



# Thomas Moreton Cooper

## 94 Kedleston Road

Thomas served as a “Sapper” with the Royal Engineers in France. The Engineers maintained the railways, roads, water supply, bridges and transport – vital for the war effort. Thomas volunteered in November 1915, and was assigned to the Army Reserve but was not mobilised until 1917, aged 35. As he worked for the Midland Railway Company, the delay in his mobilisation may have been influenced by the vital nature of railway transport. He was assigned to the Royal Engineers (Railway Operating Division).

He was posted to France late in February 1917, but we have no details about where he served.



Thomas’ family have a letter that he wrote home in June 1917 which talks of his life in the army, alongside news from home and other everyday concerns. On the next page you can find a full transcript of the letter.

On 30 November 1917 Thomas sustained a gunshot wound to this right leg and a partial fracture of his femur (it is unclear whether

one caused the other) and he was sent back to England. He was admitted to hospital in London; later he was moved to Leicester, then to Manchester, and finally to Sheffield from where he was discharged in February 1920 as unfit for military duty, over two years after his initial injury. His family believe that he also suffered from a poison gas attack, which contributed to his early death aged 53 in 1935.

Before the war Thomas worked as a Clerk and Storekeeper at the Midland Hotel. Born in 1882 and brought up in Derby, Thomas married Elizabeth Wheatcroft and they lived at 94 Kedleston Road with their two children – Nellie (born 1911) and Thomas (born 1915). Thomas returned to his old job after the war.



## Thomas Moreton Cooper continued

Thomas wrote this letter home to his sister-in-law in June 1917. It gives a glimpse of his work as a Sapper in the Royal Engineers. What is also interesting is that he mentions Bert Hurlstone who lived at 5 Park Grove. Bert was not called up for military service – we are not sure whether his profession as a Pharmacist meant that he was exempt as he worked in a “Protected Occupation” or whether he was not fit enough to serve.

*Spr T M Cooper 238600*

*France June 21/17*

*Dear Mary Ellen*

*So pleased to have received a letter from you, although it only arrived today. I see it was posted on the 12<sup>th</sup> inst. Please tell Lizzie to show address correctly in future she forgot to put the essential part my (A D2) on the envelope hence the delay in receiving it.*

*If you notice any fingermarks on this note please forgive me. I can't help it having been on Coal fatigue since coming back again here. It does not matter how much I wash I cannot get it all off. It is a matter of about an hour each night washing at the public trough – and then it is only down as far as possible, you “comprez”. I quite understand Lizzie writes for the family also when I write to her I include you all. Having little I can tell you if I wrote to separate members it would have to be in the same strain to each over.*

*Please give Jack my best thanks for what he has done towards the shed I understand has been put up in my garden at home recently. You ask about potatoes and sugar. We get the former sometimes and the latter always. Taking the food all round here it is very decent, of course we have no covering on the tables, but we don't eat tablecloths. Glad Mother benefitted by her stay at [Nottingham] and also to hear you are all well. To use an hackneyed old phrase “I am in the pink”. How does Bert Hurlstone stand in regards military duties, is the reason of his marriage because he expects to be “called up” soon, or is he exempt through his professional calling? As the “Last Post” will be going soon I will conclude.*

*With Best Love to all. Yours affects Tom*