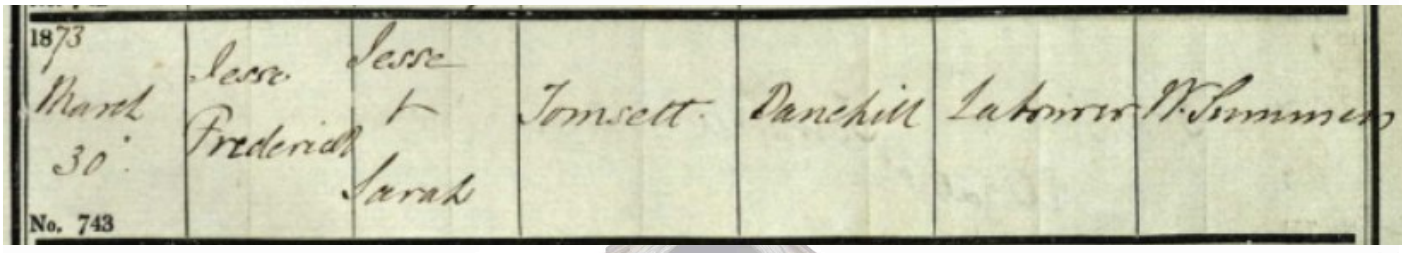
# Jesse Frederick Tomsett

## 24 January 1873 - 3 September 1932

Jesse Frederick Tomsett was born on 24th January 1873 in Chelwood Common, and baptised on 30th March 1873 in Danehill. His father, also called Jesse, (1831 - 1902). Jesse Frederick's mother was Sarah Turner (1841-1916).




**Jesse's baptismal record**

Jesse had nine siblings; Naman (1866-????), Philip (1870 -????), Emily (1875-????), Kate (1878 -????), Fanny (1878—????), Hannah (1880-????), Herbert (1882—????), William (1884—????) and Amy

Naaman married Minnie Sherlock, Kate married Horace Baker, Fanny married Thomas Sudds, Hannah married Edgar Francis and Amy married John Lodge.

In 1881 Jesse was living with his parents and siblings in the house of his grandfather, Naaman Tomsett who was a widower. Naaman farmed 3 acres and lived at Stone House, Coach Lane, Chelwood Common.

By 1891 aged 18 years he was still at home with his parents and working as a general labourer.

Jesse married Ada Baker on 25th February 1899. The Banns were read in Horsted Keynes so it is likely they were married there.

The 1901 census records them living at Yew Tree Cottage, Coach Lane, Chelwood Gate and by now they have a daughter Ellen who is 1 years old. Jesse's occupation is a "higglers labourer"

A higgler was a pedlar or small time trader, possibly giving the word haggle, as higglers sometimes sold goods for produce rather than money. In some areas a higgler was a labourer who went from farm to farm using his own horse. It is not known what type of higgler Jesse was.

In 1911 they were still living at Yew Tree Cottage, where they remained until they both died. Four more children followed Ellen (1900-????), Jesse (1902-1903), Winifred (1904-1988), Lilian (1906-1989) and Bessie (1909-????). Sadly, Jesse who was born in 1902 died in 1903 before his first birthday.

Jessie died on 3rd September 1932 aged 59 and he was buried at Danehill cemetery on 8th September 1932

## Ada Tomsett (nee Baker)

## 8 March 1869 - 6 December 1944

Ada Baker was born on 8th March 1869 in Horsted Keynes. Her parents were Horace Baker (1837-1914) and Esther Elphick (1845-1924).

Ada lived at home with her parents until her marriage to Jesse Tomsett in 1899. They had 5 children.

In 1939, after Jesse died, Ada lived at Yew Tree Cottage, with her daughter Lilian who was a domestic servant.

Ada died on 6th December 1944, aged 75 at Yew Tree Cottage.and she was buried at Danehill cemetery on 9th December 1944

**Jesse and Ada Tomsett are buried at Danehill cemetery**

## Other member of the Tomsett family

## Jesse and Sarah Tomsett (Jesse's parents)

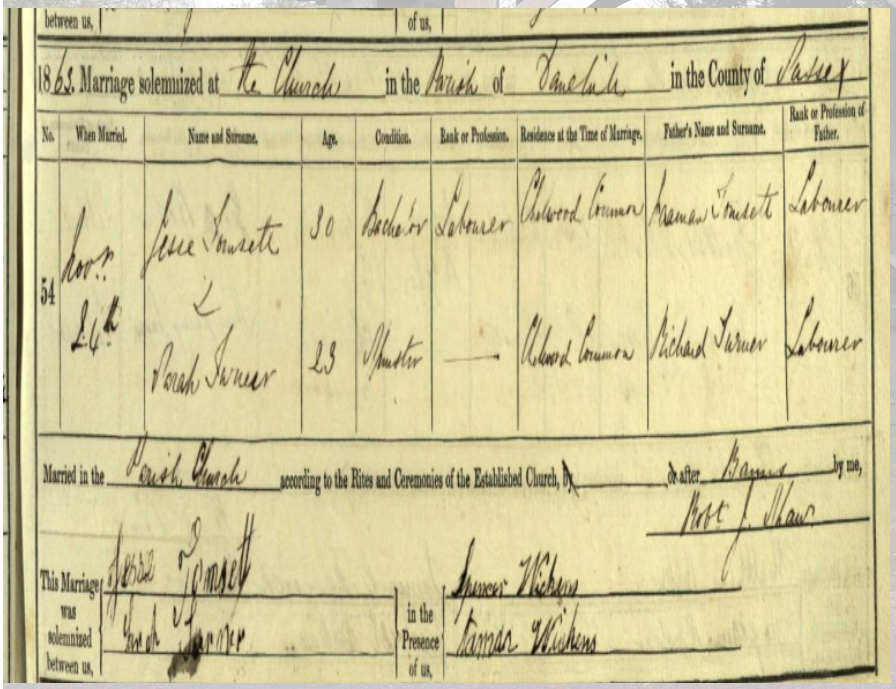
Jesse and Sarah married in 1863. They lived in the same house as Jesse's father, Naaman Tomsett (1806 - 1883). Naaman was a widower and lived with his son's family until his death. He had previously taken over the house, Stonehouse, from his mother Mary Tomsett when she died (1785 - 1856)

## Naaman Tomsett and his family (Jesse's oldest brother)

Naaman was born in 1866. He married Minnie Sherlock around 1870, who came from Horsted Keynes. They had two sons, William and Jesse born in the early 1900s. Naaman was a sign writer working in Horsted Keynes. He was a skilled, artistic craftsman. Specimens of his work and tool are maintained by his grandson, Naaman. Naaman died in his late 40s/early 50's in the 1914-1918 war, leaving his widow and two teenage boys. Jesse went to war as well and William became a wage earner and married Ethel Lade (the great-grand daughter of Jessie and Amelia Funnell, in October 1931. In 1933 Ethel and William had a son, Naaman

## Philip Frank Tomsett (Jesse's second oldest brother)

Philip Frank Tomsett was born in 1870. He married Jane Tester in 1890. They had three children; Nora (1891—????), Frank (1892—????) and Frederick Naaman (1896—????)



between us, | of us,

1863. Marriage solemnized at the Church in the Parish of Danehill in the County of Sussex

| 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. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 54 | Nov. 24th | Jesse Tomsett | 30 | Bachelor | Labourer | Chelwood Common | Naaman Tomsett | Labourer |
| | | Sarah Turner | 23 | Spinster | — | Chelwood Common | Richard Turner | Labourer |

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by Banns after by me, Robt. J. Shaw

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Jesse Tomsett, Sarah Turner | in the Presence of us, Spencer Wickens, Eamar Wickens

**Jesse and Sarah's marriage Banns.**

# William Tomsett

## 24 May 1884 - 3 May 1917

William Tomsett

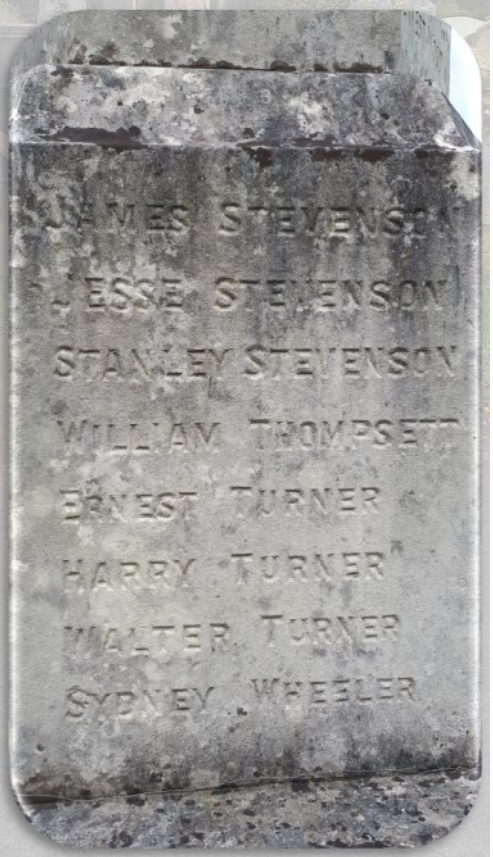
William Tomsett was born on 24th May 1884. He was the son of Jesse & Sarah Thompsett of Danehill. He was baptised at All Saints, Danehill on 28th September 1884. He attended Danehill School. He had four brothers and five sisters.

He married Blanche Hannah Turner on 30th July 1910. They had a daughter, Audrey Jane, born 21 November 1910 and a son Macdonald, born 31 January 1913. Worked at Chelwood Beacon with Victor Hills, another conscripted man in the older age group, enlisting at Uckfield.

He was a private in "D" Company, 6th Battalion The Buffs (East Kent) Regiment, G18940. (Previously in 14th Battalion The Royal Sussex Regiment.) He was reported missing, later confirmed killed in action 3rd May 1917 aged 32, at Monchy le Preux, Battle of Arras 1917. His name is on the Arras Memorial, Bay 2.

*From the Book of Remembrance*: " - killed in action May 3rd 1917, at Monchy - An officer writing about him says that he was a very brave man and mentions that his body was found very close to the German trenches."

William's granddaughter, Mrs Stella Green, has kindly shared copies of some of his letters and copies of documents, revealing a lot about his time in the Army and his home life. These and more photographs are in a separate section.

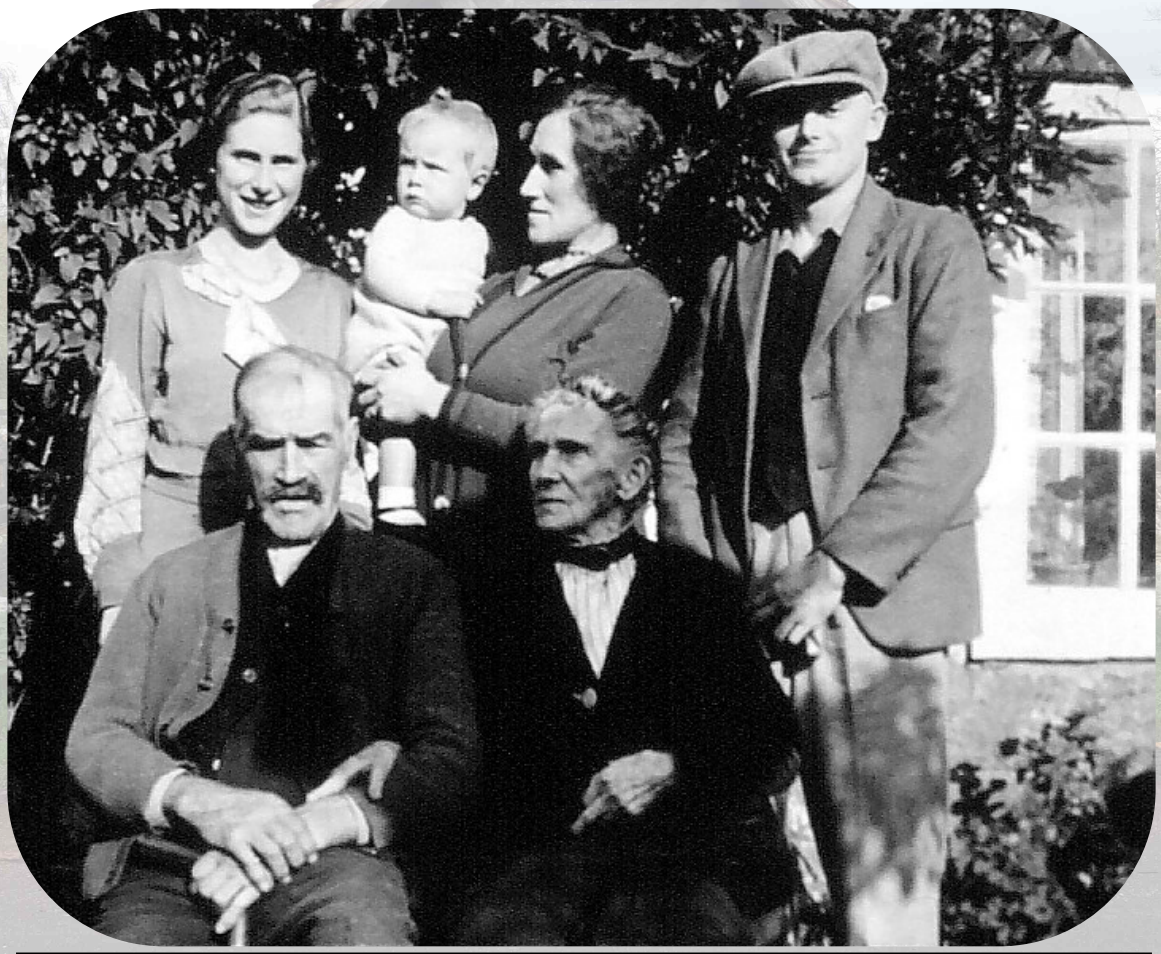



William is remembered on the Danehill war memorial

William Tomsett

Audrey Tomsett

McDonald Tomsett



Back row: Audrey, Blanche Hannah, holding her grandson, Lawrance William Roberts and Macdonald William.

Front row: Blanche's parents, Thomas Abraham Turner and Mary Jane Woodrow Turner (nee Wheeler).

# William Tomsett's Letters

The collection of copies of 22 letters. was sent to us by Mrs Stella Green, William's granddaughter These are the only letters we have written by and to a local man who served in the war.-From Will's letters we learn, in his own words, something of the ordeals all serving men suffered at the front. The last letters, from Sidney Martin give some idea of the frustration of prisoners of war, and at least one of our local men suffered that fate. Mrs Green has written "the letters from grandad, his sister and mother in law give an insight into how painful such separations were." .

Will was born in 1884, one of a family of ten, having four brothers and five sisters. He was born, baptised, and attended school in Danehill. In 1910 he married Blanche Hannah Turner, also one of a large family who lived at Rose Cottage, Boxes Lane. William (or Tom, as was often known by) and Blanche had a daughter, Audrey Jane, and a son, Mcdonald. Will and Blanche lived in Barbery Hatch, a remote cottage on the edge of Ashdown Forest in the valley below Chelwood Beacon where he was employed. Also employed at the Beacon was has father in law, Thomas Abraham Turner and Victor Hills. William played in the Danehill Football Team, there is a photograph of him with his brother-in-law, Thomas Turner, taken with the team in 1906/7.

He was probably conscripted into the Army in mid 1916 at the age of 32.

The letters include family news, details of letters and parcels received and sent. They are extremely personal, in every letter Will expresses his love for Blanche and the children and concerns for their safety. The following excerpts, arranged in chronological order, are selected to illustrate the anxieties, frustrations and hardships endured by all the men at the front, away from loved ones, facing an uncertain future. There are extracts from 14 letter from Will to Blanche; 2 from his mother in law, Mary Jane Woodrow Turner who signs herself J. Turner; from his sister, Fan; from one of his comrades and his young workmate at Chelwood Beacon, Victor Hills

**Wed 26th (probably July 1916).** Will to Blanche. *from Badjo Barracks, Aldershot, in training with the 14th Bn. The Royal Sussex Regiment.* " I have got a weekend off at last, but it is only from Saturday 12 o'clock till Sunday night" *He does not expect to* "be down at Forest Row *(station)* before half past five".*He would like Blanche to meet him there, he will buy toys for Audrey and Mac at Forest Row. Says how much he is looking forward to some home cooking. also* " there is talk of us moving away from here next week" *and* " we went out last night at 10 o'clock up till 12 o'clock and have got he same tonight full pack" *(route marches wearing a lot of equipment and carrying rifles etc.)*

**6th October 1916.** Will to Blanche. *He has now been transferred to the Buffs , The East Kent Regiment, and now has service number G.18940*

"Well dear we have got the order today that we have got to go at last. We start from here at 1 O'clock Saturday but they do not say where we are going to go but it is over the water for we have got our sea kit." *He goes on to say that he has given his pocket knife to Bert Izzard, a local man he had trained with, for him to send it on to Blanche He has been home on four days leave* "but roll on when I can get home for

good --- they have cut our hair all over with a machine, we look like a lot of jail birds but they do that so we should not get curmy *(lice ?)*" *he concludes with* "I want you to buck up and bear it as best you can, I know it is hard for us to be apart but with the help of God's hand and good health I shall come back"

**9th October 1916.** Will to Blanche *from BEF. 17 L Camp.* "we came across Saturday night and it was a nice ride I can tell you" *he goes on to say how much she would have enjoyed the voyage* "I know you like being out on the sea. -- it is not very warm out here and we have got back in tents again." *After giving news of their food and instructions of how to pack up food parcels he concludes with*

"kiss our little children for me and look after them which I know you will".

**23rd November 1916.** Will to Blanche *from BEF* "We had some snow out here last week, I began to think that winter had come early .... we don't want too much of that for our lodging are not very grand. --- the fighting is not very fierce where we are but the noise of the big guns is something awful but we don't have to take any notice of that" *Thinking of his garden* "I expect the parsnips will very soon want getting up --- the food is very small --- it is stew every day" *He tells of the letters he has received from other members of the family his concluding remarks include* "I have not time to write any more, remember me to mother and to my mother and tell them to cheer up and look at the bright side of the cruel war". *Blanche at this time is at Worthing.*

**26th November 1916** Will to Blanche: *Has received parcels with a cake and writing paper.* "Has Audrey been to school yet, I expect she will be all there when she does go" *The weather is very bad* "It has been raining for two days and makes the trenches in an awful mess" *He writes about the food they are getting and adds* "I should like you to send me a little rabbit pie, not a big one, just a taste for I miss all of the good things this winter --- this winter will want some sticking out here. It is rough for the feet, mine begin to feel the pinch already ... we cant help getting them wet for the road and every where are alike" *He asks Blanche to find Ern Turner's address to send on to him (Ernest Turner Book of Remembrance No 37, reported missing 17/7/1917)*

**26th November 1916.** His sister Fanny to Will *from High St Eton Bucks. She has sent him a parcel & Postal Orders, Edgar T. has to go, or is gone to, India, Tom's ear is better, his brother in law Herbert Lodge was home. She asks if Blanche is still at Barbery Hatch or down home.* "Old Fred Baker has died."

**Victor Hills writes to Will.** (Undated ,would have been in 1917) *from the 2nd R. Sussex Regiment BEF.* "Just a few lines to let you know that I am still in the land of the living" *Victor had got Will's address from* "someone called Gordon, a relation of yours, who has "gone up the line" *He asks how Will is getting on* "Expect it is a bit rough up there --- Not like being at home. I think we all miss the old Beacon --- I wonder how they will get on with the gardening this year? I would like to see some of those lady gardeners wouldn't you --- I have not been up the line yet". *He has seen Ted (Edwin Hills, an older brother) who is in the KRR..* "Dick and Ern are still in the pink"*(two more of his brothers). (see notes on Ernest Arthur Hills (No 19) and Victor Hills (No 20) both lost in the war).*

**An undated letter** from a comrade in the 6th Buffs, Harry Gibb, to Will. *Harry is in a General Hospital BEF. Starts his letter* "Dear Tom" *(his mates called him by that name) Harry has been in bed all the time he has been in hospital, his legs are not getting much better* "Dear Tom I suppose old fritz still keeps busy with his shells flying about, but hope it will all be finished so (we ) can have a comfortable place to kip in. I expect that this is what brought this complaint on with me. Please remember me to Jack & Freddie".

**19th January 1917.** Will to Blanche. *He gave this letter to a comrade going on leave to post in England, thus avoiding the censor* "so I can tell you a bit more" *We learn a great deal about the conditions he endured and his morale.* "I am not very well I have got such a cold in my head and it makes me feel rotten" *Hopes he will receive her parcel* "for I get sick of the food we get out here it is the same every day. A loaf of bread between 4 men, a piece of cheese and some jam. Bully *(corned beef)* stews for dinner every day and it makes me sick to look at it" *He did not like too many stews when he was at home* " but these are not like yours" *He was back in the trenches* "I can tell you it is "B" rough out here, there is about 6 inches of snow and frost with it" *He recalls* "-- at home, sledging on the Forest with you last year" *and goes on* "-- that is where I want to be for I have enough of it out here for we are treated like a lot of slaves --- we have to go out at 6 at night and back at 2 in the morning --- They talk about the British Tommy, all of them look alike to me, about half dead --- we are treated worse than dogs, we have to sleep in old wet dugouts not fit for pigs --- They say that the war is going to be over *(by)* the end of next month, I hope it will for I have had enough of it --- The town we are in now is Arris *(Arras)* and the place is knocked about too."

**16th Feb. 1917.** His mother in law Mary Jane Turner *writes to Will from Rose Cottage .* "Blanche is at Worthing. I have got the children, they are very good Audrey knows her ABC she will go to school as soon as it is better weather --- The children send you a kiss. Mac says when the weather is warmer he is coming to bring you home if you don't come --- Audrey still has her rabbit - she says if you don't come home soon she will send you a rabbit pie

Tom Turner, *(brother in law),* is still at Bexhill. Albert Turner is in London very badly wounded. Old Mr & Mrs Langridge are both dead

**4th March 1917.** Will to Blanche. BEF "we move a bit closer to the line today --- Thanks for 'Hoison' *(anti lice?)* --- we cannot help picking those bugs up, He is a lucky soldier if he don't get them --- we have to be as smart out here as in England --- keeping us well in training --- still the weather is a lot warmer now, the French are busy sowing their corn" *He says things are quite good where he is now* "our Colonel took us to a Picture Palace yesterday and it was a good turn out." *He has had letters from various members of the family, one from Ted Turner who told him* "the boy and girl were looking well, --- young Mac looks as cunning as his father --- I hope he don't have to go through what his father has since last October".

**6th March 1917.** Will to Blanche "I am well at present --- but we have got to back to the trenches again --- .it is a bit lively at times but we have to bear up and look at the bright side of it" *He has had a letter from his brother, Philip*,"they were going to arrange about selling the house and ground last Sunday --- the old home will be sold before long now. I wish I was there".

**21st March 1917.** Will to Blanche. *He is well at present and hopes to keep that way* "till I get back home with you for there is no one out here to look after *(me)* in this wide world like you can I am longing for the time to get back to you --- I think the war will soon come to an end now for the news looks better every day --- we have been back in the lines again and it is a bit thick up there now and I expect it will get worse in a few weeks --- I hope the end will come before that for there is enough noise now with those big guns" *He has heard from her mother that the children are well and thanks her for thinking about his club money* "I know you will always think of me darling, and so do I of you for in the most of all the danger I have been in out here my thoughts have been of you and the two little children, poor little souls"

**1st April 1917.** Will to Blanche : "we have to go up in the lines again and it is a bit thick over here now and it will be worse by the time you get this letter but with the help of God I shall get through it safe for the sake of you and the little children" *He is now billeted in cellars* " for there is some shells flying about ---

I have got to go out on working parties so I wish you all good morning and good luck from your ever loving and true husband".

**11th April 1917.** *Another letter from his mother in law at Rose Cottage with family news* "Tom *(Turner, brother in law,)* is still in England --- transferred to RE *(Royal Engineers) She tells him of the local boys* "still at home" *and adds a few comments about them.* "The older boy of Elias Baker was married on Saturday --- Daniel Corke has had his Charley Brown himself last week, he leaves a wife and 6 children, he was not out of England so they sent him home. He was buried at Forest Row --- Audrey sends a big kiss, she is a very good girl, Dad wishes to be remembered".

**16th April 1917. Will to Blanche** *A short letter, he is well* "We have been over the top Monday and you can see that I have got through safe.--- I hope it will be the last time for it has been the roughest Easter week I have had in my life but thank God I have got through with it so far".

**20th April 1917.** Will to Blanche: "I am fairly well after going through what we have this last 10 days --- it is a very cruel world out here now --- we took part in the advance we started going over at half past 5 Easter Monday morning and it was the prettiest sight and one of the roughest that I ever see in my life, but thank God that I have got through it safe" *He goes on to say that he hopes to keep safe for the sake of her and the little children and hopes* "to be home and tell you all what it has been like out here.---. no one knows that it is like until they have had a taste of it" *He has sent some Postal Orders home in a green envelope* "we cant buy anything with it --- the French people are not allowed to sell us any bread"

**Undated 1917.** *A poignant fragment of a letter to Blanche, Will writes of his love for her and the children, tells her not to trouble about saving money, not to go short of food and* "look after our little children for that is all we have to live for to see them through the world somehow".

**29th April 1917. Will to Blanche:** "I did not have much time when I wrote the last letter for we were on the move, we are having a few days rest but I don't know how long for orders come quick now this big advance is on, we never know from one hour to another when we are going to be called on --- Fancy being out here 7 months, I did not think that we would be parted all this time did you --- 12 months a soldier. --- This Sunday morning I would rather be at Barbery Hatch in the garden or cutting up some wood for you --- my old home is being sold on 25th April I hope it has fetched a good price for we can do with it" *He has a cold about him and asks her to send out something for it* "I cant go to bed and have something nice brought up to me by my little wife, but cheer up darling and be good and I will do the same. I have been very good since I have been out here and I am sure you are keeping good --- remember me to all at Worthing and this is all the news this time, so good day and god bless you and keep you safe till my return to you, from your ever loving and true husband, Will.

On May 3rd 1917 William Thompsett was reported missing. at Munchy le Preux during the Battle of Arras.

Three letters reach Blanche from 2nd Lieutenant Sidney Martin, 1st Battalion East Lancashire Regiment, BEF France

**The first on 22nd January 1918.** is sent to Will's sister " --- I have no doubt this will ease your mind to a certain extent for I have an idea that the poor lad has been reported missing for a considerable time --- I was out in front of our line last night patrolling when I found the body of a British Soldier and upon looking through his pockets I found the enclosed letters which I am very sorry proved him to be your brother. --- Unfortunately it was impossible to get him back to our lines but with the help of two of my men I buried him in a nice sheltered little valley and put a cross over him. Needless to say we said a few prayers before leaving him" *He goes on to write that he had found among the few letters one from his wife* "but I thought it better to inform you first. I do hope I have done right" The only other thing he thought his wife would like was his cap badge which he can send on if she wishes.

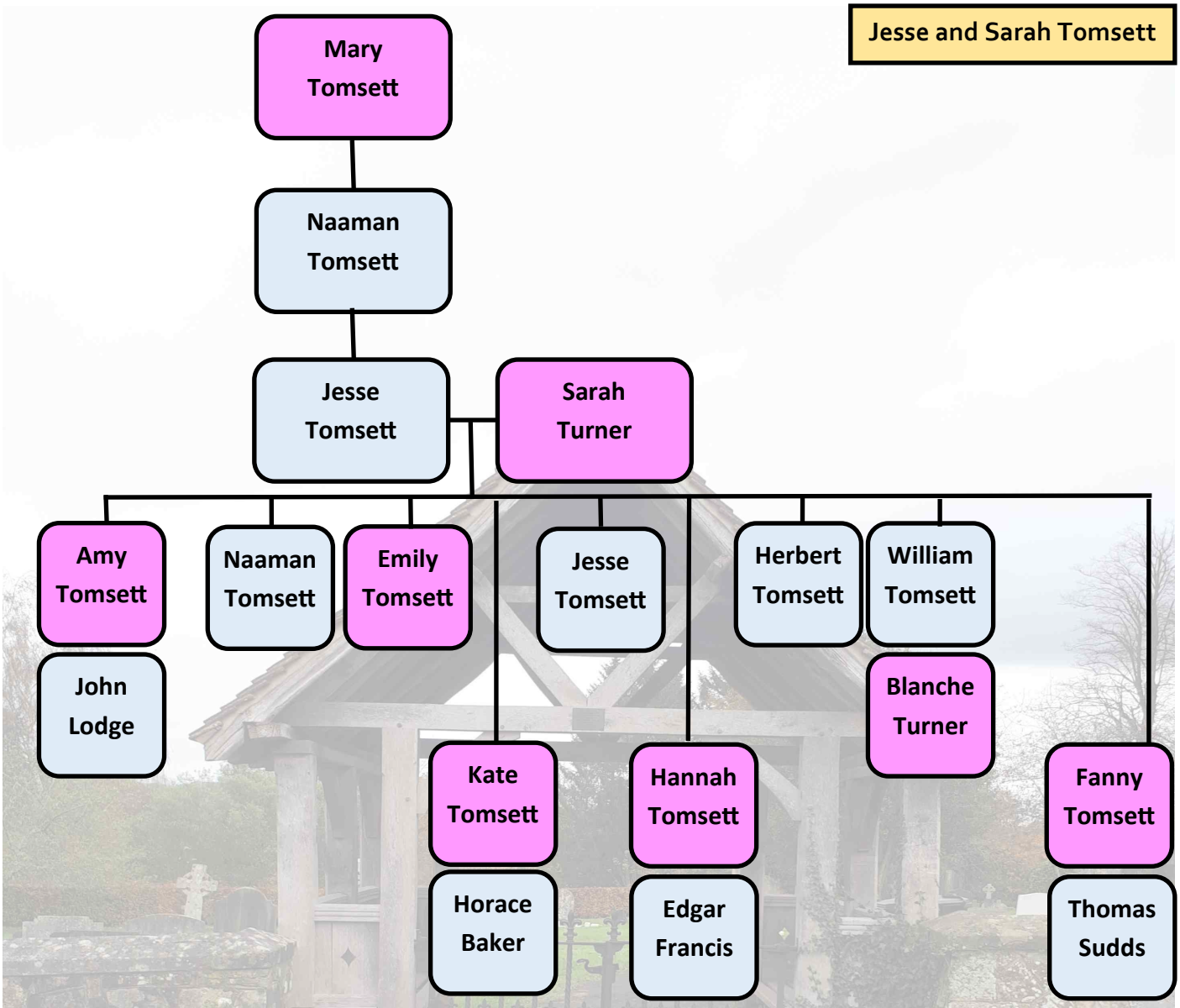
**The second letter of 11th Feb. 1918.** 2nd Lieutenant Sidney Martin *thanks Blanche for her letter written on the 31st Jan. he writes* "it is quite impossible to express my sympathy both to your two children and yourself --- we were too near the Bosche line to waste time looking for anything that might have been of value to you--- the only things I troubled about were his letters and the disc with his name on" *He sent the disc on to the proper authorities and will bring the cap badge when he comes on leave within a month* - "I will post it on to you as soon as I arrive in Blighty".

**The third letter** is written from a Prisoner of War Camp in Germany on **11th July 1918.**

*Sidney Martin tells Blanche about conditions in the camp* "everything is quite as good as we can expect considering we are prisoners of war --- I often wish we had work of some sort to do for time hangs very heavily upon my hands" *He asks Blanche to send him a photo of herself and her little children, thanks her for the cigarettes she has sent him. He regrets that he* "neglected the opportunity to visit you when I was on leave" *He assures that he will do so when the war is over. He asks her to write to a man who was his best pal before he was commissioned to let him know what has happened to him.*

Blanche received the official notification of her husband's death on February 12th 1918. She was sent £3. 8. 1. owed to William and a £3. gratuity, later she was sent a further £5. payment to cover extra expenses. She would have received a widow's pension and an allowance for the children. When she re-married in August 2nd 1925 she was sent a re marriage Gratuity of £35.7.5. which was the end of her pension.

# Jesse and Sarah Tomsett




If you have any more information about this family that you believe would be of interest please contact the Danehill Parish Historical Society dphs@outlook.com. We'd love to hear from you

Danehill Parish Historical Society

# Naaman & Minnie Tomsett
# Ada & Jess Tomsett

Mary Tomsett

Naaman Tomsett

Jesse Tomsett

Sarah Turner

Amy Tomsett

Emily Tomsett

Kate Tomsett

Philip Tomsett

Fanny Tomsett

Hannah Tomsett

Herbert Tomsett

William Tomsett

Naaman Tomsett

Minnie Sherlock

Esther Elphick

Horace Baker

Jessie Tomsett

William Tomsett

Ethel Lade

Ada Baker

Jesse Tomsett

Naaman Tomsett

Minnie Sherlock

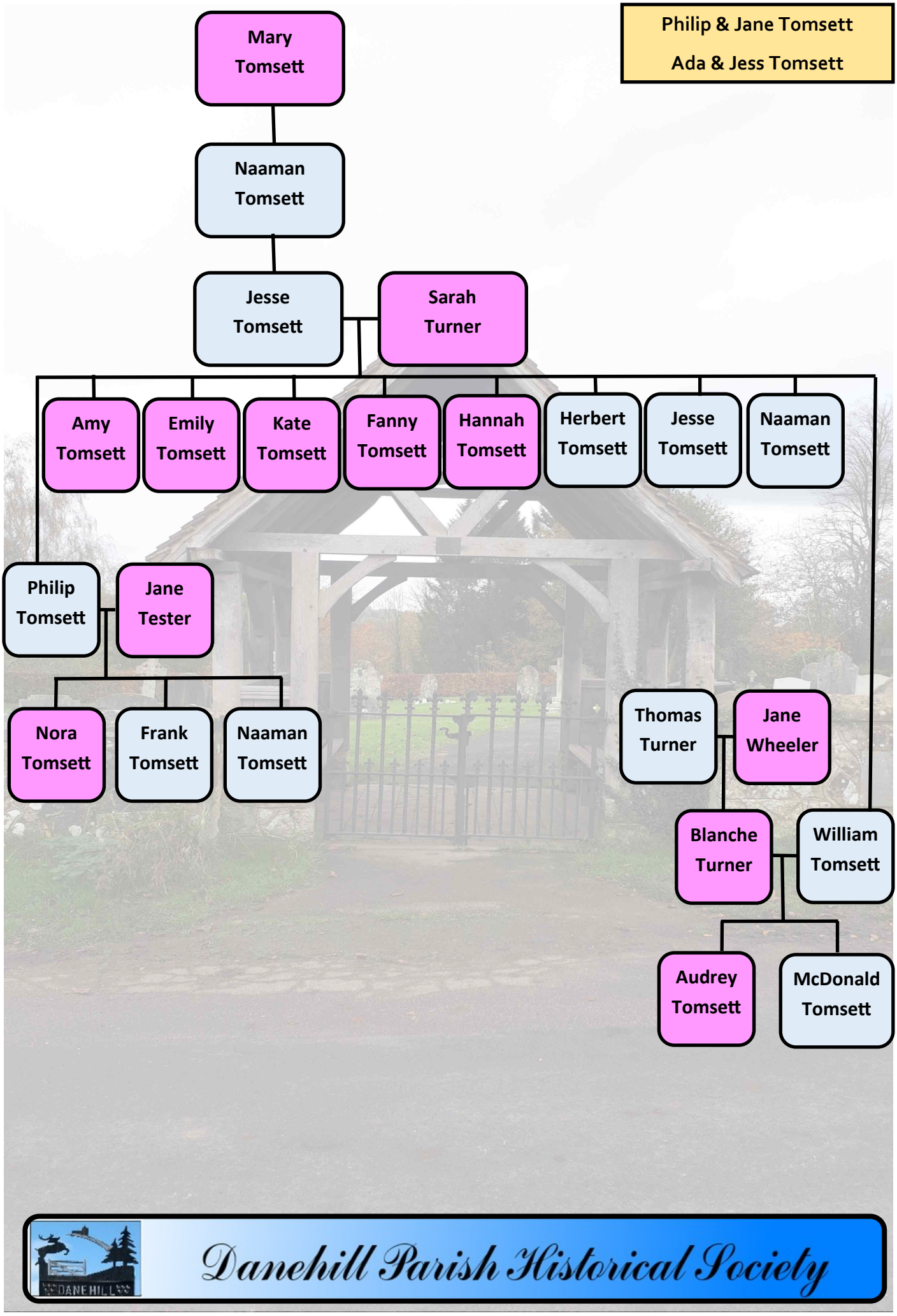
Ellen Tomsett

Jesse Tomsett

Bessie Tomsett

Winifred Tomsett

Lillian Tomsett


Philip & Jane Tomsett
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