



# Anglo-Celtic Roots

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## In This Issue

*Travels With My Aunt: Adventures in Europe 1914*

*An Officer and a Gentleman*

*John Henry McVittie: Before, During and After World War I*



Celebrating  
our ancestry for **20** years

## *Anglo-Celtic Roots*

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# Contents

## COLUMN

*From the President/2*

## FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH

***Travels With My Aunt:  
Adventures in Europe 1914***

*Barbara Tose/3*

***An Officer and a Gentleman***

*Andrew Billingsley/21*

***John Henry McVittie: Before,  
During and After World War I***

*Brian Latham/26*

## TECHNIQUES AND RESOURCES

***The Cream of the Crop***

*John D. Reid, Ken McKinlay/32*

***The Bookworm***

*Betty Warburton/36*

## BIFHSGO NEWS

***Membership Report***

*Kathy Wallace/39*

## COVER ILLUSTRATION

*Nellie Miller in 1905*

*Source: author*

## ***From the Editor***

To mark the beginning of the First World War a century ago, this issue focusses on stories from that period.

We begin with the adventure that Barbara Tose first recounted at our February meeting: her great-grand-aunt's tour of Europe just as the war began. Her tale masterfully summarizes the onset of the war while bringing Aunt Nellie alive to us as well.

Andrew Billingsley contributes the affecting history of his great-uncle Thomas Alexander Rowat's service overseas in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, brought to life using Lieutenant Rowat's letters home.

Brian Latham, who reads ACR in Yellowknife, tells of John Henry McVittie, who lived through the Halifax Explosion while serving with the Royal Naval Canadian Voluntary Reserve on HMCS *Niobe*.

Jean Kitchen

## From the President



Summer is upon us once again (at last). Whatever is on your holiday agenda over this delightful season—travel, visiting family, reading that thick book you got for Christmas, or just relaxing in the comforts of home—I hope that the months ahead will be safe and enjoyable.

But while you enjoy the good weather, don't forget your family history research. It seems that every time I turn around, there are new websites, databases and resources that deserve to be investigated. It is, I feel, one of the joys of our fascination with family history.

After four years and more than a dozen columns as your President, this is my final column. My term has come to an end, and a newly elected President will take office at our Annual General Meeting.

It has been a real privilege to serve the membership and to see our Society maintain its position as one of the best family history societies in the country. We are blessed with a dutiful and dedicated Board of Directors and a legion of volunteers who ensure, month in, month out, that the good ship BIFHSGO maintains a steady course.

I would like to thank all those that I have had the pleasure of serving with on the Board, all our volunteers, but most of all, I thank you, the members, for your support and encouragement over the past four years.

Have a great summer and till we meet again, enjoy.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Glenn Wright". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Glenn Wright

## Family History Research

### Travels With My Aunt: Adventures in Europe 1914<sup>©</sup>

BY BARBARA TOSE



*Barbara Tose descends from a long line of Canadian farmers and teachers, and English merchant seamen. She began her family research in 1982, joined OGS in 1983 and BIFHSGO in 2008, and volunteers with both organizations. Barbara retired in 2012 from Parks Canada, where she worked as an archaeological conservator. She now divides her time between her genealogy, music and photography.*

**O**n 26 June 1914, two middle-aged women, Nellie Miller and Eliza McAlpine, set off from Lindsay, Ontario for the trip of a lifetime. They joined their group, led by James L. Hughes, in Montreal from which, on 27 June, they sailed for a grand tour of Great Britain and Europe.

*On 28 June, the heir presumptive of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and his wife Sophie were assassinated in Sarajevo. The assassin identified himself with the empire's most subversive foreign neighbour, Serbia, feeding fears of internal unrest and outside assistance to the various ethnic groups within the empire that were eager for independence. Previous conflicts had been resolved diplomatically, but they had always been over issues of national interest. This time, however, Austria's honour had been cut to the quick, and the nation's deep desire to punish Serbia*

*sparked a string of events that would eventually lead to declarations of war throughout Europe.*



**Figure 1: The Archduke and Archduchess on the day of their assassinations**

Source: <http://fiz-x.com/rare-historical-photos-part-2/>

The two women from Lindsay and their tour group would share in Europe's "Last Summer" and experience the beginnings of war, determinedly returning home against the advice of the British Ambassador and despite the hardships mobilization and war created.

About a month after Nellie Miller returned from her eventful trip, she wrote a 30-page letter to her brother Henry detailing her adventures. I discovered the 28 extant pages of the letter in the early 1980s in a trunk belonging to my grandmother, which my mother had managed to save from my father's proclivity to throw out old things. I'm not certain how Grandma Tose ended up with her uncle's letter, but there it was amongst her other family mementos and unlabelled photographs.

The letter my great-grand-aunt wrote has always fascinated me, and over the years I have come to realize what a remarkable piece of history it truly is. It not only relays their sightseeing excursions but mentions events large and small that occurred in that momentous year. So, let Nellie be your guide—with, I will admit, numerous asides from me, as we travel with my aunt from Lindsay to Europe and back again.

\* \* \*

Nellie Miller was born Ellen Margaret Miller on 17 February 1856, the seventh child of William Miller and Ellen James of Adelaide Township in Middlesex County. Nellie never married and lived at home with her parents and unmarried brother and sister. She worked as a teacher in the Adelaide area until 1886, then probably took care of her father until his death in

1893 (her mother had died in 1876).

Whether she inherited a little money from her father or simply was freed from family obligations, Nellie soon after began nurse's training at Toronto General Hospital and in 1897 joined the staff of the Brockville Hospital. She quickly moved up to the position of Lady Superintendent at Brockville; then in 1905 she was hired by the newly built Ross Memorial Hospital in Lindsay as their Nurse Superintendent. In this capacity Nellie was not only in charge of the nursing staff and their training but managed the administration of the hospital. She was well-respected in both Brockville and Lindsay and was known for her efficiency, warmth and kindness.

Eliza McAlpine was the wife of one of Lindsay's local doctors, John McAlpine. I had assumed that the women had met through Eliza's husband and had become friendly enough to travel together. However, research in Lindsay, Ontario indicated that Dr. McAlpine, unable to spare the 12 weeks planned for the trip from his busy practice but concerned for his wife's health, asked Nurse Miller to accompany his wife. But how had the two women hooked up with the Hughes group for this excursion?

James L. Hughes was a well-respected educator and school inspector in Toronto who led tour

groups, mostly for teachers, through Great Britain and Europe each summer. Although he had retired in 1913, he was once again leading a group to Europe in June of 1914. But what was the connection to the Lindsay ladies? Nellie had been a teacher, but not in Toronto. She had lived in Toronto, but while training as a nurse, not working as a teacher. Neither scenario seemed likely to have connected Nellie to James Hughes, yet I didn't think that two middle-aged ladies in that era would sign on to a tour run by a complete stranger.

In researching James Hughes, I discovered that his younger brother was Sir Sam Hughes. Sir Sam was a newspaper man in Lindsay, Ontario, the MP for Victoria riding from 1892 to 1921, and in 1914 Canada's Minister of Militia and Defence. I considered Sir Sam a likely connection.

However, when I contacted the Lindsay Library about doing some research there, I was surprised when they informed me that I would want to see the "Memoirs of Eliza Hughes, the wife of Dr. McAlpine"! And so I discovered how Nellie came to be among the party led by James Hughes: her travelling companion was James' sister.

Getting from Lindsay to Montreal by train in 1914 was much easier than it would be today. So it was that Eliza and Nellie set out early on

26 June 1914 and arrived in Montreal around 6:00 that evening. After dinner and a ride up the "mountain," they returned to the docks and boarded about 10:00 p.m. They set sail about 2:00 a.m. on the 27th and 12 hours later passed Quebec City.

Nellie then mentions the first eventful sight of the trip: "The weather was beautiful, but our hearts were sore, as we passed Father Pt., the scene of the recent tragedy, where so many hundreds met death so unexpectedly." I was puzzled by this reference at first but soon discovered she was referring to the sinking of the *Empress of Ireland* only a month prior to their voyage.

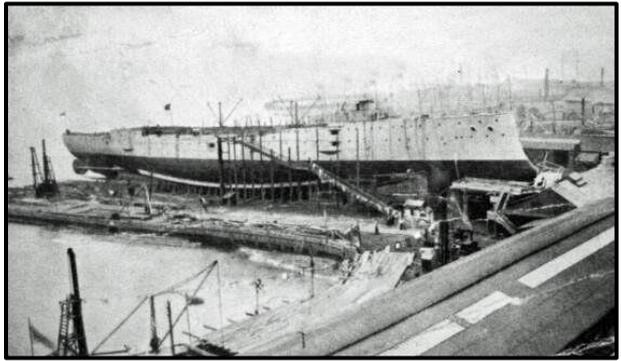
The *Empress of Ireland* was the latest and finest of the Canadian Pacific Empress line of ships. In the early hours of 29 May, just off Rimouski, the *Empress* was struck by the collier *Storstad*. Water poured in at the rate of 60,000 gallons per second. Within 14 minutes of the impact, the *Empress* was gone. Most passengers never stood a chance.

The *Empress of Ireland* remains Canada's worst maritime disaster. Of the 1,477 people on board, 1,012 perished; 840 passengers and 172 crew. The 465 survivors were picked up by the *Storstad* and two other rescue ships from Rimouski. Of the 138 children who boarded the *Empress*, only four survived. The

sinking of the *Empress of Ireland* had been front-page news a mere month before Nellie's trip, and the tales and statistics would be fresh in everyone's minds as they passed the site of the disaster.

With fog off Newfoundland and a few icebergs behind them, their journey continued with clear skies and beautiful sunsets across the Atlantic. As they approached the Emerald Isle, Nellie refers obliquely to the political situation in Ireland: "the turbulence of the little island seemed to have communicated itself to the surrounding waters." Ireland was in the midst of a very troubled period. With Home Rule about to be implemented and talk of partition of north from south, Unionists and Nationalists mobilized for a civil war that would result in the Easter Uprising of 1916 and Irish troubles for decades to come. However, Nellie's group could only stand and wonder what the future held in store for the troubled land.

Four o'clock the next morning saw them greeting the shores of Bonnie Scotland. The ship-building industry of Greenock lining both sides of the Clyde, with ships in all stages of construction, held their attention as they passed on their way to Glasgow, arriving at noon on



**Figure 2: Greenock shipyards along the Clyde**

Source: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~macfie/historygreenock.htm>

Sunday, 5 July. The group had lunch, went for an auto ride around the city, and then visited the "picture gallery" until closing.

They found the city beautifully decorated; Nellie notes that they were delighted as well as surprised "as we had sent them no word of our intended visit. Someone cruelly informed us however, that the decorations were for the king and queen who were expected on Tuesday but we enjoyed it all as well as they." After dinner Nellie attempted to "atone for her Sabbath desecration" but found all three of the nearby churches closed due to the holiday—all of this in "Sabbath-honouring Scotland," no less.

Monday found the group heading to Ayr to see Robbie Burns' cottage. James Hughes was something of an expert on Burns, having grown up in a very proud Scottish family. He would later publish a Burns biography, "The Real Robert Burns," and edit a book of Burns' poems.

Eliza's biography, written by her grandson 50 years after her death, indicates that James was often asked to speak locally while conducting these tours and did so on this particular occasion. However, Nellie makes no mention of this occurring. Instead she tells us that they sang Scottish songs to the music of a violin played by an old Scotchman who swore that the strings of the old instrument were all made from the tail of Tam O'Shanter's mare, Meg.

Nellie then mentions that the day after their visit a suffragette attempted to blow the cottage up but was arrested before she could do any harm. In fact, two suffragettes attempted to bomb the cottage.

Suffragette activity had been increasing for years; by 1914, the militant suffragettes had turned to violence, burning down and blowing up buildings all over Britain. With the King and Queen visiting the district, it was anticipated by some that the suffragettes might attempt some violence. Buildings of national importance were obvious targets. Fortunately for Burns' cottage, its trustees took action to protect the site and hired a night watchman. He surprised the two suffragettes attempting to light a fuse at the back of the cottage, and a struggle ensued. One woman, who gave her name as Janet Arthur, was captured; the other escaped on her bicycle.

The townsfolk of Alloway searched through the night for her but to no avail.

One can only imagine the indignation of the Scottish people as details of the "outrage" emerged over several days: the women employed "Bill Sykes" techniques, wearing stockings over their shoes and wearing men's tweed caps. The two bombs consisted of 15-inch biscuit tins, each containing eight pounds of blasting powder and 20-foot fuses. Janet Arthur was later identified as Janet Parker, the niece of Lord Kitchener! In actual fact, her name was Fanny Parker and her accomplice was Ethel Moorhead, another well-known suffragette working with the Pankhurst-led militant organization, the Women's Social and Political Union.

Fanny was finally released under licence on 16 July due to ill health. Still, she managed to escape prior to her trial and so was never convicted of trying to blow up Robbie Burns' cottage.

Tuesday the group made an early start for Callander by way of Bannockburn and Stirling, to Ellen's Isle and Loch Katrine. They spent the day in the land of Sir Walter Scott seeing all the sights and hearing pipes at every turn. Considering they travelled by train, horse-drawn carriages and boats on Loch Katrine and Loch Lomond, they crammed a lot of sights into one day.

They returned to Glasgow to find the whole city out to greet the King and Queen, which created difficulties for getting to their train. However, once on board, they were soon in Edinburgh, where they stayed at the Old Waverley Hotel on Princes Street. Nellie's description of their tour of the town could be a repeat of my visit to Edinburgh in 1982—the castle, St. Giles, the paving stone design of the Heart of Midlothian, and the rest of the Royal Mile. They were, however, denied access to Holyrood, as the King and Queen were in residence there.

After two days in Edinburgh, they started south with an itinerary that rivals any modern coach tour of Britain: Sir Walter Scott's home, Abbotsford; Melrose Abbey; then on by train to Keswick in the Lake District for the night.

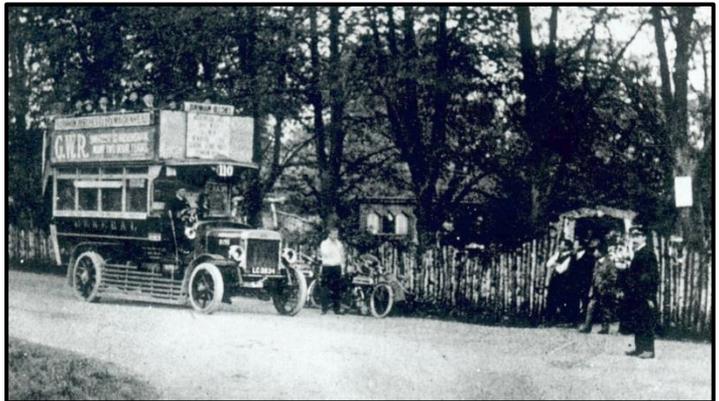
Coaches took them the next morning to Ambleside, where they took a boat ride on Lake Windermere to Lakeside. There they caught the train to Birmingham for a day of rest.

On Monday a train took them to Leamington, where charabancs took them on a whirlwind tour to

Kenilworth Castle, Warwick Castle, and Stratford-upon-Avon, then on to Bristol for the night.

The next day motor buses took them past Reverend Augustus Toplady's church and the cleft in the rock nearby where he wrote his most famous hymn. They stopped and, led by a soloist, sang "Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee." They then proceeded on to Cheddar, "of cheese fame," followed by Wells Cathedral and Bath, where the great interest was the "old Roman baths which are being uncovered."

Windsor Castle was next on their tour, though they were only allowed into St. George's Chapel, where they viewed the beautiful statuary in memory of Princess Charlotte and sat and listened to the music of the service being held.



**Figure 3: London General Omnibus at Wingroves Tea Garden, Burnham Beeches**

Source: Slough Library ([www.slough.gov.uk/libraries](http://www.slough.gov.uk/libraries)), Slough History online, [sloughhistoryonline.org.uk](http://sloughhistoryonline.org.uk)

And finally—before lunch—they headed to Stoke Poges churchyard, where Thomas Gray wrote his famous *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. They lunched under Burnham Beeches, perhaps at the Tea Garden shown in Figure 3, arriving in an omnibus just like this one. Then it was on to London where, after dinner, they rode on the top of a bus to Piccadilly Circus.

It was now 15 July. While our merry travellers wended their way from Scotland to London, much had been happening on the continent.

*Following the 28 June assassination of the Austrian Archduke, the Chief of the General Staff for Austria-Hungary, Count Franz von Hötzen-dorf, had advocated immediate mobilization. However, both Emperor Franz Joseph and the Hungarian Prime Minister, Count Istvan Tisza, the rulers of the dual state, were against such a move. The Emperor was reluctant to do so alone for fear of Russia coming to their Serbian ally's defence; Tisza rightly feared any war with Serbia would trigger a general European war.*

*To calm the Emperor's fears, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Leopold von Berchtold, had approached Germany to ensure it would back Austria should Russia become involved. Although Germany had given this reassurance readily, it had still taken Berchtold until mid-July to get agreement from the Emperor and the Prime Minister to*

*issue an ultimatum to Serbia. The wording of the ultimatum was still being debated, with Tisza holding out for less harsh terms that Serbia might be able to accept.*

*In the end, those in support of war drafted a document that no self-respecting state could possibly accept. However, delivery of the ultimatum would have to wait. The French President and Premier were visiting Russia, and neither Austria nor Germany wanted those allies in immediate contact when the document was delivered. It was decided that delivery would take place on the 23rd of July after the French had departed.*

Nellie's group had one week scheduled in London. The whirlwind did not let up, though: Westminster Abbey, the House of Commons, the "Picture Gallery" were first on the list. They visited Hampton Court Palace and were "entertained to tea" by Lady Napier.

They motored down to Guilford in Surrey to the home of the artist George Frederic Watts. At the time of his death in 1904, Watts was one of the most famous artists in the world. He was the first living painter to have a solo exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, had a whole room of paintings on permanent display at London's Tate Gallery, many more on display at the National Portrait Gallery, and two large works hanging in the nave of St. Paul's Cathedral. The Watts

Gallery, dedicated to his works, opened near his home just before he died. His widow devoted herself to the Gallery and, no doubt to earn extra income, entertained tourists to luncheon at their home.

After luncheon the group moved on to the home of Mr. Carøe, a noted architect. The group was welcomed to his restored Elizabethan country house, Vann, in Hambleton, for tea and a ramble around their extensive gardens. Nellie notes that “the barn is their music room” where they retained the huge beams and used the old lanterns for electric lights.

On the Saturday evening of their week-long stay in London, the group attended some sort of convention, where Nellie had the honour of shaking the hand of Queen Amélia, the exiled Queen of Portugal, who was residing in London. Nellie comments “She is a very fine-looking woman of gracious presence.”

On Sunday they attended the service at St. Paul’s Cathedral by invitation of the Archbishop of London. It would appear James Hughes had some friends in high places.

Being a Methodist, Nellie perhaps would have enjoyed their evening more when they went to John Wesley’s Chapel, an old brick building in the heart of the city. “Wesley’s pulpit is there just as he used it,” says Nellie, although the

information I found indicates that it was originally three tiers and was lowered to a single tier in 1864.

Before they left London, a tour of Madame Tussaud’s famous wax-works was in order. Nellie lists the many “celebrities” that they “met,” from Henry VIII to Voltaire, Knox, Wesley, Asquith, Crippen and even Mrs. Pankhurst. She then quips that she is “strongly tempted to distinguish herself in order to have a place among them.”

On 23 July, the tour group crossed to the continent from Dover to Ostende, Belgium, followed by a delightful run by rail on to Brussels. Being a “farm girl,” Nellie comments on the beautiful little farms seen from the railway window, where men and women worked together and not a foot of soil was left untilled.

*As they travelled towards Brussels, the Austrian-Hungarian ultimatum was delivered to Serbia. The expiry date was 25 July. However, Nellie’s group was unaware of the activities going on between the heads of state. It would be several days yet before they had any intimation of what was to come, and even then most people still did not think it would come to anything but a localized Balkan war.*

And so Nellie’s group continued with their plans: a visit to Brussels’ Palace of Justice then to Waterloo, never dreaming that soon the field would be “trampled by soldiers



Figure 4: The Washington Times, (D.C.), 28 July 1914

Source: Library of Congress, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026749/1914-07-28/ed-1/seq-1/>

once again." They were awakened in the morning by dogs barking, and looking out their hotel window saw hundreds of them hitched to carts waiting for the milk trains to arrive at the station. Dogs, apparently, were used instead of horses for lighter work.

From Brussels they travelled to The Hague, where they saw the Palace of Peace. Holland was a delight to Nellie, with the dykes and canals, windmills and the "quaint costumes" of the peasants. They visited the island of Marken, an isolated community where the women wear their traditional "17 petticoats, woolen stockings the feet of which are covered with felt, and sabots or wooden shoes." They lunched in Rotterdam, spent a short time in Amsterdam and motored to Scheveningen, a seaside resort "of the usual type," visited the "Picture Gallery" and Queen Wilhelmina's Palace.

They returned to Brussels with a stop in Antwerp. The cathedral was the item of interest here; Nellie describes the beautiful pulpit, supposedly carved from a solid

piece of oak in 1713 by Michiel van der Voort the Elder. Here also was Rubens' masterpiece *The Descent from the Cross*. She relates the story of the enraptured gazer who stood before the canvas until the attendant announced the closing of the cathedral. "Not yet, not yet," he pleaded. "Wait until they have taken Him down." She can't help but add "they are now dropping bombs in Antwerp" and voice her hope that the cathedral will be safe.

"July 28th: Austria has declared war on Servia," says Nellie. *Despite a "capitulation of a most humiliating kind" by Serbia, the German leaders circumvented the Kaiser, who saw "every cause for war" gone. They pressured Austria to declare war on Serbia. In Austria, too, the Emperor's permission was gained by reporting false information about Serbian troops having opened fire on Austrian forces. And so war was declared on Serbia and, despite efforts to the contrary, Europe moved one step closer to war.*

Once again, however, Nellie's group was not aware of how close a general European conflict was. They

were in Belgium, not Austria, and Nellie completes her above sentence about war being declared with “but we left for Cologne on the morning of July 29th.” They passed through Liège, where just over a week later German troops were laying siege. They arrived in the early evening and visited the beautiful cathedral, then took a short walk around the city. All night long, however, they were disturbed by marching soldiers as Germany mobilized her troops.

In the morning they took a boat along the Rhine to Mainz, drifting peacefully past the great vineyards and the old castles along the banks of the river. They found a very quiet city when they arrived in Mainz late in the evening.

*One last attempt was made to stop a general European war between Austria's 28 July declaration and 31 July. Berlin did an about-face and sent a message to Vienna telling them to accept a “stop-in-Belgrade-formula,” which would allow Europe to pull back from the brink of war. On this Russia, Germany and Britain all seemed to be in agreement. The Kaiser was willing to mediate between Russia and Austria. The Tsar was getting conflicting information, and after ordering full mobilization he retracted that to partial mobilization.*

*Apparently France, whose leaders had been away for the month of July, was only just beginning to under-*

*stand the situation and warned Russia not to do anything that might offer Germany a pretext for total or even partial mobilization. Germany attempted to buy Britain's neutrality by promising not to annex territories belonging to France, Holland or Belgium.*

*Britain, which was scheduled to have an immediate debate on Home Rule for Ireland, was being pressured by both Russia and France to declare its intentions and support its allies. Given the European situation, an agreement was reached in the House of Commons to postpone the implementation of Home Rule and show a united front to Europe.*

*On 30 July, Austrian warships began bombarding Belgrade, the capital of Serbia. In reaction to this attack, Russia ordered full mobilization on 31 July.*

On the morning of the 31st, the tour group left by train for Heidelberg but, by some mistake in Mannheim, were switched to a wrong track and did not arrive at their desired destination. Instead the decision was made to move on to their next planned stop, Strasbourg, arriving there about 2:00 p.m. Having missed luncheon at their hotel, they went to a small café for a late meal, visited the cathedral, did some shopping and returned to their hotel for dinner.

Hearing band music after dinner they went outside only to be passed

by three regiments “on their way to the front.” Four more regiments went by later. Their guide had gone out to learn of the situation and returned to tell them that Strasbourg was under martial law. The military had taken over the railway lines but it was still possible that they might get near the frontier of Switzerland.

*At noon that day, the news of Russia’s full mobilization reached Berlin. The Kaiser again offered to mediate with Austria if Russia would stop its military measures. The Tsar stated that preparations could not be stopped but promised not to take any “provocative action” as long as negotiations were taking place. Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph thanked the Kaiser for his offer but said it had come too late.*

*That evening Germany sent word to Russia that it must stop mobilization within 12 hours or Germany, too, would mobilize. In truth, as Nellie notes in her letter, German mobilization had already begun. By 1 August, German troops were already being deployed toward Luxembourg and Belgium. When there was no response from Russia and it became clear that no deal would be struck to keep France and Britain out of the conflict, the Kaiser ordered his ambassador in Russia to deliver his declaration of war. By 7:00 p.m. German troops had seized their first objective: a railway station and telegraph office inside Luxem-*

*bourg. The German government announced that Russian invaders had entered German territory. The German people believed them, steadfastly convinced that they had been forced into war by their enemies.*



**Figure 5: 30.5 cm gun used in the siege of Belgium**

Source: <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newcentury/5014>

The morning of August 1st, Nellie and her companions managed to get a train from Strasbourg to Mülhausen, now known as Mulhouse, and from there to the border of Switzerland. However, no trains were crossing the border, so they hired baggage drays and “piling our bags on them, we climbed up, and with what dignity we could muster rode through the city of Basle to the

station.” Here they secured a train to Lucerne.

As Nellie herself noted, a week later troops were fighting in Mülhausen, and yet the group did not seem overly concerned. Instead they spent nine delightful days in Switzerland touring the sights, though they did feel some of the discomforts of war. Horses could not be secured; boats and trains were cancelled because of the lack of men. Switzerland, too, had mobilized to defend her borders. Italians were pouring out of Germany, because Italy had refused to join its Central Power allies in the war.



**Figure 6: Rigi rack-and-pinion railway**

Source: <http://www.rigi.ch/Company/Rigi-Bahnen/Railway-and-mountain-history>

As war broke out all around them, the group travelled to the top of Mount Rigi by rack and pinion railway. Nellie tells the story of

an old woman who examined the car carefully before going on board. She asked the conductor how the car was held on the track. He told her all about the brakes. She said “But what if they should break?” Then he said

“There are others at the back equally strong”. “But what if they should break too; where would we go?”

He replied “It would altogether depend on what sort of a life you had lived.”

On a clear day (at least in 1914) you could see 100 miles, and the panorama was wonderful. They visited Interlaken and Montreux on Lake Geneva, staying at a beautiful little hotel on the shore of the lake with a perfect little garden filled with flowers of every variety.

*By this time, Germany had declared war on France, and Belgium had been invaded. On 4 August, Britain, unable to tolerate the invasion of the neutral state of Belgium, also entered the fray. Ferries from Folkestone to Boulogne-sur-Mer were taken over by the military for the transportation of troops and on 7 August the first British troops arrived in France.*

On Sunday morning, 9 August, an open letter to tourists from the British Ambassador in Berne was posted, assuring them of their safety but asking them not to attempt to leave Switzerland, as he could not guarantee their safe passage across France. He advised them to secure employment of some sort—after all, everyone knew the war would be over by Christmas. In spite of this advice, however, Nellie’s group left by boat that

afternoon for Geneva. It was a glorious day, and the sunset reflected on the lake was one of the most beautiful Nellie had ever seen.

The next morning at six they were on their way to the station. There they found a train to Paris as well as a multitude of other tourists hurrying home. They finally secured seats and at 8:00 a.m. started for Paris, normally an eight-hour journey. At the frontier they were held up for an hour while passports were examined. They travelled through the hot day with no food or drink and arrived at Lyons at 6:30, further from Paris than they had begun that morning. They waited on the platform for five hours, unable to leave in case their tickets were collected upon leaving the platform, for they did not have enough cash to purchase new ones. They managed to secure some sour bread, cold meat and water.

At 11:00 p.m. their train for Paris came in and, after a struggle, they secured seats, sitting up all night as there were no sleepers. They arrived in Paris about 10:00 a.m. and rushed to the hotel, where they snatched breakfast and then hurried across the city to another station, where they secured a train for Boulogne-sur-Mer. What they saw of Paris was quiet and shops were closed.

On the train to Boulogne they met a "party of noisy foreigners," principally Alsatian men who had

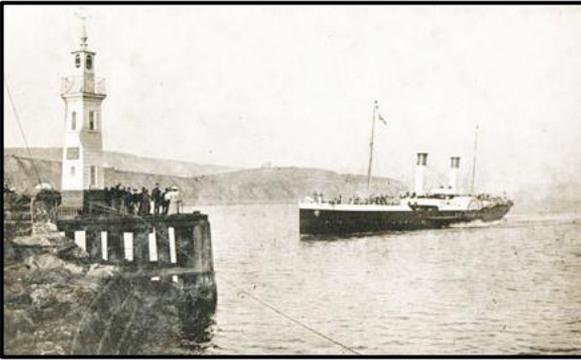
deserted from the German army. Though they had been born since the cession of Alsace and Lorraine to the Germans, the French spirit had been fostered by their parents. "Not more enthusiastic Frenchmen would be found anywhere." When they discovered Nellie's party to be British subjects the men insisted on joining them, drank their health, kissed their hands, pantomimed beheading the Kaiser and burying him deep. They had with them a Union Jack, which they presented to the British party. Nellie mentions that the flag did them good when they arrived in Boulogne at 11:00 p.m. The conductor went off to secure them lodgings for the night taking—and here we lose Nellie's voice.

As noted earlier, I discovered the 28 extant pages of Nellie's 30-page letter. Why these two pages are missing or where they went, I will never know, but missing they are. From this point, conjecture and a few details in the Lindsay newspaper supply an outline of what probably happened next.

The conductor took the flag with him and with its help either secured them lodgings for the night and/or passage on a ferry or empty troopship returning to Folkestone. From there, a train took them to London, where they no doubt finally rested after their ordeal. Since they likely arrived in London on Wednesday, 12 August but did not

leave on the SS *Scotian* until Friday, 21 August, they may have decided to stay a little time in London, couldn't secure a passage home immediately, or already had tickets for the *Scotian* on the 21st.

I had hoped that I would find some information in Lindsay that might fill in the gaps of Nellie's letter. Mrs. McAlpine's biography, unfortunately, was of little use. It is filled with tales told to Eliza's grandson years after her trip and there are many inaccuracies. An interview with Eliza after her return appeared in the local papers, but rather than the accurate outline of their adventure I hoped for, her story in the *Watchman-Warder* is a fine piece of war propaganda.



**Figure 7: Arrival of ferry from Boulogne-sur-Mer, Folkestone, England ca. 1900**

Source: Library of Congress,  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002696752/>

However, it does confirm that they landed at Folkestone and went on to London. Eliza also relates how they missed a German mine by less than

15 feet while coming down the English Channel. Apparently the *Scotian* was stopped and a "party of men" was sent to remove the menace from the waters. She does not say, however, what they did with it!

It is on the voyage home that Nellie regains her voice, telling us that they had some fog and rough weather lasting from Sunday until Friday. During this time, she was careless of danger from either German cruisers or the tossing boat. But on Friday the sun came up and so did she, for the remainder of the voyage. They arrived in Quebec on Monday, 31 August, at noon. The Allan Line, which they had been sailing with, offered them overland passage to Montreal, where they arrived in time to secure an evening train for Lindsay. They arrived home Tuesday morning, 1 September 1914, to "a little town of between 7000 and 8000, with lumber yards and a tannery near the station but in all my travels, it was by far the most beautiful spot we had seen."

*The war, as we all know, did not end by Christmas.*

*Economies were bled dry, empires and societies were shaken to pieces; the destruction of buildings, towns, cities and transportation networks was vast and had long-lasting effects. But it is the human*

*cost we remember most, for the casualties were appalling. Figures vary, but by the end of the war, approximately 10 million combatants had died and more than 21 million others were maimed and wounded.*

*An additional seven million civilians also died and countless more were injured, displaced or otherwise damaged. Millions of women were left without husbands or would never find one and even greater numbers of children were orphaned.*

*It was not the war to end all wars, for in its final settlement, it set the stage for World War II and many smaller conflicts down to the present day.*

\* \* \*

And what of Nellie? What have I learned about her? Her letter shows me that she was an adventurous and intelligent woman, who at the age of 58 was resilient enough to endure with equanimity and grace not just the tour schedule but the trials and tribulations that their escape from Europe brought.

She was certainly well educated in many areas. She read broadly, in particular knowing all the stories of Scott and the poems of Burns. She had an appreciation for art and architecture. She was aware of politics and current events, at least enough to comment on them, yet she did not appear to take on any extreme views despite her experiences.

Several comments in her letter tell me she possessed a wry sense of humour. And she was definitely an excellent writer who quietly viewed the world with great interest. From other sources I learned that she was a generous person who was well respected and liked by her colleagues and employers, showing a devotion to duty, a caring regard to the sick, and skill, diplomacy and business acumen in her administrative duties. She was affectionately regarded by the nurses she trained.

Her obituary tells me that she had a “sympathetic nature, a lovable disposition and untiring energy.” She was a dynamic and active member of the Methodist church, a delightful conversationalist and took an active interest in the life of the community.

Nellie died on 3 February 1921 after a two-year struggle with cancer, leaving the community she was so much a part of mourning her passing. She has, however, left a wonderful legacy in her letter of 1914.

## **Reference Notes**

Due to the number of resources used in researching the various topics contained in this article, I have grouped references by topic.

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<sup>6</sup>"1891 Census of Canada," database, *Ancestry* (ancestry.ca), digital image, entry for William Miller, Ontario, District 93, Middlesex West, Sub-district Adelaide, Sub-district Number A, p.13, Family 66, line 25, , Roll T-6353.

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<sup>8</sup>"1911 Census of Canada," database, *Ancestry* (ancestry.ca), digital image, entry for Nellie Miller, Ontario, District 129 Victoria, Sub-district Lindsay, Sub-district Number 57, p.16. Family 201, line 41, Roll T-20326 to T-20460.

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- <sup>3</sup> The Case of Fanny Parker alias Janet Arthur and "Another Prison Infamy" (*Votes for Women*, 1914), National Records of Scotland reference: HH16/43/6, (<http://www.scottisharchivesforschools.org>), Crown copyright: National Records of Scotland.
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# An Officer and a Gentleman<sup>©</sup>

BY ANDREW BILLINGSLEY



*Andrew Billingsley, UE, is a descendant of Loyalists who settled in the Gaspé in 1784. A retired Ottawa, he inherited an interest in genealogy from both his parents, who were excellent family record keepers.*

**I**t was August 1915. The first Canadian soldiers had arrived in France that February. On his 37th birthday my great-uncle, Thomas Alexander Rowat, wrote to his mother, noting that “we who have been reaping the benefits of previous wars have been taking peace for granted.” At the time an unmarried accountant, he had been managing a business in the Cobalt region of Northern Ontario.

By 7 September, Alex had joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Toronto as a private in the Divisional Cyclists, which was an intelligence corps carrying information from place to place on bicycles. Fortunately, he continued to write to his parents regularly.

All his wartime letters were carefully preserved, and they provide a glimpse of a soldier’s life in the First World War that I am able to quote from here. I also consulted his service record at Library and Archives Canada.<sup>1</sup>

Alex’s parents had retired near Montreal. His father had been the minister of the Presbyterian church

in Athelstan, Quebec, where Alex had grown up. Both his grandparents had come to Canada from Inverness-shire in Scotland, where his grandfather had also been a Presbyterian minister. A graduate in Arts from McGill University in Montreal, Class of ’98, Alex was fluently bilingual.

By January 1916, Private Rowat had been recruited as a lieutenant in the 159th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, undergoing training in Toronto and at Camp Borden, embarking for England at the end of October and arriving in Liverpool on 11 November 1916.

During brief training in England, Lieut. Rowat was suddenly drafted into the 38th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, made up of men mainly from the Ottawa area. The 38th had lost troops heavily at the Battle of the Somme on 18 November. Of its 18 officers, only one was able to avoid injury, with 5 losing their lives.

Alex arrived at Le Havre, France on 1 December and had the first chance to practise his French. From the port, it was another two nights on the train to an [unnamed] town of

20 thousand inhabitants, about 12 miles from the Western Front, and yet where “guns could be plainly heard.”



**Figure 1: Thomas Alexander Rowat in 1916**

Source: author

Almost immediately, Lieut. Rowat was made “an attached infantry officer” to the British 182nd Imperial Tunnelling Company for four months, taking with him a relief detachment of 30 men from the 38th. The

tunnellers had been in France for a year, building tunnels and dugouts under the trenches.

The tunnellers, mainly coal miners and mining engineers, worked in eight-day “tours,” with four nights in the trenches and four nights back in billets. Travelling to the trenches or dugouts took about four hours, first by truck, then on foot, with the final hour in the dark, in a communications trench. The daily pay was five francs, about \$1.10, with passbooks issued for record-keeping.

As an orderly officer, Alex’s duties included arranging billets for the

officers and men, paying them, and censoring their letters home.

What had the greatest impact on him was having to read the letters written by the men, especially the married men, expressing feelings that perhaps had never been expressed before, because the war had “awakened them to a sense of appreciation of blessings and comforts they had enjoyed for so many years.” Also striking was “to think that love lies in the hearts of perhaps the roughest class of men in the British Army.”

Two other experiences made a lasting impression on Alex. The first was witnessing “an armistice for the duration of two hours for the collecting of the dead.” The other took place on Christmas Eve, outside a small church, waiting for Midnight Mass to finish:

I could see the flash of the big guns several miles distant light up the sky, and brighten the outside walls of the church, and it seemed a strange paradox, the service celebrating the birth of Christ who came heralded by the angels who sang “Peace on Earth” etc., and the flash of the heavy artillery seeming to mock the word “Peace.”

The Christmas Day events concluded with an evening concert “at which I am to recite The Shooting of Dan McGrew by Robert Service.”

For his final month with the tunnellers, he became responsible for the loading of materials onto small railway cars, which were pulled by mules to the trenches. This meant seven-mile trips each way on a motorcycle.

Lieut. Rowat rejoined the 38th Battalion on 17 March 1917; by 29 March he had experienced “the four hottest days of my life. The artillery bombardments were terrific, and the talk was that there were more guns than at the Somme.” Safety was down a “funk-hole, a place about thirty feet underground, a regular mine, in fact, where it was impossible for any shell to penetrate.” He was very soon back at the Front, coming out three days before the successful first advance at Vimy Ridge on 9 April.

Two days after the advance, he wrote:

I was not in that “show”, but my Battalion was. We Canadians were very proud to see in the papers that the victory is considered one of the greatest in the war, and that the Canadians are greatly responsible for it.

He remarked on the sight of 500 prisoners of war being marched along the road, “mostly quite happy, as the war had ended as far as they are concerned, and they will be well-treated.”

Another experience also left its mark:

One realizes what it is to face being snuffed out. I was in a salvaging party in No Man’s Land, i.e. what was No Man’s Land before we made the advance, and it simply passes description. Green water filled shell holes so close it is almost impossible to walk through the place, dead men’s bones, men who had died when out scouting, no doubt, before the advance, and killed, and perhaps no one knew about it, or perhaps they were unable to get the body in. There is one mine crater which I think will remain as long as the earth remains. It must be two hundred or more feet across at the top, and at least a hundred feet deep. Thousands of pounds of explosives were used to blow it, and it looks like what I imagine a volcano crater looks like.

In his letters there are several recurring subjects, but none more common than leave. “There are only two things we look forward to here, i.e. going out of the trenches at the end of a tour, and leave.” At that point, Alex had been with the two battalions for seven months, and had his hopes dashed again and again. Visiting relatives in Scotland, or seeing Paris, were plans; or going anywhere

I could have a little tennis to keep me in exercise, and bathing, and resting, and good sleeps between real sheets. We get sleep only in snatches up the line, and then one gets so that sleep is impossible almost. The loss of, and irregular sleep has a sort of nervous strain on one.

Weather was another major concern, particularly during the winter. By the end of February, the troops had endured the longest cold spell in France in 25 years. Snow was “falling nearly every day,” as of April 11. “It is very surprising what an effect the weather has on a person’s spirits.”

The Vimy Ridge advance had moved the front line two miles ahead, to what had been German territory since the beginning of the war. The 38th Battalion had been reorganized, with six officers now assigned to each of four companies: the Officer Commanding, the second in command, and one for each of the four platoons. By the end of June, there would be 1,004 men in the battalion.

A former German dugout became the headquarters for “D” Company, where Lieut. Rowat was the acting Company Commander. Thirty feet down a winding staircase, to his amazement, he found a piano in an elaborate structure, with a beamed ceiling!

Tours in the trenches continued in late April and May, then a two-week rest back of the lines in a reserve position. During early June, four “inspiring” and “dramatic” events took place: a military tattoo with nearly 300 pipes and drums; a presentation of decorations for “conspicuous gallantry,” with the circumstances described; an “impressive ceremony” honouring

Major T.W. McDowell (an officer in the 38th who had won a Victoria Cross), which “brought tears to the eyes of strong men;” plus a valedictory parade for Sir Julian Byng, the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps.

By mid-June 1917, activity along the front line had increased, and the men of the 38th were back in the trenches, doing “line duties.” In a letter, Alex expressed the thought that “we look and long for peace, but at the same time feel that, although it is sure to come sooner or later, it may come too late for us individually.” However, in other June letters, he wrote that the



**Figure 2: Lieut. Rowat’s headstone in Villers Station Cemetery, France**

Source: The War Graves Photographic Project

“spirit of the boys is wonderful,” and that he had seen an American officer. “It shows they mean business.”

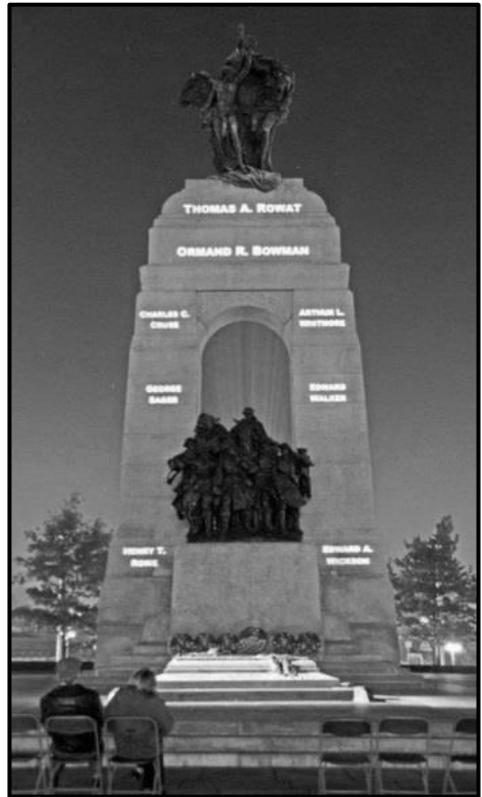
For three days beginning 26 June, the 38th Battalion met stubborn resistance, suffering 250 casualties. Sadly, Lieut. Alex Rowat was among them. According to a Circumstances of Death report,

Lieut. Rowat was in command of our “D” Company during the operation which resulted in the capture of La Coulotte and Avion. He had done very fine work, and while at his Company Headquarters on the 28th June, just after a successful advance by his Company, he was instantly killed by shell fire.

The tributes began immediately, with their Chaplain noting that “by his winning way, he had succeeded in becoming one of our most popular officers.” Others came from friends and colleagues, one writing “a man in the best sense of the word,” and another, “a strong arm to assist, or the kindly word to cheer and advise.”

In France, Lieut. Rowat’s body rests in Villers Station Cemetery, in the hamlet of Villers-au-Bois, 10 kilometres north of Arras. The cemetery contains the graves of 1,207 Commonwealth soldiers, of which 1,009 are Canadian, most of whom served in the Battle of Vimy Ridge. It is a peaceful setting, surrounded by pasture land. His two brothers and a sister have all

made pilgrimages there, as has his great-nephew.



**Figure 3: National War Memorial, Ottawa**  
Source: Dr. David Rowat

In Canada, Great-Uncle Alex is remembered by a brass plaque in Athelstan Presbyterian Church. He was one of five members of that community who did not return from the war. A remarkable number of 21 young residents had volunteered.

Students in McGill’s Faculty of Law are reminded of his sacrifice with the awarding of the Thomas Alexander Rowat Prize, given in perpetuity by his brother, Donald.

Lastly, every Remembrance Day, Lieut. Rowat's great-nephews and nieces in Ottawa read his letters again; in 2008, three also made the effort of staying out until the small hours of the morning to see his name projected onto the National War Memorial.

May the generations to come continue to remember him.

### Reference Note

<sup>1</sup>"Soldiers of the First World War: 1914–1918," RG 150, Accession 1992–93/166 Box 8506-20, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

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## John Henry McVittie: Before, During and After World War I

BY BRIAN LATHAM



*Brian Latham, a retired civil servant in Yellowknife, NT, spends his time researching his family, skiing, volunteering and walking in Europe. This article is a revision of "John Henry McVittie: from Dublin to Hilton Beach," published by the Sault Ste. Marie & District Branch, Ontario Genealogical Society, in Sault Channels, December 2011.*

To my brother Gary and me, he was Uncle John. To our parents and aunt, he was just John, but to the folks in 1920s and '30s Hilton Beach and Milford Haven on St. Joseph Island, Ontario, he was "Mac." His full name was John Henry McVittie.

But what was his life story? My childhood memories are a jumble of references to Dunnville, Guinness, Cockburn Island, the North Atlantic, Lake Nipigon, logging, hunting, the Caufields and the Whichers. It was time to put the pieces together.

The opportunity and impetus to do that came as I finally worked my

way through the suitcase of photos and papers I inherited from my aunt Katie via her sister, my mother, Mary Maxwell Tonner-Latham (1911–1998). The pieces began to fall into place as I learned how an Irish boy came to be buried in St. John's Cemetery in far-off little Hilton Beach, Ontario.

John Henry McVittie was born 24 January 1889 at 60 Rialto Buildings, Dublin, Ireland, son of James McVittie, a labourer from County Cavan, and Rebecca Ievers.<sup>1</sup> In 1903, at the age of 14, he accepted a job in the shipping department of the famous Guinness brewery, later

telling us of memorizing all the station names in order on the railway from there north.

For an unknown reason, in 1912, he decided to leave for Canada, trying to book passage on the most modern of the White Star Line's fleet, but he was too late and reluctantly took a sailing arriving a week earlier.<sup>2</sup> His disappointment was short-lived when he learned that on 15 April 1912 his favoured ship sank with 1,517 casualties, mostly in the steerage class that he could afford. It was the *Titanic*.

He found work on a farm at Attercliffe Station, Haldimand County, near Dunnville, Ontario. The farm's owner is unknown but it may be more than a coincidence that the 1911 census shows a Seneca Township farm near this post office worked by James Whicher [1869-?], his wife Ella Kelly, [1868-1918], five children and his parents, John and Lucretia. The name Whicher would figure greatly in John's later life. He told us stories of fields of corn tall enough to hide both a horse and plough. Honed here was the skill with a scythe I saw as he rhythmically mowed the small field between Hilton Beach, Ont.'s war memorial, the creek by Ernie Kitchen's place, the hotel fence and our summer cottage.

World War I changed all that.

On 2 November 1917 he joined the Royal Canadian Naval Voluntary

Reserve as an ordinary stoker, or engine tender, in a patrol ship in the North Atlantic, sailing out of Halifax.<sup>3</sup> But from then until

the end of December he was

assigned to similar duties on HMCS *Niobe*, Canada's major or only East Coast warship, probably for training. Within a month, on 6 December, the SS *Mont-Blanc*, a French ship loaded with explosives, and the SS *Imo*, a Norwegian vessel picking up relief supplies for Belgium, collided in the Halifax Explosion. The blast caused huge destruction, killed more than 1,600 people and injured over 9,000.

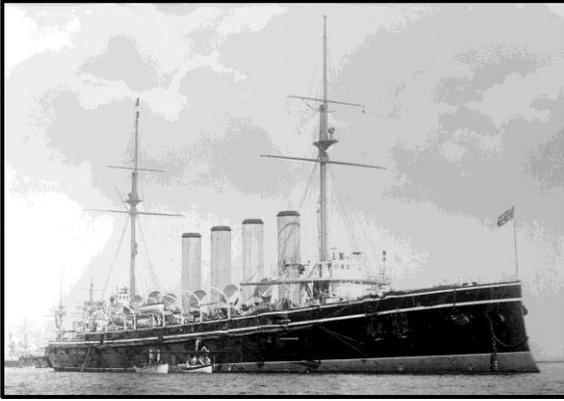
The *Niobe*, moored as a depot ship apparently very close to the explosion at the Hospital Wharf on the north end of the Dockyard, suffered "serious damage," but John was safe and may have assisted survivors onshore.<sup>4</sup> The ship he usually served on, HMCS *Margaret*, which was moored about 2 km away from the blast, was only



**Figure 1: John McVittie ca. WW I**

Source: author

lightly damaged and lost only two of



**Figure 2: HMCS Niobe**

Source: Wikipedia

its crew, who had gone ashore. From 1 January 1918 he was part of that ship's complement until he was demobilized on 30 May 1919.

But what of his stories and recollections of his service? John was a quiet, thoughtful fellow, not given to talking much about himself, probably because he'd spent many hours alone in a ship's bowels. As a civilian, he could be lost in reading or while he built things, tended engines or just pondered life and the world around him.

For us, growing up some 30 years after the fact in the 1950s and '60s, when our elders were trying to forget the Second World War, we would hear very few tales of the First World War from him and his part in it. Sadly, as children, we were not aware of how interesting his life had been and did not ask him about his time on the North Atlantic.

Nevertheless, I recall a picture of a small ship on the wall above the television that might have been the *Margaret*. We did not keep it.

And there was a story told frequently by his wife, my aunt, and my parents that his medals were stolen and sold by his wife's son. These have never surfaced and we didn't know at that time what they were, whether they were

engraved (so they could be identified) or even where and when they had been sold, although we guessed it would have been in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario in the early 1950s.<sup>5</sup>

However, two memories do come to mind, both on the negative side. I'm sure he mostly kept these to himself or confided them only to his wife, but in off moments they did come out.

The first was the recognition he was given for his service. He was in the Royal Naval Canadian Voluntary Reserve, a "citizen navy" made up of part-time volunteers who were assigned to protect Canada's coasts and to assist in the training of Canadian Navy officers.<sup>6</sup> John felt that he was not given sufficient credit by "true" navy sailors for putting his life in danger by patrolling the North Atlantic coast of Canada while ships were being sunk by the enemy.

Secondly, as an Irishman, he was saddened and angered as much as I ever saw him by the fact that Ireland had provided assistance to the German military during one or both of the wars. As a loyal British subject and a proud Irish citizen, he could not understand how this could be possible, no matter how much the Irish government may have hated the English. If this did occur in WW I, it may explain his late entry into the war.

After leaving the naval reserve, John joined several others (Ed, C.H. and Wilf Whicher, Lillian Gatis, Kathleen Strapp, J.J. Tyson, WT Parke, and H.H. Bell) in 1921 by putting \$1,500, mostly his severance pay, into shares of the Whicher Lumber Company of Colpoy's Bay in the Bruce Peninsula. He added sweat equity by working for the company from 1920 to 1931.<sup>7</sup>

He told stories of logging out of Milford Haven, St. Joseph Island, Ontario, often filling it shore to shore with logs, while hunting deer and other game on St. Joseph and Cockburn islands in upper Georgian Bay.

But it was all for naught, as the company was a casualty of the Depression; it was taken over by TL Durocher and Company of Detour, Michigan. Although a director, John was not at the final meeting on 19 January 1933. His investment was gone and some said he was not treated as well as he might have



**Figure 3: John in Milford Haven, 1930s**

Source: author

been.<sup>8</sup> He had regrets but held no grudges.

With the logging of the 1920s behind him, he may have spent the 1930s in Hilton Beach, Ontario, working for fellow war veteran Albert Edward "Ab" Caufield (1893–1970), an Island-born general merchant who had married Hilda Whicher, a.k.a. Annie Hilda (1903–1964) on 22 November 1922. John's photo collection had mostly winter pictures in Hilton, which may indicate that this was seasonal 1920s work too. I remember one of a snow plane in front of Ab's store. Basically a propeller run by a Ford car engine mounted on a skid, it was apparently designed and built by John, down to carving the propeller.

Whatever he did in the 1930s, things were probably difficult and he began to look for outside work in the 1940s. In 1941, at the age of 52, he was an oiler with the Abitibi Paper Company on the *Orient Bay* tug booming in Lake Nipigon from May to December for \$3.30 a

workday, plus board.<sup>9</sup> Then in Sault Ste. Marie an undated picture shows him with three others working for Wallace McLean, a heating contractor at 121 Brock St., while probably boarding at 24 Hughes St.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 4: the *Orient Bay* crew, 1941**

Source: author

By 1943 he had obtained a job with Algoma Steel in the electrical generation room and married (on 23 July 1943, in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan) the 20-years-younger Catherine Bell “Katie” Tonner (1909–1981), who was divorced and had a teenaged son, Lawrence Stanley Wagner (1928–1977). Their lives were happy but frugal, living at first 219 Walnut, Sault Ste. Marie, then on the Great Northern Road on the lot later occupied by the Purple Lantern Restaurant and finally two places in Hilton Beach, one beside the old jail and the other beside the old school.

Despite their ages, for five years in the early 1950s, they fostered one of Katie’s grandsons, who became an international advertising

entrepreneur in Hong Kong, retiring to Hollywood, California. After John’s retirement from Algoma, probably in 1954, Katie worked to supplement his small pensions, first at the small nearby Red & White market at Great Northern and Old Garden River Roads in Sault Ste. Marie, and then at Evelyn and Charles Sherk’s Store in Hilton Beach.

John was a quiet, methodical fellow from an earlier generation—a frightening driver in his later years; short yet muscularly solid well into his seventies; a crack shot with shotgun or rifle. He was a jack-of-all-trades: from a mechanic who dismantled his 1951 Pontiac’s engine every year to a woodworker who built or repaired our toys. He read Rosicrucian literature and the Bible, quoted Shakespeare, sang parts of Gilbert and Sullivan’s *HMS Pinafore* and coaxed vegetables out of the unresponsive sand in the “back forty” of their lot.

A man content within himself, he sat down on the couch, as he regularly did, after supper one evening just before Christmas in 1969. To a question from the kitchen by his beloved Katie, he did not reply: his life had ended in the same steady way he had lived it.

*Thank you to Garry Bishop of the St. Joseph Island Historical Society, Dennis Thompsett and Gary Latham for memories and information details.*

## Reference Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Birth certificate, issued 24 January 1903 as a condition of work at Guinness'. Birth registered in South City No. 1 district, Dublin, Ireland, No. 3, 18 February 1889. In the author's possession.
- <sup>2</sup> No ship's manifest found. Details are from a passenger entry declaration to Canada, St. John NB, 16 Apr 1920. SS *Minnedosa* p. 9, line 22 (ancestry.ca).
- <sup>3</sup> Military records of JH McVittie, in the author's possession.
- <sup>4</sup> The Nova Scotia Maritime Museum's webpage "Ships of the Halifax Explosion" (<https://maritimemuseum.novascotia.ca/research/ships-halifax-explosion>) says the HMCS *Niobe*, a depot ship at the Hospital Wharf at the north end of the Dockyard, suffered serious damage. Several crew, including the entire pinnace (shore launch) crew were killed and the surviving crew assisted ashore.

The CBC's story ([cbc.ca/Halifax/explosion/he9\\_textonly/he3\\_devastati.on.html](http://cbc.ca/Halifax/explosion/he9_textonly/he3_devastati.on.html)) said, "When the fire broke out on *Mont-Blanc*, [*Niobe* and *Highflyer*] sent a small boat and crew to investigate and help. No one knew what *Mont-Blanc* carried. They joined the . . . tug *Stella Maris* as they tried first to fight the fires, and then to tow *Mont-Blanc* away from the wharf. The seven men from *Niobe* were never found." Of the recovery, Lieutenant Sidney W. Baker, RNR, reported: "On landing I received orders to employ my division in rescue work which comprised clearing debris and extracting bodies from ruins. Many cases were badly injured and survived minutes only. With improvised

stretchers and any assistance we carried cases to what remained of a stone jetty. . . Thirty cases were conveyed in this manner to the hospital ship *Old Colony*. The whole of the rescue work was made difficult owing to flames, smoke and falling timbers . . . At 2:45 all possible rescue work had ceased in the vicinity of the fire and I returned to jetty alongside *Niobe*." Source: Michael J. Bird, *The Town That Died*, London: Souvenir Press, 1962.

A map in an interesting and frank private study of the event ([www.svpproductions.com/halifaxexplosion/blastcloud1.html](http://www.svpproductions.com/halifaxexplosion/blastcloud1.html)) shows the dockyards but not the location of the *Niobe*. The location of the *Margaret*, "Pier 2," is one to two miles from the blast site.

- <sup>5</sup> His service record states that he received the War Badge, Class AA No. 3310, awarded 9 March 1921, and the Victory and British War Medals, awarded 4 September 1924.
- <sup>6</sup> For a history of the Royal Canadian Naval Voluntary Reserve, see Gimblett, Richard H, and Hadley, Michael L, eds, *Citizen Soldiers: Chronicles of Canada's Naval Reserve*, Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010. The *Margaret* is shown on p. 14.
- <sup>7</sup> Personal files of JH McVittie included a share certificate for 15 shares at \$100 each, copies of the last two company annual meeting reports and a recommendation from Ed Whicher for the 1920–31 period (probably written in the 1940s).
- <sup>8</sup> Ralph Nelson memoirs on the St. Joseph Island Historical Society website (<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~island>)

bishop/sjhs.htm): "John Lemcke got out of the Co. before he lost his shirt but two other fine gentlemen didn't fare so well, Harry Bell and John McVittie." Note: John Lemcke's (1884–?) sister Sophia (1877–1963) married Edmund Ernest "Ed" Whicher (1880–1969) on 30 July 1902, in Grey County. Ed and Sophia were lifelong residents

of Hilton. There are many misspellings of Lemcke in the records.

<sup>9</sup>J.H. McVittie's Abitibi employment contract, in the author's possession.

<sup>10</sup>Sault Ste. Marie city directories, 1942–43, 1943–44, 1944–45, 1945–46. I question the accuracy of the addresses after his 1943 marriage.

## Techniques and Resources

# The Cream of the Crop

*Top items from recent posts on the Anglo-Celtic Connections and Family Tree Knots blogs*

BY JOHN D. REID AND KEN MCKINLAY



"Art from war—descendants of WW I soldiers sought for St Paul's commemoration" is the title of a news item posted on

the website of London's St Paul's Cathedral at [www.stpauls.co.uk/](http://www.stpauls.co.uk/). The cathedral is looking for direct descendants of 133 soldiers badly injured during the conflicts as the Cathedral prepares to display a unique piece of embroidery, an altar cloth that the men crafted for the cathedral.

The cathedral has identified six of those as Canadian: Clark, Clay, Eades, Grant, Mundy and Sadler. Four of these, George Eades,

Alexander Grewan Grant, Reginald Frank Mundy, and Harold George Sadler, (all born in the U.K.) can easily be linked to their attestation papers online at Library and Archives Canada.



BIFHSGO President Glenn Wright has identified some others on the list as Canadians: Hedley G. Brasnett (born in Norfolk, England), Harold Erskine Crosby, Harold L. Gibson, Edward Hodder (born in Loughborough, England), William Oswald Hoodless (born in Lincoln, England), Joseph Allan Lynas (born in Thorne, Yorkshire), James Ernest Muth, George Arthur Perry, Charles

William Russell, and Harold Wallace.

A little sleuthing found Malcolm Muth, son of James Earnest Muth, living in Port Dover. Reached by phone he told me his father was injured several times, and had mentioned having embroidered a tulip for St Paul's but thought the tapestry had been destroyed in WW II bombing.

Making that connection provided a sense of satisfaction. If you know of a relative of a Canadian soldier by one of those names who was hospitalized in England during WW I, check out the contact information at the St Paul's website.

### **Seafarers of the Atlantic Provinces**

The new "Canada, Seafarers of the Atlantic Provinces, 1860-1899" database from *Ancestry* comprises 282,032 records. The source is the Index of Surnames from the Ships and Seafarers of Atlantic Canada, a CD-ROM, from the Maritime History Archive, Memorial University of Newfoundland, in St. John's.

This index-only collection, containing records of crew members, masters, and ship owners for vessels registered in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, is fully searchable by name and other particulars. The records include birth and residence, rank, wages, voyage departure and arrival places

and dates, vessel name and registration, and even deaths at sea.

Records are included for Miramichi, New Brunswick (1828-1914); Richibucto, New Brunswick (1880-1914); Saint John, New Brunswick (1820-1914); St. John's, Newfoundland (1820-1936) Halifax, Nova Scotia (1812-1889); Sydney, Nova Scotia (1820-1914); Pictou, Nova Scotia (1820-1914); Windsor, Nova Scotia (1849-1914); Yarmouth, Nova Scotia (1840-1914); Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island (1787-1914). Those included are not just from Atlantic Canada; a wide variety of birth-places are given: Canada 40,790; England 32,686; USA 19,583; Ireland 13,769; Scotland 12,352; Wales 2,882.

### **Canadian Genealogist Magazine**

Between 1979 and 1988 the *Canadian Genealogist* published 38 quarterly issues. These issues have been digitized and placed online by the Ontario Genealogical Society. The PDFs can be downloaded from [http://www.ogs.on.ca/services/cdn\\_genealogist.php](http://www.ogs.on.ca/services/cdn_genealogist.php).

### **Saskatchewan, Probate Estate Files, 1887-1931**

BIFHSGO Secretary Anne Sterling was delighted to find files for two of her family members among the 41,261 records in this collection, recently added to *FamilySearch*. Indexed in partnership with the

Saskatchewan Genealogical Society, the estate records contain loose papers relating to the settlement of estates, including such matters as provision for heirs (including minor children) as well as distribution of funds, land and property. One of the files Anne examined had 100 pages. Many have over 30 images each; one for a deceased First World War soldier I browsed had left only a military will and mentioned a grandfather, cousin and the legal description of land owned.

*FamilySearch* makes frequent additions to its collections: a monthly average of four new or updated databases for England and Wales, and two for Canada, so far this year.

### **Irish Catholic Records**

*Ancestry*, which seems to be on a campaign to add Irish records, has added Catholic confirmation, baptism, marriage and burial records. In most cases these include images of the original entry; some are transcriptions.

The 544,651-record database “Birth and Baptism Registers, 1763–1912” is the largest. It includes the parishes of Addergoole, Allen, Annacarty, Armagh, Aghrim, Backs, Ballina (Ardnaree), Ballina (Kilmoremy), Ballinakill, Ballon and Rathoe, Ballyadams, Ballybricken, Ballyconneely, Ballyfin, Baltinglass, Bangor Erris, Belmullet, Beragh, Caherlistrane (Donaghpatrick and Kilcooney), Canice's

(Finglas and St Margaret), Cappawhite, Carlingford, Carlingford and Omeath, Carnaross, Castlebar, Castleconnor, Claddaghduff (Omeath and Ballindoon), Clifden, Coalisland, Cooley, Crossmolina, Darver, Donaghmore, Easkey, Emly, Golden, Golden and Kilpack, Inishboffin, Kilcloon, Kilcommon Erris, Kilcurry, Kilcurry (Bridgeacrin), Kilcurry (Faughart), Kilglass, Kill, Killala, Killursa, Kilmacshalgan, Knockmore and Rathduff, Lackagh, Lacken, Louisburgh, Louisburgh (Kilgeever), Louth, Magherafelt, Malahide, Moneymore, Mountrath, Moy, Moy (Clonfeacle), Mullingar, Naas, Portlaoise (Maryborough), Rathangan, Rathvilly, Skreen and Dromard, Summerhill, Termonmaguirc, Tinryland, Tourlestrane, Tourlestrane (Kilmactigue), Tullow, and Westland Row.

### ***Information Wanted***

When our Irish ancestors immigrated to the United States and Canada they often lost touch with their families in the old country. Between October 1831 and October 1921 the Boston *Pilot* newspaper printed a “Missing Friends” column with advertisements from people looking for their lost friends and relatives in the New World. Boston College has created a searchable database of these 41,129 advertisements, called *Information Wanted*, at <http://infowanted.bc.edu/>.

## 1939 U.K. National Registration

A major announcement from DC Thomson Family History (own *findmypast*) and The National Archives (U.K.) is of a joint project to make 40 million wartime British records in the 1939 Register available online. Once digitized, it is estimated that the collection will comprise almost 1.2 million scanned full-colour images of documents covering the entire civilian population of England and Wales at the outbreak of the Second World War.

The 1939 Register, taken on 29 September, contains the address, full name, date of birth, sex, marital status and occupation of individuals, as well as changes of name. Although the Register is literally within living memory for many people, information about living individuals will be kept closed for 100 years from their year of birth, or until proof of death has been authenticated. You can register to be kept informed of progress at [www.1939register.co.uk/](http://www.1939register.co.uk/).

## Operation War Diary

Crowdsourcing is becoming increasingly fashionable. The first part of a crowdsourcing project between The National Archives, the Imperial War Museums and Zooniverse saw over 10,000 people across the globe enlist to tag around 50,000 names, places and activities in 200 WW I war diaries in just

eight weeks. A second batch of 3,987 digitized First World War unit war diaries from France and Flanders is now online and available for tagging via [www.operationwardiary.org/](http://www.operationwardiary.org/).

## *Genealogy à la carte* Blog

Welcome Gail Dever, BIFHSGO webmaster and speaker at our September conference, to the blogosphere. Gail says that "*Genealogy à la carte* is based on conversations with friends over lunch, coffee—and via email. It is about family history news, resources, trends, issues, education, and the occasional story, all from a Montreal *point de vue*. While many of the posts will be about Quebec genealogy, the focus of the blog will not be limited to Quebec."

It's great to see the blossoming of family history blogs by BIFHSGO members, each with a unique perspective:

Elizabeth Kipp's *English Research from Canada*: [kippeeb.blogspot.ca/](http://kippeeb.blogspot.ca/)  
Elizabeth Lapointe's *Canadian*

*Genealogy*:

[genealogycanada.blogspot.ca/](http://genealogycanada.blogspot.ca/)

Ken McKinlay's *Family Tree Knots*:

[familytreeknots.blogspot.ca/](http://familytreeknots.blogspot.ca/)

and now

Gail Dever's *Genealogy à la carte*: [genealogyalacarte.wordpress.com/](http://genealogyalacarte.wordpress.com/).

And let's not overlook Al Lewis' website, [bytown.net/](http://bytown.net/), which he calls "A Digital History of Eastern Ontario and Western Quebec, Canada,

Including the Cities of Ottawa and Hull/Gatineau, 1600 to 2014." It is

an essential resource frequently updated.

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## The Bookworm

BY BETTY WARBURTON



This is a revision of an earlier Bookworm column that appeared in the Winter 2012 issue of *Anglo-Celtic*

*Roots*. Because the theme of the current issue is World War I, it seems appropriate to print these suggestions again with a few additions. It should be noted that most of these books about the Great War deal with the British Army.

### General Overview

Bridger, Geoff. *The Great War Handbook: a Guide for Family Historians and Students of the Conflict*. Pen and Sword, 2009 (940.41242 BRI). If you know little about the conflict, this is the book for a good introduction. It gives the reader an overview of events, the structure of the British Army and the meaning of some of the terms used, such as "stand to," as well as describing sources to consult.

### Histories of the Great War

Tuchman, Barbara. *The Guns of August*. Bantam Books, 1962 (940.444 TUC). A detailed account of the events of August 1914.

Lloyd, Alan. *The War in the Trenches (the British at War)*. Book Club Associates, 1976 (940.4144 LLO). As the author records the events on the Western Front, he also describes life in the trenches.

MacDonagh, Michael. *The Irish at the Front*. Hodder & Stoughton, 1916.

Masefield, John. *The Old Front Line with an Introduction to the Battle of the Somme by Col. Howard Green*. Pen & Sword, 2006 (940.4272 MAS). It includes John Masefield's description of the battlefield after his tour in 1916, as well as Green's account of the battle along the Somme River.

Westlake, Ray. *Tracing British Battalions on the Somme*. Pen and Sword, 2009 (940.4272 WES). Using war diaries, the author summarizes the movements of each battalion of British regiments participating in the Battle of the Somme.

Wolf, Leon. *In Flanders Fields: the 1917 Campaign*. Penguin, 1958 (940.431 WOL).

Cave, Nigel. *Passchendaele: the Fight for the Village*. Leo Cooper, 1997 (940.4144. CAV). The author limits

his account of the fight for the village of Passchendaele to the participation of the New Zealand and the Canadian Corps.

### **Histories of Regiments**

Banks, T. M. and R. A. Chell. *With the 10th Essex in France*. Guy & Hancock, 1924 (940.414242 BAN).

Ewing, John. *The History of the Ninth (Scottish) Division 1914–1919*. Naval and Military Press, 2009 (940.4123411 EWI).

### **The Home Front**

Grieves, Keith. *Sussex in the First World War*. Sussex Record Society, 2004. The author uses a wide range of sources to describe life in Britain during the war.

Kennedy, J. H. *Attleborough in Wartime—1919*. Archive CD Books Canada, 2008 (CD-ROM 001055). A history of the war and how it affected a Norfolk town.

### **Personal Narratives**

Arthur, Max. *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*. Ebury Press, 2002 (940.48141 ART). Veterans from Britain, Germany, America, Australia and Canada were interviewed about their day-to-day experiences on and off the Front.

Bongard, Ella Mae. Eric Scott, ed. *Nobody Ever Wins a War: the World War I Diaries of Ella Mae Bongard*. Janeric Enterprises, 1997 (94048171 BON). The diary of a Canadian nurse who served in France.

Heron-Allen, Edward. Brian W. Harvey and Caroline Fitzgerald, eds. *From Sussex Shore to Flanders Fields: Edward Heron-Allen's Journal of the Great War*. Heron-Allen describes in detail day-to-day experiences in the stringent conditions of wartime Britain, as well as his experiences with the Sussex Volunteer Regiment.

McMillan, David. *Trench Tea and Sandbags*. R. McAdam, 1996 (940.48171 MCM). A brief account of the army service of the author's great-uncle in a Canadian Highland regiment during the First World War.

Spagnoly, Tony and Ted Smith. *Salient Points: Cameos of the Western Front; Ypres Sector 1914–1918*. Leo Cooper, 1998 (940.4481 SPA).

### **Aids to Finding Your WW I Ancestor**

Holding, Norman. Revised and updated by Iain Swinnerton. *Location of British Army Records 1914–1918: 4th ed.* Federation of Family History Societies, 1999 (929.341 HOL).

The library also has Holding's *World War I Ancestry* and *More Sources of World War I Ancestry*, which offer more resources. Both are published by the Federation of Family History Societies and have the call number 929.341 HOL.

*National Roll of the Great War 1914–1918*: London. CD Archive Books, 2001 (CD-ROM 001034). If your ancestor lived in London, you may find him here.

Raymond, Stuart A. *War Memorials on the Web; Part 1, Southern England, the Marches and Wales*. Federation of Family History Societies, 2003 (011.77 RAY V. 1).

Raymond, Stuart A. *War Memorials on the Web, Part 2: the Midlands, Northern England and East Anglia*. Federation of Family History Societies, 2003 (011.77 RAY V. 2).

Swinerton, Iain. *Identifying Your World War I Soldier from Badges and Photographs*. Federation of Family History Societies, 2001 (355.14 SWI).

Tomaselli, Phil. *Tracing Your Royal Air Force Ancestors*. Pen and Sword, 2007 (929.1072 TOM).

*Tracing Your Family History: Royal Navy*. Imperial War Museum, 1999 (929.1072 TRA).

Wright, Glenn. *Canadians at War 1914–1918: a Research Guide to World War One Service Records*. Global Heritage Press, 2010 (929.1072 WRI).



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## BIFHSGO News

# Membership Report

BY KATHY WALLACE

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1654	Richard Manningham	Russell, ON
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1662	Bill Horne	Ottawa, ON
1663	Marianne Rasmus	Ottawa, ON
1664	Susan Murdock	Ottawa, ON
1665	Bruce Allen	Ottawa, ON

Several resources for doing First World War research are available on [www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca); go to "Research and Databases," click on "Links to Online Resources," and choose the category "Military Records."



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## **The Society**

The British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa (BIFHSGO) is an independent, federally incorporated society and a registered charity (Reg. No. 89227 4044 RR0001). Our purpose is to encourage, carry on and facilitate research into, and publication of, family histories by people who have ancestors in the British Isles.

We have two objectives: to research, preserve, and disseminate Canadian and British Isles family and social history, and to promote genealogical research through a program of public education, showing how to conduct this research and preserve the findings in a readily accessible form.

We publish genealogical research findings and information on research resources and techniques, hold public meetings on family history, maintain a reference library, and participate in the activities of related organizations.

Membership dues for 2014 are \$40 for individuals, \$50 for families, and \$40 for institutions. Members enjoy four issues of *Anglo-Celtic Roots*, ten family history meetings, members-only information on [bifhsgo.ca](http://bifhsgo.ca), friendly advice from other members, and participation in special interest groups.

# BIFHSGO Calendar of Events

## Saturday Morning Meetings

Library and Archives Canada  
395 Wellington Street, Ottawa

- 13 Sept 2014** *Preparing for a Research Trip to Scotland*—Christine Woodcock will look in-depth at the records in the major repositories only available in Scotland that will help to move you along in your research. She will also discuss where to stay, planning an itinerary and discovering your own Scottish heritage.
- 11 Oct 2014** *Assisted Emigration to Escape the Great Famine of Ireland*—three terrible choices were open to Irish tenants: hope not to be evicted, go to the workhouse, or emigrate to Canada. Ann Burns will review the conditions they faced, whether staying or leaving.
- 8 Nov 2014** *Who Was the Canadian Soldier?*—Since 1919, historians have given us what seemed like a clear picture of Canada's participation in the First World War. Dr. Jonathan Vance will describe this conventional wisdom and discuss how a return to the records of the Canadian Expeditionary Force is producing a dramatically different picture.

### Schedule

- 9:00–9:30 Before BIFHSGO Educational Sessions: check [www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca) for up-to-date information.
- 9:30 Discovery Tables
- 10:00–11:30 Meeting and Presentation
- 12:00–1:00 Writing Group

For information on meetings of other special interest groups (Scottish, Irish, DNA, Master Genealogist Users), check [www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca).

### Articles for *Anglo-Celtic Roots*

Articles and illustrations for publication are welcome. For advice on preparing manuscripts, please email the Editor, at [acreditor@bifhsgo.ca](mailto:acreditor@bifhsgo.ca). The deadline for publication in the Fall issue is 25 July 2014.