

Thomas Woodcock V.C.

Irish Guards 2nd Batalion

b. 19/03/1888 Wigan, Lancashire. d. 27/03/1918 Bullecourt, France.

Thomas Woodcock (1888-1918) was born at 15 Belvoir Street, Wigan, Lancashire on 19th March 1888. His father, Henry Woodcock, was a colliery worker at Arley Mine. He married Isabella "Bella" Twigley on 24th November 1877 at St Patrick's, Wigan. She was born in Lanarkshire, Scotland. Sadly, Henry began to suffer from lumbago and was unable to work. He then went missing on 4th July 1918, and his jacket and cap were found by the canal. His body was discovered when the canal was dragged. It is believed he was also affected by Thomas' death. Thomas was one of eleven children born between 1878 and 1903.

Thomas enlisted on 26th May 1915 and joined the Depot the following day. He embarked at Southampton and landed in France on 22nd December. Having served in the 7th (Guards) Entrenching Battalion from 27th December, he joined 2nd Irish Guards on 19th May 1916. He was attached to 174th Tunnelling Company from 13th-19th August and was admitted to 9th Field Ambulance with diarrhoea on 21st October. It developed into dysentery and he was moved to No 39 Casualty Clearing Station on 24th October and 4th General Hospital at Camiers on the 27th. He didn't return to the Battalion until the end of November, and later attended a Lewis Gun course in February 1917.

On 12th-13th September 1917 north of Broenbeek, Belgium, when an advanced post had held out for 96 hours and was finally forced to retire, the lance-sergeant (John Moyney) in charge of the party and Private Woodcock covered the retirement. After crossing the stream themselves, Private Woodcock heard cries for help behind him - he returned and waded into the stream amid a shower of bombs and rescued another member of the party whom he carried across open ground in daylight towards our front line, regardless of machine-gun fire.

He returned to Britain on leave in February 1918, and on his homecoming on 3rd March, was presented with a marble clock, an illuminated address and more than £200 in cash. The VC was presented by King George V at Buckingham Palace on 9th March 1918. A reception was arranged by the parishioners of St Patrick's Church on the day he left to return to France. During it he said, "I am going back tonight to do a little bit more for the King."

Thomas returned to France on 17th March 1918 and tragically was killed in action ten days later at Bullecourt, France. He was buried in Douchy-les-Ayette British Cemetery, and his wife received a parcel of his personal effects, including a bloodstained newspaper and a photo of him surrounded by family and civic dignitaries. The photo was less than a month old. Mary received a widow's pension for herself and her two children from 28th October 1918. In addition to Thomas, she also lost her daughter, Nora on 11th July 1918.

Thomas was represented at the 1920 VC Garden Party at Buckingham Palace by his son, John Henry Woodcock. In addition to his VC, he was also awarded the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal 1914-20, and Victory Medal 1914-19. On the 5th March 1964, his daughter-in-law, Mrs Hargreaves, loaned the VC to the Irish Guards. The medals were received by the

Colonel of the Irish Guards, Field Marshal Earl Alexander of Tunis. The VC is held by the Irish Guards and is in the Guards Museum, Wellington Barracks, London.

LOCATION OF MEDAL: IRISH GUARDS RHQ, LONDON.
 BURIAL PLACE: DOUCHY-LES-AYETTE CEMETERY, FRANC



On the 26th of may 1915 a recruitment day was held at St Patricks Church in Wigan. Tor a second battallion of the Irish Guards. In the early stages of the war the first battallion had sustained many losses. This scene was comon place in the Irish communities of England. In 1915 with the IRA and Sinn Fien activity, Ireland was not considered safe for the recruiting sergeants. Instead they recruited from the Irish communities on the mailand. On the 26th of May as far as I can ascertain nine young men all exempt miners enlisted They were;

- Thomas Woodcock,
- James Scally,
- Patrick Kenny,
- William Ford.
- John Haliday,
- James Speakman,
- Thomas Parkinson,
- James Murphy.
- John Derbyshire.

They were first part of an Irish guards entrenched unit before joining the 2nd Battalion. Between 1916 and 1918 they were all killed in action, with the exception of Sergeant John Derbyshire who had been promoted to sergeant. He was wounded and sent home but died due to his wounds in 1919. John Derbyshire was not included on the cenotaph.

Irish Guards Wigan Cenotaph



Thomas Woodcocks gravestone

