

Sapper Thomas Arnold Clayburn©

Regimental number: 477045

9th Field Company, Royal Engineers

born: 1891–died: 1918

Thomas Arnold Clayburn was born in Holymoorside, near Chesterfield in Derbyshire, in the summer of 1891.¹ He was the youngest of three children born to William and Anna Clayburn.² William, born in 1859 to John and Charlotte Clayburn,³ was a clerk who worked in a number of different industries. At the time of Thomas' birth, he was working for a cotton manufacturer.⁴ Anna was a farmer's daughter,⁵ born in 1866 to Mary and Thomas Lowe Watkinson.⁶

William and Anna were married in Brampton in 1886,⁷ and their son Sydney Drabble was born the next year,⁸ followed by daughter Hilda Mary in 1889.⁹ By 1911 the family had moved about 15 miles north to Ecclesall, near Sheffield, Yorkshire.¹⁰ William was now working as a clerk for a gold and silver refinery, Sydney was a clerk at the University of Sheffield, and Thomas was a joiner and cabinet maker, following in the footsteps of his grandfather John Clayburn.¹¹

In about July 1916,¹² a few months after the death of his father,¹³ Thomas enlisted in the Royal Engineers at Sheffield¹⁴ and was assigned to the 9th Field Company, which was part of the Corps' 4th Division. At the time it was stationed in Northern France just south of Arras,¹⁵ but on 23 July it moved north by train to Poperinge in Belgium.¹⁶ Most of the work involved building and repairing trenches. Thomas' training in carpentry would have been invaluable. In August they were subjected to a gas attack and artillery bombardment near Ypres but did not suffer serious casualties.¹⁷ Then in September they moved south to Bertricot, just north of Amiens.¹⁸

They stayed in this general area until March 1917, when they moved to Ourton, north of Arras.¹⁹ Here they took part in the April offensive,²⁰ digging strong points, putting wells in working order, and clearing roads and the river, which was full of debris. This month, one other rank (non-officer) was killed, and one officer and 14 other ranks wounded.²¹

In September 1917, the company moved to Proyen, Belgium,²² but returned to the Arras sector in October.²³ Towards the end of April 1918, after an enemy attack was repulsed, they were subjected to a gas attack which left 24 other ranks injured (out of a total of about 200).²⁴

In June 1918 near Riez du Vinage, the 9th Field Company suffered four fatalities: two were killed by shells and two died from wounds.²⁵ The following account of the action appears on the site of the Royal British Legion Scotland Kirkwall Branch – Orkney Isles:²⁶

On the morning of 17th June, 1st King's Own made a successful daylight raid on the German trenches in the Vinage Sector of 4th Division's front. That probably triggered heavy German artillery fire later that day, when Sappers Simon Corrigan and Bertie Bloomfield of 9th Field Company RE were killed in action, while Sapper Thomas Clayburn died of his wounds next day. The three sappers were probably working together in the front or support line, when they fell victim to German artillery fire.

Sapper Thomas Clayburn was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station with severe wounds to the chest.²⁷ He died and was buried on 18 June, age 26, in the Pernes British Military

Cemetery (Plot 5, Row B, Grave No. 14). The cemetery lies one kilometre west of Pernes-en-Artois, in the region of Pas de Calais, and contains the remains of 1096 soldiers from the two world wars. The inscription on his tombstone reads

GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS . . . JOHN XV.13.²⁸

Sapper Thomas Arnold Clayburn received the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918).²⁹

Thomas' mother Anna lived another two years, passing away in Ecclesall Bierlow in late 1920, aged 54.³⁰

Thomas' brother Sydney Drabble Clayburn also served in the British Army. He enlisted in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps at Sheffield on 15 December 1915³¹ but was not mobilized until 27 July 1917.³² He served for one year and 202 days and was stationed in India and South Africa.³³ He was demobilized in February 1919.

In 1939 Sydney was living in Cornwall with his unmarried sister Hilda Mary and working as a solicitor's clerk.³⁴ Sydney died in 1953, aged 65,³⁵ and Hilda died in 1971, aged 82.³⁶

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¹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 8 January 2019), entry for Thomas Arnold Clayburn, Registration district: Chesterfield, Inferred county: Derbyshire, Volume: 7b, Page: 62

² "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 8 January 2019), entry for Thomas A. Clayburn, Registration district: Chesterfield, Sub-registration district: Chesterfield, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 40, Piece: 3252, Folio: 25, Page: 19, Household schedule number: 121

³ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 8 January 2019), entry for William Clayburn, Registration district: Chesterfield, Inferred county: Derbyshire, Volume: 10a, Page: 519; "1861 England Census," www.ancestry.ca: accessed 10 January 2019), entry for John Claybourne [sic]

⁴ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 8 January 2019), entry for William Clayburn, Registration district: Chesterfield, Sub-registration district: Chesterfield, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 40, Piece: 3252, Folio: 25, Page: 19, Household schedule number: 121

⁵ "1871 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 9 January 2019), entry for Thomas Watkinson, Registration district: Chesterfield, Sub-registration district: Chesterfield, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 34, Household schedule number: 19, Piece: 3614, Folio: 82, Page: 4

⁶ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 8 January 2019), entry for Anna Watkinson, Registration district: Chesterfield, Inferred county: Derbyshire, Volume: 7b, Page: 520

⁷ "England & Wales Marriages, 1538–1988," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 10 January 2019), entry for William Clayburn

⁸ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 8 January 2019), entry for Sydney Drabble Clayburn, Registration district: Chesterfield, Inferred county: Derbyshire, Volume: 7b, Page: 691

⁹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 8 January 2019), entry for Hilda Mary Clayburn, Registration district: Chesterfield, Inferred county: Derbyshire, Volume: 7b, Page: 702

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- ¹⁰ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 8 January 2019), entry for William Clayburn, Registration district: Ecclesall Bierlow, Registration district number: 509, Sub-registration district: Ecclesall West Central, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 31, Piece: 27751
- ¹¹ "1861 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 10 January 2019), entry for John Claybourne [sic], Registration district: Chesterfield, Sub-registration district: Chesterfield, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 34, Piece: 2532, Folio: 32, Page: 4
- ¹² Based on "War Gratuity Calculator" (<https://wargratitude.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/gratuity-calculator/>: accessed 18 May 2017); "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 19 January 2019), entry for Thomas Arnold Clayburn
- ¹³ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 9 January 2019), entry for William Clayburn, Registration district: Ecclesall Bierlow, Inferred county: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9c, Page: 448
- ¹⁴ "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 8 January 2019), entry for Thomas Arnold Clayburn
- ¹⁵ "UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 January 2019), entry for Royal Engineers Regiment, Sub-unit: 9 Field Company, Piece description: Piece 1469, page 148
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 151
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 157
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 161
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 245
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.246
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 247
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 256
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 257
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15
- ²⁶ "The Corrigall Brothers," by Brian Budge, *The Royal British Legion Scotland Kirkwall Branch – Orkney Isles* (<http://www.rblls-kirkwall.org.uk/memorials/Swk/CorrigallBrothers.pdf>: accessed 29 January 2019)
- ²⁷ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 25 January 2019), entry for Playburn [sic], T. A.
- ²⁸ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 3 January 2019), entry for Clayburn, Thomas Arnold, Service No: 477045
- ²⁹ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 January 2019), entry for Thomas A. Clayburn
- ³⁰ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 9 January 2019), entry for Anna Clayburn, Registration district: Ecclesall Bierlow, Inferred county: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9c, Page: 360
- ³¹ "British Army WWI Pension Records, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 January 2019), entry for Sydney Drabble Clayburn, p. 75914
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 75916
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 75921
- ³⁴ "1939 Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 16 January 2019), entry for Sydney D. Clayburn, Schedule number: 45, Sub-schedule number: 1, Enumeration district: WAKD
- ³⁵ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 9 January 2019), entry for Sydney D. Clayburn, Registration district: Plymouth, Inferred county: Devon, Volume: 7a, Page: 658

³⁶ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 9 January 2019), entry for Hilda Mary Clayburn, Registration district: Liskeard, Inferred county: Cornwall, Volume: 7a, Page: 148