

Gunner (Samuel) Thomas Bamford – Royal Marine Artillery, Howitzer Brigade No. 11, Service No. 1258/S



Thomas was born on 11 November 1895 in Lavendon. His registered and formal name was Samuel Thomas Bamford, although it is his second name that appears upon the village cross and elsewhere.

Thomas' parents were James Bamford, a bricklayer born in 1863 at Turvey, and Elizabeth Ann Whitmee, born in 1859, who was a Charwoman living in Weston Road, Olney. Elizabeth and James were married in 1883 and evidently moved to Lavendon where Elizabeth was Assistant Post Mistress in her Aunt Hepzibah Davison's shop in Olney Road. She subsequently became Post Mistress in the shop that was sited next door to the present-day Lavendon Garage. Following the early death at age 41 of James Bamford on 20th May 1904, Elizabeth went on to marry Harry Cotton in 1909 and they continued to live at the Post Office in Lavendon. Harry was a Brick Maker and later a Builder's Labourer who was born at Hyde Farm, Olney in about 1878.



Above: The Post Office in Olney Road where Thomas was living at the time of the 1901 and 1911 censuses.

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Thomas had six other brothers and sisters, Beatrice, Edith, Frederick, Julia, William (John), and Harry.* By 1911 Thomas' sister, Julia, was Assistant Post Mistress and his mother, Elizabeth, the Post Mistress. Thomas himself was working as a Carter's Lad for a builder, perhaps his step-father. Brother John was working at the Mill and his other brother Harry later worked in the family shop, including making deliveries in a van custom-built by Frank Lay in the workshops that pre-existed the modern day Lavendon Garage, also visible in the above photo.

Thomas enlisted in the Royal Marine Artillery (Short Service) on 16 November 1915 at the age of 20. On 1st July 1916 he was posted to France via Boulogne and became a Gunner in the No. 11 Howitzer Brigade. The Royal Marine Artillery (RMA) provided two artillery brigades for the Western Front, one was an anti-aircraft unit and the other was equipped with twelve heavy 15-inch howitzers which formed the RMA Howitzer Brigade. The huge weapons were deployed as single units along the front line and each required a crew of 60 men. They weighed nearly 11 tons each and were capable of firing a 1400 pound shell well over 10,000 yards.



Above: A Royal Marine Artillery crew loading a 15" Howitzer near the Menin Road, pictured on 5th October 1917, a few weeks after the death of Gunner Thomas Bamford.
(Courtesy Imperial War Museum photo ref E AUS 921.)

On 28th May 1917, Thomas was hospitalised after being wounded in his right hand and thigh by fragments of High Explosive shell. He rejoined his unit on 1st July and was then given leave to the UK during 18th – 28th July 1917. Sadly on 8th September Thomas was again seriously wounded and immediately hospitalised where he died the following day on 9th September 1917. He was buried at the Gwalia British Cemetery at Poperinghe in Belgium, grave location 2 B 23.

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The following account appeared in the local Bucks Standard newspaper of 29th September 1917:

Private T. BAMFORD, R.M.A. Howitzer No. 11.
We regret to announce the death of the above, who is the son of the respected sub-postmistress of Lavendon, who would have been 22 years of age had he lived until November. He was sleeping in a dug-out with his comrades when an enemy shell fell amongst them, killing and wounding nearly all of them. He had been on the Western front for 15 months and received his first leave only two months since. He was regarded as the best shot of his company, having gained the crossed guns and star badge after three months' service. His sorrowing relatives have received the deepest sympathy from the villagers, and also letters from his C.O. and comrades. The following is a copy of that received

from his C.O. :—Dear Mrs. Cotton,—You will by now have heard of the unfortunate death of your son, so I will not repeat the details. Everything was done for him, and he was very quickly sent off in a motor ambulance, but he died soon after reaching the hospital on the 9th instant. He was buried in a British military cemetery, the last rites being administered by an army chaplain. A cross will be erected, and you may rest assured that every care will be taken to tend the spot where he and several of his comrades lie in peace. I am very sorry over this misfortune, for I had known your son since he first came out here, and had grown to like him very much. He was always so cheerful and anxious to help even under the most depressing conditions, and was as brave as a lion. None of us could afford to lose him. With the deepest sympathy, yours very sincerely, LLEWELLYN HARRIES."

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Additional Notes:

The 'Bamford Case'

* Thomas' father, James Bamford, seems to have been fiercely protective towards his children; during the years 1884-87 he refused to have his first two children, Beatrice and Edith, vaccinated contrary to the compulsory requirements of the 1873 Vaccination Act. James appeared in court several times and refused to pay some severe and somewhat unjust fines, eventually resulting in his imprisonment in Northampton Gaol for a month. The so-called 'Bamford Case' garnered much local support for him and matters escalated as far as the House of Commons. Ultimately, the experience of James and his fellow 'victims' contributed to the securing of an 1898 Act which permitted conditional exemption for those conscientiously objecting to compulsory vaccination.

Extract - Thomas' enlistment in November 1915:

Name <i>Bamford Samuel Thomas</i>		Register No. <i>1258</i>		Division <i>RMA.</i>	
Date of Birth	<i>11 November 1895</i>	When re-engaged		DESCRIPTION OF PERSON:	
Place Born	<i>Lavendon Olney Bucks</i>	Next of Kin and their address	<i>Brother Anne Cotton Post Office Lavendon Nr Olney Bucks</i>	For Band Boys	On Enlistment as a Boy
Religion	<i>Church of England</i>			and Buglers only	On Attaining the age of 18
Enlisted	<i>16 November 1915</i>			On Enlistment as Private	
Enlistment	<i>20 - 0 - 15</i>	Date of Marriage		On Re-engagement	
				On Final Discharge from the Service	
In what Regiment	Period	Authority	Date	Character	