

**Private William Frew<sup>©</sup>**  
**Regimental number: 40404**  
**2nd Battalion, Royal Scots**

**born: 5 November 1889 - died: 29 May 1918**

Private William Frew was born at about 11 a.m. on 5 November 1889 in Eastfield, Airdrie, Scotland, the son of James and Isabella (nee Fowler) Frew.<sup>1</sup> James was a coal miner. Both William's parents were born in about 1859—James in Linlithgow Bridge, West Lothian, and Isabella in Slammanan, Stirlingshire.<sup>2</sup> They married on 31 December 1878 in Morvenside, Edinburgh, and probably had at least nine children. William had four older brothers and sisters—James (born on 13 September 1881),<sup>3</sup> Mary (born in about 1885), Henry (born in about 1887) and Isa (born in about 1888)—and four younger siblings—Jeanie (born in about 1892), Agnes (born in about 1896), Marion (born in about 1898) and Alexander (born in about 1900).<sup>4</sup>

For at least the first 10 years of William's life, the family lived near Airdrie<sup>5</sup> but, by 1911, it had moved closer to Edinburgh. The family was living at 47 Westrigg, Blackridge, West Lothian, about 30 miles west of Edinburgh, where William's father was a hewer in a coal mine. William and two younger sisters were also working the coal mines—William, age 21, as a drawer and his sisters Jeanie, age 18, and Agnes, age 16, as pithead workers. The youngest two children, ages 10 and 14, were still in school.

William may have been accused of some mischief before enlisting. He and two other men, all mine drawers in Westrigg, were accused and tried for maliciously throwing stones and breaking 14 insulators on telegraph poles on the Bathgate and Airdrie Road on 1 July 1913. They pled not guilty and, even after the presentation of considerable evidence, the sheriff found that the charges had not been proven.<sup>6</sup>

William was still living in Blackridge<sup>7</sup> when he enlisted in the British Expeditionary Force in about November 1914<sup>8</sup> in Blackridge and served with the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Scots.<sup>9</sup>

In mid-May 1918, his battalion was stationed near Chocques, about four miles northeast of Bethune, in northern France. The days there presented a mixture of heavy artillery and aircraft activity, with some quiet periods. On Sunday, 12 May, the soldiers participated in the church parade but were also preparing to move back into the line. During the night of 12/13 May, the battalion relieved the 13th Kings Regiment (Liverpool) and its artillery bombarded the enemy line, with some retaliation.

On 20 May 1919, William's battalion was in the Suffolk Line, where it was subjected to a heavy bombardment of shrapnel, high explosives and gas, beginning in the early hours of the morning. The focus of the attack, which lasted until about 5:30 a.m., was on Hinges, its chateau and the village of Oblinghem. Orders were given to sprinkle the ground around the trenches with chloride of lime (in an attempt to neutralize the impact of the gas) and to wear box respirators constantly.

By about 10 a.m., reports were being received at battalion headquarters of illness from the gas attack. An hour and a half later, about 40 cases were reported but, according to the medical officer, they were not serious. As injured men from other regiments passed by the headquarters, it was realized that the situation was "considered rather serious." The troops could not evacuate the Suffolk Line—even though most of the men of the Left Company were affected by the gas, "many of

them being sick and most of them being temporarily blind.” Runners had to be sent up the line to guide the soldiers down to the Regimental Aid Post. Rifles and other equipment were found all over the trenches, since the men were not capable of carrying them, so men who were “only slightly gassed” were dispatched to retrieve them.

There was a lull until about 2 p.m., when it became clear that the soldiers had been affected by the gas when they removed their masks for meals. By then the box respirators had been worn for about 10 hours and soldiers were suffering from the heat.

The battalion was not allowed to withdraw until relieved by 1st Gordons in the evening. Then the battalion went into billets in Chocques and enjoyed baths and changes of clothing. By the end of the day, it was reported that two soldiers had been killed, one wounded and 363 gassed. In the following days, the battalion was resting and engaged in training activities.<sup>10</sup> On 26 May, William was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station suffering from the effects of gas poisoning.<sup>11</sup> Had he been gassed with the other soldiers on 20 May but remained in billets with the battalion until his condition worsened? He died three days after he arrived at No. 1 CCCS and was buried in Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 2, Row D, Grave 29) with the Canadian chaplain R. K. Lambert presiding.

Pernes British Military Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when No. 1 and No. 4 CCCSs came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.<sup>12</sup> William was one of 86 injured admitted to No. 1. CCCS on 26 May 1918. In total, there were nearly 4,000 soldiers admitted to this CCCS in the month of May and 115 died.<sup>13</sup>

A letter was sent to his mother to notify her of her son’s death.<sup>14</sup> She also received the monies owing to him from the army upon his death.<sup>15</sup> After the war, she was living at 55 Westrigg in Blackridge and had the following inscription included on his gravestone:

THOUGH DEATH DIVIDES  
FOND MEMORIES CLING<sup>16</sup>

William was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).<sup>17</sup> It is not known why he was not awarded the 1914–15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915). If he did enlist in about November 1914, it would have been likely that he was on the Front before January 1916 and hence entitled to this medal. Perhaps, for some reason, he did not go to Front at the beginning of his service.

It is likely that William’s father died before the Great War—dying in Blackridge in 1913<sup>18</sup>—and that his mother died in 1931, also in Blackridge.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Statutory Registers–Births,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 19 May 2018) entry for Frew, William, Reference: 651/1 972 spaces here OK?, Registration district: Airdrie or New Monkland; “Statutory Registers–Births,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 19 May 2018) entry for Frew, James, Reference: 651/2 484, Registration district: New Monkland Landward

<sup>2</sup> “1911 Scotland Census,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 30 May 2018), entry for Frew, James, Reference: 671/2 2/ 26, District: Blackridge, County/City: West Lothian

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- <sup>3</sup> "Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 19 May 2018) entry for Frew, James
- <sup>4</sup> "1901 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 4 May 2018), entry for William Frew, Enumeration district: 43, Household schedule number: 73, Line: 14, Roll: CSSCT1901\_34
- <sup>5</sup> "1901 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 4 May 2018), entry for William Frew
- <sup>6</sup> "Not Proven," *The British Newspaper Archives, Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 2 July 2018), *Linlithgowshire Gazette* 01 August 1913
- <sup>7</sup> "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 4 May 2018), entry for William Frew
- <sup>8</sup> Based on "War Gratuity Calculator" (<https://wargratitude.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/gratuity-calculator/>: accessed 18 May 2017); "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 4 May 2018), entry for William Frew
- <sup>9</sup> "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 4 May 2018), entry for William Frew
- <sup>10</sup> "UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914–1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 4 May 2018), Regiment or unit: Royal Scots (Lothian Regiment), Sub-unit: 2nd Battalion, Division: 3rd Division, Diary dates: 1914 Aug 1–1914 Dec 31, Piece description: Piece 1423/1-7: 8 Infantry Brigade: 2 Battalion Royal Scots (1914 Aug–1919 May), Piece number: 1423
- <sup>11</sup> "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* ([www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca): accessed 4 May 2018), entry for Frew, W.
- <sup>12</sup> "Pernes British Military Cemetery," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/11600/PERNES%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>: accessed 13 January 2015)
- <sup>13</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&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202\\_e.html&r=1&f=G](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&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G): accessed 15 December 2014)
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- <sup>15</sup> "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 4 May 2018), entry for William Frew
- <sup>16</sup> *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org): accessed 5 May 2018), entry for Frew, William, Service No: 40404
- <sup>17</sup> "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 26 November 2018), entry for Harry Reuben Knight
- <sup>18</sup> "Statutory Registers–Deaths," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 30 May 2018) entry for Frew, James, Reference: 671/2 25, Registration district: Blackridge
- <sup>19</sup> "Statutory Registers–Deaths," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 30 May 2018) entry for Frew, Isabella, Reference: 671/2 9, Registration district: Blackridge