



Archibald Thomas Bentham

194995 Sapper, 14th Division Signal Company, Royal Engineers

He died in the Battle of Menin Road on 22nd September 1917 in France, aged 29

Archibald is buried at Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension Nord, France

1889 April 23 rd Born Oct 1 st 1888 No. 126	Archibald Thomas	Thomas Edward + Maria	Bentham	Haynford	Policeman	J. F. Darrell.
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Archibald was not really a local lad, born in Haynford (the village's old name), in 1888. Archibald's father was a policeman; P.C. Thomas Edward Bentham's job seems to have kept the family on the move. By 1891 the family had moved from Hainford (the village's new name), where Archibald and his older sister, Edith, had been born, to Frettenham. In 1901, the family were in Horsham St Faiths where the family had grown to include three more, younger, siblings. Two, Stanley and Gertrude, were, as might be expected, born in Frettenham, the youngest, Eric, in Old Carlton reflecting the family's continued movements.

The news reports of the time indicate that P.C. Bentham was enjoying a fairly typical career dealing with chicken thefts, poaching and of course drunkenness! Two years later, in 1903, the now Sgt Bentham was in Terrington, pursuing the local villains including, once more, chicken thieves. Chickens were not really raised for eating but for their egg laying capacity and were a lot pricier than they are today. Chickens were an oft dealt in commodity but were also easy to steal!

Archibald's father, Thomas, had started off in service. At age 20 he was the sole gardener for the positively ancient James White, the 92 years old Rector of Soley, Bentham's home village. The household of two, White and his middle-aged spinster niece, had 8 live in staff, although this did include two nurses. The nurses, assuming they were there to care for the rector, did a good job; the old boy survived until March 16th, 1885, aged 96. Perhaps with the advent of a new Rector, Bentham decided it was time for a change of job and at that point joined the police force, or perhaps it was marriage that provoked the change of career? In fact, the two may have happened more or less simultaneously as Thomas Bentham Jnr married Maria Scott in late 1885. The eulogy that accompanied his retirement in 1919 confirms that he did indeed enrol in the County Police in 1885.

By 1911, the Bentham family were (mostly) in Terrington, a village in the northern part of Norfolk. Thomas Bentham had, exceptionally been promoted from Sergeant to Police Superintendent skipping over the intermediate rank of Inspector, the older two children were away from home, Stanley Edward was an accounts clerk in the Overseers Office, essentially the office which administered local welfare, either in the Parish or in the Workhouse. Gertrude was a dressmakers apprentice and Eric John, a grocers apprentice. Eric was also simultaneously in the Boy Scouts, appearing in a charity fundraising sketch show with the 'Wesleyan Concert Party' which seems to

have consisted of the young ladies to balance the young fellows! It seems strange to think of boy scouts being full time workers as well as scouts! The following year, 1912, Stanley Edward, joined the police to work his way up the ranks, like his father, Thomas, he too eventually achieved the rank of Superintendent.

Meanwhile, Archibald Bentham had chosen not to follow his father into law keeping, instead he joined another institution, the Post Office and, as a Sorting Clerk and Telegraphist, had been nominated to Wisbech in 1906, aged just 18 this would have been his first 'proper' job. As an interesting side note, Archibald's grandfather, Thomas Bentham Snr, had combined shoe making with being a letter carrier. This was a surprisingly common combination; I suppose shoe making could be fitted in around the work and a lot of shoe leather would have been used on a mail round! So, Thomas Snr was the early Victorian version of a post man, Archibald was the high-tech 20th century version! In later years this was a very respectable family but hopping back one generation and we find Thomas's father was illegitimate as revealed in his marriage lines. More a cause for embarrassment in the late 19th to mid-20th Century than any time before or since.

1858. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of Saint Giles in the County of City of Norwich

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
302	1858	Thomas Bentham	23	Bachelor	Shoemaker	Holy, Norfolk		
	March 2 nd	Mary Ann Bailey	26	Spinster		Saint Giles	Edward Bailey	Labourer

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, after Reading by me, Richard Sedgwick

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Thomas Bentham and Mary Ann Bailey in the Presence of us, Henry Howard and Harriett Isaac R. Sedgwick R. e. u. m. b. e. n. t.

The 1911 census finds Archibald respectably lodging up in Walsoken, Wisbech in the home of a middle-aged couple along with another young Sorting Clerk. The end of 1911 sees the marriage of Archibald to Lillian Bentham who, in the same census, was the only one of her 14 siblings still living at home, with her widowed mother, in their 6-room house on Ramnoth Road. It is quite possible that Lillian's 68 years old mother had limited literacy as Archibald had filled out the census on behalf of his future mother-in-law. The 1901 census reveals Lillian's father to have been a James Bunning, a farmer at the Manor House, Walsoken, who died in mid-1904. Lillian was a little older than her husband, her father was not a large farmer, claiming only 50 acres in one return. In March 1877, described as a cow keeper, he was brought before the Bench for having assaulted Robert Watts.

The Bench advised the parties to come to terms . . . Watts did not seem disposed to¹

Although this is the only example I have of James Bunnings' wayward behaviour, his widow appears to have been only semi-literate, maybe the family was a bit rough and ready for the aspiring Benthams.

Slightly surprisingly, Archibald's sister, Edith Maria, was also in Wisbech, in the workhouse which startled me slightly until I realised she was working there as a seamstress and 'Girl's Caretaker'.

¹ Cambridge Chronicle and Journal 24 Mar 1877

Further information has been received relative to the death of Wireless Operator Archie T. Bentham, Royal Engineers, (son of Supt. Bentham), who died on September 22nd. It is from the commanding officer of the company, and he writes :—" It is with deep regret I have to inform you of the death in hospital of Sapper Bentham. During the time he was with the unit he made himself universally respected by both officers and men for unfailing devotion to duty. He was a thoroughly competent man and a real trier. He was always ready to take on anything that turned up without complaint, and always did his work conscientiously and thoroughly whatever may have been the circumstances. He died in the casualty clearing station from toxin poisoning brought on through a poisoned foot. He was under the personal care of the colonel and the consulting physician until the last, and he endeared himself to them all by his cheerful manner. His death is deeply regretted by us all, and I can only assure you that our sympathies go out to you in your great sorrow."

Diss Express
12 Oct 1917

Archibald enlisted in the Corps of Royal Engineers (14th Div. Sig. Coy) in Wisbech in 1914, his telegraphy skills would have been much in demand, particularly in Signals, and one might have hoped would have kept him out of the direct line of fire. However, whilst shells and bullets were no respecters of skills and talents, there was more than one way of dying during this devastating war. Archibald met his death, not dramatically in the heat of battle but painfully and slowly and just as heroically due to a poisoned foot. He seems

to have been a much-respected member of his unit.

Thomas Bentham had left Terrington to work "at Harleston for a number of years', during and immediately after the First World War. When his youngest son Eric enlisted, he gave his Next of Kin's address as Harleston. By a bizarre co-incidence of timing, whilst his son lay ill in France, Thomas himself was also laid low, "lying seriously ill at his home in Harleston". It was ill health that forced Bentham's retirement in 1919, as well as the severe (mystery) illness which kept from duty for 5 months, in 1918 he was involved in two severe crashes within a few months, resulting in on-going health issues; he made a gradual recovery and lasted another 24 years, dying at the grand old age of 80 in North Walsham. The Benthams had gone back to their old north Norfolk stamping grounds, possibly scooping up both their daughters on the way, may be to care for their parents; neither Edith or Gertrude ever married. Edith but died in North Walsham, in 1969 at the age of 82, Gertrude in 1977 aged 83. They would have been the generation who not only lost brothers and cousins in the war, but also potential husbands and never to be conceived children.

Diss Express
28 Sep 1917-
one day before the death of Supt. Bentham's son

ILLNESS OF SUPT. BENTHAM.

We regret to record that Mr. Thomas Bentham, Superintendent of Police for this division, is lying seriously ill at his home at Harleston, his condition being a cause for deep anxiety. Mr. Bentham, by his fidelity to duty and unfailing courtesy to all with whom he has been brought into contact, has gained universal esteem in this district and all will wish him a speedy and complete recovery.

DEATH OF EX-SUPT. T. E. BENTHAM

The death has occurred at the Cottage Hospital, North Walsham, of Ex-Police Supt. Thomas Edward Bentham at the age of 80. Mr. Bentham was Superintendent at Harleston from October 1911 to September 1919, when he retired from the Force and went to live at North Walsham. His son, Mr. Stanley E. Bentham, is the present Superintendent at Harleston.

Diss Express
16 May 1941

Diss Express
30 May 1941

All this does rather raise the question as to how this Hainford born, married son, living, working and recruited in Wisbech came to be marked on our memorial. Archibald Bentham had never lived in the town, indeed may have never even set foot in the town and his parents had left the town before the War Memorial had been erected; his next of kin was given as his wife, Lillian Bentham of Ranoken Drive, Walsoken Wisbech, the town he had been living in for 11 years.

I suspect the driving force behind commemorating Archibald in Harleston was Archibald's younger brother who did follow in his father's footsteps. Supt. Thomas Edward Bentham's middle son, Stanley, joined the police force in 1912 and became a Supt. in his own right, finally retiring in 1946 after 34 years' service. Amongst the tributes paid to the son was one by the clerk to the court who had worked with both

HARLESTON PETTY SESSIONS

POACHING OFFENCE

Held at Harleston on Friday, before Mr. A. Lombe Taylor (chairman), Mrs. E. W. Wade, and Messrs. A. N. Wright and C. C. Bussey.

The Late Ex-Supt. T. E. Bentham
Before the business of the Court commenced, the Chairman referred with regret to the recent death of their old friend, Ex-Supt. T. E. Bentham, father of the present Superintendent. Ex-Supt. Bentham, the chairman said, had been Supt. at Harleston for a number of years, during which he had gained respect and esteem. The Clerk (Mr. H. G. F. Buckton) and Mr. W. C. F. Brundell on behalf of the legal profession, associated themselves with the Chairman's remarks. Supt. S. E. Bentham expressed his thanks

Mr. G. E. K. Burne paid tribute to the courtesy and helpfulness Supt. Bentham had extended to him. He (Mr. Burne) had taken a special interest in him because he was Clerk to the Court during the time Supt. Bentham's father had been the Superintendent for South Norfolk. He congratulated Inspector Allthorpe who had always been most helpful and welcomed Inspector Sayer. Supt. Bentham returned suitable thanks.

father and son Supt.s Bentham! One has to wonder how Archibald would have done had he survived to full maturity. I am sure he would have gone far in the Post Office as he too seemed to share his father's ability to endear himself to his colleagues whilst being diligent in his work.

Diss Express
3 May 1946

The youngest son, Eric John Bentham enlisted in late 1914, only a few months after the war opened, as Private 16619 in the Norfolk Rgt. He was sent off to France on the 30th of May 1915 and, only 3 months later, the then L.Cpl Bentham 16619 of the 7th Btn Norfolk was admitted to the Hospital Ship, St Andrews off Le Havre with a gunshot wound in his right shoulder. The records state he had been enlisted 9 months and had been in action for 2 months. He received 9 days of treatment, whether he was then sent for convalescence or returned to his unit is not clear. He was later transferred to the Leicestershire's, service number 42100

In 1918 the Sevenoaks Chronicle had him reported missing since the 27th of May his status was officially reported as missing by the military on the 15th of July when the address of his next of kin was given as Harleston, confirming this certainly is our man, it is rather sweet to see he continued with his involvement with the scouts. Many families clung on to the hope their son or brother would be found; many never were, alive or dead. Even today remains are still turning up in the rich farmlands of Flanders.

Lce.-Corpl. Eric John Bentham, who was reported missing 27th May, was employed at J. S. Charlton's until joining the Army, in November, 1914. He was a member of the choir of St. Nicholas' a Sunday School teacher and Assistant Scoutmaster.

Sevenoaks Chronicle and Kentish Advertiser
2 Aug 1918

I am delighted to say that Eric J Bentham did, against all odds, eventually turn up. I think it is safe to assume he had been taken

prisoner by the Germans and the war was either in its final days or finished by the time he was located and then repatriated. One can only imagine the family's relief, having lost one son to have the other return. He returned to Norfolk, for a while at least marrying a Vera Bartle in Henstead in 1923, Vera's father was a coachman and the family had moved around a bit. Vera was born in nearby Billingford, the family had been there for at least 7 years, but by the 1911 census they were in Swardeston, part of the Henstead district. The family had moved to Abingdon by 1928 where their only son David J B was born. They settled in this area, appearing there in the 1939 register when Eric, true to family form, was excelling in his job working for Sutton's Seeds, describing himself as an Agricultural and Horticultural Expert. During this war his talents would have been invaluable on the Home Front; Digging for Victory and maximising crop yields to reduce the amount of imported foodstuffs that were needed. Fortunately, Eric's son was too young to be embroiled in this war although he would have done national service. Like much of his family, Eric made it to 80, dying in Oxfordshire in 1976.

Thomas, a likeable, competent and hardworking man had raised likeable, hardworking, successful sons and knocked the clay off the family's boots. It is a shame Archibald did not survive to be part of this success story.