

**ORKNEY
FAMILY HISTORY
NEWSLETTER**Issue No 71
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From the Chair

By the time you receive this commemorative edition of Sib Folk News it will be just over 100 years since the Great War started on the 4th August 1914.

When it ended on the 11th November 1918 there was hardly a family in Orkney, or indeed throughout the land, that had not been touched in some way by the horror of that conflict.

Orcadians from every island in Orkney flocked to the recruiting offices and were to be in the forefront of most of the major battles, where many were to give up their young lives for King and country.

It is hard for us today to comprehend the scale of the slaughter where, in just one day on the Somme, British casualties numbered nearly 60,000 with almost one third of them fatal.

Mothers and fathers lived from day to day dreading the arrival of the telegram boy with the fateful message.

In some families one son had enlisted, in others two or more. In my own island of Papa Westray Willie and Mary Irvine from Hinso saw three of their sons enlist in the army and one in the merchant navy and only one of the four was to survive. And the Irvines were not the only family in Papay touched by the Great War. There are eight names on the WW1 memorial — eight young lives from a tiny island with a population, in 1914, of 260. And that was being repeated in homes throughout the land.

This issue tells the story of the Irvine boys together with those of some of the other Orkney lads but it commemorates all Orcadians and all the young men who died in the war to end all wars so that we might be free.

Anne Rendall

Chair



By Anne Rendall, Member No 63

Like many families throughout the country, Willie and Mary Irvine from Hinso, Papa Westray, saw three of their sons enlist in the army and two sons in the Merchant Navy.

By the time WW1 broke out their sons Robert and George had emigrated to Canada, Robert in 1910 and George in 1913 both getting jobs with the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway.

George, born 29th April 1893 was already in 'H' Co. 56th Regiment Militia and we have the pay list for June 1914 where he was paid \$10.80 for 12 days drill training. On 1st September 1915 George enlisted in the 67th Battalion Canadian Infantry, as Gunner Private No.102054 in Victoria, British Columbia. After his training he was posted to France where he was gassed twice and hospitalised. His army records are currently being digitalised so we don't have the exact dates involved. After peace was declared he was transferred and saw further service in the 54th Canadian Infantry and 29th Vancouver Battalion. He was a member of the Corps Guard to the then Prince of Wales and was on duty at a castle near Bonn, Germany. A tall man he excelled at sport and was a keen athlete and took part in various army sports in France and Germany and won some half dozen medals, especially tug-of-war. He returned to Edmonton, Canada in 1919 where he worked as a Boiler Maker's Helper and according to his tax return for 1920 he was paid \$1722.40 The depression hit Canada shortly after that and George decided to come home to Hinso to help his parents on the croft. He arrived in Liverpool aboard the 'Canada' on 29th October 1922.

Willie and Mary's youngest son closely followed his older brother's example and enlisted at Holland House, Papa Westray on 17th December 1915 in front of the Justice Mr J Petrie. He was listed as a ploughman, 20 years 82 days and 6' tall. Gunner David Irvine no. 91482 Royal Garrison Artillery was mobilised on 29th May 1916 and according to his casualty form he disembarked in France on 16th Nov 1916 and was posted to the Fourth Army Pool in the battle field. He was in the Hospital in January 1917, it couldn't have been too serious as he was posted to the 3rd Army pool by 9th Feb. On the 10th December 1917 he was killed in action, along with two of his comrades, aged 22 years. His NCO, Sergeant Light, wrote to his mother on 26th December to express his sincere sympathy and described David as 'a very popular member of his section'.

His British War and Victory Medals were sent to his mother on 12th October 1921.

He is buried in Villers-Faucon Communal Cemetery.

Thomas, the fifth son was born on 5th July 1889 enlisted at Holland House on the same day as his younger brother and was listed as a fisherman and crofter and 5ft 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

Private Thomas Irvine, Seaforth Highlanders no 10686 did his training at Fort George and was mobilised in February 1916 he was wounded by a shell and discharged on 26 August 1917. Thomas came home to his parents at Hinso, but unfortunately he

never recovered from his wounds and died on 2nd Sep 1918, his death certificate showing chronic brights disease as cause of death.

Willie and Mary's eldest son John born 16th Jan 1881 was already in the Merchant Navy and based in Glasgow when the war broke out and was interred in Germany and only released 'on penalty of death should he take up arms against Germany'. He obviously took no notice of the warning as he continued serving and was involved in a sea battle with a U boat in the mid Atlantic on 17th March 1917. The Chief Officer wrote a poem telling of the epic fight.

We read about our army who are fighting on the shore,
and also of our navy, and what we're fighting for;
Now I'll tell you of a sea-fight as fine as could be seen
Between HMT Shimosa and a German Submarine.

We left the port of Newport, Mon, on March the nineteenth day,
Steamed down the Bristol Channel bound where we cannot say;
On the morning of the 24th, the enemy hove in view
And fired a shot across our bow, a signal to heave-to.

Our Captain gave the order to call out every man,
For each to stand at stations and beat him if we can;
We will try our very hardest to give to him the slip,
While shells fell fast and furious around about our ship.

A message then he sent to us, it sounded like a boast,
Saying if we would surrender he would take us to the coast;
Stand by the gun! Our Captain cried, we will answer with a shot,
We'll fight for death or victory, but surrender we will not.

Our gunners then got ready to fight him to the last,
And for two and a quarter hours the shells fell thick and fast;
Our shells were having good effect, three hits were very clear,
And soon his gun was silenced, he was seen to disappear.

Now all you hardy captains of the Mercantile Marine,
If while sailing o'er the ocean you should sight a submarine;
If you have a gun just fight him, it's the only thing to do,
And show old Bill, the Kaiser, what Merchant ships can do.

RJ Morgan, Chief Officer.

Unfortunately the SS Shimosa was sunk in the mid-atlantic by a U46 later that year on 31st July with 17 hands lost including the master.

On 20 June 1919 Captain John Irvine was awarded the DSC. The citation reads;

In recognition of zeal & devotion to duty shown in carrying on the trade of the Country during the war to receive the Distiguished Service Cross - Captain John Irvine. ■



THE BATTLE OF LOOS

By Patricia Long, Member No 1531

The Battle of Loos, in September 1915, was one of the major British offensives on the Western Front. Six divisions were sent towards the German lines in what was described as The Big Push. There were fifty thousand British casualties and one of them was my grandfather's first-cousin: **William Leask** from Coldomo, Stenness. The publication of his vivid account of his experiences, "Behind the Barbed Wire in Germany" was prevented by WWII but it was serialised in the *Orcadian* in 1936.

For some weeks before the battle, the troops knew something was about to happen. Several large buildings were cleared for hospitals. "Stacks of stretchers were piled up around our billets, which made us think some. Lots of the stretchers were still caked with dried blood." On the afternoon of 24 September, the Commander of their company of the Seaforth Highlanders, Major **Tremearne**, told them that their job was to take Lens and said, "Men, this will be a costly show".

That night, they made their way up to the front line. "It started to rain, making the trenches all greasy, and the going hard. Each man was carrying three hundred rounds of ammunition, a two-gallon drum of water, and three empty sandbags slung through his belt. Each man also had a pick and shovel alternately. We cursed, stumbled and slipped along in the darkness, with the fore-sight of our rifles getting caught every now and then in the telephone wires. Eventually we reached our allotted position, and waited for dawn. All through the night it drizzled, and we sat and shivered."

The barrage began at dawn: "Our artillery went mad; the shells screamed over our heads without a break... Our trench was falling in with the vibration of bursting shells. The roar as they skimmed over our heads was terrifying. It was like standing under a railway bridge with about twenty express trains thundering over all the time."

The Battle of Loos is remembered as the first time Britain used chlorine gas, and the troops had to put their gas masks on. "I felt very lonely when I put mine on. I wanted the companionship of my neighbour badly. About quarter of an hour before zero hour, we were told to roll up our masks, but leave them on our heads.

At five minutes to go the barrage lifted. "Three minutes to go, boys." How I wished I was home. An awful empty feeling was gripping my stomach.

"Get ready, boys, one minute to go." We were standing on the lower rungs of the ladders now waiting, waiting for what?

"Half a minute to go, are you all ready?"

"Come on men, over we go."

Over the parapet we went amidst encouraging cries from the

engineers we were leaving behind. "Good old Jocks, slip it about them Seaforths." Once we got moving things took on a different aspect. We soon found out that there was still plenty of life in the German trenches.

Men were going down all over the place, some smiling because they had got a nice Blighty one, others with the death mask settling over their faces before they hit the ground. The artillery had cut the barbed wire very effectively in my part of the line, and it was not long until we were standing on the German parapet, firing down at the bottom of the trench. Some of them were flinging money and cigars at us.

We jumped over the trenches and made for Loos, which was about a mile away over open ground."

The fighting went on through the streets of the town and up Hill 70 behind it. "There followed fierce, bitter fighting. Man met his fellow man face to face, and fought to the death with rifle butt, bayonet and bomb. Mercy was neither asked nor given."

When they reached the crest of the hill, the shelling stopped, as mist prevented either side knowing where the line was. The men rested and shook hands with each other but after twenty minutes they were ordered to advance on the town of Lens, although reinforcements had not arrived. They came under heavy fire just outside the town and were ordered to halt in front of barbed wire entanglements.

"I remember lying with my nose buried in the ground scooping the earth in front with my trenching tool. Lying there with my nose in the ground, the sweet smell of white clover, which was growing all around us, made one think what a farce it all was. Every now and then I would have a little peep to see how my mound was getting on, and wondering if there was enough to stop a bullet. As I scooped a hollow so did I worm myself into it.

I wonder how many bullets were fired for every man hit? The tune of them sounded continuously. The ping, ping, as they went past one's head, and the ripp, zipp, as they struck the earth beside one, got monotonous. For two hours we lay there waiting on our reinforcements to come pouring over the hill. Nothing to do but dig oneself in, no enemy to be seen, just wait on the reinforcements or death, with heavy odds on death."

Orders eventually came to retire. "The left of our line started to get up and go back, so we all, that is to say all who were left, got up and started to go back up the hill. The line of dead and wounded could be seen stretching away into the distance. So this was war! We had not served any purpose by coming over ▶

◀ the hill. What a feeling of despondency!

On going back up the hill, men began to drop faster and faster. I had a premonition that I would never get back, and thought I was going to be killed. I would look at a bunch of grass ahead, and wonder if I would be dead before reaching it.

It was a very small handful of us that reached the crest again. I remember a man in front of me turn a somersault when, bang, I thought somebody had hit me with the butt end of his rifle. A chap said to me, "Are you hit?" On blood starting to run out of my chest I knew I was hit.

I could see some of our men digging a trench about two hundred and fifty yards away, and knew I had to get there. My rifle began to get heavier and heavier, until at last I had to drop it. Then I became blind, but still conscious and on my feet. At last my knees began to get groggy, and eventually down I went, when all became blank. On coming to again, I managed to sit up with my hands on the ground behind to support me.

A crowd of Germans were coming up at the double towards me, and one who was running about fifty yards ahead came over with his rifle and bayonet ready to stick me. How I watched that German's eyes as he approached me. I wondered if it would be very sore to have a bayonet stuck in one; would he stick me in the ribs or the stomach? Then I thought, I am dying anyhow, so this will only hasten matters. As the German drew near, I saw the look in his eyes change, and knew he was not going to harm me. He called "verwounded" and ran on.



I fell back unconscious once more. I was wounded about mid-day, and when I came round it was getting dusk, and Germans were still running over the top of

me. They were digging themselves in ten yards beyond me, I was ten yards on the wrong side of the line. The unthought of had come to pass – I was a prisoner.

I was now lying in a pool of blood, and every time I moved my right arm it gurgled out afresh... I now opened my tunic and shirt and had one look at my wound; oh horrors, it seemed my chest was blown out. My left hand was the only one I could use, so I opened my knife and started to cut off my equipment. I simply severed through everything until at last I managed to free myself."

William lay there through Saturday afternoon and night. On Sunday morning, British shells began to rain down around him.

"The barrage was getting heavier, and I thought I should go mad with terror as the shrapnel splinters were flying all around me. At last I got beyond the terror stage, and found myself watching the shells bursting quite calmly.

Strangely enough, I found myself in a most comfortable position now, lying at a nice incline with bits of plank holding

me up. After the intense bombardment had lasted for an hour or two, our infantry started to attack, but the Germans started running back into the trench, machine guns were hauled up from the bottom of it, and opened fire on our men, simply mowing them down. Our boys were unable to shift them and I had the terrible experience of seeing my own side falling back, I was not to be re-taken.

The shelling eased off after that, and the sun shone brilliantly, so I lay and thought, and swooned alternately. My water was all finished, and I was suffering greatly from thirst, but my wound had no feeling. When it got between 11 and 12 o'clock mid-day, I thought of all the church services that would be on at home, and imagined I could hear the old minister at Fort George praying, "Oh Lord, we pray for our soldiers in the trenches and our sailors on the sea, and especially, oh Lord, do we pray for those lying on the battlefield wounded sore unto death." I felt quite important to think I came under the latter heading. My thirst was getting unbearable, and I kept thinking of all the burns at home running to waste, and I dying just for the want of one drink. At last, my thirst became so unbearable, I started shouting (or trying to) to the Germans. They could come and finish me off or do what they liked, anything was better than the awful thirst."

As daylight broke, two young German soldiers crawled out of the trench and hauled **William Leask** in. He spent seventeen days in a ward for the severely wounded in Douai Hospital and was then sent to a hospital in Wesel on Rhine in Germany. He was finally fit to be sent to a POW camp at the end of the year.

He spent the remainder of the war in several camps in Western



Germany, being made to work in factories, shunting yards and coal mines. He made five escape attempts and finally crossed the Dutch border, a few days after the war ended. He had been told the Armistice had been signed but decided to take no chances and cross the border under his own steam. A few weeks later he landed in Hull.

"When the actual moment came for landing, one could not help thinking 'What about the boys we have left behind, who will never set foot on their own shores again.' I think all the men had the same thoughts, for there was a dead silence. Not a man had a word to shout, not even for a girl. The moment was too great." ■





Adapted from material produced by Johanna Stewart nee Tait for her 'Fereday' project

In 1989 **Johanna Tait**, then a schoolgirl aged 13 decided to try her hand at an entry for the Fereday Project. This was set up by Ray Fereday, formerly Principal Teacher of History at Kirkwall Grammar School where a prize is still awarded annually for the best historical investigation carried out by second year pupils. The standard of work is extremely high and many entries contain much in the way of original research.

When Johanna's mother, **Joey Tait**, nee Hercus, member no 29 of the Orkney Family History Society heard that we were hoping to produce a WW1 themed issue she delivered Johanna's original entry together with the original documents referred to in the story. While lack of space precludes me from including all of these I hope that the extracts and additions I have used conveys the essence of Johanna's story. Ed.

Willie's War by Johanna Tait.

I had always been intrigued by the wooden trunk that my gran told me that great grandfather, **William M Hay**, had made while serving aboard HMS Victorious in Scapa Flow during the first World War.

The trunk still stands in the shed which is warm and smells of creosote. When I started to look through the trunk I found quite a lot of interesting information about World War 1 and the people in it, particularly **William Charles Robertson**. **William Charles Roberson** was born in Kirkwall on the 18th October 1884. His mother was **Jane Leslie** and his father was **William Robertson**, both from Kirkwall

William would have been 30 years old when World War 1 began in 1914.

The war was sparked off by the assassination in Sarajevo of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Hapsburgh thrones, on the 28th June 1914.

Germany declared war on Russia and France and invaded Belgium. Britain declared war on Germany on June 28th, 1914.

Men all over the country volunteered to fight for King and Country. By the end of 1914 1,186,000 men had enlisted into the fighting forces.

Men from Orkney volunteered too and many of them

would never before have been out of the islands. How brave they were setting off to fight. Some men were threatened that if they did not enlist they would lose their jobs and would be called cowards.

William enlisted in the Seaforth Highlanders in 1916 when he was 33 years old. The Seaforths had the largest recruiting area in the British Army which included all of Scotland north of Inverness including the Orkney Islands. The Regiment raised a total of 17 battalions during the course of WW1. The second battalion was sent to France as part of the BEF and all service battalions fought in most theatres of war receiving 60 Battle Honours, 7 Victoria



Crosses and losing 8,830 men during the war.

Their uniform was a piper-green coatee and a McKenzie tartan kilt. Their badge is a stag's head with the motto Cuidich'n Righ which means Help to the King.

William Charles Robertson left 4 Main Street, Kirkwall

to help the king and was soon in the battlefields of France as part of the 7th battalion of the Seaforth Highlanders.

He evidently had some leave in Orkney for I discovered some photos of his niece **Ursula** dressed up in his uniform.

Life in the trenches would have been dreadful; mud, water, fleas and lice. In 1916 his mother received a letter informing her that **William** was in hospital with pyrexia which is a fever caused by bacteria. In November **William** was ill again this time from tonsillitis.

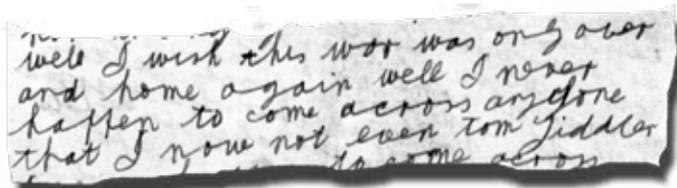
The 7th battalion saw action in the battles of Albert, Bazentin, Delville Wood and Le Transloy. During 1917 **William** would have fought at Passchendale and Welsh Ridge. In 1918 the battalion was in the thick of the fighting at St Quentin, Bapaume and Messines. It is possible that **William** was also at the Battle of Cambrai as my mother has a ring made from munitions metal and engraved 1914 Cambrai 1918. The allied losses at this battle alone were 44,000 ▶



◀ dead or wounded with over 700 men missing. Despite the terrible times he must have faced, his letters remained calm and remarkably cheerful. This is part of a letter written to his niece **Ursula** on the 14th January 1918. It was posted at a field post office and it carried the stamp of the censors who read all soldier's mail to ensure that no restricted or secret information was passed on.



The Cambrai Ring



"I am glad that you got the cards that I sent you and Gillies. I sent your daddy one hoping he got it alright....I wish it was only over and home again. I just got the mail that you sent.....It is very cold and frosty here....I wish this war was only over and home again..... again ta ta. Write soon XXXX"

Another letter was written to his mother on the 5th April 1918:-



Charles is remembered by Sharon Kirkness whose family tree is linked to Margaret Kirkness, Charles' mother

Charles Kirkness 135762

19th Canadian Infantry
 Central Ontario Regiment
 Born Orkney Islands 30th January 1891
 Enlisted Toronto aged 26
 Killed in Action 12th January 1917
 Son of Peter and Margaret Kirkness of Hammersworth, Sandwick.
 Next of kin Peter Kirkness (brother).
 Charles Kirkness is buried in the Bullay Grenay Communal Cemetery

.....I am not had any time to write any of you - always moving from one place to the other.....never had my boots off for six daysWell dear mother I think I will be drawing to a close at this times.....write soon.

Sadly this was to be the last letter that **William** would write. On the 25th April a Seaforth Chaplain wrote to **William's** mother to tell her that her son had been severely wounded. On the 18th May the dreaded telegram was delivered to 4 Main St, Kirkwall informing Mrs **Jane Robertson** that her son had died from wounds on the 25th April.

William is buried at the Grootbeck British Cemetery which is four miles west, south west of Ypres which is in Belgium.

He is just one of the 37million military and civilian casualties of the war to end all wars ■



FOOTLOOT RECOVERED

Gregor Lamb recalls a boyhood tale

Peter Esson was the librarian in Stromness when I was a pupil at Stromness Academy. At lunchtime several of us boys used to go down to the library and pore over the books there. Peter liked a yarn and it was during one of these interludes that he told the following story:

'When I wis in the trenches in the First World War, Red Cross parcels used to arrive noo and again and we fairly luffed forward tae that. Wan time whin things wir dished oot I got a pair o hand knitted socks—that wis wan thing thit we really appreciated fur wir feet wir nearly alwis uncomfortable and a pair o new socks wis jist bliss. Weeman aal ower Britain wir knittan socks fur the men in the trenches. Weel I wis jist fur pittan wan on when I thowt I fand something inside. I tuk hid oot. Hid wis a piece o paeper wae a handwritten note:

This socks were knitted by Ellen Smith, 14 John Street, Stromness, Orkney, Scotland.

Mercy that wife lived jist twa-three doors along the street fae me. Wis that no a coincidence!'

Peter was lucky, not only to get his new socks but also to be able to wear them.

In his book, Backs to the Wall published in Australia in 1937, Lieutenant G. D. Mitchell of the 10th Australian Battalion tells of the interesting sequel to a foraging party of 31 German soldiers and an officer surrendering to him.

'I went through the German officer's pack and I was surprised to find that the officer had already gone through the pack of a British soldier for inside the pack were tins of beef, bars of soap, a tin of Capstan cigarettes and a pair of new socks. I immediately put the socks on but as I was doing so discovered that there was something inside one. It was a piece of paper with a handwritten note which read, To some brave soldier. I hope these socks are comfortable. If they are not, rub soap in them. Ruth MacDonald, 7 Manse Place, Inverness, Scotland, NB. (i.e. North Britain G. L).■



The story of Richard James Rousay of Eday by Anne Moodie, Member No 693

One of the rewarding things about family history research is the fact that you can reconnect with members of your family who have been forgotten through time. One such person was **Richard J Rousay**, who is listed on the Eday War Memorial but who had left the island many years before his death in 1919. To the present generation his name means very little but that only increases the interest of the family historian. In keeping with many other OFHS members I was intrigued by the prospect of tracking down this long lost relative and finding out about his life and war service.

Richard James Rousay was born at Costyhead (later Costa Head) Eday on the 16 August 1867. He was the third son of **Richard Rousay** and **Isabella Peace**. His siblings were: **Peter**, born 27 February 1863; **John**, born 27 November 1864; Isabella, born 3 March 1871 and **William Cormack**, born 31 May 1873. **Richard** also had two half sisters, as both his parents had been married before and each had a daughter called Jane.

The 1881 census shows the family living at Costyhead but by the 1891 census **Richard** had gone to Edinburgh. This was common for many of the Islands young men as crofts could not support more than one family. He is shown as living at 16 Brougham Street, a boarder in the house of a saddler and his wife. He is aged 23, unmarried and his occupation is given as a Stationer's Assistant.

It isn't known what firms **Richard** worked for but Edinburgh was a city built on the production of books. Until the mid-1960s, Edinburgh was the major centre outside London for printing and publishing in the UK and by the beginning of the 20th century, stationery manufacture rivalled in importance its parent industry, the book trade. Printing, publishing and stationery businesses were located throughout the city and employed a workforce of between 5,000 and 7,000 people well into the 1960s. The industry developed through the need to supply Edinburgh's thriving financial, legal and educational establishments, all consumers of great quantities of stationery.

On the 25 January 1895 **Richard** married **Jessie McChlery McRea** at Broughton St, Edinburgh. Richard was 27 and was working as a Stationer. **Jessie** was the daughter of **John McRea**, a Printer Foreman and **Jessie Boyd**. Her occupation was given as hospital nurse. During their time in Edinburgh, Richard and **Jessie** had 3

children. **Richard James**, born 7 March 1896 at 3 Dalgety Street; **Jessie Boyd McRea Rousay**, born 11 November 1897 at 36 Easter Road and **John McRea Boyd Rousay**, born 18 October 1899 at 36 Hay Terrace. Unfortunately the family then disappear from the 1901 census, both in Scotland and in England. This may well have something to do with the spelling of the name. At some point they move to London.

In London they had a further two children - **Isabella** born 14 April 1904 and **Henry Hutchings**, born 15 April 1906. Sadly Isabella died of pneumonia in 1909, aged 5 years. Interestingly on each of the certificates **Richard's** occupation is listed as Stationer's Manager; Commercial Traveller and a Printers' and Stationers' Traveller. It is not known if he moved jobs through choice or because he found it difficult to get on in London. The family also seemed to move house a lot. In the 1911 census **Richard** is shown as a Printer's Manager and the family were living in Enfield. The eldest son **Richard**, aged 15, was working as a Machine Winder (Electrical).

We find Richard again through his Army enlistment record in 1914. Although aged 47 he gave his age as 44 and joined the Territorial Force, the 7th City of London Regiment, later becoming part of the 18th (London) Battalion of the Rifle Brigade. This battalion was formed from national reservists who were initially used for guarding vulnerable points in Great Britain. Richard's address is given as David Buildings, Hoxton Street N, London. Hoxton was an extremely poor area of London, north of the river, near Shoreditch, Hackney and Bethnal Green. He is again listed as a Traveller. The Attestation papers also show that **Richard** had previously served in the 21st Middlesex Regiment, in a territorial capacity. ▶

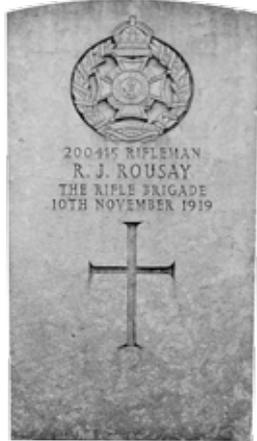


Church Parade, 18th Rifle Brigade Rangoon, 30th June, 1918

◀ **Richard** was transferred to the 18th (London) Battalion and sent to India on the 25 November 1915. With so many men needed on the Western Front the decision was taken to use reservists to guard the outposts of the Empire. During his time in India **Richard** had no home leave but was in hospital 3 times. On one occasion it stated that he was 'weak, thin and fainted on parade'.

It is not known what contact **Richard** had with his family in Orkney. All that remains on our side of the family is a letter from his daughter **Jessie** (known as **Cissy**) to her cousin **Jessie Rousay** in Eday. The letter is dated the 24th November but unfortunately no year is given. In it **Cissy** mentions the fact that her brother **Dick** had been in Scapa Flow early in the war. **Dick** served in the Royal Navy. **Jessie** had obviously had a scare with a mine and **Cissy** surprisingly asked if she had any 'relics' from the experience as **Cissy** liked to go 'relic hunting after the raids' and had a piece of 'Zepp'. **Cissy** also writes of 'knitting some things for a Tommy at the front.

The letter is very poignant because **Cissy** talks of **Jessie** and **Isa Rousay** coming to London for a holiday 'when my father comes home and the war is over which I don't think will be very long now'. Sadly that never happened. **Richard James Rousay** died on the 10th November 1919 and is buried in Colombo (Kanatte) General Cemetery, Sri Lanka. There was a Military hospital situated at Colombo which also treated sick and wounded servicemen from passing transport ships. **Richard** may have been on his way home from India. His death certificate states that he died of Malaria. Further tragedy struck the family in 1922 when **Richard's** wife **Jessie** died of heart disease and exhaustion aged 50.



It would be great if someone reading this article has information about **Richard's** descendants or even a photograph. In our family he was all but forgotten about apart from the name on the Eday War memorial. Through a bit of research a reconnection has been made which is particularly appropriate in the year in which we commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. So many young Orcadians gave their lives for this country. It is important that their memory lives on. ■

WW1 and WW2 claims the lives of two brothers

Evelyn Eunson, Member No. 646 writes to say that a few years ago her son said that a friend of his, **Anne Marie**, had Orkney connections and would like to visit the Islands.

When the friend arrived it turned out that her connections with Orkney were two young sailors who had lost their lives in two World Wars. They were her grandfather's brothers, on either side of him in the family.

Anne Marie had brought two copies of a card, in remembrance of 'Archie' and 'Cecil', with pictures and wording similar to that which appears below.

Evelyn's son took her to the Kitchener Memorial where she left a card and flowers in Memory of **Archie** who had lost his life in HMS Hampshire and **Evelyn** arranged to have the card for **Bertie's** placed in the display cabinet at the Royal Oak Memorial.

Anne Marie was pleased when we found her Uncle **Bertie's** name in the Book of Remembrance in St Magnus Cathedral.

She was sad not to find Uncle **Archie's** name anywhere and while Kitchener had been honoured there was little to mark the passing of the 649 others who perished that June night.



**ARCHIBALD GRANT
WATTS**

BORN 27 NOV. 1896
in Jersey. C.I.

Died on HMS Hampshire
15th June 1916



**HERBERT CECIL
WATTS**

BORN 21 JULY 1900
in Jersey. C.I.

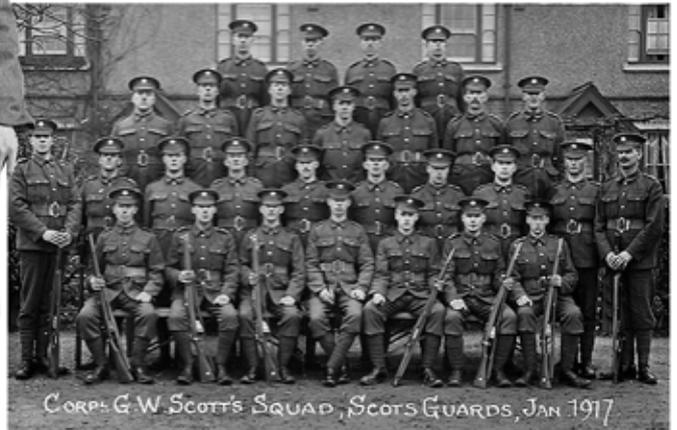
Died on HMS Royal Oak
14th Oct 1939

Very much loved sons, grandsons, brothers and uncles
Remembered Always.

*But for the touch of a vanished hand
And the sound of a voice that is still!
Break, break, break,
At the foot of the crags, O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.*
Alfred Lord Tennyson



How can we remember those we never knew?



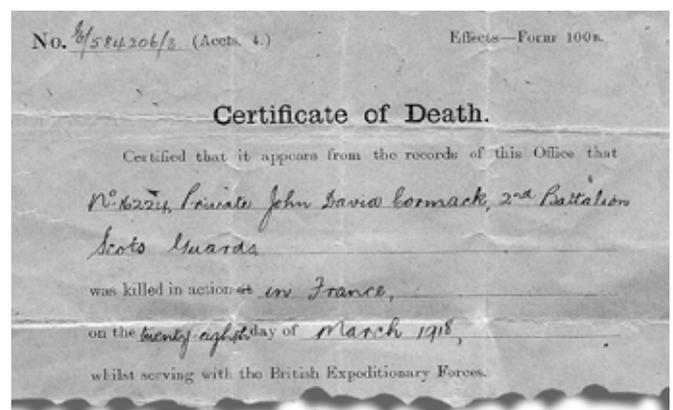
By Anne Cormack, Member No 73

My husband's uncle, **John David Cormack**, from Dundas House, South Ronaldsay, left his job in the local Co-op and enlisted aged 18 at Hoxa Head in June 1916. He was mobilised in November 1916. Having qualified as a sniper, **John** landed in France in August 1917 and joined his battalion in the field on 21st September. From August 13 he kept a diary, and amazingly this diary found its way back to the family after he was killed. It is now one of our treasured possessions. The following extracts written as events happened and without the benefits or otherwise of hindsight, show the unimaginable horrors these young soldiers had to endure.

- Sept 2 1917 In morning was up before Grenadier lieutenant about letter I wrote home yesterday because I said I'd not be in the Guards next war if I could help it. Nearly got court martialled. Tore up letter
- Sept 19 Got letter from home first since I landed in France
- Oct 1 Got telegram from home at dinner time "all well etc"
- Oct 5 On fatigue carrying water. Got badly shelled. Corp Luron? killed. Serg Wright wounded. Got lost going up and get in French lines
- Oct 6 Lay in trench and shelled all day. Was stuck in mud up to the waist. Very cold and wet woke up shivering often
- Oct 7 Lay in trench. Got bombed and fired at with machine guns from aeroplanes. Got rum and blanket and fell asleep. Heard one chap say it was like jumping out of hell into heaven
- Oct 9 Passed dozens of dead Grenadiers. German prisoners coming in thick and wounded from attack
- Oct 10 Several casualties acted as stretcher bearer
- Oct 13 In French dugout. Very dirty place lice fleas rats etc. Couldn't get to sleep for hours for lice
- Oct 14 German aeroplanes dropped bombs all around. One fell on 1st Battalion. Killed 8 men and wounded 14

- Oct 18 Went sick with blisters on face caused by the gas we got on Friday night. Got face tied up (John was relieved of duties until October 31)
- Nov 17 Marched 15 kilometres to big chateau where Wellington slept before Waterloo
- Nov 21 Went over the top to drive them out of corner of wood
- Dec 25 Xmas day. Had dinner in magazine
- Dec 31 Had great night. Singing and dancing etc bringing in the New Year
- Jan 22 At Guards Cinema at night and saw **John Matches*** in afternoon
- Mar 5 Fetched down German aeroplane with our rifles 3 of us. One young airman on her
- Mar 22 On parade in morning. Got dressed in fighting order and went off in motor buses
- This is the last entry in **John's** diary. He was killed six days later.

***John Matches** was probably from East Cleat, South Ronaldsay. We found him in the 1911 census aged 22. ▶





Remembering John Guthrie Brass Kirkness

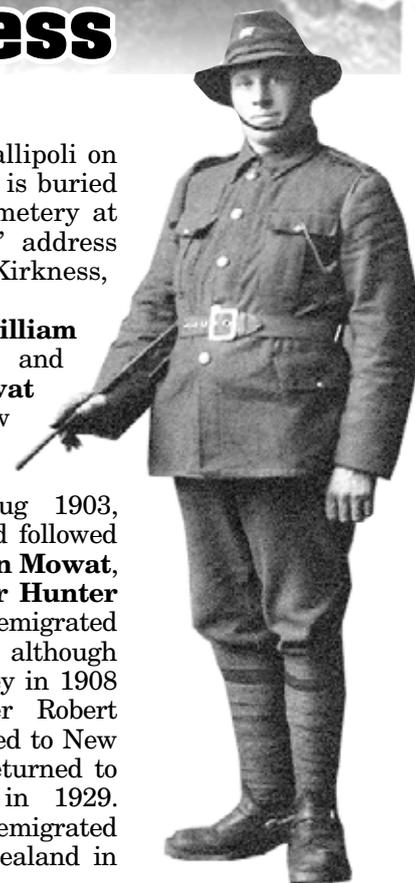
By Virginia Rapson, Melbourne, Australia

My grandfather's brother **John Guthrie Brass Kirkness** (also known as Jack) died at Gallipoli. I have a couple of photos which you are welcome to use. Unfortunately I cannot give any personal anecdotes about him as he was not mentioned a lot by family when I was growing up although I do remember a sense of sadness when his name was mentioned. I only realised the significance when I was going through my mother's old photos after she died. I have pieced together what I do know about him.

He was the third child (of 5 or 6 children) of **William Robert Brass Kirkness** and **Jane Guthrie** and was born on the 6 March 1886 at Queenamoan, Scabra, Sandwick. His mother died on 9 May 1891 when he was 5. His father remarried soon after her death and fathered seven more children. In the 1901 Census, at age 15, John was recorded as a farmer's son living with his father, stepmother and his younger sister and three of his half siblings at the above address. It appears that John emigrated to New Zealand via London on The Athenic departing June 1905. He was recorded as living and working as a farmhand near Ashburton in the South Island of New Zealand in 1911. He joined the Canterbury Mounted Rifles, N.Z.E.F. (rank Trooper) and is recorded as dying of disease (some sort of gastric infection, I believe), age 29, while

on active service at Gallipoli on 10 December 1915. He is buried at the Canterbury Cemetery at Gallipoli. His parents' address is listed as Midhouse, Kirkness, Sandwick.

My grandparents **William Stephen Kirkness** and **Eliza Jane (Jean) Mowat** had preceded him to New Zealand, coincidentally also travelling on The Athenic, departing Aug 1903, both aged 19. They had followed **Jean's** sister, **Mary Ann Mowat**, and her husband **Peter Hunter Johnston**, who had emigrated previously in 1901 although they returned to Orkney in 1908. **John's** half brother Robert Scott Kirkness emigrated to New Zealand in 1911 but returned to Orkney permanently in 1929. His half sister **Selina** emigrated permanently to New Zealand in 1914.



Continued from the previous page

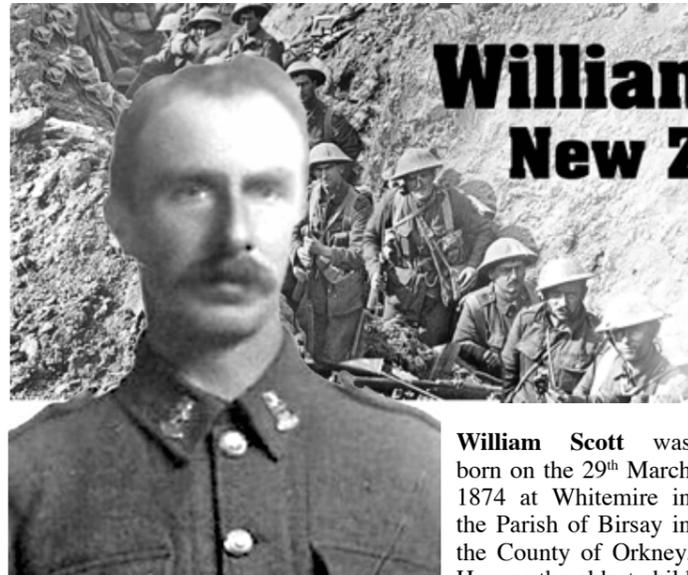


In the late 50s, while a student, I worked during the summer as an au pair with a family in the north of France. One Sunday they insisted our afternoon car outing should be to one of the many WWI graveyards in the area, an odd choice of destination, I thought, to show a young Scots woman. I have never forgotten

that day. As far as the eye could see, there were closely packed white crosses, since in that cemetery at least the more familiar traditional gravestones had not yet been erected. It was the youth of the victims that disturbed me. So many of them were about my age, young men who, had they been allowed to live, would by then have been in late middle age, proud grandparents perhaps, but they never got the chance.

Around fifteen years ago, **Alastair** and I went to Northern France to visit the graveyards where we knew, or suspected, several family members might be commemorated. Since **John David Cormack** was never found he does not have a grave. We discovered his name, along with many others, inscribed in Bay 1 of the Arras Memorial.

ANNE CORMACK (Member 73)



William Scott - 42715 New Zealand Rifle Brigade

By John Burgess, Member No 2976

them in before 4pm. A second bottle of water was issued to us. Our position was shelled hourly during stand to this evening. I counted 17 shells fall around us in one minute".

21st August 1918. P Murphy got a bullet through his leg in the night while on gas guard. Reveille at 2am. Breakfast at 2.30am. Rum issued to all but the writer. Marched forward in battle order at 3.15am. We went in single file the rifle section in front. A runner, **F Thornley**, acted as guide and was followed by Capt. **Seddon**, Sgt. **Keatley**, Lieut. **Boyd**, Rflm. **Smith**, the writer and others. There was a very heavy mist and the grass was very wet. We advanced through ground filled with shell holes and it was heavy going. We took up our position in an open trench a few hundred yards behind our front line trench about 4am. We had some difficulty in finding our position in the mist. The platoon that was to be on our left did not find their position till half an hour after us. My platoon, No 3 A Coy. 3rd Bn. NZRB, was on the right end of the NZ line. We had on our right the 42nd Lancashire Fusiliers. Our position was just where a communication trench (C.T.) ran into the trench we were in. This was a dangerous place and was the most likely place to be shelled by the enemy to prevent fresh troops from coming in. We waited here till 4.55 when our barrage opened up. The enemy replied immediately with his barrage. As soon as the barrage opened **Smith**, **Boyd** and I left the trench and got into shell holes about 3 chains in front. The other men preferred the protection of the trench but we were thankful later on that we had got out of it. The enemy's barrage consisted of small shells, shrapnel, ground shrapnel and machine gun bullets. He had our distance to a nicety and knowing where the C.T. was made our position a very hot one. The noise of the guns firing, the shells exploding and the machine gun bullets whistling past was something terrific. Lying under a barrage like this is the part of a battle that tries the mens' nerves most. They just have to wait under shot and shell not knowing what instant they may be wounded or blown to pieces. Our barrage was to last from 4.55am till 6.30am. After that a creeping barrage was to be put up from 6.30 till 7.30. As soon as the creeping barrage started we had to follow it as closely as we could. Immediately after our first barrage opened the two stretcher bearers in my platoon got wounded. A few minutes later a shell blew Capt. **Seddon** and two of my mates, **Shelley** and **Dent** to pieces and wounded another two. I had been only a couple of yards from Capt. **Seddon** in the trench. I was glad that I had gone forward into the shell hole. Felt very sorry that Capt. **Seddon** and **Shelley** and **Dent** were killed. Capt. **Seddon** had only been with the platoon for a short time and I think he would have made a very capable officer. **Shelley** and **Dent** were both very able young fellows and when there was any fatigue work or trench digging to be done could always hold their own with anyone. They were mates and had managed to stick together all the time since they came over. My position in the shell hole proved a lucky one. Most of the enemy's shells passed over it and burst close



Captain Seddon

to the trench and shrapnel generally goes forward. After I had been there for about half an hour a piece of shell landed about a yard from my head and went into the ground. A little later a shell burst a short distance from me and covered me and my rifle with mould. I had to immediately clean my rifle to put it in order again. After that I just lay quietly in the shell hole till 6.20. There was such a sheet of machine gun bullets flying overhead that we wanted no inducement to keep down. At 6.20 our whole line began to move forward so as to get close up to the creeping barrage. That was to start at 6.30. We travelled very fast and as the ground was bad with shell holes and very heavy going we were soon pouring with sweat. Our legs were also very wet with the dew off the thistles and grass. We hurried on across our front line trench and the men in it must have been glad to see us go in front of them. We were travelling at such a pace that it took me all my time to keep up with some of the others. We caught up on the barrage but had to slacken down as we were getting too near it. Our objective was about 1000 yards in front of the line. The enemy's front trench was a long distance back from ours and he was holding the ground in front of ours by a series of strong points. He had great numbers of machine guns planted every here and there and we came across places from which he had removed his whizz bang guns that morning. Our barrage had been so severe that he had retired in front of it. We reached our objective and in the confusion and excitement went a little past it and had to come back a little to let the next platoon get into position. **Smith** got wounded by a sniper just as we were turning. The man next to him, **Hill**, went to help him and was shot dead by the same sniper. **Smith** was able to get back and went out to the dressing station. Shortly after, Lieut. **Hart** who was in charge of the platoon on our left was shot by the same sniper. He died whilst being carried out on a stretcher. The artillery eased off and we took our position in shell holes. Shortly after a barrage was again opened up by both sides and we began to dig in as fast as we could. When the mist began to lift we could see a number of men coming towards us in the distance. We opened fire on them but the Tommies on our right called out to us to stop for they thought that it was some of their men. However they turned out to be Germans and in the confusion between the Tommies and ourselves got away out of sight. Had we been better organised we should have captured them. We continued to dig in and when the light got good enough we could notice some Germans getting back from the ridge we were on to the next one. We put in some time sniping at them but as they were over half a mile away and took advantage of all the cover they could I don't think



we did much more than frighten them. One of their machine guns that we couldn't place was giving us some trouble. After a while our Lewis Gun got on to what we thought was the place but I think the Germans must have shifted theirs. One of the platoons on our left captured about 20 prisoners. We were digging in close to a railway line. From where I was I could see a dead German lying alongside the line. A few yards in front of us lay a very large German shell. It was about 5ft and 15 inches through. It had something written on it with chalk in German. It was the biggest shell I have seen yet. Fritz had removed one of his light guns from where we were and there was lots of his ammunition lying about. In the evening the carrying party managed to get some tea and meat and potatoes in to us. It was more than we expected and we were very glad to get it. After tea we had to leave our position and go half a mile further along the ridge and dig in again. It was a splendid moonlight night and we could see nearly as well as in the day. After we had finished digging in here

the O.C. of our Company Capt. **Russell** came along and told us to go still further along. He took us along another three or four miles and as I was carrying a bag containing 30 or 40 lbs. of rations for the platoon, besides my own gear, I was pretty well played out by the time we got there.

The ground in front of us was held by Tommies and we dug in again. We were just on the end of a ridge and we hadn't been there long when the enemy started sending over ground shrapnel and playing his machine guns on us. I was in a rather exposed place and just dug a hole straight down till I was able to get my head out of sight. We had to stand to for the rest of the night. I saw two lots of Tommies leaving our ridge and going down towards the railway. Fritz had sent over some sneezing gas and they were sneezing like anything. I smelled the gas too and put on my mask. I thought the Tommies were going out to do some work but we found out in the morning that they had evacuated their position without telling us and there we were holding the place ourselves and thinking the Tommies were in front of us. Just at daylight we saw two Germans coming along between us and the railway line and we immediately took



them prisoners. One of them was wounded in the arm. Shortly after a runner came across from the Tommies on the ridge behind us to tell us that the enemy had been seen on our right. The runner got hit as he came across. A German machine gun that we couldn't place was peppering away at us

and annoying us a lot. Our B. Coy. was on the left of our platoon and both they and we sent out patrols to discover where the enemy were and what they were doing. The ridge was covered with grass two or three feet long and was full of shell holes. Our patrol reported that they had seen the enemy. We sent out our Lewis gun section, about eight of them under L/Cpl Milne and they came across about 20 Germans with 4 machine guns. Our gun got in first and killed over a dozen of the enemy and we took five prisoners. Milne put their 4 machine guns out of action before coming back. This was a piece of good work and he deserves credit. The enemy machine gun that we couldn't place kept sweeping the ridge and they had some difficulty in getting back with the prisoners one of whom was wounded. Just as they got to our trench another of the prisoners got hit in the leg by one of their machine gun bullets and a Tommy (one of two who had just come over to us) got one through the arm. I bandaged the Tommy's wound and one of the prisoners did the same for his mate. Our machine gun section brought back about a dozen German revolvers with them. They weren't able to bring the guns so had to put them out of action. One of them, **Williams**, got wounded. Sgt. **Keatley** handed over the prisoners to an officer of B. Coy. After we had to string out along the ridge and watch using shell holes for shelter.

In the afternoon the Tommies occupied the ridge we were on. We got word from the prisoners that the Germans were going to counter attack in the evening. In the evening I had to go with some others three or four miles from where we were to the cookhouse to get the tea. On our way back just at 7 o'clock the enemy counter attacked. We were just coming past some of our 18 pounders at the time (about 20 of them) and they opened up like a piece of machinery as soon as the S.O.S. went up. A very big barrage was put up by both sides. We heard that the Tommies had to retire 200 yards but that our men held their ground. The counter attack was checked. We had to stand to in the trenches till it was over and were very glad it was checked for we didn't feel very fit to go into action again. We expected to be relieved tonight after two days continuous work but our relief lost their way and it was nearly midnight before they reached us. We went back to trenches close to where we were when the stunt started. We arrived there about 2.30am and slept till 11am. ▶

of **David Scott** and **Charlotte Oliver**. **Charlotte** was the second daughter of **Andrew Oliver** and **Catherine Taylor** and was born on the 17th October 1848 in the Orphir area of Orkney whilst **David** was the youngest of the three children born to **William Scott** and **Robina Marwick** and was born on the 26th March 1853 on Rousay. **David** and **Charlotte** married on the 18th March 1873. **Charlotte** passed away on the 10th August 1901 and **David** on the 19th September 1926. They are buried in the Wallacetown Cemetery in Southland, New Zealand. They were my great grandparents and **William** my great uncle.

David and **Charlotte** and their two sons **William** and **David Flaus** left Greenock (Glasgow) on the 16th August 1877 on the "Marlborough" arriving at Bluff, Southland, New Zealand on the 6th November 1877. They settled at Wallacetown (13km northwest of Invercargill) where they bought 33 acres of land. Over time they added to this and finished up with around 250 acres. **David** was a prominent breeder of Shorthorn cattle and his stock always commanded high prices. **David** and **Charlotte** had a further six children (3 boys and 3 girls) after their arrival in New Zealand with my grandfather being the second youngest of the 8 children.

William was also a farmer and his father assisted him to acquire a farm of some 200 acres. **William** never married and in early 1917 was called up to serve in the New Zealand Armed Forces. He was 43 years of age and was the only member of the family to be called up for service. His 4 brothers were all younger than **William** but they were married with young families.

On the 26th April 1917 **William** and the rest of the assembled troops boarded the "Pakeha" in Wellington for the trip to Plymouth, England arriving on the 27th July 1917. When **William** arrived in Plymouth he was admitted to the Devonport Military Hospital with Malaria.



William was a prolific writer and the short version of the voyage from Wellington to Plymouth runs to 160 pages.

The following are the writings of **William** about his time on the front **20th August 1918**. We were told by our platoon officer, Capt. **Seddon** that we were going to take part in a stunt against the enemy tomorrow. If we had any letters to write we had to hand

Friday the 23rd. In this stunt, in my platoon of about 35 or 36 there were 12 casualties, 4 killed and 8 wounded. I haven't heard yet how the rest of the Company fared.

When we got up at 11 o'clock, most of us had to go back to the cookhouse and bring in the breakfast and shift the cookhouse gear and rations to where we were. I carried back a sandbag



full of meat and another of vegetables and had on about as big a sweat as when I went over the top. The flies had the outside of the meat painted white and when I got rid of it I had to take off my coat and clean it. We had our breakfast at 1.30 pm. After that I had a good wash in a shell hole and

cleaned my rifle and ammunition. We then got orders to be ready to move up the line at a minutes notice. A big fight with a heavy barrage on both sides had been going on all day. We got ready and waited for orders. We got what sleep we could. We moved out at 10 o'clock next day (Saturday). We went along a road that had been made as a German trench and there were a great many dead Germans in it, some on the road and some in their bivouacs. Gear and arms and ammunition were scattered about everywhere and the smell of the dead was unpleasant. Another man and I were put on as stretcher bearers to replace the two who had been wounded. We were up at 5 next morning and were told we might have to leave any minute. The battle was still raging and we saw a good many prisoners being sent back. A great number of troops and an immense quantity of transport of all kind went up towards the line today. Limber load after limber load went past.

A damaged aeroplane lay not very far from where we were and a lot of us had a look at it. We waited in readiness till 7 pm. when we marched off. We had to stop several times on account of the road being blocked with traffic. Sometimes two rows of horse limbers besides motors and tanks and a continuous stream of troops were on the road. We travelled very fast when we could get going but we could hardly see for dust. We passed the dressing station to the east of a town with a number of motor ambulances in front it. We met a number of stretcher cases coming out from the battle. German prisoners were acting as stretcher bearers for some cases. The enemy made a counter attack as we went along and immediately the S.O.S. went up our artillery opened out. A great strafe was put up by both sides. It began to rain now and we got wet through. To make matters worse we lost our way in the dark. It was pitch dark and we turned up the wrong road looking for the trench we had to go into for the night. After a lot of delay we got on the road again and in time came to the trench we had to occupy. We had to stand to in the open trench all night, or I should say from about midnight till 4am. in the rain with no shelter but our oil sheets. We don't carry overcoats. The enemy let us know they weren't asleep by dropping shells about us every now and again. We ate a few mouthfuls hurriedly from our rations and then started and travelled along the trench for about two hours. The trench was a very bad one and the travelling along it very hard. The enemy also was shelling about it in places and playing over it with their machine guns. As we were crossing an open space from one trench to another I got a small bump on the leg from a spent bullet but it did no harm, didn't even cut the cloth. We took up our position in a sunken road and dug in. We were shelled out of here before long and had to move a little higher up. We got shelled out of here too and went back and finished digging in. Each man dug in a place for himself in the bank on the side

of the road so that he could get shelter from the shell splinters and bullets and have a place to lie down. A big strafe was put up by both sides in the evening but we had a fairly quiet night.

Sept. 26 1918. We went over the top again on Sept. 9th and got badly knocked about and had to go back to where we started from. Eight more of my platoon were killed and seven more wounded. Only nine of us were left after this stunt. We had twelve killed and fifteen wounded in the two stunts. The second stunt took place just past Metz.

Tuesday 27th. Stand to at 4.30am. A big strafe took place to the north of us at 7.30am another at 11am and another at 6pm.

Wednesday 28th. A strafe in the morning. We shifted further along this evening. Our side kept on putting shells into the town all day and the enemy retired from it next day.

Thursday 29th. Two of the Company got killed today and three wounded, two of them in my platoon. My mate and I had to go and carry them out to the dressing station.

Saturday 31st. We had to get out and stand to in a hurry this morning. One of our men was killed and two wounded today. My mate and I with two others to help us had to go in and carry out one of the wounded. A lot of the wounded are able to go out themselves.

William's luck ran out on the 24th October 1918. In a letter to his sister Kate dated Dec 7, 1918 he wrote – "October 24th was my unlucky day. The three other stretcher bearers in our Company and I were lying side by side in a bivouac when a shell landed right on us. I was the only one of the four dug out alive. The other three were killed but I was only stunned. My face and left arm were peppered with wounds and my arm was broken just below the elbow. Three of my fingers were very badly cut. I was blind in my right eye for a month but can use it again now. My hearing has also been affected a little. My wounds with the exception of my fingers and a cut from my eye and down the side of my nose are healed up now. The arm is knitting together nicely too. I was in hospital in France for a fortnight and then was brought over here (Southwark Military Hospital). I expect to be sent to one of our N.Z. hospitals as soon as there is room."

William was transferred from Southwark to Brockenhurst where he was for six weeks and then to the N.Z. Convalescent Hospital in Essex. He hoped to get some sick leave so that he could go up to Orkney and see his cousins. A number of his cousins wrote to him during the war. **William** returned to New Zealand in the later part of 1919.

I do not know if he made it to Orkney but when I was in Orkney in 2007 a distant relative came round one night with some photos and one of the photos was of **William** in his Army uniform. Did he get to Orkney or was the photo posted?

William leased his 200 acre farm before going to the war for £130 a year for 7 years with the lessee then going to buy it at £15 per acre. On his return to New Zealand he obtained another farm (probably a N.Z. Government rehab farm) in Central Southland and he farmed there till ill health forced him to retire. He shifted to the little settlement of Winton and lived there until his death in 1951. **William** is buried with his parents **David** and **Charlotte**, sister **Kate**, sister-in-law **Mary** and nephew **Ernest William** in the family plot in the Wallacetown Cemetery.



RIP William
You served your country
well.

William Sinclair

1893 – 1963

Sheila Spence Member No 39.

William Sinclair, uncle of the author, was born in Orkney on the 4 acre holding in the parish of Holm known as Cudbreck in the Hensbister toonship. He was the eldest of nine children born to **David Sinclair** of Holm and **Mary Ann Miller** of Kirkwall. In the early years of the twentieth century the family moved to Leith where the younger children were born and where there were already many Orkney families who had left Orkney previously.

William served in the I914 ~ 18 war until he was wounded and discharged. His injuries, in addition to being rendered stone deaf, consisted of a badly damaged right wrist. After convalescence he was employed in the Lord Roberts Poppy factory in Edinburgh. This establishment employed war wounded and made, besides poppies, many leather goods such as book marks, purses and wallets, all of which bore the embossed mark of a poppy.

He married, quite late in life, to a **Violet Steele**, also of Edinburgh, and they had no family. After the death of Violet he was cared for in the home of one of his younger sisters but eventually, needing more care, he moved finally into the Murray Home for War Veterans in the Gilmerton district of Edinburgh.

He never, at any time, bore any resentment to his fate and was always extrovert and sociable and especially enjoyed playing card games with his young nephews and nieces. When conversing with others he would produce a notepad and pencil so that people could write out the answer to the many questions which he asked of them. On his death, recorded as chronic bronchitis and heart failure, his few remaining possessions were inherited by his brother, **James Sinclair**, the author's father.

Footnote: Amongst the possessions was a cap badge and shoulder flash of the Black Watch of Canada. These had belonged to a brother of **William's** wife, **Violet**, who had emigrated from the UK to Canada before the 1939-45 war and had been killed in France leaving behind his wife and young daughter. As these military items are now in my possession I have written, on two separate occasions, to the Black Watch of Canada offering to send these to either any remaining descendants or even to themselves and have not had the courtesy of even an acknowledgement. Perhaps Orkney Family History Society may reach someone who is interested!



Robert P. Cromarty and one of Sergt Cromarty's Wartime helmets.

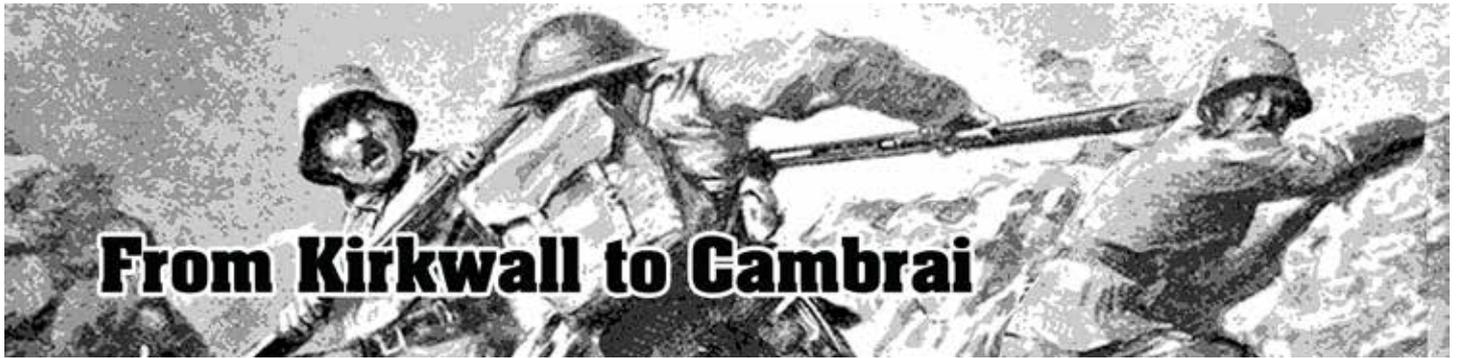
Some comments on R.P. Cromarty's younger years. The first World War 1914—18

Fighting Gas Peril - Science Man Comes Back

Bringing gas helmets with him - Victory is with the Allies, is the word at the front. After a stay of six months at the front, during which time he had been engaged finding new methods for fighting the deadly German gas, Sergt. R. P. Cromarty 1920 Queen's Street East, Toronto, returned home at 7:30 this morning. Sergt. Cromarty, who graduated in Arts from the University College of Toronto University in 1914, enlisted in Montreal last June with the Sanitary Section of the Army Medical Corps. At the time of enlistment he was lecturing in McGill University, his work being chiefly in the laboratory. Major (Dr.) Starkey, also of McGill University, was the organizer of the Sanitary Section of the A.M.C. The Section sailed for Shorncliffe June 28 and arrived in Belgium in September, and shortly after was ordered to France. (From a Toronto Paper Clipping).

After the war Dr. Cromarty educated himself to General Surgery and Urology to work at Brandon, Manitoba, Canada.

Robert Cromarty's grandparents, William Cromarty and Margaret Gutcher, raised their family at South Cara, South Ronaldsay Orkney Islands 1846-1870.



By Andrew Stewart, Member No 2749

My research into the family of my maternal grand father Alexander Yule, took me to the place of his birth in Orkney. Of the members of the family that fought in the First World War, two of his uncles fought with distinction. His uncle **James Yule**, is the son of **James Yule** and **Robina Herdman** and was born on 29 July 1893 in Old Scapa Road, Kirkwall. From his Army records he was a General Labourer and resided at 24 Wellington Street, Kirkwall. He joined the 6th Battalion, Seaforth Highlanders as a Private (S/12437) in December 1915. **James** was deployed to France in 1916 and remained there until the end of the war. In March 1918 he was stationed at the Flesquieres Trench during the German spring offensive. On the 21st March, James was awarded the Military Medal for his actions during this offensive. I located the following extract from the history of the 51st Highland Division.

21st March 1918.

The second wave of the 6th Seaforth Highlanders, in spite of a heavy fire directed against them from Flesquieres Trench, made repeated attempts to enter it, in which all officers except one per company became casualties.

Meanwhile, Lieut. Colonel **S. MacDonald**, D.S.O., commanding the 6th Seaforth Highlanders, had arrived at the Hindenburg support line, and had reorganised his two companies there for further efforts. He found that the village, wood, and chateau were a series of strong nests of machine-guns. However, employing tanks in the vicinity, which had run out of petrol, to open on the village with their 6-pounders and Lewis guns, he led his battalion forward in person, and gained a foothold in Flesquieres Trench, which extended from the Ribecourt-Flesquieres road for 300 yards to the left.

From this position Colonel **MacDonald**, showing splendid qualities of leadership, organised two determined attempts to reach the village under cover of rifle and Lewis-gun fire. Though one or two machine-guns were put out of action, the intense fire which this enterprise attracted from the high walls of the chateau grounds and the houses in the village, checked the advance on both occasions. During one of these attempts a private soldier, single-handed, killed the team of a machine-gun and carried the gun back to the British lines.

I wonder if the private listed above was Uncle **James**. From the London Gazette records he was awarded a Bar to the Military Medal on the 7th October 1918. Unfortunately I have not been able to locate the reason for this award.

James survived the war and was transferred to the Labour Corps until he was demobbed in 1920. Since **James** had won a gallantry award twice, it would be reasonable to expect an entry in the local newspaper. The ever helpful ladies at the Kirkwall Library

performed a search and located the following article in the Orkney Herald.

Orkney Herald, Wednesday, April 7, 1920

Presentation of Military Medals and Bars at Kirkwall.

INTERESTING CEREMONY

*On Thursday evening, in the Council Chambers, Kirkwall, an interesting ceremony took place when the Military Medal with Bar was presented to Sergeant **James Yule** and Private **James Craigie**, both belonging to Kirkwall, and late of the 5th and 6th Battalions of the Seaforth Highlanders respectively. Provost White made the presentations in the presence of a large number of the general public, and in doing so said he was glad in the first place to see so many there that night.*

They had met to perform what was to him a very pleasant and agreeable duty, namely, to present to two of their friends and fellow-townsmen the Military Medal, and each case also a Bar, which had been awarded for bravery in action. (Applause). The Military Medal was a medal confined to the Army. It was instituted in December 1914, and is awarded only to men not above the rank of a non-commissioned officer. It is ranked next to the Distinguished Conduct Medal. A great number of decorations have been made during the war they had just passed through, and people were inclined to think that with so many medals of all kinds, they depreciate the value. He personally did not think so. The war had been one of such magnitude compared with other wars - a war to which medals had been very properly won. In his opinion he thought every one of their brave lads who went over the top was entitled to a medal. The details of the action or acts for which the medals were awarded were not to hand, but the date that Sergeant Yule gained his honour was 21st March 1918, (Applause). It was awarded for bravery in action near Cambrai, in front of the Bourlon Wood. He (Provost White) had been fortunate in getting a cutting of a newspaper with an account of the work of the Seaforth - a battalion of the famous 51st Division, and which their friends were members. The account has reference to the retreat on 21st March 1918, and the noble work done by the Seaforth Highlanders on that date. It was well to remember these facts, because these stories were somewhat common in those days which were now happily past. In the action in which the Military Medal was won, the 5th and 6th Battalions were part of the famous division and were sent up as supports. The Bar was gained for bravery in action on the days of 8th and 9th April 1918. They would notice that the award was for bravery in a different sector of the front. The official statement in connection with the award was 'for courage, resource and devotion to duty'. He might say that the details of the act could be explained by Sergeant Yule, but he does not wish to expatiate or enlarge upon the brave deed for which the medal was awarded. ▶

◀ Private **Craigie** was awarded the Military Medal for bravery in action on 28th July 1918, round about the date when the tide began to turn. It was gained for rushing a German machine gun. Four short weeks after found the Seaforth's on the new sector Arras, and whilst in action on this front, Private **Craigie** was awarded the Bar to his medal for rushing a machine gun and capturing the crew (Applause). There was one thing clear from the remarkable narrative of those days, and it was the wonderful record of the famous 51st Division. It was evident that to those who could read between the lines, the division was sent where work was needed, and it was a great honour to see that the 6th Battalion, who formed a part of this division, got some of its recruits from Orkney. He was sure they would agree with him when he heartily congratulated the two men on the honour they had received for their services. They had honoured themselves and their town (Applause). On pinning the medal on Sergeant **Yule's** breast, Provost **White** said 'I have much pleasure in



This picture of James Craigie was taken from the Royal British Legion, Kirkwall Branch.

Captain George **Flett M.C.** : and Major **F Buchanan**.

The above article gave me more information about **James Craigie** who happens to be **James Yule's** brother-in-law. **James Craigie**

decorating you with this Military Medal and Bar, and wish you long life to wear the honour' (Applause). Turning to Private **Craigie** he said 'I have likewise much pleasure in handing you this decoration, may you have a long life to enjoy and wear it' (Applause). Short complimentary speeches were also made by Sheriff **Mercer OBE**:

(son of **Robert Craigie** and **Jessie Ann Hourston**) married **Jane Thomson Bruce Yule** on 03 Mar 1911 in 2 Wellington Street, Kirkwall. Sadly **Jane** died on 13 Apr 1916 in Balfour Hospital, Kirkwall. At their wedding **James** was a General Labourer and resided at 11 Catherine Place, Kirkwall. James also served with the Seaforth Highlanders.



James Craigie's Military Medal and Bar, British War and Victory Medal

I have heard that they worked at Kirkwall Docks after the war with a third Military Medal and Bar winner (202649 Private **William Loutitt** MM and Bar).

James Yule married **Maggie Jane Rorie** (daughter of **William Rorie** and **Maggie Jane Sinclair**) on 28 Aug 1919 in The Albert Hotel, Kirkwall. James died 08 Mar 1953 in Eastbank Hospital, Kirkwall, Orkney and was laid to rest in St Olaf's Cemetery, Kirkwall.

James Craigie died on the 27th April 1963 in Kirkwall, Orkney and was laid to rest in St Olaf's Cemetery, Kirkwall, Orkney.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking the staff at the Orkney Library & Archive, Kirkwall, for their time and assistance together with the Orkney Herald and the Royal British Legion, Kirkwall Branch for the use of the above photographs.

Alexander Stewart, Member No 2749.

Our December issue will revert to our usual format

and your articles for this issue will be most welcome. Please email your contribution directly to me johnsin@gotadsl.co.uk as a Word doc. Any relevant photographs always makes the article more interesting and these should be attached as 'good quality' JPEGs.

Despite having many members it is always a struggle getting enough material to fill each issue. For some reason December is even more difficult to fill so your efforts for this issue will be even more appreciated.

You will see that I have omitted our usual *Membership Details* etc from the back page of this issue but all the relevant information together with many links and items of interest can be found on our website at www.orkneyfhs.co.uk A handy membership download is also available at www.orkneyfhs.co.uk/docs/mempack.doc



Fancy meeting you here

By Alan Shearer, Member No 3190

As I grew up at Kirkton & Linton in Shapinsay, I was always aware of Great Uncle **David Hepburn**, as his War Medals, Life Saving badges, and an Iron Cross, hung in pride of place in Linton's bend. As I grew older, I also saw his name on the 1914-18 section of the War Memorial, and knew he had died in the Great War. I did note that he was a Captain, indeed the highest rank commemorated on the memorial, but only as I learned a smattering of Social and Military history, did I become increasingly curious how the son of a humble 30 acre tenant farm in Orkney became an officer in an army where, at the outset in 1914, officers were almost exclusively Public School educated and at least middle class in origin.

Later, as I tried to learn a little of his story, I also became curious as to why he entered the War as a Private in the Lovat Scouts – I knew he had a career in the Edinburgh police before enlisting, far from the recruiting area of the Lovat Scouts – if he had been a pre-war territorial as the Lovat Scouts all were on mobilisation, how did this square with his residence in the Capital?

Finally now, spurred on by the centenary of the First World War, I have obtained answers to at least some of the questions, and at least partially to the final question – where and how did he die. Most of the answers come from copies of the 30 or more documents in his actual Military File, originally kept by the War Office, and now held at the National Archives at Kew. There may be more to learn, but for now the following is his story as I have been able to piece it together.

David Laughton Inkster Hepburn was born at 3.30pm on 4th November 1883, at Linton, to **James Hepburn** and his wife **Mary**, previously **Drever**, and **M.S Work!** I understand she came from Little Feaston, and thereafter her eldest son **James** sought to get her family land back and ultimately succeeded by buying Little Feaston when it came for sale in the 1940's. An interesting footnote is that **James Hepburn** and **Mary Drever** were married at St Cuthbert's in Edinburgh in 1871- clearly a tenant farmer from Shapinsay was better travelled than we might have imagined. Was she in service in Edinburgh – many Orkney girls went to Edinburgh or Leith to enter domestic service, as the Steamer connections were strong between Kirkwall and Leith then.

I do not know much of **David's** early life, but the 1901 Census finds him as a 17 year old at Linton where he is cryptically entered as a 'worker', and staying along with his by now widowed mother **Mary**, his older brother **James** (29) and **Agnes** his sister-in-law. There is also a niece **Agnes** (6) and nephew **James** (3). Whether he was working at home – there is no servant man named in the Census that night – so he may have been, or was he working elsewhere in Shapinsay, I do not now know. Missing already from

Lieut. David Hepburn (left) on an occasion where he was able to meet up with his nephew James Hepburn, also from Linton, Shapinsay, at a camp behind the lines somewhere in France, probably winter 1917-18. James wears the uniform of a Private in the Machine Gun Corps to which he was transferred after initially being conscripted into the Seaforth's. He survived the War although wounded, and suffered from the effects of Gas for the rest of his life.

the family of **Mary Hepburn** is her second son **John**, who has by now emigrated to Portland, Oregon, and his great grandson **Doug Hepburn** died only recently in that area of NW USA.

David Hepburn joined the Edinburgh City Police, probably in 1904. He would have attained the age of 21 that year which may well have been a qualifying factor. His decision to look for a career in the Police may well have been influenced by his height, recorded in his military records as 5 foot 11³/₄ ins, and the fact that as the youngest son, he was unlikely to become the Farmer at Linton. Edinburgh was again a choice because of Orkney connections and his mother had also most probably lived there before becoming the housewife at Linton.

We do not know a great deal about the next 11 years of his life as a Constable in the City, but we have photographs and Medals that show him as a Lifesaver, and family recollections that he visited home on holidays, bringing north a shotgun and Rifle to pursue his interest in shooting – the Rifle was used apparently to shoot Selkies on the Galt skerry among other places – deliciously UN-PC, and both old guns remain in my possession to this day. We also know that he was married in Edinburgh during this period.

His wedding took place at 12 Douglas Terrace, Edinburgh, on 7th June 1909, to **Margaret Miller**, a Clerkess four years his junior – he was now 25. **Margaret** is recorded as having been born in Keiss near Wick, to **Alexander Miller** a Baker, and his wife **Christina, M.S MacKay**. One of the witnesses was a **Helen Miller**, presumably her sister. The marriage was conducted under the auspices of the Baptist Church, presumably Margaret's mother Church. It is interesting to note the young people from the north coming together in the City – were they attending functions of the Orkney or Caithness exile associations, both of which were (and are still) active in the Capital?

The next six years must have been a happy interlude, though no family featured in their lives. However, on 7th June 1915, we find **David** enlisting for War Service. He is one of hundreds of thousands who did so in 1914/15, and well before conscription made service compulsory, so he must have done so through a sense of duty and patriotism as so many others did to form the 'new armies' being raised by Lord Kitchener. Two days earlier, he signed a standard format 'Last Will & Testament' leaving ▶

◀ his worldly goods to his wife **Margaret**. His address is 5 Bright Terrace, Edinburgh, and the will is signed at 2 George Place, a fine address in the new town, presumably that of an Edinburgh solicitor. As witnesses we see a **George Drever**, Seaman of 6 Union St. Leith, almost certainly a fellow-Orkadian, and secondly a clothier, **Robert Sinclair**. **Robert** sadly also appears on the Shapinsay War Memorial – he was born at Sandsend, Shapinsay and died serving with 118 Siege Battery, RGA during the Battle of Arras on 19th May 1917. Clearly **David** and **Robert** who were born just about a mile apart in Shapinsay, carried their early acquaintance from school and island home, to the great City where they both married girls from the north, and tried to follow their career paths until the Great War intervened.

Now we see hints of an answer to one of our questions – **David** enlisted to serve under the territorial force regulations, and elected to join the 3/2nd Lovat Scouts. The Lovat Scouts had been raised for the Boer War by Lord Lovat, mainly from the vast Fraser estates in Inverness-shire, and based on Beaufort Castle at Beauly. They served as Light Horse but with the aim of using their civilian skills of Spying and Marksmanship, taken from their estate occupations of Ghillies & Stalkers, to help match the field craft and rifle skills of the Boer farmers. In this they were very successful, and when volunteer forces were re-organised as the Territorial Force in 1908, two TF battalions, 1st and 2nd, were embodied. The various detachments of the Scouts, who mobilised in August 1914, came from all over the north and west, and their roll call read like the Jacobite clan regiments of 1745! The rank and file included the very best men of the Highland and Western islands, many of them Gaelic speakers, while their officers, as in the old Clan regiments, were the minor gentry and younger relations of the Chief, or in 1914, the local professional classes. They were raised as Yeomanry, and so were horsed, but again they sought to specialise in their working skills with the spyglass and Rifle.

Why did **David Hepburn**, raised in an area out with the recruitment scope of the Scouts, and working in a city whose men filled the many battalions of the Royal Scots, go for an Inverness based yeomanry regiment? Perhaps being brought up on the farm he felt at ease with horses – he was also a keen shot with a rifle. Maybe he also cherished the ability as a volunteer, to choose where he would go, and a regiment with the undoubted reputation of the Scouts after their South African success, and formed from men from the north of Scotland, appealed to him.

In any event he enlisted on 7th June 1915, and went to the 3rd/2nd Battalion Lovat Scouts, as a Private no. 5634, and based at Gorleston-on Sea, Norfolk. The 3rd/2nd Batt. existed to train men and provide Drafts to reinforce the 2nd Lovat Scouts overseas. The original Territorial 1st & 2nd Scouts, were sent overseas to Gallipoli, Egypt & Macedonia, where they were amalgamated, but did not suffer the horrendous casualties many regiments suffered. This may be the reason that nearly 18 months later we find **David Hepburn** still with the 3/2nd Scouts in England, though by now as an acting Corporal.

He appears to be impatient to see active service, as on 10th March 1917, he reports to the Royal Flying Corps at Farnborough to take a technical test to check his aptitude for suitability for posting to RFC as a Photographer. This would have involved taking photographs from the air from reconnaissance aircraft, a hazardous enterprise over the front! However, this was not to be, and his record shows him returned to unit on 20th March 1917, having failed the 'trade test' at the RFC School of Photography. He had, though, also applied on 7th February 1917, for consideration to be admitted to an Officer Cadet Training Unit. In his application

he is shown as serving as a Corporal in A Company, 1st Yeomanry Cyclist Regt. At Gorleston –on – Sea. The unused Lovat Scout battalions had by this time been reformed on to a Cyclist unit, presumably in the hope that some mobility might be restored to the battlefield at some stage. His application shows him to be in very good physical shape, and is supported by a Certificate of Moral Character by the Chief Constable of Edinburgh – here we see a record of that officer having known him for 13 years, hence our deduction that he joined in 1904! **Wm. Shaw**, Head Teacher at Broughton H.G Adult Continuation Classes, Edinburgh, attests to his additional education beyond the Board School attended in Shapinsay- he must have attended evening classes in the Capital. In any event, the losses amongst Junior Officers from the very start of the War had been crippling, and this must account for the willingness now in 1917, to allow able candidates from a background which would certainly not have been entertained in 1914, to come forward. This time he is successful, and his record shows him as discharged from the Cavalry records at Canterbury as of 31st July 1917, and commissioned as of 1st August 1917, having successfully undertaken a course at 8th Officer Cadet battalion, Lichfield starting from 7th April 1917! As is probably still the custom to this day, as a lowly 2nd Lieutenant he is 'Gazetted' in the London Gazette, and shown as commissioned in the 6th West Yorks as from 1st August.

In his original application for OCTU, he showed the Royal Scots as the Regiment in which he sought an appointment. In the London Gazette however, batches of new Lieutenants are posted to various units, and most likely wherever they were needed to fill casualty's boots! The 6th West York's were a territorial force battalion, serving as part of the 49th West Riding Division (TF), and had since 1915 seen plenty of fighting. Indeed it seems likely that only a few of the original weekend soldiers who mobilised in August 1914 would have remained by the autumn of 1917.

So he would have joined the West Yorks almost immediately and gone overseas for the first time. During the autumn of 1917 the Battalion were engaged in some desperate fighting, particularly in the Battle of Poelcappelle, which started on 9th October, and which saw one of the unsuccessful assaults towards the village of Passchendaele, during what became known as the Third Battle of Ypres. This would certainly have been a bloody and sobering introduction to the War as the Germans fought the Poelcappelle assault to a standstill, and the shelling and rain turned the battlefield into a quagmire.

After the New Year, the 49th Division became heavily engaged along with all the army in N.W France and Belgium, in trying to hold back Ludendorff's huge offensive which started in March, with the aim of splitting the British off from the French, and winning the War, before the resources of the US could finally tip the balance inexorably away from Germany. Sometime that spring, with the 49th Division fighting in the same area as the 9th Scottish Division, and both within XI Corps. of British Second Army, 2nd Lieutenant **David Hepburn** was given the acting rank of Captain, and transferred to serve with the 5th (Service) Battalion, Queens own Cameron Highlanders, part of the 'Fighting 9th'. No doubt this occurred due to officer casualties within the Camerons, but to what extent he managed to use a preference to serve again with his compatriots from the Northern Highlands to facilitate the move is unclear now, though it seems likely.

And so the desperate days of late March and early April saw Field Marshall Haig issue his 'backs to the wall' order, and the British line buckle and bend under the heaviest German offensive since 1914. On 25th April 1918, the History of the 9th Scottish Division ▶



By Colleen Smith, Member No 2484

Upon entering the military **Andrew** was described as being aged 27, 5ft 7 inches tall, weight 9stone 7lbs, with dark hair, grey eyes and a dark complexion. His religion was Presbyterian. **Andrew** was noted as being not muscular with a note added saying that this would improve with training. **Andrew** spent a total of 2 years 225 days in the Army of which 115 were in New Zealand. The New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF) was the title of the military forces sent from New Zealand to fight for Britain during World War I and World War II. Ultimately, the NZEF of World War I was known as the First New Zealand Expeditionary Force. The NZEF of World War II was known as the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force.

Andrew was born at Breckan, Evie on 31st January 1889, the first child of **Andrew Baikie**, a farmer's son, and **Adamina Baikie** (nee Baikie). **Andrew** grew up on the farm Arsdale and worked there after he completed his schooling.

Andrew travelled out to reach New Zealand in January 1912. His uncle, **John Baikie**, farmed in Canterbury on South Island. **Andrew** was working as a ploughman there when he was called up under the provisions of the Military Services Bill, 1916. **Andrew** enlisted at Waimate, South Canterbury on 10th November 1916. **Andrew** was assigned to C Company, 24th Reinforcements of the Canterbury Infantry Regiment at Trentham on 5th January 1917, but he transferred to C Company of the 23rd Reinforcements on 28th January. After only three months training, **Andrew** embarked at Wellington on 2nd April to sail to Europe. **Andrew's** company disembarked at Davenport (Plymouth) on 10th June and travelled to Camp Sling. Sling was a dreary, bleak place situated in the heart of the great Salisbury Plains. Twelve miles to the south of the camp is the town of Salisbury and London being seventy four miles away. Here at Sling training was really stepped up. The soldiers were disciplined in a way they had never experience; drill and musketry had to be sharpened up along with bomb fusing and throwing, wiring, and gas mask drills together with practices with and knowhow of the Lewis gun, trench stunts, trench-digging, and practising fake attacks. In the early days, reinforcements for France were kept in Sling only a week or two. After 1916 they usually took the full course of thirty days. At the end of that time they were fit, tough, efficient troops. This is where our **Andrew** found himself.

Andrew left Camp Sling in a draft for France on 6th July, and marched into Camp at Etaples next day. Etaples was a small fishing village, in the north of France some 4.5km from the Straits of Dover. During the First World War the town was a vast Allied



military camp and then 'hospital city'. Wounded soldiers were often sent to Etaples to recover or en route for Britain. Training here was harsh; both raw recruits and battle-weary soldiers were subjected to exhaustive training in gas warfare, bayonet drill, as well as long sessions of marching at the double across the dunes. **Andrew** was here for three weeks then he joined C Company, 2nd Battalion, Canterbury Regiment in the Field on 25th July. The New Zealand Division was then in Flanders, Belgium where it had taken part in the successful Battle of Messines. Messines started with the explosion of 19 huge mines and a furious artillery bombardment on 7th June. The 2nd Canterbury Regiment was one of two battalions that stormed Messines village and took it after fierce street fighting that day. The Battalion lost heavily in an attack on Unchained Trench at nightfall on the 13th and in taking and holding the Chasseur Cabaret ruins on the 15th. The 2nd Canterbury's 16 officers and nearly 500 other ranks casualty list in the Battle of Messines was the heaviest New Zealand loss.

When **Andrew** joined the New Zealand Division it was back in the Messines Sector, preparing to launch an attack to threaten Lille on 31st July, the opening day of the Third Battle of Ypres, now known as Passchendaele. Although 2nd Canterbury was not one of the assault battalions, it took casualties from heavy German shell-fire while holding the line in August. **Andrew** was wounded in both legs by a shell on the 15th and was admitted to No. 2 Australian Casualty Clearing Station. No.2 Australian Casualty Clearing Station was based at Trois Arbres, near Bailleul Belgium virtually 'in the front line', from 17 June 1916 until approx. 15 March 1918.

Andrew was then moved to No. 4 General Hospital at Camiers (just north of Etaples) The hospital occupied a large municipal building, the bed capacity of which was 650. A nursing sister at this hospital contacted **Andrew's** mother in Orkney to tell her that her son was admitted to the ward, wounded in both legs. His right leg was so bad that he had to have it amputated below the knee. She went on to say that **Andrew** was in a rather a critical condition but was a very cheerful and a splendid patient.

Andrew was placed on the Seriously Ill list on 18th August, when his right leg was amputated below the knee because of gangrene infection. He was removed from the Seriously Ill List on the 31st and embarked on the hospital ship for the UK. HMHS St David was one of 5 Military Hospital Ships which commenced service in the first month of the War. Her sisters St Andrew and St Patrick were also Cross Channel steamers, each adapted for 180 patients.

On arrival in Britain **Andrew** was moved to the NMo2 ▶

◀ New Zealand General Hospital. This was a 350 bed facility with a large operating theatre. The Chief Medical Officer was a New Zealander and three quarters of the staff belonged to or were associated with that country.

The hospital, which was exclusively for New Zealand personnel, handled some 27,000 patients during the four years it was in operation. During this time all costs were borne by the people of New Zealand and those New Zealanders living in Britain.

It was in this wonderful facility that a seriously ill Andrew was eventually restored to health, a process that was to take many months for it was not until January 1919 that Andrew was fitted with an artificial limb.

Andrew lost no time in visiting old friends in Orkney, albeit a brief stay for on the 19th February he returned to the hospital where the medical board classified him as 85% disabled.

On the 19th June he embarked for New Zealand on board the hospital ship Marama and on arrival in New Zealand he was officially honourably discharged.

Andrew's disability did not prevent him from continuing to do farm work. He returned to his Uncle **John Baikie** and his brothers **James** and **Jack** (John) who all had moved from Orkney to the Glenavy/Waimate areas of New Zealand. Here Andrew continued to work closely with his brothers for many years. He was very fond of entering the sheep dog trials and was known to remove his

artificial leg and sit on a handlebar of a bike backwards pedalling with one leg to give his nieces a race. **Andrew** never married but it was well known that he was sweet on a lady from Orkney and even though **Andrew** went back there twice he obviously could not persuade her to move across to New Zealand. This lady also never married. **Andrew** is described by some of his relatives as being a typical 'Baikie' He died of sickness at Waimate on 14 August 1950 and was buried August 17 1950. He was only aged 61. **Andrew** is buried in the Waimate Lawn Cemetery Returned Services section.

Andrew received the British War medal and the Victory Medal.

Andrew's brother, **James William Baikie** also enlisted with the New Expeditionary Force. Upon entry James was described as 26 years, brown hair, grey eyes, dark complexion, height 5 ft 8 inches and weight 11 stone. Religion; Presbyterian. However as he had received a serious right eye injury when he was younger, he was classed as not being able to do overseas duty. This did not stop James who then became a gunner and driver with the New Zealand Reverses 14 unit for the duration of the war. **James** married very late in life and had two daughters and two sons. **James** died in 1968.

Brother **Jack** (John) did not join because he was a married man with children

Thanks to Brian Budge who was part of the source of this article.

Colleen Smith. Member No 2484. ■

Continued from Page 19, concluding part of 'Fancy Meeting You Here'.

◀ published in 1921, describes the action that day, where the Germans were assaulting the Mont Kemmel ridge in Belgium.

"On the left of our line the storm beat violently against the Dammstrasse, but failed to break the defence of the Highlanders, who held the position with the Camerons and the Seaforths" The Scots held off the assaults till near noon but "Between 11.30 and 1.30pm shells fell without ceasing and the Camerons in the forward posts were practically wiped out, but our position through Piccadilly Farm-The Mound proved invulnerable to every attack for the remaining part of the day".

David Hepburn died that day, and it seems probable he was killed sometime during that prolonged deluge of shellfire the Germans poured onto the Cameron positions to try and 'soften them up' to allow an infantry assault.

The remainder of his Military record shows the prolonged correspondence between his widow, or her representative Mr **John Mackenzie**, Solicitor, Edinburgh, and the War Office, before they finally feel able to officially declare him deceased for probate purposes, as late as 3rd July 1919. His widow applies for a pension as early as June 1918, but at this stage the War Office, though regretfully confirming him as missing, cannot verify his death. Her solicitor also writes that summer as she cannot prove his death to a Life Insurance society, but again the War office advise it is too early for an official acceptance of his death. The dispassionate manner in which the civil servants have to deal with this, and presumably thousands of others, is quite sobering!

In seeking to prove her husband's death, and allow her to act under the terms of his Will, **Margaret Hepburn** appears to have contacted the British Red Cross to try and trace men who could testify to his final moments. They do indeed get three letters, and these are duly considered by the War Office.

On 16th July 1918, 2nd Lieut. A. Douglas of A Coy. 5th Camerons, BEF, France wrote " He was with me shortly before he was killed. The Germans attacked in the morning of the 25th April and we held

on until 8 o'clock at night. He shelled us very heavily and I went to the one end of the trench and your husband to the other and that was the last I saw of him as we had to fall back being driven out by force of numbers... the Germans had the ground before word reached me that your husband had been killed"

Influenza rest camp in the UK, a Pte. **J. McLeod**, 5th Camerons, wrote the following "At Damstrasse, Wyschaete Ridge, Lt **Hepburn** was in charge of three platoons and we were sniping the Germans all day... I was a stretcher bearer and the last I saw of Lt **Hepburn** he was in the trench and told me he would fight it out to the end. I therefore do not think he is alive, if so he would be a prisoner of war".

On 26th June 1918, from the Royal Free Hospital, 2nd Lieut. **J. Wilkie** stated "Lt **Hepburn** was wounded at Kemmel on 25th April and died of wounds there. I was just behind him".

The War Office felt that Lieut. **Wilkie** was the only one of the three 'witnesses' whom they felt it worthwhile to ask for further detailed information on the death of Lt **Hepburn** – on 8th August he reported back to them " The only information I can give concerning the death of 2 Lieut. **D.L.J Hepburn**, 6th West Yorks attach. 5th Cameron Hldrs. At 6 am on 25th April 1918, at Kemmel his company were surrounded and he did not return with the survivors who were left" written from a Military Convalescent Hospital at Moffat !

In the event the civil servants decided that Lt **Wilkie's** account could not give any definite information, while Lt **Douglas's** account was considered 'hearsay only'. Tellingly, they seem to have disregarded the testimony of Private **McLeod** altogether – again perhaps they felt it inconclusive, or maybe an officers' word was more significant!

David Hepburn has no known grave, but is commemorated on the Shapinsay parish War Memorial, the Scottish National memorial, and on the Tyne Cot Memorial to the north east of Ypres, along with 35,000 British & Commonwealth soldiers who died in the Ypres Salient after 16th August 1917, and who also have no grave. ■



Canadian troops enter Cambrai. a cmcc photograph

By Gavin Rendall, Member No 1

Gavin Rendall, and a former editor of Sib Folk News has contacted me to say that his WW1 contribution came about when he was idly

scanning through old microfilm of the long defunct Orkney Herald. When the name David Rendall of Saverton appeared on the screen his interest was aroused for this had to be the brother of his grandfather, the same David Rendall who had lost his life in the closing days of WW1.

What Gavin did not know was that David had been in a Canadian regiment when he died. Further investigation was required and this eventually Gavin pieced together in a rather interesting story.

His research immediately struck another sad note for the very next issue of the Orkney Herald recorded the death of David's mother from heart failure, no doubt brought on by news of the death of her son.

Gavin's first conclusion regarding David was that he must have emigrated before the war started for the citation in the Orkney Herald reads:

OVERSEAS FORCES OF CANADA

Private D Randall

49th Canadian Battalion

Gave his life for his country 28.9.18 and is buried at

Crest British Cemetery, Plot 1, Row B, Grave 16.

There would seem to be three errors here, continued Gavin, for this photograph, one of the last we have of him, shows him with the twin stripes of a corporal. This I was to discover later was confirmed in his army records. Also the date of his death is one day out and there is a not uncommon error in the spelling of his name — Randall instead of Rendall.

My next step, said Gavin, was to write to the National Archives of Canada in an endeavour to discover David's army details and perhaps the date of his arrival in Canada. The Archives replied and said if the port of disembarkation was provided they could send details of passenger lists on microfilm to my local library. This I could not do. Archives said, however that they had forwarded the request to the Personnel Records Centre and that a reply would be received in due course.

Due course was a few months but when the material arrived from the records office Gavin was amazed at the detail that was covered.

The following are extracts in chronological order.

David Rendall (spelt correctly)
Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force.
Regimental No.433007. Unit 49th Battalion.
Place of enlistment and date. Edmonton,
Alberta, 5th April 1915.
Trade: Plasterer.
Age on enlistment 28 years 11 months
Height 5ft 7 3/4 ins.
Complexion: Medium. Eyes: Blue. Hair: Fair
Religion: Other Protestant.
Health: Fit but 'teeth need to be fixed'.

Army Record

14 06 1915 Arrived in England.
09 10 1915 Embarked for France and
disembarked at Boulogne.
10 03 1917 Appointed Lance Corporal in the
field.
10 03 1917 Promoted Corporal.
17 03 1917 Detailed for Agricultural work.
04 08 1917 Granted 10 days leave.
02 09 1917 Rejoined from leave.
31 12 1917 Attached to the Canadian
Corps Agricultural Detachment
12 05 1918 Rejoined unit for duty.
17 08 1918 14 days leave.
14 09 1918 Rejoined unit.
07 10 1918 Killed in Action.

Gavin still hopes to find out when David arrived in Canada. He knows that Janet Logie, of Loganvald, has a postcard sent by him. It shows a field of black and white cattle somewhere in Canada. Most emigrants went out with friends or went to where friends had already settled so that may still be an avenue to be explored.

His trade of 'plasterer' is interesting. Did he take up plastering after settling in Canada or did he work at it in Westray?

What kind of 'Agricultural' work was he engaged in for the army. Was it looking after horses? Gavin would love to know. Gavin knows that David was a very good fiddle player. Harry Rendall of Messigate thought that he may even have taught Gavin's father but Gavin reckons that his father would have been too young as David would have been 15 years older. It is possible, however that they might have been close friends. ■



The Uncle I Never Knew

By Margaret Lyall Slater, Member No 2040

When I was a child my parents and I spent our annual summer holiday in Longhope, at 'The Loft', the home of my mother's family — the Groats.

Looking down from the wall of the 'ben end' where I slept, was a large photograph of a young man in his best suit.

Underneath was a scroll commemorating his death in World War 1.

"Private **Malcolm Groat**, 1/5 Battalion Princess Louise's (Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders)

Killed in Action, Egypt, 11th December 1917.

He was the uncle I never knew.

When I grew up I decided to find out more about **Malcolm** or **Mackie**, as he was known to the family.

In 1982 I wrote to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in Maidenhead Berkshire for information. They found photos of his grave in Ramleh (now called Ramla) in Palestine (Israel).

Seemingly when **Mackie** received his 'call-up-papers' his four sisters tore them up as they could not bear to think of him leaving home to join the army!

He was sent another set of papers, with the threat of a visit from the police if he did not turn up at Fort George, near Inverness, where he was enrolled on December 22nd, 1916 in the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders. He was only 19 years and 1 month old. His trade was listed as 'farm worker'. I am sure that he had never left Orkney before and can only imagine how nervous

and apprehensive he must have been on that fateful day.

In 2008 I contacted the Regimental Museum of the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders at Stirling Castle for more details of **Mackie's** service and was told to contact the National Archives at Kew where all relevant documents are now kept.

Some of these previous archives were destroyed by a direct hit during World War 2 but I was advised to employ a researcher who would do his best to find out what was still available.

I was sent a long list of researchers' names and chose one whose charge was £70!

I now have a file of some forty-three pages, some still having scorch marks as a result of the bombing and subsequent fire. It was £70 well spent.

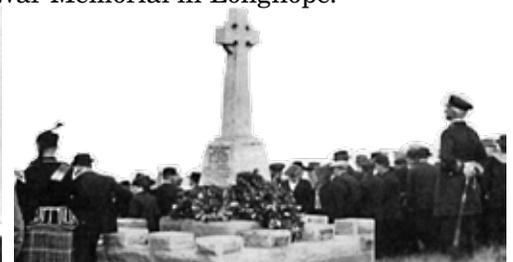
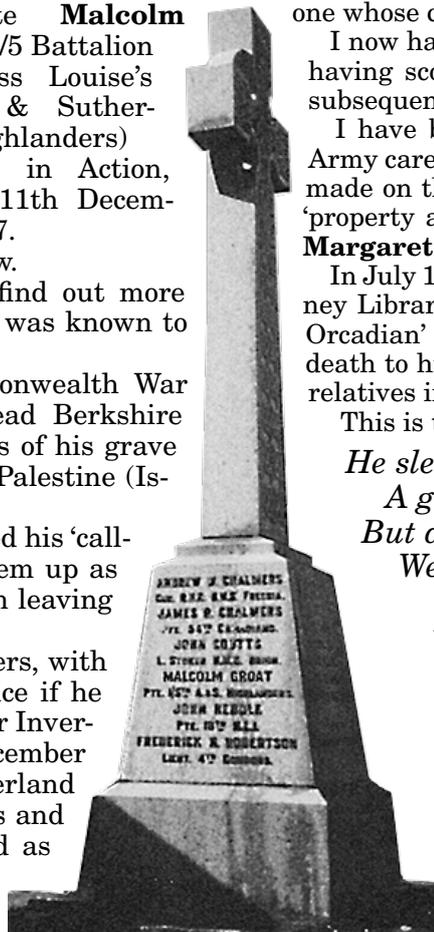
I have been able to find out about **Mackie's** short Army career and have seen his signature on the will he made on the 13th March 1917, in which he left all his 'property and effects' to his mother, my grand mother **Margaret Groat**.

In July 1983 in the Archivist's Department of the Orkney Library I saw the poem which was printed in 'The Orcadian' on March 30th 1918 to announce **Mackie's** death to his fellow Orcadians, neighbours and possibly relatives in Canada.

This is the last verse:-

*He sleeps in a grave in a distant land,
A grave we may never see,
But as long as life and memory last,
We will remember thee.*

Malcolm Groat is remembered on the War Memorial in Longhope.



Service at War Memorial Longhope 1921

And could there be a more fitting ending to this edition of Sib Folk News than the words of the above verse.