

76: Thomas Wilson Roberts

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: Thomas Wilson Roberts

Rank: Second Lieutenant

Battalion / Regiment: Cheshire Regiment 1st Bn. formerly 6th Bn. The King's (Liverpool Regiment)

Service Number: ? Date of Death: 1 September 1916 Age at Death: 25

Buried / Commemorated at: Bronfay Farm Military Cemetery, Bray-sur-Somme, Departement de la Somme, Picardie, France

Additional information given by CWGC: Son of John Wilson Roberts and Mary Elizabeth Wilson Roberts, of Liverpool. Enlisted Aug., 1914.

Thomas Wilson Roberts was born in early 1891, the eldest son and third child of John Wilson Roberts and Mary Elizabeth.

In the 1881 census John Roberts, then 28, was the manager of a tea warehouse and was lodging in Brighton Street, Seacombe. John became a tea merchant and started his own business in Liverpool in 1891, Wilson Roberts & Co.

The Roberts & Co. website [<http://www.e-coffee.co.uk/>] gives the following information and a photograph of John:

Our family has been involved in the tea and coffee business since the 19th century. John Wilson Roberts came from Nefyn, on the Llyn peninsula, in North Wales.

Like many Welsh, he moved to Liverpool to work, and into the tea trade, which was dominated by the Welsh. Liverpool was at the peak of its prosperity and tea was a major import. He started his own business - Wilson Roberts & Co. – in 1891.

Initially the company was solely a tea merchant, with coffee not added until the 1930s. Sales were largely back to the North Wales area. The Port of Liverpool constituted the other main area of business. Shipping lines – Cunard, Blue Star Line, White Star Line and others were customers.

That was the pattern of trade until the late 1950s – 1960s when the decline of the Port and the arrival of supermarkets mean that new markets had to be found. The catering trade became the biggest element of sales.

We moved into speciality Tea and Coffee shops in the 1980s.

We opened shops in Wigan, Chester, Royal Exchange Manchester, Southport and Soho! In 1989 we added The Cafe at Cedar Farm, in Mawdesley. Rising high street rents and the aftermath of the 1996 Manchester bombing led us to pull out of the retail trade.



John Wilson Roberts

The family name, Wilson, was perpetuated by giving it as the second name to all of John's five children.

In the 1891 census, shortly after Thomas Wilson Roberts was born, the family was living off Manor Road in Liscard:

1891 census (extract) – 1, Norland Terrace, Manor Road, Liscard

Although, by 1901, the enlarged family had moved a short distance, they were still living in Liscard:

1901 census (extract) – 4, Stoney Hey, Liscard, New Brighton

Nevin (now Nefyn) is a small village on the north coast of the Llyn Peninsula, Caernarfonshire (now Gwynedd).



The family was still at the same address, a substantial brick-built semi-detached property, in Liscard at the time of the 1911 census when Thomas was working at a bank:

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.														
NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family.	AGE Date Birth (day and year) 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 married on this Schedule, the number of—	Children born alive to present Marriage. (If no children born alive write "None" in Column 7.)	Completed years the present 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.	Industry or Service with which worker is connected.	Whether Employed, Worked, or Working on Own Account.			
John Wilson Roberts	Head	58	Married	50	6	0	50	6	0	Tea & Coffee Dealer	Employer	Carmarthen, Glam.	454	
Mary Elizabeth Roberts	Wife	53	Married	25	5	0	25	5	0	Art Student	Worker	Rose, Liverpool	958	
Dilys Roberts	Daughter	24	Single									Cheshire Liscard		
Dorothy Mary Roberts	Daughter	22	Single									Cheshire Liscard		
Thomas Roberts	Son	20	Single							Bank Clerk	"	Cheshire Liscard		
William Roberts	Son	17	Single							Assistant (Tea Trade)	"	Cheshire Liscard		
Olive Roberts	Daughter	12	Single							School	"	Cheshire Liscard		
Margaret Hannah Jones	Servant	20	Single							General Servant (Domestic)	"	Denbighshire Gwersyllt	455	

1911 census (condensed) – 4, Stoney Hey Road, Wallasey

John Wilson Roberts	58	tea and coffee dealer	born Nevin
Mary Elizabeth	53		born Liverpool
Dilys	24	art student	born Liscard
Dorothy Mary	22		born Liscard
Thomas	20	bank clerk	born Liscard
William	17	assistant (tea trade)	born Liscard
Olive	12	school	born Liscard
Margaret Hannah Jones	20	general servant (domestic)	born Gwersyllt

The newspaper accounts of Thomas's death note that, before he enlisted in the Liverpool Rifles on the outbreak of war in August 1914, he was a bank clerk with the Bank of Liverpool - this acquired Martins Bank in 1918, changed its name to Bank of Liverpool and Martins Ltd., which became Martins Bank Ltd in 1928 and became part of Barclays Bank Ltd in 1969.

The Liverpool Rifles was a unit of the Territorial Army formed in Lancashire as a 'Rifle Volunteer Corps' (RVC) in 1859, becoming a battalion of The King's (Liverpool Regiment) in 1881. It is recorded that Thomas served on the front line with the Rifles [6th Battalion The King's (Liverpool Regiment)] in February 1915, and gained his commission to Second Lieutenant, before joining the 1st Battalion Cheshire Regiment in March 1916.

The 6th Battalion The King's (Liverpool Regiment) was formed in August 1914 in Princes Park Barracks, Liverpool, and was part of the Liverpool Brigade, West Lancashire Division. On 25 February 1915 the troops landed at Le Havre and transferred to the 15th Brigade, 5th Division but on 18 November 1915 they left the Brigade and were attached as Army Troops to the Third Army. On 26 January 1916 they transferred to the 165th Brigade, 55th (West Lancashire) Division.

SECOND-LIEUTENANT T. W. ROBERTS.

Second-Lieutenant Thomas Wilson Roberts, Cheshire Regiment, has died of wounds received in action. He was twenty-five years of age, and the elder son of Mr. John Wilson Roberts, The Willows, Neston (formerly of New Brighton), and eldest grandson of the late Mr. Thomas Rogers, Beech Bank, Liscard. He was in the employ of the Bank of Liverpool prior to declaration of war, when he immediately enlisted in the Liverpool Rifles, going to the front in February, 1915. He gained a commission this year, joining his new regiment in March. His brother, William Wilson Roberts, who also served with the Liverpool Rifles in France, now holds a commission in a Welsh Regiment.

Liverpool Daily Post - Friday 8 September 1916 and repeated in the Liverpool Echo - Thursday 7 September 1916 and the Chester Chronicle - Saturday 9 September 1916

It appears probable that Thomas, in the 1st Battalion Cheshire Regiment (part of the 15th Brigade, 5th Division) died in the last days of fighting at The Battle of Delville Wood on The Somme (15 July - 3 September 1916), a time of ferocious fighting, much at close quarters or hand-to-hand. The objective of the 5th Division was, by attacking the German line between Delville Wood and High Wood, to capture the village of Longueval.

The fighting for the wood continued into August 1916 with heavily-fortified German machine gun posts and well-hidden snipers

greatly hindering the Allied advance through the wood. Delville Wood was only finally fully cleared of Germans on 3 September 1916. The War Diaries give some details of the actions on the day that Thomas died, and the early part of the following day:

1 ST BATTALION CHESHIRE REGT.			WAR DIARY	Army Form C
SEPTEMBER			INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY	
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.			(Erase heading not required.)	
Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	
CHESHIRE TRENCH	1-9-16	2-30am	Relief of the 14 th Warwicks by us was completed at this hour, though the information that the relief was complete was not received until 6:30am, owing to the fact that the orderly lost his way. The enemy used a considerable number of lacrymatory shells near Battalion Headquarters which made the valley very unpleasant.	
		6-30am	The trenches taken over were very difficult to locate, but eventually were taken over accurately. "A" Company in advanced trenches B 2 a 20/30 to B 1 b 90/30 with advanced post at cross track B 1 b 80/50. "B" Company in advanced trench running from B 1 a 90/05 to B 1 d 35/40 and thence to B 1 d 40/80; "D" Company less 1 platoon in GORDON Trench in B 1 a and B 1 c, and "C" Company and 1 platoon of "D" Company in trench E. If Brigade HQ in the line northwards from B 5 d 6.	
			14 German prisoners (1 wounded) sent down by "A" Company arrived at Battalion HQ. These men had apparently walked in the trench which "A" Company were occupying, early in the morning.	
TRENCHES	1-9-16	10am.	Contact Aeroplane flew over lines. Signals put out.	
			The situation in these trenches throughout the day was quiet, and in spite of the fact that the advanced trenches had no communication trenches leading to them, parties carrying water, etc. were able to get up in the open and were not worried by sniping.	
			Shelling was not heavy, but Battalion HQ which were at the corner of DUNCAN ALLEY and MALTZ HORN Trench B 5 d 40/90 were shelled intermittently throughout the day.	

TRENCHES

In the early morning a report was received that some field guns or French 75s were falling short in a trench occupied by our "B" Company. Casualties during the day were not very heavy, but amounted to about 23 other ranks.

During the morning O.C. "B" Company sent out a patrol to German gun pits about 150 yards N. to N.W. of strong point at B 1 a 90/05, and found that one was unoccupied and another contained 10 Germans and a machine gun.

Two of the Germans were accounted for and our patrol returned safely. This patrol was under 2nd Lieut C. V. BLAIN (since killed).

3:10 pm

Brigade Operation Order No 55 b received, which postponed the main attack until the 3rd of September, but extended the objective of the 15th Infantry Brigade to LEUZE WOOD and the southern side of the spur of the hill on which LEUZE WOOD is situated. This was to be effected by strong patrols pushing forward half an hour after the final objective was reached.

5:15 pm

Brigade Operation Order 55 c received detailing strong patrols to be sent out at 8:30 pm this evening in order to assist main attack, the Cheshire Regiment patrolling to the N. corner of WEDGE WOOD and the points Y 26 c 33 and B 2 a 65/70 and if no opposition met with, strong points to be established.

8:30 pm

2nd Lieut J. W. ROBERTS wounded together with 8 other ranks by a shell which landed in "C" Company's trench.

Operation proceeded with; no reports as yet.

2-9-16 12:15 am

Brigade Operation Order 55 d received detailing the main attack to take place on September 3rd, the attack being made by the 13th Infantry Brigade, the 15th Infantry Brigade being in support.

1 am

Reports received with reference to the patrols which state that the enemy was found waiting and patrols were unable to occupy posts in view of the definite instructions that the operation was not to become an attack, and that loss was not to be suffered.

4:30 am

The situation remains quiet and the location as before.

10:30 am

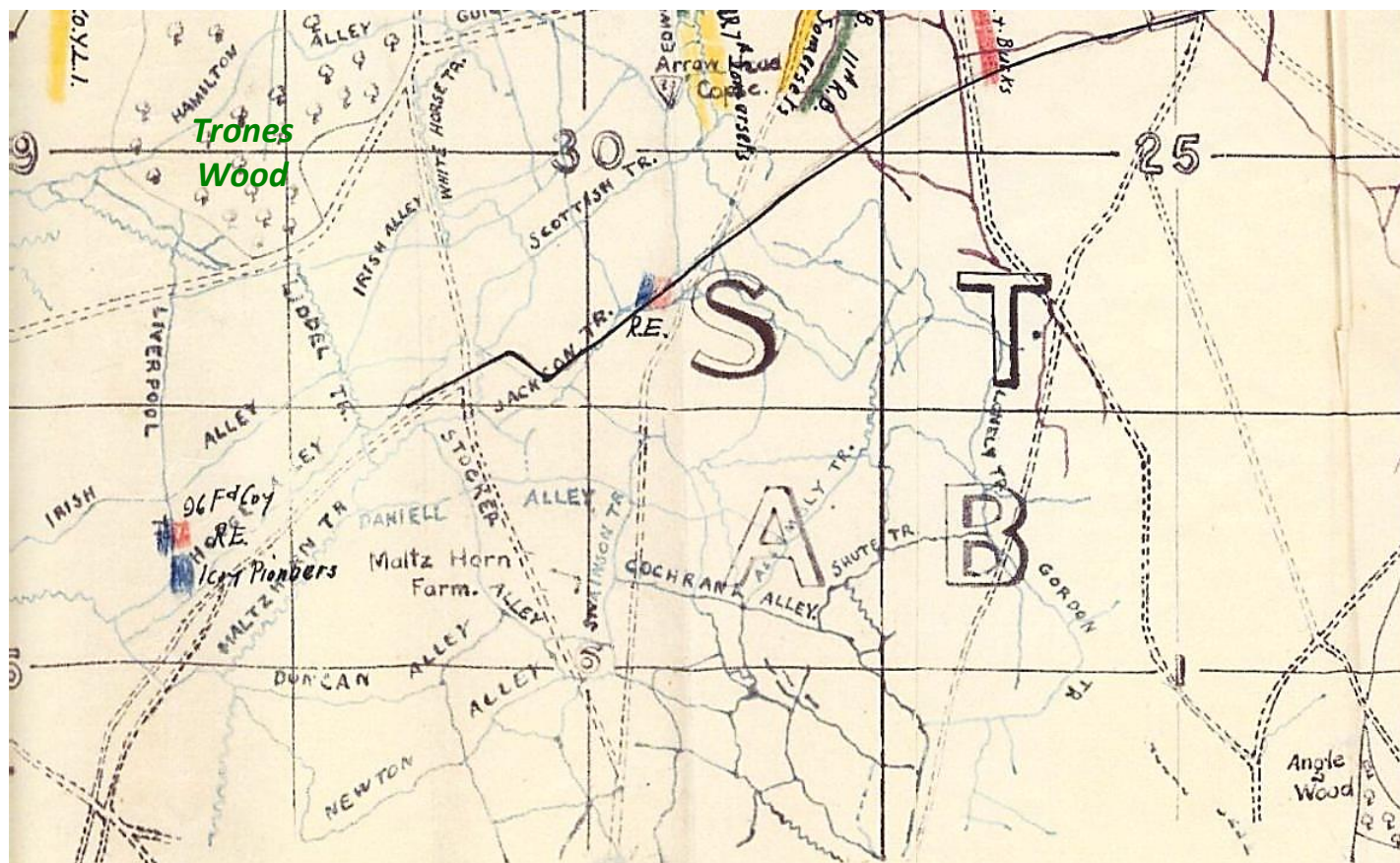
The enemy shelled our front trenches slightly.

The condition of the troops at this time was good, but somewhat strained owing to the weather conditions of the past few days. During the night the enemy shelled the valley where Battalion Headquarters was with gas shells, necessitating the wearing of smoke helmets during a large portion of the night, but no serious casualties resulted.

11:15 am

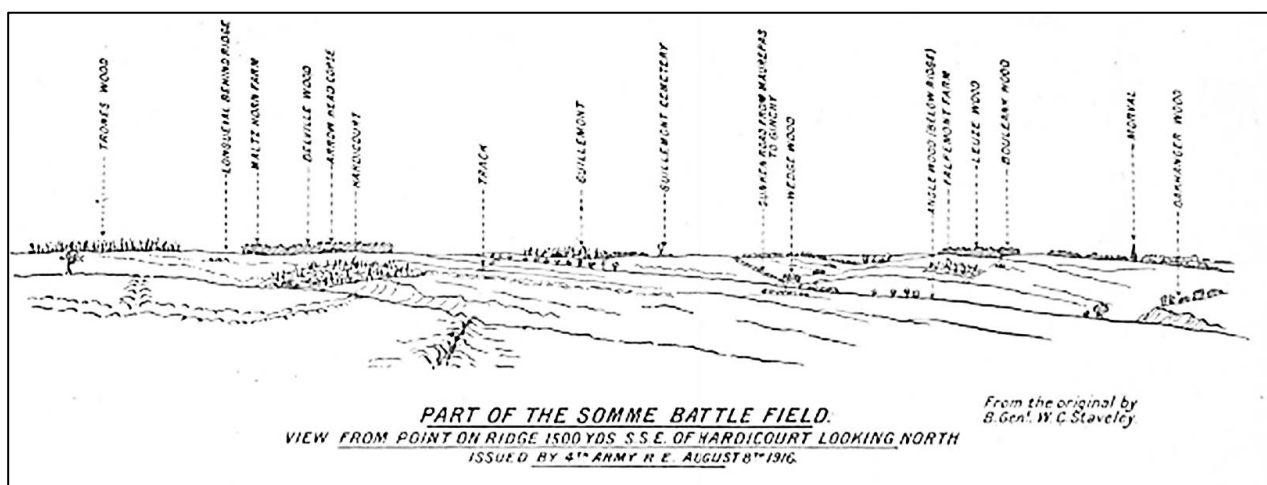
"A" Company still reports our own shells still falling short, and that they had two casualties yesterday from these.

The Diary notes that, at 8.30pm on 1 September, 2nd Lieut T.W. ROBERTS wounded together with 8 other ranks by a shell which landed in 'C' Company's trench. Although it is not recorded here, it may be presumed that he died very shortly afterwards.



Trench Map of area near Maltz Horn Farm, south of Trones Wood, in August 1916

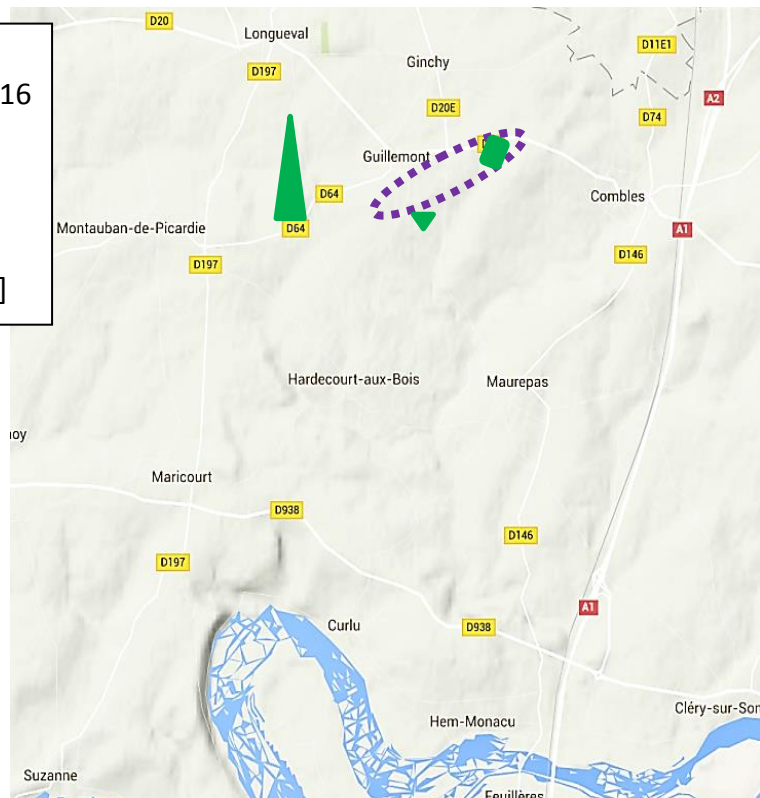
The map (south of Longueval and west of Hardecourt and close to Delville Wood) shows the trench system, including Maltz Horn Trench and Duncan Alley (in the SW sector) and Gordon Trench (SE sector). The southern extension of Trones Wood lies in the NW corner of the map and has been labelled in green. [Source: <http://www.leavold.com/showmedia.php?mediaID=218&medialinkID=372>]



History of the 35th Division: A Lancashire Brigade in France

The panorama shows the location of Maltz Horn Farm close to Delville Wood and west of Hardecourt (shown as *Hardicourt*) with Wedge Wood to the east.

The area, encircled in purple (north of the River Somme), in which the action of early September 1916 took place and where Thomas Wilson Roberts died. Three of the significant woods have been shown in green: Trones Wood (large triangle), Wedge Wood (small triangle) and Leuzy Wood (commonly called *Lousy Wood* – rectangle) [Base map :Google Maps]



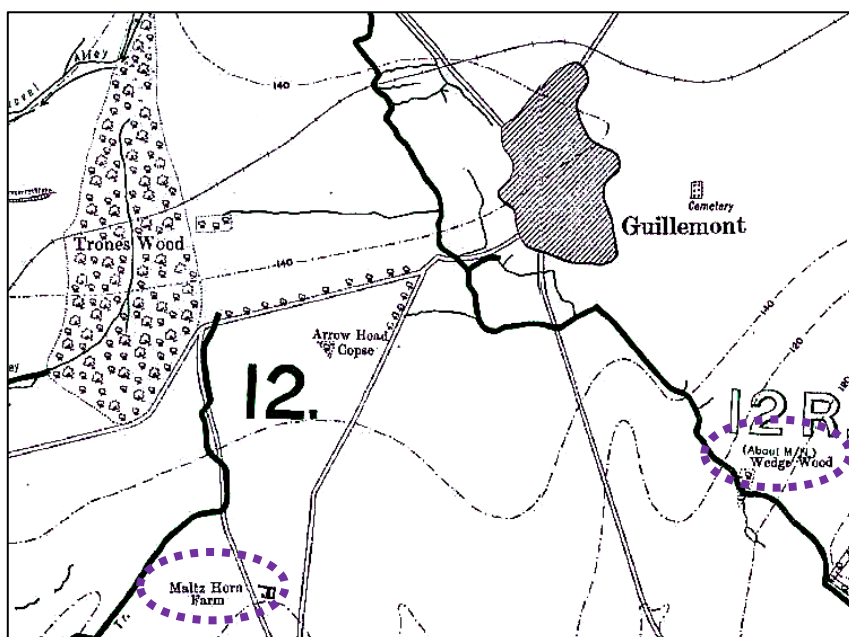
Neston Officer Killed

News has been received that 2nd Lieut. Thomas Wilson Roberts, of the Cheshire Regt., has died of wounds received in action on Sept. 1st. He was the elder son of Mr. John Wilson Roberts and Mrs. Roberts, of "The Willows," Neston, and was on the staff of the Bank of Liverpool until the war broke out, when he sacrificed all his future prospects and willingly offered his services to his country during the first week of hostilities. He was well known and very popular in the West Kirby and Wallasey districts, and much sympathy is extended to his parents in their bereavement.

Birkenhead News –
Saturday 9 September 1916



Second Lieut. T. W. ROBERTS.



Detailed map of the area south of Guillemont showing the location of Maltz Horn Farm and Wedge Wood (encircled in purple).

[Source: http://www.ossett.net/WW1/Albert_Holmes.html]

The Grave Registration Register (but not the Graves Registration Report) records his surname, unhyphenated, as Wilson Roberts

WILSON ROBERTS, 2nd Lt. Thomas. 1st Bn. Cheshire Regt., formerly 6th Bn. The King's Liverpool Regt. 1st Sept., 1916. Age 25. Son of John Wilson Roberts and Mary Elizabeth Wilson Roberts, of Liverpool. Enlisted Aug., 1914. I. C. 28.

It appears very probable that the Roberts' family did not move to Neston ('The Willows' is probably the large house on Manorial Drive, Parkgate) until about 1914 as John Wilson Roberts is not listed in the 1914 trade directory for the town. It is, therefore, very likely that Thomas did not live in Neston for very long - if at all - before he joined the army in August 1914. Curiously, The Willows was the same address - and at around the same time - as that of the parents of Bryn Thomas **84: Bryn Atherton Brodie Thomas**.¹

ROBERTS Thomas Wilson of the Willows Neston **Cheshire** second lieutenant 1st battalion Cheshire regiment died 1 September 1916 in France Administration (with Will) **Chester** 1 December to Mary Elizabeth Roberts (wife of John Wilson Roberts). Effects £556 12s.

England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966

The Probate record of 1 December 1916 shows that Thomas's Estate was worth £556 12s – this is equivalent, in 2016, to a *historic standard of living value* (ie purchasing power, related to the Relative Price Index) of £34 000.

John Wilson Roberts, Thomas' father, died in Neston in mid-1921 aged 68.

Mary E Roberts, Thomas' mother, died in Eastham in mid-1932 aged 74.

William Wilson Roberts (born 1 October 1893), Thomas' brother who also served in WW1, died in West Lancashire in early 1979 aged 85.

William married Helen D Bruce (born 26 May 1907) in Hayfield, Derbyshire, in mid-1933, and in the 1939 Register they were recorded as living at 'Cranleigh', Beech Road, Aughton, Ormskirk:

Cranleigh	ditta	192	1	Roberts William W	-	M	1 Oct	93	M	Yea and Coffer Merchant
			2	Roberts Helen D	-	F	26 May	07	M	Unpaid Domestic Duties
			3	Roberts David D	-	M	13 Sep	34	S	At School
			4	Roberts Judith W.D	-	F	18 Mar	37	S	Under School Age
			5	William Worthington S.	-	F	10 June	08	S	Domestic Duties

Daughter Judith Wilson Mary Roberts married Martin William Worthington at St Michael's Church, Aughton (between Ormskirk and Maghull) on 8 August 1974.

¹ Although Thomas Wilson Roberts was serving with the 1st Battalion Cheshire Regiment when he died he had served previously with the 6th Battalion The King's (Liverpool Regiment). Bryn Thomas was serving with the 13th Battalion The King's (Liverpool Regiment) when he died. The two men died within 16 days of each other in 1916.