

# Cheltenham & Gloucester Branch of The Western Front Association

## Remembering one of Gloucestershire's Fallen



*Chelmsford, March 1915  
Thomas is sitting at the front with his wife, Agnes*

### Thomas Kilby Keeley Corporal 646, 1/5 Gloucestershire Regiment Lance Sergeant 238010, 2/4 Gloucestershire Regiment

**Thomas Kilby Keeley** was born in Campden on 14 January 1888, the second son of James Edward and Mary Ann Keeley of Lower High Street, and was baptised at St James's Church on 1 April. His father was a native of the town and in 1901 was employed as a carpenter on a farm.

Thomas was educated in the town and then found employment as a baker's porter, although he later worked for Thomas Parsons as a plumber.

When war was declared he had already been a member of the Territorial Army for a number of years. He was mobilised on 5 August 1914 and went to Chelmsford with the 1/5 Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment for final training before they were posted overseas. That was where he married Agnes Ellen Sharpe before the battalion arrived in France on 29 March 1915.

The next few months were spent in the Ploegsteert Wood sector, south of Ypres. Here

they were able to gain experience of life in the front line in a relatively quiet part of the Western Front.

While he was at the front his initial period of service with the Territorial Army expired and he returned to England, where he went to Bristol and enlisted in the 2/4 (City of Bristol) Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment. He returned to France and had served a period of one year and eight months at the front when he was killed during the Battle of Passchendaele.

The battalion were in training at Nieuland in France at the start of August 1917. They practised a trench attack on 7 August and there were church parades on 5 and 12 August. On 15 August they marched to Esquelbecq, where they entrained at 3pm and detrained at Hopoutre at 6.30pm, before marching to a camp for the night. The following day they left the camp at 6.20pm

**Thomas Kilby Keeley**  
Corporal 646, 1/5 Gloucestershire Regiment  
Lance Sergeant 238010, 2/4 Gloucestershire Regiment

and marched to a position north-east of Ypres where trench shelters and bivouacs were erected. On 17 August they relieved the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Irish Regiment in the front line near Wieltje and the battalion diary notes that there was heavy shelling and an artillery duel all day on 18 August.

Thomas's wife received a letter from his captain informing her of her husband's death: *"It is with very deep regret that I have to inform you that your husband, Sergt Keeley, was killed in action on*

*19 August 1917. He was a hero to the end and met his death while advancing on a German position. He was a great fellow, loved and esteemed by all his officers and men. To me his loss is very great indeed. I shall never forget the excellent work that he did for me at all times."*

Thomas was 29 years old when he died and was the second son that James and Mary Keeley had lost within four months. He is buried in New Irish Farm Cemetery, near Ypres.



*New Irish Farm Cemetery, near Ypres*