

**Grange U3A Family and Social History
Group Project on the Grange WW1 War Memorial**



Cambrai Memorial, Louverval, Nord, France.

**A short biography in commemoration of
John Thompson 1883- 1917**

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John Thompson was the second son of George Thompson and Mary Anne (*nee Major*) of Grange over Sands. Born in 1883 and baptised on the 4th November, John was the second eldest of seven children.

In 1891 George lost his wife, aged just 33 years, and the family lost their mother. The census shows that the children were scattered amongst George's brothers. John and his elder brother Richard, went straight to his uncle John in Nether Kellet, and Emily and Edward were sent to be with William Thompson in Cavendish Street, Cartmel. Meanwhile George was living with Margaret Turner in Grange Fell Road, Grange over Sands.

By the next census in 1901, John, Edward and Emily were living with a maternal aunt, Margaret Elizabeth Major, at 12 Vine Street, Lancaster. Sadly, Margaret also died young aged forty, barely a year after the census.

In 1911 George had been reunited with three of his children, John, Edward and Emily at 12 Vine Street, with their cousin Leonard Major and son of Margaret Major, who had taken them in to her family. It must be said that the Thompson family *en mass* had really stepped up to the plate to look after the children.



**Picture believed to be of John Thompson (2nd from left)
at Loos 1915, cleaning up the trench in winter.**

The 1st/5th Battalion was a Territorial unit which after mobilisation in August 1914 was assigned to Home Defence duties in the Northwest of England. From September to November 1914 the battalion was used for guard duties on the Great Western Railway line between Didcot and Oxford. (*See Thomas Ward biography for more details*).

In the February of 1915 the regiment embarked for France, landing at Le Havre. The battalion was one of the first Territorial units to be sent overseas and was initially part of the 5th Division. Subsequently they were attached to the 166th South Lancashire Brigade which was itself part of the 55th West Lancashire Division at the time of John Thompson's death.

John was killed in the Battle of Cambrai which took place between the 20th - November and the 3rd December 1915. The battle was famous because of the involvement of tanks *en mass* for the first time. John was killed in the prelude to the tank advance along with many others from the 1st/5th Battalion. His battalion was in action on the 30th November in the Ossus sector supporting the 1st/10th Liverpool Scottish Regiment. The action was near the hamlet of Epehy. The units of 1st/5th KORLR, Liverpool Scottish and the 1st/5th North Lancashire were cut off and surrounded. They resisted until 05.00am the following morning (1st December) when they succeeded in reaching their own lines.

During the German counter-attack the battalion had to withdraw due to it being outflanked by German "Storm troops". The initial response by the British High Command to this withdrawal was that they had collapsed too easily. Other regiments in the same Division had been wiped out to a man. It must be remembered that the generals still believed in "Death or Glory" and that every soldier would fight to the last man.

Author: David Clapp

To be completed