

William Edward Thornhill, M.S.M.

Born 3 October 1872, Basford, Notts
Sergeant, No 66563

Died 21 January 1919, Dawlish, aged 46
Royal Army Medical Corps

William Edward Thornhill came from a Nottinghamshire family to live and work in Dawlish as Secretary to the Dawlish Gas Company. He was a few days short of 40 years old when he enlisted in Exeter.

Thomas Thornhill (1840-) was born and lived for most of his life in Beeston, Notts. He married Emma Maltby in 1865 (GRO ref 1865, June, Basford, vol 7b, p 121) and they had eight children between 1867 and 1883. **William Edward Thornhill** was the third child, born when they were living at Beeston (BRO birth ref 1872, Oct-Dec, Basford, vol 7b, p 135).

In 1881 the family were at William Street, Beeston:

Thomas Thornhill,	head,	40	Silk warper	born	Beeston
Emma	"	wife,	36		Chilwell
Joseph	"	son,	14	Domestic servant	"
Elizabeth	"	dau,	10	Scholar	"
Edward	"	son,	8	"	Beeston
Mary Ann	"	dau,	6	"	"
Henry A	"	son,	4	"	"
Fredrick	"	son,	2		"
Fanny	"	dau,	5/12		"

In 1891 **Wm Ed Thornhill** was recorded as a boarder at 2 Church Cottages, Church Street, Great Rowsley, Derbyshire and was a Booking Clerk for the 'M R Co.' (Midland Railway Company?).

On 8 May 1895 **William Edward Thornhill** married Emily Ethel Evans at St Andrew's, Derby. Emily Ethel Evans (1873-1949) was the daughter of the widow Emily Evans who was living at 19 Wellington Street, Derby in 1891. The young couple moved in to live with her mother where his occupation was shown as being a Railway Clerk.

By 1911 the family had moved to Dawlish, living at 10 Lansdown Place, and **William Edward Thornhill** was the head of household and 'Public Accountant and Secretary to the Dawlish Gas and Coke Co Ltd'.

They had two sons, Edward Percy Thornhill, aged 3, and Henry Arthur Thornhill, aged 2, and Emily Evans, mother-in-law, was living with them, aged 66. A further child, Dorothy, was born at the end of the year.

On 18 September 1915 **William Edward Thornhill** enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps at the age of 39 and 350 days at Exeter, having received a 'Notice' (presumably conscription). The Medical Examination gave him as being 5'7" tall, of medium build and having a slight stammer in speech.

His service records exist in damaged form and they show that he was posted to 'X'Company on 23 September as a Private. His home address at this time was Park Road, Dawlish.

On 20 October he was posted to 99th Field Ambulance in the 33rd Division and embarked at Southampton on 12 November 1915 and disembarked at Le Havre on 15 November. On 3 December he was appointed Clerk with pay, but reverted to ordinary duty on 22 July 1916. He was promoted to Corporal on 14 August 1916.

He was appointed Acting Sergeant with pay on 25 November 1916.

He was given 11 days leave from 5 to 15 November 1917.

He was appointed Sergeant on 24 January 1918. He was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal and this was published in the London Gazette of 18 January 1919. (*The Meritorious Service Medal is a silver medal for distinguished service, or for gallantry, principally by non-commissioned officers of all of the British armed forces and of Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service.* [Wikipedia](#))

The Field Ambulance was a mobile front line medical unit (it was not a vehicle), manned by troops of the Royal Army Medical Corps. Most Field Ambulances came under command of a Division, and each had special responsibility for the care of casualties of one of the Brigades of the Division. The theoretical capacity of the Field Ambulance was 150 casualties, but in battle many would need to deal with very much greater numbers. The Field Ambulance was responsible for establishing and operating a number of points along the casualty evacuation chain, from the Bearer Relay Posts which were up to 600 yards behind the Regimental Aid Posts in the front line, taking casualties rearwards through an Advanced Dressing Station (ADS) to the Main Dressing Station (MDS). It also provided a Walking Wounded Collecting Station, as well as various rest areas and local sick rooms. The Field Ambulances would usually establish 1 ADS per Brigade, and 1 MDS for the Division.

When it was at full strength a Field Ambulance was composed of 10 officers and 224 men. It was divided into three Sections. In turn, those Sections had Stretcher Bearer and Tented subsections. RAMC officers and men did not carry weapons or ammunition.

Newspaper reports told of him being given leave at the end of November and on returning home to 10 Park Road he was 'completely broken down in health'. He died on 21 January 1919 and the cause was given as 'acute nephritis and Syncope', whilst on leave from France.

Syncope: Partial or complete loss of consciousness with interruption of awareness of oneself and ones surroundings. When the loss of consciousness is temporary and there is spontaneous recovery, it is referred to as *syncope* or, in nonmedical quarters, fainting.

Nephritis is a general term used to describe a group of diseases that cause swelling or inflammation of the glomerulus. This inflammation reduces the kidney's ability to filter waste from the blood.

The funeral was reported in the Western Times on 25 January. (see separate document) Among the mourners were the widow, Emily Ethel Thornhill, and the two sons, Edward Percy Thornhill (born 9 June 1907 – 1989) and Henry Arthur Thornhill (born 13 December 1908 – 1979). There is no mention of the daughter, Dorothy (born 9 December 1911) but traditional funerals were often male only events.

From the Exeter & Plymouth Gazette of 24 January 1919

"Sergeant W E Thornhill, R.A.M.C., has died at his residence, Park Road. In September 1915, when the need for men was particularly pressing, he offered himself, although his age was 47 (*actually 39*), and was accepted. After a lengthy period of service in France he returned home on leave just before last Christmas, completely broken down in health. In civil life he was an

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accountant, and up to the time of joining the army acted as Secretary to the Dawlish Gas Company. He leaves a widow and three young children, with whom much sympathy is expressed. The morning following his death it was officially announced that the Meritorious Service Medal had been conferred upon the deceased for valuable services rendered with the Army in France and Flanders."

His widow received a Death Grant of £2. 7s. 10d. Probate was granted on 24 March 1919 to his widow and the effects came to £241. 10s. 8d.

The Devon Roll of Honour 'Thornhill, William Edward, Sergt, R.A.M.C., 1st Jan 1919, Dawlish' (*incorrect date of death*)

Dawlish War memorial inscription: THORNHILL W.E. SERGT. R.A.M.C.

Devon Heritage site info: 66563 Sergeant William Edward Thornhill of 99 Field Ambulance, the Royal Army Medical Corps. Parents not known. Born in Beeston, Notts in 1873. Died 21 January 1919 aged 46. Buried in Dawlish Cemetery.

Commonwealth War Graves entry: THORNHILL, W E Serjeant 66563
21/01/1919 Royal Army Medical Corps, 99th Field Amb
Grave Ref: 2340. [Dawlish Cemetery](#)

Last known address: 10 Park Road, Dawlish

Next of kin: Emily Ethel Thornhill, widow

References:

Free Birth, marriage, death refs

The long, long trail (Field Ambulance data)

33rd Division brief history - <http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/order-of-battle-of-divisions/33rd-division/>

refs via subscription websites;

Hastings family tree - Ancestry

census data

Army Service recorded