

# Lance Sergeant Thomas Cheshire

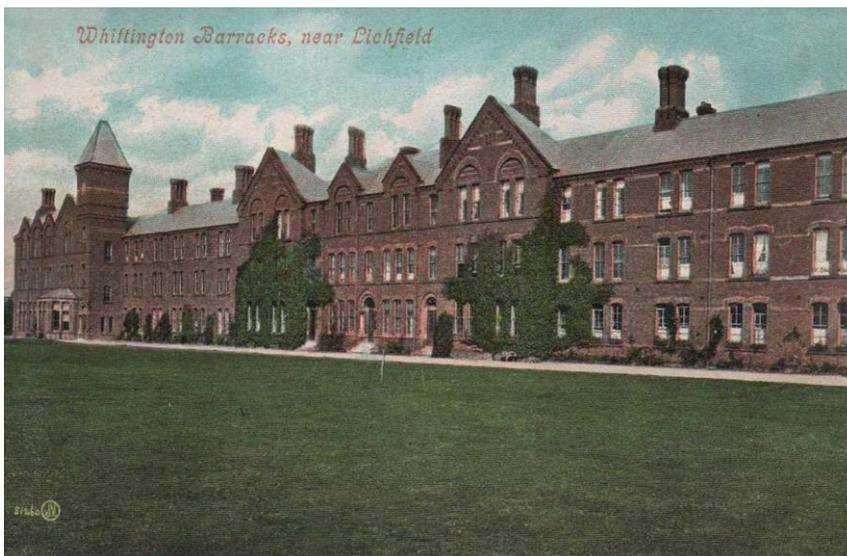
At the age of 65, Thomas Cheshire was quite likely one of the oldest men to join the Army Reserve for one year's service. Having completed a year in the special reserve, Corporal Cheshire received a promotion to Lance Sergeant and continued to serve beyond his designated time until he was declared unfit for further service on August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1916. He died twelve days later on 1<sup>st</sup> September at Queen's hospital, Birmingham.



**Figure 1: A postcard of Milford Station, Stafford, gives a good impression of an LNWR station.**

Thomas was born in Berkswich, near Stafford, on September 15<sup>th</sup> 1849<sup>i</sup> to Benjamin and Mary Ann Cheshire. Benjamin worked for the London and North Midland Railway Company established in 1846. The 1851 census records the family living at 135, Milford, Staffordshire. Thomas had three older siblings, a brother Joseph and two sisters, Hannah and Mary. By 1861, his father had become Station Master at Milford, near Stafford and had moved the family to live nearby at Milford Lodge in Walton.

Thomas was educated at Colwick School<sup>ii</sup>, part of the free school movement supported by wealthy philanthropists and under the chairmanship of Lord Shaftesbury from 1844.<sup>iii</sup> On leaving school Thomas became a grocer before enlisting for twelve years army service at the age of 24 years on July 30<sup>th</sup> 1875. As Private Cheshire, No 212, Thomas joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (98<sup>th</sup> Foot) Prince of Wales North Staffordshire Regiment for 6 years with the colours and 6 years in the reserve (first class), but in the event spent most of his service abroad.



**Figure 2: Whittington Barracks, Garrison HQ of the North Staffordshire Regiment**

Following a period of training and garrison work at home, Thomas was posted to the West Indies on November 6<sup>th</sup> 1873 and served in Barbados for just over two years. His next posting from December 1875 to August 1880 was in Malta during which time he received a wound that kept him in hospital for twelve days.

Thomas's final overseas tour took him to India in August 1880 where he served for five years, and received a promotion to corporal. In 1881, the 98<sup>th</sup> Foot was amalgamated with the 64<sup>th</sup> Foot to become the Prince of Wales North Staffordshire Regiment under the Childers Reforms. The regiment served in Lucknow, India and in places which now form part of post partition India, for example, Karachi (Pakistan) and Quetta (Afghanistan). During his time in India Thomas's health was regularly affected by 'climate'. He endured many instances of serious illness including hepatitis, dysentery (twice), dengue fever and three bouts of ague (high fever) before leaving India for home on November 11<sup>th</sup> 1885.

On his return to Britain, Thomas was immediately discharged from the army at Gosport, having completed his term of engagement and returned to civilian life now aged 36.<sup>iv</sup> Just over two years later, Thomas married Georgina Allen at St Thomas Church in Stafford on Boxing Day 1887.<sup>v</sup> He had by that time taken up employment as a porter in the drapery trade. The couple had no children of their own, but during their early married life in Tillington shared their home with a young boarder called Gabriel Allen who was quite likely related to Georgina (her father's name was George Gabriel Allen).<sup>vi</sup>

By 1901 Georgina and Thomas had moved to Moseley and lived at 9, Laburnum Grove sharing their home with two boarders.

When war was declared, Thomas at the age of 65 years signed on for one year in the Army Reserve. He was appointed as a special reservist on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1914 with the North Staffordshire Regiment in Lichfield, retaining his earlier rank. In his attestation, Corporal Cheshire, No 9574 was described as 'very good' of character and 'honest, sober and hardworking'.



**Figure 3: Queens Hospital Birmingham**

On 20<sup>th</sup> July 1915, Thomas was promoted to Lance Sergeant and continued to serve beyond his designated reserve year. Ten months later in May 1916 Thomas fell ill. A medical report on 7th August 1916 describes the nature of his health problems as 'feeling weak and heavy and unable to walk as usual'. A medical examination found 'his liver enlarged and his heart

weak'. Thomas was discharged as 'physically unfit' for further duty on 22<sup>nd</sup> August.<sup>vii</sup> Twelve days later, on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1916, Thomas died at Queens Hospital, Birmingham following an operation<sup>viii</sup>, just two weeks short of his sixty-seventh birthday. His cause of death was given as 'cancer of the thorax' and 'hepatic carcinoma'.<sup>ix</sup>

**Researched and written by Jim Hone and Edwina Rees**

**Moseley Society History Group**

## Endnotes

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- i De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour 1914-1910
- ii See i
- iii *The Nottinghamshire Baptists and Education*, p 100  
[http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bq/27-3\\_094.pdf](http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bq/27-3_094.pdf)  
Ragged Schools  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ragged\\_school](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ragged_school)
- iv Attestment papers of Thomas Cheshire
- v See i
- vi 1891 census
- vii Discharge papers of Thomas Cheshire
- viii Birmingham Daily Post 5<sup>th</sup> September 1916
- ix Certified copy of death certificate for Thomas Cheshire

## Illustrations

- Figure 1 Post card of Milford Station  
[http://www.stationcolours.info/index.php?p=1\\_2\\_LMS](http://www.stationcolours.info/index.php?p=1_2_LMS)
- Figure 2 Whittington Barracks  
<http://www.oldukphotos.com/graphics/England%20Photos/Staffordshire,%20Lichfield,%20Whittington%20Barracks.jpg>
- Figure 3 Queen's Hospital, Birmingham  
Courtesy of Roy Cockel