

## Thomas Greet's Story



Badge from <http://www.bing.com/images>

By Angela Levy

## Thomas Greet's Story

Thomas Isaac Mockford Greet was born in June 1877 at Brighton, sixth of the eight children of Bennett Greet and his wife, Elizabeth.

In 1881 the family was living at 11, Viaduct Road, Brighton, and Bennett Greet's occupation was "tarpaulin sheet dresser".<sup>1</sup>

In 1891 this was rephrased as "sheet dresser Railway" on the census form. Thomas, aged 13, was an errand boy.<sup>2</sup>

Sometime after this the family moved to Fuchsia Cottage, Salt Lake, Lancing, where Bennett Greet, having radically changed his occupation, was a market gardener. What is more, it was his own business. "On Own Account" and "At Home" is how it is put on the Census form.<sup>3</sup>

He employed his son, Thomas, aged 23, and 20 year old George White who, in 1904, would become his son-in-law when he married Emma Jane Mockford Greet, Bennett's second daughter.

Thomas Greet's own marriage, to Maud Peckham, was registered at Steyning in December 1903. Maud had been born in Devon and she was an exceptional woman.

Over the next 12 years Thomas and Maud had six children – Kathleen, Elsie, Olive, Hilda, Richard and Phyllis.

The 1911 Census shows the

family living at Dreadnought Cottage, South Lancing. Thomas was now one of Lancing's three postmen. He is the man on the extreme left of the photograph, taken in 1912, outside the Post Office in Lancing.

Robert Bartlett, the owner of the stationer's shop, is the grey-bearded man on the extreme right in the same photograph. His grandson, Arthur Bartlett, fought and died in the First World War.

Thomas enlisted into the 8<sup>th</sup> battalion, City of London Regiment (Post Office Rifles) whose history is an interesting one.

The Post Office volunteers were in Paris in 1816 assisting the British Forces with communications, and sorters served in the Crimean War (1853-1856).

In 1867 a group of Post Office volunteers helped defend installations, such as post offices, against bomb attacks by Irish Independence supporters.

In 1868 a regiment of 1,000 Post Office employees, formed under Lieutenant-Colonel du Plat Taylor, was named the 49<sup>th</sup> Middlesex Rifle

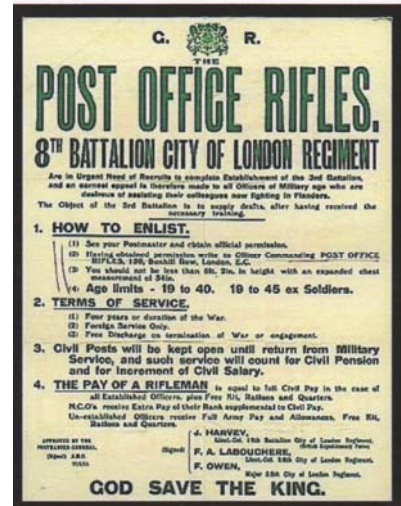


Thomas Greet (left) Robert Bartlett (right)  
 (from [www.lancingwarmemorial.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.lancingwarmemorial.blogspot.co.uk))

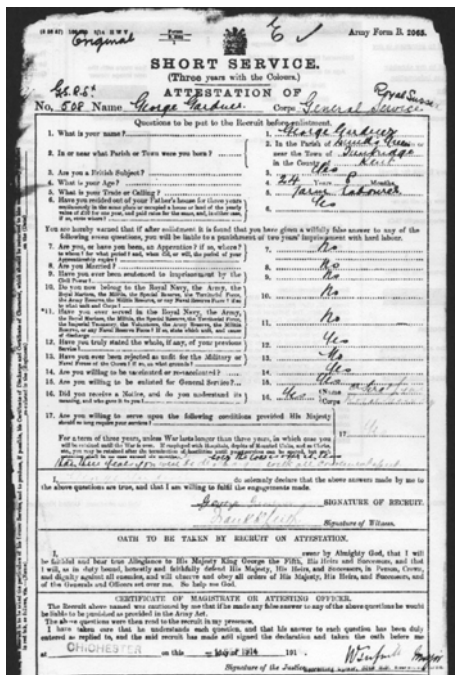


Lt.-Col du Plat Taylor  
 ([www.postalheritage.org.uk](http://www.postalheritage.org.uk))  
 Original from National Army Museum

Volunteers (Post Office Rifles) and re-numbered the 24<sup>th</sup> Middlesex in 1880. They fought in Egypt and the Sudan, supported General Gordon in Khartoum and contributed officers and men to oversee communications in the Boer War (1899-1902). Even after the Haldane Reforms of 1908, the regiment continued to recruit postal workers into the Territorial Force under its new title 8<sup>th</sup> (City of London) Battalion, the London Regiment (Post Office Rifles). Such was the number of recruits when the First World War began on 4 August 1914 that a second battalion was formed in September 1914. Initially, this was a reserve regiment but, eventually, they went into action in May 1917. ([www.postalheritage.org.uk](http://www.postalheritage.org.uk)) About 2 million service records of World War 1 soldiers were destroyed in 1940 during enemy bombing raids in World War 2 and anyone hoping to trace an individual soldier has roughly a 40% chance of finding him. Unfortunately, Thomas Greet's records were among those that were lost. When a man joined the Forces he was "attested", that is, he was asked a series of



Recruitment Poster  
[www.postalheritage.org.uk](http://www.postalheritage.org.uk)



Example of an Attestation form (from WW1 Soldiers documents WO363 via [www.Ancestry.co.uk](http://www.Ancestry.co.uk))

questions about himself, such as area of birth, age, occupation, ever been in prison, ever been in the Services before and ever been vaccinated. The answers were entered on the Attestation form. A typical form is illustrated. The recruit was required to sign the form after swearing the oath of allegiance. Between 1914 and 1918 there would have been slight variations in the wording of the oath but Thomas would have probably used much the same words as his brother-in-law, George White. "I.....swear by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His heirs and Successors, and that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, in Person, Crown and dignity against all enemies, according to the conditions of my service".<sup>4</sup> (from the

bottom of the form on the left)  
 Everything was witnessed and counter-signed.



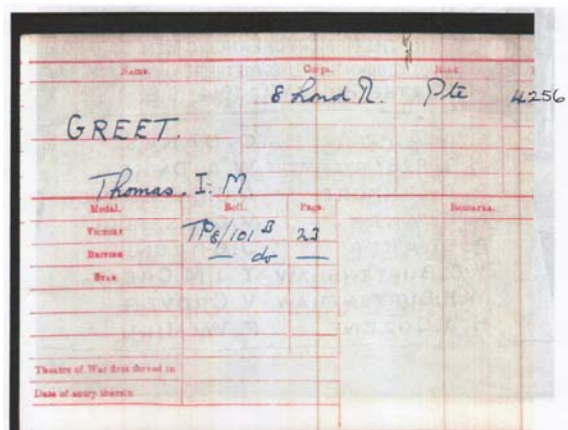
The form would show the name of the regiment the recruit had joined and, most important, his service number. Without this you cannot be sure you are tracing the movements of the right man even if you know his regiment for there may be more than one man with the same or a similar name in the same regiment. In this case, though, Thomas has a very distinctive name.

Moreover, even without the Attestation form, it is possible to glean some of its information from other sources. For instance, if the soldier is a relative there will be someone, perhaps, who actually knew him or heard others speak of him.

For this case history I am indebted to Terry Hallard and Sheila Simpson, the great-grandson and great-granddaughter of Bennett Greet, Thomas' father, for their help.

Thomas Greet's Medal Roll card survives and his service number appears on it.

Without the Attestation form it would seem that we don't know when he enlisted but the Army recorded when batches of numbers were allocated for each regiment.



Name	Regt.	Rank	Number
GREET.	8 Lond R.	Pte	4256
Thomas, I. M.			
Medal	Roll	Page	Remarks
Victory	TPG/101	23	
Bar	—	—	
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

Thomas's Medal Roll Card  
 (from [www.Ancestry.co.uk](http://www.Ancestry.co.uk)  
 Military Records)



Laura Best  
 (from Worthing Gazette  
 11 August 1915 p7 col d)

Via the internet, I found a list that places

Thomas's number, 4256, between 10 July 1915 and 20 August 1915.<sup>5</sup>

Sue Light's webpage for Lancing War Memorial confirms this date range with Paul Nixon's opinion that Thomas's enlistment date was probably about 24 July 1915.

This is further backed up by an article in the Worthing Gazette of 11 August 1915 (page 7 column d) which features Laura Best, aged 23, formerly a domestic servant (according to the 1911 Census). Laura was the daughter of Edwin Best, a bricklayer, and his wife, Sarah, of Alma House, South Lancing.

The Worthing Gazette article states, "Miss Best succeeds Mr Thomas Greet, who has joined the Post Office Rifles, and we are interested to learn that she is performing her duties in a most admirable and expeditious manner"<sup>6</sup> which suggests that she had been in the job for a week or two. (Worthing Gazette 11 August page 7 column d)

The recruiting poster for the Post Office Rifles tells us that a man wanting to enlist first had to obtain the permission of his postmaster, who, in this

case, was Robert Bartlett.

If permission was granted, the next step was to write to the "Officer Commanding POST OFFICE RIFLES, 130, Bunhill Row, London. E.C." <sup>7</sup>

Thomas was a small man but he must have been at least 5' 2" as that was the minimum height required as well as an expanded chest measurement of 34".

The age range for recruits was 19-40 years and for ex-soldiers re-enlisting it was 19-45 years.

Service was for 4 years or the duration of the War and it would be foreign service only. Significantly, the poster emphasizes that the recruit's job would still be his after the war,

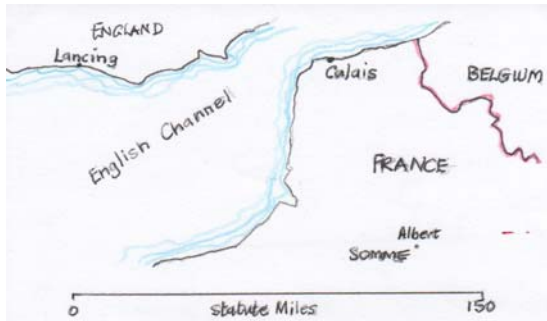
"Civil Posts will be kept open until return from Military Service, and such service will count for Civil Pension and for Increment of Civil Salary." <sup>8</sup>

Moreover, "The Pay of a Rifleman is equal to full Civil Pay in the cases of all Established Officers plus Free Kit, Rations and Quarters. NCO's receive Extra Pay of their Rank supplemented to Civil Pay. Unestablished Officers receive Full Army Pay and Allowances, Free Kit, Rations and Quarters."

Thomas must have joined his Battalion in France in 1916 because, although he received the British War Medal and the Victory Medal, he was not awarded the 1914-15 Star which was for service abroad before 31

December 1915.

According to the Lancing War Memorial website – The Lost Rooks and Seagulls of Lancing – the Battalion was on the Somme throughout April 1916, east of Albert in the Carnoy sector.



Lancing to France map  
 (drawn by the author)

At some point during that month

Thomas was severely wounded. Although being well over 8 months pregnant with

her seventh child, Maud travelled to France to be with her husband.

Thomas died of his wounds on 24 April 1916 with Maud at his bedside. The baby, Ernest Patrick, was born 13 days later. His mother had risked her own life and his in order to be near her husband. Even if Thomas was in hospital on France's coast of the English Channel Maud had still had the Channel crossing to endure.

Thomas was buried in Le Treport Military Cemetery, Département de la Seine-Maritime, Haute-Normandie, France. He shares a headstone with 18149 Private A.T. Smith of the Essex Regiment,

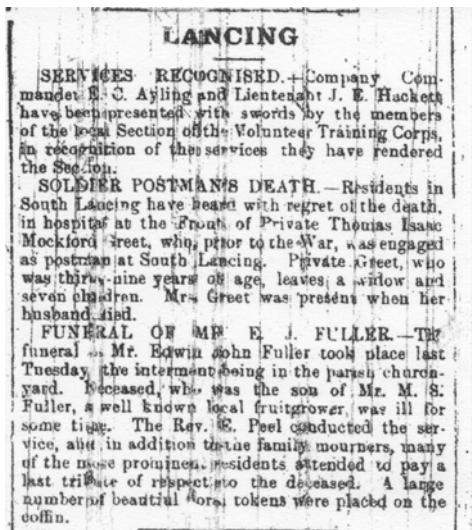


British War and Victory Medals  
 (from [www.bing.com/images](http://www.bing.com/images))



Image from <http://www.cwgc.org.uk>

who died on 28 April 1916.  
 The location is Plot 1. Row N. Grave 2A.  
 Thomas Greet's death was reported in the Worthing Gazette of 3 May 1916 (page 2 column e) under the heading "SOLDIER POSTMAN'S DEATH" resuming "Residents in South Lancing have heard with regret of the death in hospital at the



Thomas Greet's obituary  
 (Worthing Gazette 3 May 1916 p2 col e)



Lancing War Memorial  
[www.lancingwarmemorial.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.lancingwarmemorial.blogspot.co.uk)

Front of Private Thomas Isaac Mockford Greet who, prior to the War, was engaged as postman at South Lancing. Private Greet, who was thirty-nine years of age, leaves a widow and seven children. Mrs Greet was present when her husband died."<sup>9</sup>  
 Thomas is also remembered on Lancing War Memorial (above).



Author's photograph

Information Sources

My thanks to Sheila Simpson and Terry Hallard for their help with this article.

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<sup>1</sup> England census 1881 via [www.Ancestry.co.uk](http://www.Ancestry.co.uk)

<sup>2</sup> England Census 1891 via [www.Ancestry.co.uk](http://www.Ancestry.co.uk)

<sup>3</sup> England Census 1901 via [www.Ancestry.co.uk](http://www.Ancestry.co.uk)

<sup>4</sup> Oath quoted from a typical Attestation paper from WO363 Service Records via [www.Ancestry.co.uk](http://www.Ancestry.co.uk)

<sup>5</sup> <http://armyservicenumbers.blogspot.co.uk>

<sup>6</sup> Worthing Gazette 11 August 1915 7 col d

<sup>7</sup> From the Recruitment Poster (shown on 3) from [www.postalheritage.org.uk](http://www.postalheritage.org.uk)

<sup>8</sup> As endnote 6

<sup>9</sup> Worthing Gazette 3 May 1916 p2 col e