

*THE DUNHAMS: A POST
OFFICE FAMILY
BY NUALA STARKEY*

The beginnings of a postal dynasty

What possessed Thomas Dunham- baptised 10th September 1808 in Norfolk - to leave the First Regiment of Life Guards and move to Kingstown, Ireland?

He shows up in Elm Cottages among the Nobility, Gentry, Merchants and Traders in the Post Office Annual Directory and Calendar of 1843,¹ yet his discharge from the Regiment was in 1846. By 1849 he owned a house in Monkstown, Dunleary and was claiming legitimacy by affidavit of his first born Thomas Junior, born 18th September 1849. This was the same period as The Great Famine (Ireland), a period of mass starvation and disease in Ireland lasted from 1845 to 1852.

He officially married Elizabeth Cobb at Sloley, Norfolk, England on 12th January 1851. Could the looming Crimean War, fought from October 1853 to February 1856 have influenced his decision to leave England? A more likely attraction was the pensioned work for the GPO and the chance of fast promotion in Ireland. Thomas produced two sons and thus a Post Office family with three generations of men working for the Post Office. One of his grandchildren continued the tradition. He died aged seventy-four, having been the Inspector of Mails. He was a wealthy man, leaving effects of £384 4s 11d in 1884.

Military connections

In 1831 the office of Postmaster General of Ireland was amalgamated with the equivalent office for Great Britain. The GPO thereafter operated throughout Great Britain and Ireland until 1921. Military links with the GPO, probably trialled in Ireland, were formalised in 1868. As part of the Volunteer Movement, John Lowther du Plat Taylor, Private Secretary to the Postmaster General, raised the 49th Middlesex Rifle Volunteers Corps (Post Office Rifles). Members were GPO employees, who had been either members of the 21st Middlesex Rifles Volunteer Corps (Civil Service Rifles) or special constables enrolled to combat against Fenian attacks on London in 1867/68.

The regiment was restyled 24th Middlesex Rifle Volunteers Corps (Post Office Rifles) in 1880 as part of the Cardwell Reforms.

¹ The Post Office Annual Directory and Calendar For 1843, Dublin (Dublin: 1843): p. 219.

The 24th Middlesex Rifle Volunteers Corps was formed by Royal Warrant in 1882 as the Army Post Office Corps (APOC). This newly formed army reservist company saw active service providing a postal service to the British military expeditions to Egypt (1882), Suakin (1885) and the Anglo Boer War (1899–1902). The APOC was eventually subsumed by the Royal Engineers in 1913 to re-emerge as the Royal Engineers (Postal Section) Special Reserve. The Postal Section provided the Army Postal Service (now British Forces Post Office) in the First and Second World Wars and in 1993 became the Postal & Courier Service Royal Logistic Corps.

In 1883 the regiment raised 'L' Company as a Telegraph Corps. A year later it was designated as the Telegraph Reserve Royal Engineers. Its role was to supplement the Regular Army's telegraph services operated by the Royal Engineers. After the Haldane Reforms, the regiment kept its association with the Post Office and continued to recruit postal workers into the Territorial Force under its new title '8th (City of London) Battalion, The London Regiment (Post Office Rifles)' in 1908. It served as an infantry regiment in the First World War (1914–18).

The regiment was disbanded in 1921.

During World War II the generation of engineers trained by the GPO for its telecommunications operations were to have important roles in the British development of radar and in code breaking. The Colossus computers used by Bletchley Park were built by GPO engineer Tommy Flowers and his team at the Post Office Research Station in Dollis Hill.

The lives of Joseph William Dunham Sr (1853-1916) and Joseph William Dunham Jr (1881-1944)

Joseph William Jr (1881-1944), Thomas's grandson and the son of Joseph William Sr (1853-1916), was a sorting clerk at the GPO, Dublin, aged twenty according to the 1901 Census. In 1902, he enlisted for Short Service in the Post Office Corps, Regimental Number 826. He died at Baggot Street Hospital, Dublin, aged sixty-three in 1944.

Joseph William Dunham Sr (1853-1916) was also a Freemason, and I wonder if this could have enhanced his career prospects at the Post Office. He joined in 1889 when he was thirty-six. He moved lodges at least once, but was in the Amethyst Lodge Number 206 when he died aged sixty-two in 1916. He had retired in 1901 aged forty-eight with thirty years of service to the GPO. His effects when he died totalled £203, considerably less than his father left. Although he did not experience rapid promotion as his father had, he became head stationary clerk. He lived the life of a gentleman and his daughters married well.

Joseph's daughter Elizabeth, aged twenty-five, married Charles Ralph Topham, an accountant and son of William Topham, a Professor of Music, at Church of Ireland, Church of Christ, Dublin in 1901. Her sister Margaret or Margery Dorothy, aged twenty-nine, married Thomas Dormer Stuart, a clerk in Holy Orders, at St Matthias's Church of Ireland Church, South Dublin in 1908. He seemed to be connected to

Durrow Queen's Company. Isabella, aged twenty-two, married Henry Edmund Shanahan, clerk, at St Matthias's Church, South Dublin in 1905. His father George was Post Secretary of the Board of Works.

Despite these fortuitous marriages, however, five of Joseph Sr's eight children died young:

- Thomas died at eleven months of Hydrocephalus and Convulsions in 1878.
- Samuel Robert died in 1899 aged thirteen of a lung infection
- Elizabeth was twenty-six when she died on 1903 of Tuberculosis and Heart Failure.
- Anne Louise died at age seventeen of Tuberculosis in 1904.
- Isabella was twenty-five when she died on in 1908 of Peritonitis and Heart Failure.

Thus tuberculosis killed three of Joseph Dunham Sr's children and possibly his father. Joseph himself took eight weeks leave for bronchitis between 13th November 1899 and 18th January 1900. Did this precipitate his retirement due to ill health in 1901? His enjoyment of fifteen years of retirement must surely have been marred by the death of three children during this time. Money could not buy health when no cure was available.

Ironic that the family member without military connections should die of anthrax. It may have been caused by him using a deliberately infected shaving brush imported to Dublin from Germany as part of a rumoured war time sabotage. When anthrax spores get inside the body of an animal or human, they attack it, causing a dangerous infection and producing a toxin that kills immune system cells. This can be fatal as it was for Joseph.

Human anthrax vaccines were developed by the Soviet Union in the late 1930s and in the US and UK in the 1950s. The human vaccine for anthrax only became available in 1954. Antibiotics became available around the same time. It was all too late for Joseph Sr.

Youngest son returns to England, third generation immigrant

In 1939 Charles married Alethea de Clare Marshall in Coventry Cathedral. He had been the Vicar of Ansley, near Nuneaton, for three years and had been the first British Chaplain of Tanganyika. A Dunham had returned to England. However, the Dunham family had contributed as a Post Office family in Ireland.

Fact Sheet: Joseph Dunham

Pensioner Details
<i>Pensioner name:</i> Joseph Dunham
<i>Person ID:</i> IR1003
<i>Your name:</i> Nuala Starkey
<i>U3A group:</i> North Down & Ards
Part One: Birth and Family
1: When and where was your pensioner born?
<p>Joseph William was born in 1853, in Dublin. This was the same year that the Great Industrial Exhibition was held in Dublin and PS Queen Victoria sank in a snowstorm at night entering Dublin Bay with the loss of more than 80 lives.</p> <p>The Great Famine (Ireland), a period of mass starvation and disease in Ireland from 1845 to 1852 was just over.</p> <p>He started work in the GPO, Dublin at 19 as a Sorting Clerk in 1871, becoming a Sorting Clerk and Telegraphist of GPO and retiring as Head of Stationary in 1901 due to ill health, aged 49, with a very reasonable pension. He died at 61 of Anthrax and Gangrene on 28th December 1916.</p> <p>On 6th January 1839 Ireland was struck by the most damaging cyclone in 300 years. Joseph lived until the end of 1916, so he experienced turbulent times in Ireland with the Home Rule movement and the Easter Rising. These were followed by The Irish War of Independence (1919 to 1921), a Civil War (28 June 1922 – 24 May 1923) and the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. World events also took their toll. The Crimean War was a military conflict fought from October 1853 to February 1856.</p> <p>World War I was a global war originating in Europe that lasted from 28 July 1914 to 11 November 1918. It led to the mobilisation of more than 70 million military personnel, including 60 million Europeans, making it one of the largest wars in history. It is also one of the deadliest conflicts in history, with an estimated 9 million combatant deaths and 13 million civilian deaths as a direct result of the war, while resulting genocides and the related 1918 Spanish flu pandemic caused another 17–100 million deaths worldwide, including an estimated 2.64 million Spanish flu deaths in Europe and as many as 675,000 Spanish flu deaths in the United State.</p>
2: Who were your pensioners' parents? Record any details you can find out about them here (e.g. occupation, religious affiliation, whether they could read or write)
<p>Joseph's father Thomas (1808-1884) and mother Elizabeth Cobb (1813-1879)</p> <p>Joseph's paternal grandfather Thomas was a gardener from Suffolk (1788-1866). His grandmother, Elizabeth Worts was born in Norfolk (1784-1886) and they lived in Norfolk. His father Thomas (1808-1884) was born in Norfolk as was his mother</p>

Elizabeth Cobb (1813-1879).

Parent's Marriage

Name:	Elizabeth Cobb
Gender:	Female
Marital status:	Single
Marriage Date:	12 Jan 1851
Marriage Place:	Sloley, Norfolk, England
Spouse:	Thomas Dunham
FHL Film Number:	1596387

The 1851 marriage of Joseph's parents, produced two sons and a Post Office family since all the men worked for the Post Office and some of the grandchildren continued the tradition.

My first recording of Thomas Dunham senior in Ireland is in Richmond Cottages, Dublin, in 1862, aged 54, where he is working for the GPO.

After Thomas Dunham and Elizabeth Cobb, both English Protestants, married in Sloley, Norfolk on 12th January 1851 they moved to Dublin and lived in 9 Richmond Cottages for most of their married life. In 1875 when Joseph got married, Thomas was the Assistant Inspector of Mail in the GPO, Dublin. He retired as the Inspector of Mail in the GPO, Dublin.

According to Post Office Records in 1882/1883 Thomas Dunham, a 73 year old Mail Assistant in the Chief Office in Dublin, retired because of old age. He retired with a pension of £133 6s 8d after having worked at the Post Office for 48 years. His salary had been £200. He died on 11 December 1884.

Thomas died of Acute congestion of the lungs at 74 years of age. Elizabeth died of Apoplexy at 66. Note Charles Boniface their neighbour and Thomas's fellow worker in the GPO was with Elizabeth when she died.

3: Did your pensioner have any siblings? What were their names, and how old were they in relation to your pensioner? Use this space to record anything else you have found out about them (e.g. occupation)

Joseph's brother Thomas (1850-1913)

He had an older brother, Thomas, whose wife Elizabeth Cunningham was the daughter of Eglinton Barrack Sergeant William Cunningham. They were married in the All Saints Church of Ireland Parish, Clooney, Co. Londonderry on 7/3/1869.

When they married, Thomas, aged 19, was a Mail Guard living in Clooney Terrace, Derry. His father Thomas was a Mail Assistant. In the 1901 Census Brother Thomas is a Clerk in the GPO. In the 1911 Census he is widowed and retired from the GPO.

Thomas junior died on 8/3/1913 at 18 Charleville Road, Dublin North with his niece Mabel Cunningham, from Montreal, Canada, present. He died of Cerebral Haemorrhage (9 days cert). Elizabeth died of Carcinoma of the bowel and Asthmatic Cardiac failure on 16/12/1908.

Part Two: Marriage and children

1: Did your pensioner marry? What was their spouse's name, and when and where did they marry them? Use this space to record any extra details you can find out about their spouse (e.g. when/where they were born, their occupation)

Joseph William married Isabella Josephine Sharp on 18th May 1875. She was 18 years old, he 22, at the time. They were married in the Saint Aloysius's Church of Ireland Parish Church, South Dublin. He was then a Clerk at the GPO. His father Thomas was Assistant Inspector of Mails. Her father William Sharpe was a Saddler.

Joseph started work in the GPO, Dublin at 19 as a Sorting Clerk in 1871, becoming a Sorting Clerk and Telegraphist of GPO and retiring as Head of Stationary in 1901 due to ill health, aged 49, with a very reasonable pension. Joseph died on 27th December 1916 at the age of 62 at home, 21 Charleston Road (Rathmines & Rathgar East, Dublin). He died of Anthrax and Gangrene. He was with John Charles, his son.

Isabella lived until she was nearly 76 (but 81 years old was recorded) and died of Influenza and Senile Decay on 24th October 1932.

She had lived most of her life in Dublin and was born in Wicklow on 19th December 1856.

2: Did your pensioner have any children? What were their names, and when they were born? Use this space to record any extra details you can find out about them (e.g. occupation, where they lived later in life)

Joseph and Isabella had 8 children between 1876 and 1889.

The 1911 Census stated that only three of these were living. The surviving children were Margaret or Margery Dorothy, Joseph William and John Charles.

The first 3 children were born in Belfast at 23 Calvin Street, Castlereagh, Co Down, Belfast. These were Elizabeth (1876), Thomas (1877) and Margaret (1879). Thomas died at 11 months of Hydrocephalus and Convulsions.

The family seemed to move back to Dublin about 1880 to 5 Prince of Wales Terrace, Ballsbridge. Joseph William (1881), Isabella (1883), Samuel Robert (1885), Anne Louise (1887) and John Charles (1889) were born in Ballsbridge, Dublin.

Samuel Robert died in 1899 aged 13 of a lung infection at Adelaide Hospital, South Dublin. Anne Louise died at age 17 of Tuberculosis in 1904.

Elizabeth aged 25, married Charles Ralph Topham, an accountant and son of William Topham, a Professor of Music, at Church of Ireland, Church of Christ, Dublin in 1901. She was 26 when she died on 31/12/1903 of Tuberculosis and Heart Failure at home,

14 Belgrave Square, Dublin with her father present.

Margaret or Margery Dorothy, aged 29, married Thomas Dormer Stuart, a Clerk in Holy Orders, at St Matthias's Church of Ireland Church, South Dublin in 1908. He seemed to be connected to Durrow Queen's Company. His father was William S Stuart, a contractor.

Isabella, aged 22, married Henry Edmund Shanahan, Clerk, at St Matthias's Church, South Dublin in 1905. His father George E was Post Secretary of the Board of Works. She was 25 when she died on 7/4/1908 of Peritonitis and Heart Failure at 12 Lower Beechwood Avenue, Dublin.

Joseph William, aged 21 in 1902, enlisted for Short Service in the Post Office Corps, Regimental Number 826. Aged 40, he married Marian Ethel Craig in Holy Trinity Church of Ireland Church, Rathmines, Dublin on 10/8/1921. He was a Sorting Clerk and Telg of GPO in 1911 and a Civil Servant in 1921, living in the family home, 21 Charleston Road, Dublin. His brother John Charles and Alice Craig were witnesses. Her father was Joseph Manifold Craig MD. Joseph William died in 1944.

John Charles was an undergraduate Divinity Student at Trinity College Dublin in 1911 aged 22. In 1939 Charles had been the Vicar of Ansley, near Nuneaton, for three years and was first British Chaplain of Tanganyika. He married Alethea de Clare Marshall in Coventry Cathedral. Joseph and Isabella had 8 children, but 5 died very young,

Part Three: Work

1: What occupation was your pensioner recorded as doing in census years? Please make sure to state clearly which year you are referring to

In the 1901 Census (note Durham used) Joseph is 48 and a Clerk at the GPO, living at 74 Ranelagh Road with his wife (46 years old) and 6 children, 2 Scholars, 2 marriageable but unemployed daughters and 2 employed children. One son is a Clerk like himself in the GPO, and a daughter is a Shorthand Typist. An older unemployed Aunt is also living with them.

In the 1911 Census Joseph is 58 years old. He is listed as a Retired Civil Servant, living in 21 Charleston Road, (Rathmines and Rathgar East, Dublin). He lived with his wife Isabella Josephine who was 54 years of age. (b. 1856) and their sons Joseph William, aged 30, a Sorting Clerk and Telg of GPO and John Charles, aged 22, an undergraduate Divinity Student at Trinity College Dublin

The 1901 and 1911 census shows Joseph William's family was Church of Ireland and all could read and write. They could not speak Irish.

Joseph joined the Post Office aged 19 in 1871 as a Clerk and Telegraphist. He was sent to Belfast. Later, between 1879/80 he returned to Dublin to work.

2: What occupations were people living with your pensioner (e.g. spouse, children, boarders) doing in the census years? Please make sure to state clearly which year you are referring to

Joseph William Dunham became Durham in the 1901 Census. Himself and his son Joseph William are Clerks in the GPO. His daughter, Margery is a shorthand typist.

According to the 1911 Census Joseph lived with his wife Isabella Josephine who was 54 years of age. (b. 1857) and their sons Joseph William, aged 30, a Sorting Clerk and Telg of GPO and John Charles, aged 22, an undergraduate Divinity Student at Trinity College Dublin as well as Margaret Jones Dunham, his aunt.

The 1911 census shows Joseph William's family was Church of Ireland and all could read and write. They could not speak Irish.

Part Four: Anything Else

Please use this space to record anything else you have found out about your pensioner

Joseph William Dunham was a Freemason. He joined in 1889 when he was 36. He moved Lodges at least once, but was in the Amethyst Lodge Number 206 when he died.

He left a Will in 1916, the effects of which totalled £293

Joseph's death at 61 of Anthrax and Gangrene on 28th December 1916 remains a mystery. Anthrax is a serious infectious disease, treatable with antibiotics, usually found in farm animals. The bacterium that causes the illness, bacillus anthracis, creates spores which can survive in the environment. If anthrax spores get inside a body of an animal or human, they attack it, causing a dangerous infection and also producing a toxin that attacks immune system cells which can be fatal.

Human anthrax vaccines were developed by the Soviet Union in the late 1930s and in the US and UK in the 1950s. The human vaccine for anthrax only became available in 1954 so timing was bad for Joseph. Risk factors include people who work with animals or animal products, travellers, postal workers, and military personnel but there were rumours that Germans deliberately imported [infected shaving brushes from Germany as part of a war time sabotage](#). A *Londonderry Sentinel* article entitled 'Was It A German Plot?' from 26 August 1916 wrote that "fifty gross of cheap shaving brushes found to be infected with anthrax bacilli have been seized in Newcastle and the district by the authorities [...] there is no improbability in the suggestion that the nation which has poisoned wells and committed other atrocities should have selected this diabolical means of attack on their enemies".

Part Five: Your Sources

Please use this space to record the sources you have used

- 1901 Census Joseph W Dunham
http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Dublin/Rathmines___Rathgar_East/Ranelagh_Road/1293424/
- 1911 Census Joseph W Dunham
http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Dublin/Rathmines___Rathgar_East/Charleston_Road/52411/
- Appointment as clerk to Belfast 1871 Belfast Telegraph Newspaper
<https://search.findmypast.co.uk/bna/viewarticle?id=bl%2f0000428%2f18710213%2f018&stringtohighlight=joseph%20william%20dunham>
- Joseph W Dunham marriage 1875
<https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/details-civil/9569f92870665?b=https%3A%2F%2Fcivilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie%2Fchurchrecords%2Fcivil-perform-search.jsp%3Fnamefm%3DJoseph%26name%3DDunham%26location%3DDublin%2BSouth%26>
- Death Joseph W Dunham
<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=IRE%2FBMD%2FD%2F626471012>
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1917/05224/4445831.pdf
- Will probate Joseph W Dunham
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- Membership of Freemasons 1889 Joseph W Dunham
https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/60904/images/43991_3082375_0002-00562?pld=86375
- Death of wife Isabella 1932
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1932/04872/4317771.pdf
- Daughter Elizabeth birth
<https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/details-civil/0ff3768639045?b=https%3A%2F%2Fcivilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie%2Fchurchrecords%2Fcivil-perform-search.jsp%3Fnamefm%3D%26name%3DDunham%26location%3D%26yyfrom%3D1876>

- Daughter Elizabeth marriage to CR Topham 1901
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/marriage_returns/marriages_1901/10319/5756301.pdf
- Daughter Elizabeth death
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1904/05638/4586608.pdf
- Son Thomas birth
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1877/02990/2095946.pdf
- Son Thomas death
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1878/020505/7195534.pdf
- Daughter Margaret birth
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1879/02910/2066372.pdf
- Daughter Margaret marriage 1908 to TD Stuart
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/marriage_returns/marriages_1908/10056/5657248.pdf
- Son Joseph William birth
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1881/02842/2041727.pdf
- Son Joseph William marriage
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/marriage_returns/marriages_1921/09234/5341667.pdf
- Son John William birth
<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=IRE/BMD/D/612977192>
- Son John William death
<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=IRE/BMD/D/626471012>
- Daughter Isobella birth 1883
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1883/02750/2010477.pdf
- Daughter Isobella marriage to HE Shanahan 1905
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/marriage_returns/marriages_1905/10165/5698135.pdf
- Daughter Isobella Shanahan death 1908

https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1908/05497/4539712.pdf

- Son Samuel Robert birth 1885

https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1885/02648/1976517.pdf

- Son Robert death 1899

https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1899/05806/4643367.pdf

- Daughter Anne Louise birth 1887

https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1887/02572/1951060.pdf

Death Anne Louise 1904
[4583537.pdf \(irishgenealogy.ie\)](https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1904/04583/4583537.pdf)

- Son John Charles Birth 1889

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- Will probate Isobella 1933

<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBOR/GOVPROBATE/C/1933-1933/00031639>

- Death of Elizabeth *Weekly Irish Times* 9 January 1904

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- Banns for parents' Marriage

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- Parents' Marriage

<https://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=9858&h=445924&ssrc=pt&tid=172985765&pid=312242343704&usePUB=true>

- Baptism of father Thomas

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- Marriage of paternal Grandparents

https://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=61636&h=1640107&tid=&pid=&queryId=cec474ba3cbc0c5fe04d724023b8e912&usePUB=true&_phsrc=wGl127&_phstart=successSource

- Death of father Thomas 1884

https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1884/06308/4808475.pdf

- Death of brother Thomas's wife Elizabeth 1908

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- Death of mother Elizabeth 1879

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- Death of brother Thomas 1913

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- Brother Thomas 1901 census

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- Brother Thomas 1911 census

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