

## **Thomas Birtchnell**

**1889 - 1916**

**Moved to Oxford as an adult**

**Printer's machine minder**

**Died near Albert, aged 26, on 8 July 1916**

### **Family**

Thomas Bodsworth Birtchnell\* was born on 28 October 1889 in Aylesbury. He was the youngest of the ten surviving children of George Birtchnell, a stonemason, and Betsy Boyce. At their marriage in 1866 George had been able to sign his name but Betsy, who was a servant, could not.

Most of Tom's brothers and sisters went into printing-related work, and by 1911 he was a printer's machine minder. His father had died the previous year, and he was living with his mother and three of his sisters, still in Aylesbury. But at some point before 1916 Tom moved to Oxford with other family members.

### **War Service: 1/3 Kent Field Company, Royal Engineers**

Tom joined the 1/3 Kent Field Company of the Royal Engineers, enlisting at Gillingham. His unit was originally sent to Gallipoli but returned to France in February 1916, and Tom seems to have joined them there. They worked on communications and water supplies, but when the Somme offensive began in July they were attached to attacking brigades in the 29<sup>th</sup> Division. This unit was in action straight away at the Battle of Albert which lasted from 1-13 July, and it was on 8 July that Tom died, aged 26. He was buried in Englebelmer Cemetery, and his family paid for these words to be added to his headstone: "Though gone from our sight never absent from our thoughts". His name was also added to his father's gravestone in Aylesbury, recording that he was killed in action at Beaumont, France. The village of Beaumont-Hamel had been attacked by the 29<sup>th</sup> Division on the first day of the Somme and they had suffered huge losses there. It was not finally taken by the British until November 1916.

Tom's mother appears to have continued to live at Kingston Road in Oxford for some years, but then to have returned to Aylesbury.

\* Recorded on his father's gravestone as "Tom Bosworth Birtchnell"

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This is the story of one of the men who appear on the war memorial of Walton Street Methodist Church, which can now be seen at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church in Oxford, UK. These stories were compiled in 2019 based on detailed research by Stephanie Jenkins

([http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/war/walton\\_street\\_chapel/index.html](http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/war/walton_street_chapel/index.html)), supplemented by information from a variety of military sources.