

## **Private James Robertson<sup>©</sup>**

**Regimental number: 2514**

**11th Battalion, Royal Scots**

**born: about 1894–died: 14 May 1916**

Private James Robertson died at 7 a.m. on 14 May 1916 at No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,<sup>1</sup> which at the time was stationed near Baillleul in France, near the Belgian border. Baillleul was occupied in October 1914 and became an important hospital centre, not just for No. 1 CCCS but also for No. 1 Australian and five British Army casualty clearing stations.<sup>2</sup>

James was a tinsmith's assistant when he enlisted as a private in the Special Reserve of the Royal Scots Regiment on 23 September 1912.<sup>3</sup> Prior to working with a tinsmith, James probably drove a van for a fishmonger, who gave up his business in April 1912.

To support his enlistment, James was given letters of recommendation from his employers. The fishmonger described him as "honest and obedient."<sup>4</sup> Another reference came from Mr. Blackwoods, foreman at Wilkie and Paul, brassfounders and tinplateworkers<sup>5</sup> on Brandfield Street in Edinburgh. He had worked there for six weeks up to 24 June 1912 and left to go to another situation. (For some reason, which the research failed to explain, he was known to this employer as James Watson.) Also, his commanding officer made the following comments on his application for the Special Reserve "a smart looking youth of respectable appearance. Keen to join the Special Reserve, and should make a good [recruit] of sturdy build."<sup>6</sup>

He served in the Special Reserve until he was called up on permanent service on 5 August 1914, at the outbreak of the war. He was a private in the British Expeditionary Force and went to the Western Front on 7 October 1914 with the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Scots Regiment.<sup>7</sup>

He was admitted to hospital on 1 January 1915 and was shipped back to England on 16 January, where he remained until early June 1915. When he returned to France, he was probably still with the 3rd Battalion. He was wounded again in action on 15 August 1915 and was again shipped back to England with a gunshot wound to his back. He probably returned to the Front on 7 November 1915. In December of that year, he lost seven days' pay for being absent without leave. In February 1916, he appears to have joined the 11th Battalion. Three months later, he was wounded again—this time, fatally. It is not known when James was injured or where he was buried. However, only one patient died at No. 1 CCCS on 14 May—perhaps it was James.<sup>8</sup>

James came from a large Presbyterian family living in Edinburgh, Scotland. His father, also James, and his mother Ann were both born in Edinburgh in about 1861.<sup>9</sup> They had at least nine children:

- Peter (born in about 1877),
- Euphemia (born in about 1881),
- Mary (born in about 1883),
- Bridget (born in about 1885),
- Kate (born in about 1887),
- John (born in about 1890),
- James (born in about 1894),
- Hugh Patrick (born in about 1897) and
- Annie (born in about 1900).<sup>10</sup>

In 1881, the family was living at 24 Bell's Wynd in Edinburgh, where James Sr. was a carter. Ten years later, they had moved just a few blocks away to Burnet's Close, on High Street. By 1901, they had moved again—this time to 2 Scott's Close. In 1891, James Sr. had been a coal carter but, by 1901, he was a brewer's carter. His wife Annie was a hawker. Three of James' sisters, Euphemia, Mary and Bridget, were paper sorters.

James' mother died before the end of the war and his sister Kate had married. She was now Mrs. Watson and living at 39 Potterrow in Edinburgh<sup>11</sup> It was to Kate that the chaplain wrote to notify the family of James' death. Kate and a friend, Miss Mary Smith, received the monies owing to James from the army upon his death.<sup>12</sup>

James' death, age 22, was announced in *The Scotsman* on 19 May 1916.<sup>13</sup>

## RANK AND FILE KILLED.

### EDINBURGH.

James Robertson, Royal Scots, has died of wounds received in action. He was 22 years of age. He was called up as a reservist, and was wounded twice. His home address was 39 Potterrow, and formerly Craig's Close, High Street, Edinburgh.

Announcement of Private James Robertson's death

Source: British Newspapers, *Findmypast*

James was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914–15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).<sup>14</sup>

James' younger brother Hugh Patrick, a ham curer, also enlisted to serve in the Great War. He enlisted on 24 March 1915 in the 17th Battalion of the Royal Scots but, by 6 January 1916, it was determined that he was no longer physically fit for war service.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* ([www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca): accessed 6 June 2018), entry for Robertson, J.

<sup>2</sup> "Bailleul Community Cemetery, Nord," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org): accessed 17 January 2017)

<sup>3</sup> "British Army WWI Service Records, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 13 August 2018), entry for James Robertson. Unless otherwise noted, all information about his military career comes from this source. His service file was significantly damaged and some of the images were difficult to read.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> "Edinburgh & Leith Directory," *Scottish Post Office Directories* (<https://digital.nls.uk/directories/browse/archive/85344410?mode=transcription>: accessed 22 November 2018)

<sup>6</sup> "British Army WWI Service Records, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 13 August 2018), entry for James Robertson

<sup>7</sup> "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 16 August 2018), entry for James Robertson

<sup>8</sup> "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN>)

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[http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202\\_e.html&r=1&f=G](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G)

<sup>9</sup> "1901 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 13 August 2018), entry for James Robertson, Registration Number: 685/4, Registration district: St Giles, Enumeration District: 27, Household schedule number: 74, Line: 22, Roll: CSSCT1901\_383

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. This is also consistent with the surviving siblings identified in his military service record.

<sup>11</sup> "British Army WWI Service Records, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 13 August 2018), entry for James Robert

<sup>12</sup> "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 13 August 2018), entry for James Robertson

<sup>13</sup> "Rank and File Killed," *The Scotsman*, 16 May 2016, *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 27 November 2018)

<sup>14</sup> "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 16 August 2018), entry for James Robertson

<sup>15</sup> "British Army WWI Pension Records 1914–1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 13 August 2018), entry for Hugh Patrick Robertson, Regimental number: 21701, Form title: Short Service Attestation