

DRIVER TOM BEESLEY

128263, 11th Division, Ammunition Column, Royal Field Artillery

Died aged 19 on 13 January 1917

Remembered with honour at **Thiepval Memorial, France**; Pier and Face 1A & 8A

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



Thiepval Memorial



Driver T. Beesley [Graphic 10/2/1917]



Royal Field Artillery

TOM BEESLEY was born in Tewkesbury in early 1898 to Thomas Beesley and Ann (formerly Griffin). Thomas was a wheelwright and blacksmith, born in Tewkesbury in 1864; Ann, born in 1855, came from Withington. They married in 1884 and had seven children of whom five were still alive in 1911. Tom's grandfather, James Beesley, was born in Warwickshire and came to live in Tewkesbury by 1841 to work as an engineer in the silk works; in 1871 he was an engine driver. Between 1901 and 1917 the family lived at 2 North East Terrace and then at 9 Chance Street. Tom was a pupil of the Council Schools and, on leaving school, went to work for Messrs. Frisby's at the Cross. As a member of the local Church Lads' Brigade, he was occupied for several months on the outbreak of war in protecting one of the Midland's waterways. On completing his period of guard duty, Tom went to work in a munitions factory in Birmingham.

'Thomas' Beesley enlisted in Aston, Warwickshire, in January 1916 around his 18th birthday, becoming a driver in the Royal Field Artillery. Given the timing it is quite likely that he volunteered under the 'Derby Scheme'; under that arrangement, men who were born in 1898 were required to serve from the age of 18 years and 7 months, and this category of recruit began to be mobilised from 7 October 1916. Soon after, Tom was probably posted to 11th Division, Ammunition Column. The role of ammunition columns was to bring ammunition and other supplies to the gun batteries in the divisional artillery brigades from supply dumps. The 11th (Northern) Division, part of Kitchener's New Army, had already served in Gallipoli in 1915, before being sent to France for the *Battles of the*

Somme. After the final phase of the campaign in November 1916, military operations by both sides were mostly restricted to survival in the rain, snow, fog, waterlogged trenches and shell-holes. In January 1917 the division was still there with British attempts to keep German attention on the Somme front by making localised attacks to capture portions of the German defences and deflect attention from preparations for the Allied offensive at Arras planned for April 1917. During the *Operations on the Ancre*, the 11th Division took part in one of these attacks known as the *Capture of Munich Trench* (10-11 January).

Driver Tom Beesley died of wounds on 13 January 1917, probably sustained in that action. In February the *Register* reported that: "*Mrs Cook, sister of the late Driver Beesley, ... has received a letter from the deceased soldier's Commanding Officer, who says 'Driver Beesley was engaged with a fatigue party near the trenches, on the return journey a shell burst near the party, and mortally wounded ... he died without recovering consciousness. He was buried the same afternoon about 4 pm in a military cemetery ... he was always a willing worker and a faithful soldier'.*"

Although Driver Beesley was buried in a military cemetery, his grave marker must have been lost in later fighting. His body was never recovered or identified and he is commemorated instead on the *Thiepval Memorial to the Missing*. His death was commemorated in the *Register* in January 1918 by his family. He was probably the first conscript – but certainly the first member of the local Church Lads' Brigade – to lose his life in the war.