Surrey
Mary	27		born Neston
John	3		born Neston
George	8 months		born Acton Heath, Cheshire

By the time of the 1911 census the family had expanded significantly and was now living at Bowling Green Cottages. This was very close to the Farmer's Arms Public House; this was located close to the junction of the present-day A540 (Chester High Road) and Boathouse Lane, on the northern side of the road and near the point where the A540 crosses the railway line.

The census recorded that Thomas - the name he seemed to use - was born at Horsell, a village about mile northwest of Woking in Surrey.

Horsell Common achieved some notoriety in H. G. Wells' classic science fiction novel *The War of the Worlds* as being the landing point of the Martians.

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Confusingly, George Richardson's birthplace was recorded as Aston, near Northwich, rather than Acton - it is known that his birth was registered at Northwich.

Henry and Mary had been married for 14 years and all 7 children had survived.

John Richardson enlisted in Birkenhead (probably in May 1917) and, before being transferred to the Machine Gun Corps., was with the Hereford Regiment (Service No. 238660). Although the Birkenhead News reported that, prior to his enlistment, John was employed by '..Mr Booth of Greasby as engine driver' it is not certain whether he was in employment with William Herbert Booth (corn dealer), John Harold Booth (also a corn dealer) or farmer Thomas Alfred Booth.

The 5th Machine Gun Company joined the 2nd Division on 1 January 1916 and moved into N^{o.} 2 Battalion MGC on 4 March 1918.

The newspaper report of John Richardson's death notes that he had served previously in Italy although it is unstated when this was – it may have been when he served with the Hereford Regiment (the 1st Battalion saw some brief service in Italy).

Whilst it is unclear where he died John is commemorated on the Ploegsteert Memorial around 7½ miles south of leper (Ypres) in Belgium. The memorial commemorates more than 11,000 servicemen of the UK and South

African forces who died in this sector during WW1 and have no known grave; although the report of John's death states that 'He has been reverently buried by men of the Division, and a cross marks his grave' it appears that this site was later lost and his body not recovered or reburied later.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission notes that:

Most of those commemorated by the memorial did not die in major offensives, such as those which took place around Ypres to the north, or Loos to the south. Most were killed in the course of the day-to-day trench warfare which characterised this part of the line, or in small scale set engagements, usually carried out in support of the major attacks taking place elsewhere.



The inscription to John Richardson on the Ploegsteert Memorial, Hainaut, Belgium

A GUN CREW KILLED AND WOUNDED.

Mr. and Mrs. T. Richardson, Bowling Green, Neston, have received the intimaardson, was killed in action on April 13th. Though the official news was only received by his parents last Friday, the sad information had already been conveyed to by the following letter from his captain, who said: "The enemy had made repeated attacks in massed formation egainst our positions and the guns of this company were largely instrumental driving off the chemy with great During the battle a shell fell on the gun served by your son, and all the team were either killed or wounded. It was not entil sesterday that it was confirmed that your son was killed as he had proviously been reported missing, although believed killed. He has been reverently buried by men of the Dirision, and a cross marks his grave." Deceased, who had been in the Army just over 11 months, had served with the Machine Gun Corps in Italy and France, and previous to joining up and France, and previous to joining up d France, and previous to joining up

as engine driver. He was held in high esteem by all who knew him, and many messages of sympathy have been received by his parents.

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920

Name. Corps. Rank. Regtl. No.

M. C. C. P. U.5240

RICHARDSON

Medal. Roll. Page. Remarks.

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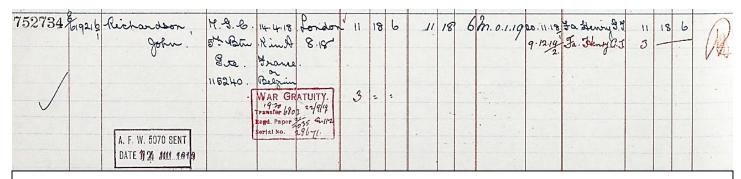
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Birkenhead News - Saturday 25 May 1918



Pte. JOHN RICHARDSON.





Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929

In June 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.

John Richardson had accrued a credit of £11 18s 6d and Henry, John's father, received this credit. Henry Richardson received also the £3 War Gratuity. The total payment, £14 18s 6d, is approximately equivalent to a *labour value* (ie wages) of about £2300 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.

At the time of the 1939 Register (29 September) Henry G T Richardson (born 14 August 1873, thrashing machine driver) and Mary J (born 22 December 1873), John's parents, were living at 4 Boathouse Lane, Parkgate. With them was their youngest son (and last child), Henry. Henry (born 8 September 1912) was single and recorded as a builder's blacksmith. Henry married Eva Heath at Neston Parish Church in mid-1944 and it is believed that a daughter, Joyce, was born in late 1947.

Henry George Thomas Richardson died on Wirral in early 1944 aged 70 but it is not clear when Mary died.

Of John's siblings:

George was born on 13 July 1900 and he married Mary Charlotte Francis at St Bartholomew's Church, Thurstaston, on 18 December 1926. Mary, born in Birkenhead, was a daughter of James Samuel and Elizabeth Alice Francis of Higher Tranmere; in 1911 James was a jobbing gardener and it is known that, around the time of his marriage, George was an undergardener. However, it is understood that, in 1927, George was a traction engine driver living at Dawpool Lodge. George and Mary had at least two children; Douglas George was born 7 August 1929 (and appears to have died in Barmouth in mid-2000) and Joseph Francis was born on 19 October 1930 and died in about 1980. Around 1935 it is understood that George was employed at the Deva Hospital, Chester, where he ran the hospital gardens.

Mary died on 17 September 1946 when their address was 26 Village Road, West Kirby. It is believed that George died in the Deva Hospital in Chester, probably in late 1949, of encephalitis.

Elizabeth Alice was born on 25 November 1902 in Neston; it is understood that she did not marry and that she died in the Neston area in late 1985. In the 1939 Register she was a hospital kitchen superintendent at the Cleaver Sanitorium, Oldfield Road, Heswall.

James Andrew Richardson married Emma Booth at Neston Parish Church in late 1929 and it appears that he died in the Wrexham area in March 1984. He may have been a fireman.

William Charles Richardson (born 21 June 1907) married Alice Matthews at Neston Parish Church in late 1929. In the 1939 Register William, a traction engine driver's assistant, was living at 6 Woodward's Cottages, Bridge Street, Neston. Alice does not appear in the record, although the second line of the entry has been redacted (as of March 2018). A son, William Alan (born 15 June 1930) is recorded in the Register and a further line has been redacted. It is believed that William and Alice had three further children: Keith (born mid-1935), George Allan (born late 1937) and Jean Alice (born late 1941). It is not certain when William and Alice died.

Florence Violet Richardson was born 2 May 1909 and she married Alfred Briscoe (born 2 May 1898) at Neston Parish Church in April / June 1938 and died in the Neston area in early 1996. In the 1939 Register they were living at 'Omega', Burton Road, and Alfred was recorded as a journeyman plumber. It is believed that they had a daughter, Olive, who was born in mid-1941 (and registered in East Wirral) but who died shortly afterwards in 1941 (the death was registered in West Wirral).

Thomas Richardson may have married Catherine Ellen Roberts at St Bartholomew Church, Thurstaston, in late 1932. He died at Bridgenorth Road, Heswall, although the date is unknown.