

Acting Lance Corporal John Samuel Thomson[©]

Regimental number: M2/227858

Army Service Corps

born: 26 June 1885–died: 31 October 1918

John Samuel Thomson was born on 26 June 1885 in Dumfries, Scotland, the second child of John Thomson and Helen, née Hill.¹ Their first child was a daughter, also named Helen, born in 1877.²

When she wed John, Helen was a widow; she had married Michael Watt in 1866³ and borne him two daughters—Agnes (b. 1867)⁴ and Jane (b. 1868),⁵ though Jane died in the year of her birth.⁶

Michael Watt was a railway guard at the time of Agnes' birth in 1867, and he met a tragic death on the job three years later in 1870. He was serving as a goods train guard, signalling to the driver to hook up to some wagons when he slipped and fell on the tracks and was run over by several of them. He died an hour later, after suffering greatly.⁷

After Michael's death, Helen worked as a dressmaker before marrying John Thomson two years later.^{8, 9} At the time of his wedding, John worked for the railway, but he subsequently had a number of occupations: from steamship fireman in 1881¹⁰ to farm servant in 1885,¹¹ crane man in a shipbuilding yard in 1891,¹² and farmer in 1901.¹³ He died in 1909, aged 61.¹⁴ Helen was still alive in 1921, living with her daughter Agnes in Norfolk.¹⁵

John Samuel, while born in Dumfries, was living in Plantation (a district of Glasgow) with his parents, sister and half-sister in 1891.¹⁶ Ten years later the family was living on Fauld's Farm in Cumbernauld, northeast of Glasgow, where John Sr. was the farmer and John Samuel was a blacksmith's apprentice.¹⁷ His sister Helen was also living there with her two young daughters (see below), as was John Sr.'s widowed father James.

In 1911, John Samuel, now a blacksmith journeyman, married Margaret Brown, spinster, a dressmaker from Polmont, Stirlingshire.¹⁸ She was the daughter of Andrew Brown, a coal miner who 13 years later would lose his life in one of the worst Scottish mining disasters in history, the Redding Pit disaster, near Polmont.¹⁹

On 25 September 1923, 73 miners, including Andrew Brown, were nearing the end of a long overnight shift in No. 23 Pit when there was a sudden in-rush of water. Six men escaped up the main shaft, 21 were rescued that day, and three bodies were brought up, but 43 miners remained entombed underground as the rising flood prevented any further rescue. It was two months later before their bodies were recovered.²⁰ Eleven miners, including Andrew Brown, were found together at the lowest part of the mine in what was likely an air lock, as messages to miners' family members were found in a tin belonging to one of the miners, indicating they survived for a number of days before the oxygen ran out. Andrew, at 65, was the oldest of those entombed.

John Samuel and Margaret had two children: John in 1912²¹ and Alison Dalrymple in 1915.²² In September 1916, John Samuel enlisted in Hamilton, Lanarkshire, and was assigned to the Mechanical Transport Depot of the Army Service Corps, in London. His occupation was listed as taxi driver. He was called up for service on 6 October 1916 and transferred to France a month later with the 1st Base Mechanical Transport Depot.

Over the next year he was assigned to various mechanical transport companies for short periods, but most frequently to 402 Mechanical Transport Company. This company was formed in July 1916 and served as the ammunition column for the 25th Brigade Royal Garrison Artillery,²³ responsible for transporting the heavy artillery and shells where they were needed. On 23 March 1918, Private Thomson was promoted to the rank of Acting Lance Corporal.

In October 1918, 402 Company was operating in the area east of Arras.²⁴ On 30 October an Albion truck with one of the Siege Battery Ammunition Columns was badly damaged by shellfire, and there were six casualties, including Acting Lance Corporal Thomson. He was taken that day to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, where he died of "wounds received in action" the following day. He was buried on 1 November 1918 in the Auberchicourt British Military Cemetery (Grave 2, Plot 1, Row A).²⁵ The inscription on his grave reads:

"LOVED BY ALL WHO KNEW HIM"

Auberchicourt, a village about 12 km to the east of Douai, was occupied by Commonwealth troops in October 1918. The Auberchicourt British Cemetery, which is just west of the village, was set up at the end of October and was used until February 1919 while the 6th, 23rd and 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Stations were located nearby.

His awards file was destroyed,²⁶ but Acting Lance Corporal Thomson would have been eligible for the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) for his service.

John Samuel's sister **Helen** (also spelt Hellen or Ellen) was listed as a message girl in the 1891 Census at the age of 13.²⁷ In 1897 she married George Findlay, a railway signalman.²⁸ Both were 19 at the time. They had three children, Ellen (b. 1898),²⁹ Agnes (b. 1901),³⁰ and George (b. 1905),³¹ but both Agnes³² and George³³ died in infancy.

John Samuel's half-sister **Agnes** was living with John Samuel, his sister Helen, their mother and John Thomson senior in 1891, working as a dressmaker.³⁴ That same year she married William Wilson, a grocer.³⁵ By 1901 they had moved to Norfolk, England, where William was now a farmer.³⁶ They had five children³⁷ and were still living in Norfolk in 1939, by which time William had retired.³⁸ Agnes died in 1960 at age 93.³⁹



1915 Recruiting Poster,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Army_Service_Corps#/media/File:Army_Service_Corps_recruiting_poster_1915.jpg

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¹ "Statutory Registers-Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 20 May 2025), entry for Thomson, John Samuel, Dumfries, City/County: Dumfriesshire, GROS data 821/ 279

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³ "Scotland, Select Marriages, 1561-1910," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 26 May 2025), entry for Helen Hill, 1866

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- ⁵ "Scotland, Select Births and Baptisms, 1564–1950," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 26 May 2025), entry for Jane Watt
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- ⁷ "Fatal Accident," *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, 30 April 1870, page 5, *British Newspaper Archive* (<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000962/18700430/056/0005>: accessed 26 May 2025), search for Michael Watt
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- ¹³ "1901 Scotland census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 May 2025), entry for John Thomson, Enumeration District: 3, Household schedule number: 27, LINE: 1, Roll: cssct1901_168
- ¹⁴ "UK and Ireland, Find a Grave Index, 1300s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 26 May 2025), entry for John Thomson
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- ¹⁶ "1881 Scotland census," *Ancestry*, entry for John Thomson
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- ²¹ "UK, British Army World War I Service Records, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 30 May 2025), entry for John Thomson Thomson [sic]. Unless otherwise specified, all information about his military service comes from this source.
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- ³⁴ "1891 Scotland census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 May 2025), entry for Agnes W Thomson, Enumeration District: 25, Household schedule number: 42, LINE: 1, Roll: cssct1891_301
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