

A/Corporal Thomas Albert Archer

Regimental number: 8887

3rd Battalion, Rifle Brigade

born: 11 January 1878 - died: 26 April 1916

Rifleman Thomas Albert Archer, born 11 January 1878 in Bethnal Green, London, was the son of John and Sarah Archer.¹ Thomas was baptised on 10 February 1878 at St Philip's Church in Bethnal Green. His father, John Alfred, was born in about 1850 in Shoreditch, London,² the son of John William Archer.³ His mother, the former Sarah Elizabeth Palmer, was born in about 1853 in Bethnal Green, the daughter of John Palmer.⁴ John and Sarah were married on 19 February 1871 at St Bartholomew's in Bethnal Green.⁵ His father was a toy maker⁶ – an occupation that Thomas would also take up later. Before they had children, Sarah was a satin ribbon platter.

John and Sarah had fifteen children – nine of whom survived to 1911.⁷ The surviving children included five boys – John (born in about 1871),⁸ Robert William (born in November 1872),⁹ Thomas, Francis (born in March 1886)¹⁰ and Henry Benjamin (born in January 1890)¹¹ – and four daughters¹² – Sarah (born in about 1880),¹³ Elizabeth (born in about 1884),¹⁴ Amelia (born in about 1893)¹⁵ and Rose (born in about 1900).¹⁶

When he was 24, Thomas enlisted in Dalston as a Private in the Rifle Brigade.¹⁷ When he signed up on 14 January 1902, he attested for short service, which means that he committed to serve three years with the Colours (that is, in the Army) and then nine years in the Army Reserve. He had previously served in the 5th Battalion of the Rifle Brigade but had purchased a discharge.

When he enlisted in 1902, he was a toy maker and a member of the Church of England. He was 5' 4" tall, weighed 124 pounds, had a fresh complexion, blue eyes, and reddish hair, and was considered fit for service. However, he had two bouts of respiratory problems when he was stationed at the army base in Gosport, Hampshire. On 2 May 1902, he received his 3rd Class certificate of education. Later that month he was hospitalized for eighteen days with pleurisy and then in August 1903 he was hospitalized for sixty-three days with bronchitis. Although he received good conduct pay in 1904, he also had some disciplinary issues. In August 1903, he was absent from midnight to nearly midnight the following day. A disciplinary issue for which he was admonished. Then in December 1904, he was charged with being "dirty on church parade" and confined to barracks for three days.

His army service expired in January 1905. Then, on 11 April 1909, while still in the Army Reserve, Thomas married Sarah Beckwith at St Mary's Church in Hoxton, London.¹⁸ Sarah was the daughter of Christopher Beckwith, a cabinet maker. The marriage did not last. At the time of the 1911 census, Thomas was living with his family in Walthamstow¹⁹ and Sarah was living with her widowed mother, Sarah, four miles away in Upper Edmonton.²⁰ She was making tassels for an umbrella maker. On a statement about Thomas' relatives, made in April 1919, it is noted that:

Mrs. Archer states she is unable to give particulars of any of her late husband's relatives – she only met his father & mother once on his wedding day (11 April 1909). Mrs. and her husband parted after the first month of married life & heard nothing from him after that.²¹

Thomas was living with his family in 1911 at 108 Gosport Road, Walthamstow in London.²² Both Thomas and his father had given up working as toy makers. His father, Thomas and his younger

brother, Henry, were all working as railway porters with the Great Eastern Railway. The Great Eastern Railway's main link was from Liverpool Street Station in London to Norwich.²³ So it is likely that they worked at Liverpool Street Station.

In January 1914, Thomas' three years in the Army and nine in the Army Reserve would have expired, but he re-enlisted in the Reserve in August 1913, knowing that, if the Britain went to war, he could be called up for permanent service. That is what happened and by late 1914, he was again serving in the Army. In November 1914, he was appointed A/Corporal in the 6th Battalion. In 1914 and 1915, he was posted to Depot, then to the 6th and 3rd Battalions. He was joined the British Expeditionary Force in France on 13 April 1915.²⁴

Just over a year later he was serving again with the 3rd Battalion when he was wounded and admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, where he died on 26 April 1916.²⁵ He was buried in the Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord (Plot II, Row D, Grave 151).²⁶ The day that he died, one soldier was reported to have died at the 1st CCCS²⁷ – perhaps it was Thomas.²⁸ Two hundred and three new patients were admitted that day.

Bailleul is located close to the Belgian border. It was occupied on 14 October 1914 and became an important railhead, air depot and hospital centre. Several Casualty Clearing Stations, including the 1st Canadian, were quartered there for considerable periods. The earliest Commonwealth burials at Bailleul were made in April 1915. An extension was built and burials continued until April 1918, and occurred again in September and after the Armistice, when graves were brought in from the neighbouring battlefields.²⁹

A letter to notify the family of his death was addressed to his estranged wife, Sarah, but at the address of his parents in Walthamstow in 1911.³⁰ The monies owing to him from the army after his death were sent to his wife,³¹ who was then living at 7 Wilkes Place in Hoxton.³² She and Thomas did not have any children.

It is not known if any of Thomas' brothers also served in the Great War. However, after the war, his father was living at 46 Regent's Row in London with two of his brothers, John and Robert.³³

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¹ "London, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813-1906," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 June 2015), entry for Thomas Albert Archer

² "1871 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 June 2015), entry for John Archer, Registration district: Bethnal Green, Sub-registration district: Hackney Road, ED, institution, or vessel: 2, Household schedule number: 136, Piece: 474, Folio: 39, Page Number: 24

³ "London, England, Marriages and Banns, 1754-1921," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 June 2015), entry for John Alfred Archer, Parish: St Bartholomew, Bethnal Green, Borough: Tower Hamlets, Register Type: Parish Register

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ "1871 England Census," entry for John Archer,

⁷ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 June 2015), entry for Thomas Archer, Registration district: West Ham, Registration District Number: 188, Sub-registration district: Walthamstow, ED, institution, or vessel: 13, Piece: 9687

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- ⁸ "1881 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 June 2015), entry for John Archer, Registration district: Bethnal Green, Sub-registration district: Hackney Road, ED, institution, or vessel: 2, Piece: 410, Folio: 55, Page Number: 49
- ⁹ "London, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813-1906," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 June 2015), entry for Robert William Archer
- ¹⁰ "London, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813-1906," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 June 2015), entry for Francis Archer
- ¹¹ "London, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813-1906," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 June 2015), entry for Harry Benjamin Archer
- ¹² "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 June 2015), entry for Thomas Archer, Registration district: Shoreditch, Sub-registration district: Haggerston, ED, institution, or vessel: 13, Piece: 279, Folio: 92, Page Number: 30, Household schedule number: 227
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ "British Army WWI Service Records, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 June 2015), entry for Thomas Albert Archer. Unless otherwise stated, all information about his military career comes from this Army Service record.
- ¹⁸ "London, England, Marriages and Banns, 1754-1921," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 June 2015), entry for Thomas Albert Archer, Parish: St Mary, Hoxton, Borough: Hackney
- ¹⁹ "1911 England Census,"), entry for Thomas Archer
- ²⁰ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 June 2015), entry for Sarah Archer, Registration district: Edmonton, Registration District Number: 132, Sub-registration district: Edmonton, ED, institution, or vessel: 13, Piece: 354, Piece: 7363
- ²¹ "British Army WWI Service Records, 1914-1920,"), entry for Thomas Albert Archer
- ²² "1911 England Census,"), entry for Thomas Archer
- ²³ "Great Eastern Railway." *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Eastern_Railway; accessed 10 July 2015)
- ²⁴ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 June 2015), entry for T. A. Archer
- ²⁵ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," *Library and Archives Canada*, (records accessed 2013 & 2015), Record Group 9, series IIC10, volume 4556, Record number 60
- ²⁶ "Commonwealth War Graves Commission," (www.cwgc.org; accessed 3 December 2015), entry for Archer, T. A., Service No. 8887
- ²⁷ "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G; accessed 17 June 2015)
- ²⁸ "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G
- ²⁹ "Bailleul Communal Cemetery, Nord," Commonwealth War Graves Commission (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2000047/Bailleul%20Communal%20Cemetery.%20Nord>; accessed 17 June 2015)
- ³⁰ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Record number 60
- ³¹ "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 19 January 2015), entry for Thomas Albert Archer
- ³² "British Army WWI Service Records, 1914-1920,"), entry for Thomas Albert Archer

