

82: Thomas Pemberton Swift

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: Thomas Pemberton Swift

Rank: Lance Corporal

Battalion / Regiment: Carrier Pigeon Service Royal Engineers

Service Number: 346888

Date of Death: 05 August 1918

Age at Death: 36

Buried / Commemorated at: Tehran Memorial, Tehran, Iran

Additional information given by CWGC: The son of Thomas B. and Hannah Swift, of The Cross, Neston and the husband of Mary Alice Wright (formerly Swift), of Laburnum Farm, Willaston

Thomas Pemberton Swift was born in Childer Thornton in late 1882, the eldest of the four children of Thomas Bennett and Hannah Swift. 'Pemberton' was a family name.

Thomas Bennett Swift married Hannah Binner of Birkenhead at St Paul's Church, Birkenhead, in late 1881; Hannah was a daughter of blacksmith Edward and Hannah Binner and in the 1881 census Hannah jnr, 20, was recorded as a domestic servant in Birkenhead.

Thomas Bennett Swift was a son of butcher Pemberton and Martha Swift of Parkgate; in 1881, shortly before his marriage, Thomas (23, butcher) was living with his married brother, also Pemberton Swift (27, butcher) on Chester Road in Childer Thornton.

Thomas Bennett Swift, and his brother, Edward Bennett Swift, went on to establish shops in Neston (on The Cross, where Thomas was living in April 1891, and in Little Sutton:

Thomas B. Swift	Head	34	Butcher	X	Parkgate Cheshire
Hannah	Wife	29			Birkenhead
Thomas P.	Son	8			Childer Thornton Cheshire
Martha	Daughter	6			
Edward B.	Son	3			Neston Cheshire
Hannah L.	Daughter	4 months			
Fanny Binner	Sister-in-law	19	Dressmaker	X	Tranmere Cheshire
Sarah L. Roberts	Boarder	25	Milliner	X	Rhyl Cheshire
Sarah E. Evans	Servant	14	General domestic	X	Sale Manchester
Henry B. Swift	Nephew	16	Butcher's assistant	X	Parkgate Cheshire

1891 census (extract) – The Cross, Neston

Thomas B. Swift	34	butcher	born Parkgate
Hannah	29		born Birkenhead
Thomas P.	8		born Childer Thornton
Martha	6		born Childer Thornton
Edward B.	3		born Neston
Hannah L.	4 months		born Neston
Fanny Binner	19	sister-in-law, dressmaker	born Tranmere
Sarah L. Roberts	25	boarder, milliner	born Rhyl
Sarah E. Evans	14	general domestic servant	born Sale, Manchester
Henry B. Swift	16	nephew, butcher's assistant	born Parkgate

In 1911 Thomas jnr was still living with his parents and unmarried siblings on Neston Cross, although he moved to Hadlow Terrace, Willaston, later in the year:

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.														Number of Schedule 287 (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						
<p>of every Person, whether Member of Family, Visitor, Boarder, or Servant, who</p> <p>(1) passed the night of Sunday, April 2nd, 1911, in this dwelling and was alive at midnight, or</p> <p>(2) arrived in this dwelling on the morning of Monday, April 3rd, not having been enumerated elsewhere.</p> <p>No one else must be included.</p> <p>(For order of entering names see Examples on back of Schedule.)</p>																			
		For Infants under one year state the age in months as "under one month," "one month," etc.	Write "Single," "Married," "Widowed," or "Servant," opposite the names of all persons aged 15 years and upwards.	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.)	Completed years the present Marriage has lasted. If less than one year write "under one—"	Total Children Born Alive.	Children still living.	Children who have died.	Personal Occupation.	Industry or Service with which worker is connected.	Whether Employer, Worker, or Working on Own Account.	Whether 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) "Naturalised British subject," giving year of naturalisation. (3) "Totally Blind," or "Feeble-minded," state the infirmity opposite that person's name, and the age at which he or she became afflicted.
		Ages of Males.	Ages of Females.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.
1 Thomas Bennett Swift	Head	29	29	Married	29	4	4	4	4	Butcher		Employed	at home	Parkgate					
2 Hannah Swift	Wife	49	49	Married	29	4	4	4	4	Assisting in the business				Birkenhead					
3 Thomas Pemberton Swift	Son	28	28	Single						Butcher's son, work in business		Employed	at home	Childer Thornton					
4 Edward Bennett Swift	Son	23	23	Single						Joiner		Employed	at home	Neston					
5 Martha Swift	Daughter	26	26	Single						Assisting in business				Childer Thornton					
6 Hannah Lilley Swift	Daughter	20	20	Single						Assisting in business				Neston					
7 Henry Bennett Swift	Nephew	36	36	Single						Butcher		Employed	at home	Parkgate					

(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 names and families in Columns 2 and 3 separately, and have entered their sum with the total number of persons.
(3) After making the necessary corrections I have completed all entries on the Schedule which appeared to be defective, and have corrected such as appeared to be erroneous.

Initials of Enumerator: *W*

(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 (House, Tenement, or Apartment). Count the kitchen as a room but do not count scullery, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom; nor warehouse, office, shop.

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

Signature: *Thomas Bennett Swift*
Postal Address: *The Cross Neston, Cheshire*

1911 census (condensed) – The Cross, Neston

Thomas Bennett Swift	54	butcher	born Parkgate
Hannah	49	assisting in the business	born Birkenhead
Thomas Pemberton	28	butcher's son, work in business	born Childer Thornton
Edward Bennett	23	joiner	born Neston
Martha	26	assisting in business	born Childer Thornton
Hannah Lilley	20	assisting in business	born Neston
Henry Bennett Swift	36	nephew, single, butcher	born Parkgate

Thomas snr and Hannah had been married for 29 years and all four children had survived.



5 Hadlow Terrace, Willaston
[photo : <http://www.rightmove.co.uk/>]

Thomas jnr married Mary Alice Powell at Neston Parish Church on 26 December 1911 and it appears that they moved from Neston to 5, Hadlow Terrace, Willaston at that time. Mary was the daughter of farmer (deceased) Walter Scott Powell and, a cashier, was 28; Thomas was 29.

Thomas and Mary (who was known as 'Mollie' / Molly) are believed to have had two children:

Thomas Pemberton Swift	born 28 October 1912
Walter Charles Swift	born 29 June 1914

Thomas attested for the 4th Battalion South Lancashire Regiment in Neston on 6 December 1915 when he was aged 33 years 1 month. He was described as being a 'butcher & farmer', 5ft 9¼ins tall, weighing 147lb (10½ stone / 66.8 kg) and with a 39-inch expanded chest. His physical development was said to be 'very good' and he had two scars on his right forearm. On joining he was given the Service Number 6328 and it was noted that he had already served with the 'Old Volunteers', a name commonly ascribed to the Territorial forces ¹.



Thomas Pemberton Swift ['Pem'] and family, in c1910
[Source : Ancestry.co.uk]

Thomas Pemberton was mobilised on 28 September 1916 and on 28 November was posted from the 4th

Battalion South Lancashire Regiment to the 6th (Service) Battalion. This battalion had been formed in Warrington in August 1914 as part of Kitchener's First New Army and they sailed from Avonmouth in June 1915 landing at Cape Helles (Gallipoli) in July before moving to Mudros.

The troops had landed at Anzac Beach on 4 August 1915 but, with the other formations, were evacuated from Gallipoli and went to Egypt via Mudros on 20 December 1915. As Thomas did not enlist until a year later he fortuitously missed the shambolic action in Gallipoli but, embarking at Devonport on 3 December 1916 for India, disembarked in Bombay (now Mumbai) on 3 March 1917, probably having landed and served some time in Mudros en route.

Thomas appears to have been attached to Depot 8 at Hebbal, on the northern side of Bangalore and, on 8 March 1917, he was appointed as Acting Corporal. His stay in India was short-lived as, on 28 May 1917 he embarked at Bombay for Basra, Persia (now southern Iraq) where he disembarked on 5 June. For reasons unknown, on this same date, his rank reverted to Private and he joined 'D' Company, a formation of the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force, in the field.

On 11 July Thomas was admitted to the 41st Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps, suffering from 'P.U.O.' - Pyrexia (a fever and high temperature) of Unknown Origin, a condition which could be the result of numerous diseases such as tuberculosis, endocarditis, gallbladder disease, viral, bacterial, fungal or parasitic infection, or even cancer.

Thomas spent some time recuperating in several field hospitals before, on 16 August 1917, being discharged to the Base Advanced Depot at Amara (now Amarah).

¹ It is recorded also that he had previously had the Service Number 36982.

A month later, on 12 September 1917, he rejoined his unit at Abu Tamat and, on 6 November, was appointed as an unpaid Lance Corporal.

In May 1918 Thomas was compulsorily transferred ('in the interests of the service' on the orders of the Deputy Adjutant General [D.A.G.]) to the Carrier Pigeon Service:

16-5-18	D.A.G.	Compulsorily transferred in the interests	
	3rd Echelon	of the service to the ROYAL ENGINEERS	
	Mes Ex Force	with effect from 7/5/18 and posted to	C.R/16516/A.3/1
		Director of Army Signals and Telegraphs	
		Mes Ex Force, for duty with Carrier Pigeon	
		Service. Allotted new Corps number 346888	
		and mustered as a Pioneer.	

Thomas now had a new Service Number, 346888 - when he first enlisted, in the 4th Battalion South Lancashire Regiment, his number was 6328 but this was changed to 368982 when he transferred to the 6th Battalion - and he was now with the Royal Engineers. In fact, his transfer to the RE appears to have taken place in March 1918 when, on one month's probation, he moved to the Office of the Director of Army Signals & Telegraphs in General Headquarters 2 in Baghdad.

On the date when Thomas joined the Carrier Pigeon Service - 7 May 1918 - he was appointed as a paid Lance Corporal but his earlier health problems persisted and, on 2 August 1918, he was admitted to the 20th Field Ambulance (the location of this is unknown but it may have been near Basra) where, the following day, he was reported

to be 'dangerously ill' with heat exhaustion. Two days later Thomas Pemberton Swift died; he had served for 2 years 243 days, 1 year 155 days being outside Britain.

Copy of telegram despatched to ~~On Military Service.~~

Swift
5 Hadlow Terrace, Willaston, Nr Chester.

R4 C. 8323 9th aaa Regret to inform you Officer
Commanding 3rd Echelon Basra Persian
Gulf reports 346888 T.P. Swift R.E.

Chatham. Died 5th August heat exhaustion
9-8-18. for Colonel i/c R.E. Records. Lieut: R.E.

Colonel i/c R.E. Records

W.C.

Following the death of Thomas his widow, Mary Alice, was awarded a pension of 25s 5d per week for herself and their two children.

In June 1920 Mary's address was recorded as being 'Stores House',

Willaston and, towards the end of that year, she married Ernest A Wright (born 1 April 1893) at Christ Church, Willaston, and moved to 'Laburnum Farm' in the village. Ernest and Mary were at the same address at the time of the 1939 Register (29 September); Ernest was a master butcher and farmer and Mary (born 2 December 1886) was a shop assistant. With them was Winifred Mary Wright (born 13 August 1921), single, a butcher's cashier. One other line of the Register entry has been redacted - this was probably the entry for their second daughter, Jean who was born in mid-1926.

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

(25000) Wt. 22710/551. 50,000 (d). 3/18. R. & L., Ltd. Widows—Form 3.

Any further communication on this subject should be addressed to:—
The Secretary,
Ministry of Pensions
(Widows and Dependents Branch),
45, Grosvenor Road,
London, S.W. 1,
and the following number quoted.

MINISTRY OF PENSIONS
(Widows & Dependents Branch),
45, GROSVENOR ROAD,
LONDON, S.W. 1,

21-1-19 191

No. 7360 RE (Rev. 114)

SIR,

I am directed by the Minister of Pensions to inform you that the widow of No. 346888 Pte. Thomas P. Swift, Carrier Pigeon Service Royal Engineers has been awarded a Pension of 25/5 a week, for herself and two children, with effect from the 17 2 19

The Officer issuing Separation Allowance has been informed of the award.

The Pension will be paid from the Pension Issue Office.

The certificates received in support of the application have been returned to the widow.

I am, SIR,
Your obedient Servant,

Matthew Nathan
The Officer in charge of Records, Secretary.

Chatham RE



Royal Engineers Motorcycle Rider & Carrier Pigeons

It is not clear why, if Thomas died in Iraq (then Mesopotamia), that he is commemorated on a memorial at Tehran in Iraq (then Persia).

By June 1920 Thomas's brother, Edward Bennett Swift (born 1 September 1887), had also moved to Willaston and was living at 'Neston Cottage'. Edward, 25, married Mary Norman (also 25,

born 5 February 1887) at Neston Parish Church on 16 October 1912 when his occupation was recorded as carpenter although the word 'butcher' had been written and then scored through. Mary was a daughter of Little Neston builder Thomas Henry Norman.

At the time of the 1939 Register the family was living at 28 Port Causeway, Bebington, where Edward was a house joiner.



Martha Swift (born 24 June 1884) had married Little Neston builder Frederick Norman on 27 September 1915 and was living on Riverside, Ness. They appear to have had two children, Frederick Maurice Norman (birth registered early 1920, died unmarried 23 August 1962) and Vera (born 16 October 1923). At the time of the 1939 Register (29 September) Martha, a widow (Frederick had died in Liverpool, aged 47, on 16 February 1931) was living at 'Oaktree', next to the Normans' builders' yard in Little Neston. Unmarried Vera, a typist at a soap and glycerine

manufacturer's, was with Martha; Vera married Allen Michael Daly at Neston Parish Church in mid-1949.

Martha Norman died on 23 May 1959 aged 74.

Allen Daly died on 22 January 1992, aged 40, and Vera died on 16 August 2002 aged 78. They are buried at Neston Cemetery.

Hannah Lilley Swift married Alfred Bamford, an insurance clerk from Ness Holt (but born in Burton) at a Civil Marriage on Wirral in late 1919 and was living on Church Road, Neston.

Thomas Bennett Swift, Thomas's father died in early 1927 aged 70 and Hannah, his mother, died in early 1932 aged 71 in Neston.

Thomas Pemberton Swift jnr, Thomas' eldest son, died in the Birkenhead district in early 1990 when he would have been 77. Born on 28 October 1912 he has not been located in the 1939 Register but he married Hilda Ashton at Christ Church, Willaston, in mid-1942.

His second son, Walter Charles Swift (born 29 June 1914) died in the Birkenhead area in May 1999 when he would have been 85. Walter, then 25, married Dorothy Wilcoxon (aged 26, born 15 October 1912) of Puddington at Burton Parish Church on 7 August 1939; Dorothy's father was builder Robert Wilcoxon and one of the witnesses was Walter's brother, Thomas. No children of Walter and Dorothy have been identified.

At the time of the 1939 Register, when Walter was recorded as a master retail butcher, they were living at Elm Farm in Burton.

Thomas Pemberton Swift snr was honoured also on the War Memorials at Christ Church, Willaston, and at the Willaston Royal British Legion ².

SWIFT—August 5, in hospital, on active service, aged 35 years, Lee-Corpl. THOMAS PEMBERTON R.E.S., the devoted husband of M. A. (Mollie) Swift of Willaston, and beloved eldest son of Thomas and Hannah Swift. The Cross, Neston, Cheshire (Deeply regretted.)

Liverpool Echo – Wednesday 14 August 1918

791923	68/470	Swift	Comd. Gen. 5-8-18	152-9	2.6.19	Miss Mary Alice	8	10	11
		Thomas	Ser R. R. Humphreys	6785	3-7-19	Miss Mary Alice	17	1	10
		Pemberton	Heph	346888					
			War Gratuity	10	10				

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. In July 1919 Thomas's widow, Mary Alice, received two payments of outstanding wages - £8 10s 11d and £17 1s 10d – from the army and a War Gratuity of £10 10s. This, a total value of £35 12s 9d, is equivalent to a *labour value* (wages) of around £5500 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.

² At the time of writing, this has been closed and the site is scheduled for housing.

The Royal Engineer Signals Service (RESS) on The Western Front

The British did not have a separate Corps of Signals in the Great War and at the outbreak of war in August 1914 all the British Army's signalling/ intercommunication requirements were met by the Royal Engineers Signal Services (RESS) that was formed in 1908. The communication services that were available to the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in late 1914 can be summarised as follows:

Visual signalling	Long used by the army in the form of fire-beacons, semaphore, and the heliograph
Telegraphy	Duplex [two-way] telegraphy; a relatively new invention dating from 1870
Telephone	But initially only at the senior command level
Dispatch Riders	The use of motorcycle dispatch riders had just begun in 1914
Runners	Battalion level message carriers - often susceptible to high casualty rates
Wireless	Wireless sets - radios - were also being introduced in 1914, but their bulky and fragile nature made portability difficult
Pigeons	Front Line coded message carriers from late 1914
Military Postal Service	

All these services except the battalion runners, and some of the visual signallers, were provided by the RESS.

By 1915 increasing importance was given to pigeons carrying coded messages from the Front Line to the battalion HQ and beyond. Originally the British Army on the Western Front did not have any messenger pigeons, but in September 1914, the French provided a nucleus aviary of 15 pigeons from which was developed a bird strength of thousands: 12,000 pigeons were deployed at the First Battle of the Somme in 1916 and, by 1918, 20,000 birds were available for duty.

Training the pigeons and caring for them were not easy tasks, and the British Expeditionary Force issued official guidelines for the men working in the Carrier Pigeon Service. Advice given included:

'Experience has proved that pigeons very quickly become accustomed to shell-fire, which does not appear to disturb them at all in their lofts. It thus becomes possible to take pigeons much closer to the firing line. This is usually done by means of the employment of mobile lofts.'

'In fine weather, the birds need exercise at least twice a day. Once outside the loft they should take exercise and not be allowed to sit about when not on the wing, otherwise this will become an acquired habit and will lead to slowness in entering the loft when returning with a message.'

'The young pigeons, known as "squeakers", should be ready for service work when three months old. At this age good strong young birds will be ready to accomplish flights of from 10 to 50 miles in the field.'