

THE BLEASDALE FALLEN OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

PIONEER/SAPPER
THOMAS PATRICK
LONGWORTH

c. 1883 – 1918

104TH/106TH FIELD COMPANY, ROYAL ENGINEERS

DIVISIONAL ENGINEERS, 25TH DIVISION

ARMY No. 66057



KILLED IN ACTION 9TH APRIL 1918



REMEMBERED WITH HONOUR

PIONEER/SAPPER THOMAS PATRICK LONGWORTH c. 1883 – 1918
104th/106th Field Company, Royal Engineers
Divisional Engineers, 25th Division
Army No. 66057

Thomas Patrick Longworth was born in Blackpool in or around 1883. In 1911 he was working for Fylde Water Board on the construction of the new reservoir at Grizedale Lea, Barnacre, as a blacksmith's striker. He joined the Royal Engineers in 1915 where presumably he was able to put his skills to good use until he was reported missing, presumed killed in action, in France on or about 9th April 1918. He was 35 years old.

THOMAS LONGWORTH'S FAMILY BACKGROUND

Thomas Longworth had followed a family tradition by becoming a blacksmith. The 1851 and 1861 Census Returns show his grandfather as a blacksmith in Layton (Blackpool). Thomas' father, Robert who was brought up in Layton did not follow his father in to the smithy. He worked as a ploughman to begin with. In 1891 he was working as a labourer for the Fylde Waterworks Company, and he may have already joined the Water Board's workforce in Blackpool ten years before. In 1901 he was a pipelayer working for the Fylde Water Board.

Robert and his wife Margaret had four sons, three daughters, and a child who died. Thomas was the second oldest. Three of them entered the trades of painting and clog making in Blackpool. Thomas however, followed his father into the Fylde Water Board.

THOMAS' WORKING LIFE

As a thriving seaside resort at the end of the nineteenth century, Blackpool needed increasing supplies of water which meant Fylde Water Board was a major employer in the area. The Board needed large numbers of men for building its new reservoirs and laying new water pipes so it was not surprising that at least one of Robert's sons followed in his father's footsteps. In 1901 Thomas was living at home at 23, Fenton Street, working as a navvy, but he may soon have taken up the trade of blacksmith, as in 1911 he was working on the construction of Barnacre Reservoir as a blacksmith's striker.

WORKING AT BARNACRE RESERVOIR

Thomas joined Fylde Water Board's workforce building Barnacre Reservoir sometime after construction started in 1903. As blacksmith's striker, he would have worked for the blacksmith on the site. The smithy was situated in an outbuilding of the former Grizedale Lea farmhouse, now in the middle of the site of the reservoir. Thomas' job would have involved such jobs as shoeing horses and repairing chains, lifting equipment and the rolling stock on the reservoir railway. Life would have been hard, out in all weathers, isolated from any urban community.

As a single man, he may have made his home at first in one of the workmen's huts on the site where over 200 single men lived in dormitory accommodation, sleeping in two tier bunk beds and cooking for themselves. The huts were supervised by a family living in one end of the

building. He joined the local Friendly Society, the Bleasdale branch of the Ancient Order of Foresters in St. John's Church, Calder Vale, which other reservoir workers joined.

It is possible however that he became a lodger in one of the farmhouses or cottages in or around Barnacre. Perhaps that was how he met the girl he was to marry.

MARRIAGE TO MARY HINDLE OF BARNACRE

Thomas married Mary Hindle, the younger daughter of William and Mary Hindle who farmed at Park Head, Barnacre on 6th June 1910. On 2nd April 1911 they were living at a four roomed house, Mill Cottage, Oakenclough (also described as 'In Fields' on the Census) where Mary was imminently about to give birth to their son, Robert William, on 7th April. Thomas' sister Jenny was with them on Census Day, presumably to help Mary when the baby arrived. They may have moved to Spring Cottage, Bonds, the address Thomas put on his enlistment form of 16th January 1915 which was also where she was living when she was awarded a widow's pension in November 1918, although in May that year the Preston Guardian gave Thomas' home as West View, Barnacre.

ENLISTMENT

Thomas saw several of his fellow workers join up immediately after war was declared on 4th August. Some of them had been in the Territorials before the War. As a married man with a child, Thomas may have been reluctant to go, but on 16th January 1915 he enlisted at Garstang, probably at the Town Hall where the Recruiting Office was situated. His enlistment and service papers have survived, and although difficult to read, they give an outline of his activities during the War.

Thomas' medical shows that he was aged 32, and 5 foot 8 inches tall. He had a tattoo of 'Hands across the Sea' on his left wrist. This was a popular motif on seaside postcards and perhaps he had had it done in Blackpool where there were a number of tattoo artists. Was it done specially for Mary in anticipation of his military service?

ACTIVE SERVICE ON THE WESTERN FRONT

Thomas was sent to 104th Field Company, Royal Engineers to train as a Pioneer. The Pioneers or Sappers were the soldiers who carried out construction and maintenance work for the troops, a job for which his experiences at Barnacre would have held him good stead. In due course he was sent out France where he was on active service until 1st December 1916. His record was not entirely unblemished. In January 1916 he was involved in an incident which earned him 7 days 'number 2 Field Punishment'. This however was an isolated incident.

In the following December he was admitted to hospital in France at No. 22 General Hospital, Camieres. This could have been for any number of reasons e.g. a wound, an accident or illness. He remained there for 11 days and returned to England where he stayed until he returned to France on 22nd April 1917. In August he joined the 106th Company, from No. 11 Reinforcement Company, Royal Engineers. In the Spring of 1918, the Company was caught up in the German Spring Offensive during which Thomas was reported missing.

THE GERMAN SPRING OFFENSIVE, 1918

Karen Macaulay has researched 106th Field Company and described its part in the events of March and April 1918 in the Arras and Somme area which cost Thomas his life. She writes:

‘By March 1918 106th Company was at Achiet le Grand, about 12 miles south of Arras, undertaking such tasks as constructing deep dugouts, new huts and stabling. In the early hours of 21st March the Company was ordered to “stand to” as the Germans had opened a huge artillery fire on the British lines. This was the beginning of the German Spring Offensive and over the next few days the British were forced to withdraw. By 28th March the Company had been pushed back as far as Domesmont on the Somme, and here they rested for two days then entrained at Doullens and travelled from here to Godswearsvelde in the Ypres sector. From here they marched to Romarin and set up camp. On 2nd April the Company took over work from 5th Australian Field Company improving the front line. This work continued over the next few days.

‘On 9th April the Germans launched another attack as part of their offensive. This was named as Operation Georgette and aimed at the lines in Flanders. When the attack commenced the 106th Field Company was ordered to march to the left bank of the River Lys, dig in and support the front line troops attempting to resist the German onslaught.’

THOMAS’ DEATH AND THE AFTERMATH

Thomas was reported missing during this action on 9th April. Sadly, no one knew for certain what had happened to him. On 4th May 1918, the Preston Guardian reported tersely:

“Sapper Thos. Longworth R.E. residing at West View, Barnacre is reported as missing. In civil life he was a blacksmith.”

In the same article, another Barnacre soldier was reported missing, and three from Claughton were reported either ‘dangerously ill’ or wounded.

Mary was granted a pension of 20 shillings 5d. (£1 2p.) per week from 16th December 1918 for herself and her son, by the War Office, who sent Mary a total of £38 5s 6d., the money owing to him at his death.



He is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial, Zonnebeke, Belgium, on the Bleasdale, Calder Vale and Garstang War Memorials, at Garstang Congregational (now U.R.C.) Church and on a plaque erected by the Bleasdale Court of the Ancient Order of Foresters in St. John’s Church, Calder Vale.

He was awarded the Victory and British War Medals and the 1915 Star.

Mary spent the rest of her life in Garstang. Sadly, Thomas and Mary’s son, Robert William, was killed in a car accident in 1923, aged 11. They are buried together in the U.R.C. Churchyard in Garstang. To their names has been added the inscription: ‘Thomas P. Longworth, missing in France, April 9th 1918’.

References:

The Preston Guardian 4th May 1918 and 31st March 1923 (microfilm, Community History Library, Harris Library, Preston):

For other references etc., see the Acknowledgement Page.