

Private Matthew Thomson

MM 292170/5679



7th Battalion Gordon Highlanders

Private Matthew Thomson MM is buried with a CWWG headstone in the North East corner of Slains cemetery, close to the old Mort house.

Matthew was born on the 22nd December 1892 in Collieston.

The 1901 census shows that he lived at 10 Low Town, Collieston with his mother Williamina Thomson, grandmother Annie Thomson, brothers William aged 11, George aged 5 and sisters Anne aged 3 and Harriet aged 11 months.

Matthew attended Slains Public School in Collieston where he studied core subjects plus singing, drill and drawing. The school roll varied as families moved in and out of the area, fluctuating between 55 to 77 children in both the junior and senior division, however dropped by 30% when the fishing ceased.

Attendance rates were generally high, however, were impacted by inclement weather, potato gathering, grouse beating, harvest times and illnesses, such as colds, flu, whooping cough, measles and diphtheria.

The 1911 census shows that Matthew had left home and was now working as a horseman at Ardmadden, Tulloch, near Old Meldrum part of the household of William Simpson, a farmer.

He joined the 7th Battalion Gordon Highlanders in January 1916.



Matthew first saw action at the Somme, a series of hard-fought engagements lasting from July to November 1916, where all the Gordons fought with great distinction.

His next action was at the battle of Pilkem Ridge during the Arras offensive which lasted from April to May 1917.

Reports show that Matthew was injured in May 1917 but no further details are known.



He won his Military Medal on the 31st July 1917 at the third battle of Ypres, also known as Passchendaele. The battle lasted from the 31st July 1917 to the 10th November 1917.

The award of the Military Medal was for "Bravery in the Field" and announced formally in the London Gazette, on 18th October 1917.

One Gordon Highlander remarked "Mon the barrage was that fine you could light your pipe at it".

Matthew then fought at the battle of Cambrai on the Hindenburg Line in November 1917.

The next engagement was at the German spring offensive on the 21st March 1918, known as the St Michael Offensive in the Cambrai sector.

The Regimental History highlights the grievous loss with 1 officer killed, 5 wounded and 12 missing. 36 other ranks were killed. 178 wounded, and 482 were listed as missing.

By the evening of the 22nd of March 1918, the 7th Gordons only mustered 8 officers and about 100 other ranks.

Matthew was captured by the Germans during the bitter and confused fighting on the 22nd March 1918 at Boursies and sent to Parchim Prisoner of War Camp which is in the German state of Mecklenburg and released in December 1918.

Sadly, for the 7th Battalion, their losses had been so critical the Battalion was amalgamated with 6th Gordons at Frevent-Capelle on 5th October 1918, to form 6th/7th Battalion Gordon Highlanders.

It is worth noting that about 50,000 men served with the Gordon Highlanders during the Great War. Nearly 10,000 were killed, 19,000 wounded and many missing. A sobering reminder of the sacrifice and service of all the men from Aberdeen and the Northeast.

Matthew was also awarded the British War medal and the Victory medal.

He died on the 8th February 1920 aged 29 as a result of wounds or injuries sustained during his service.



Lest we forget