

Private John William Husbands

The British Fifth Army attacks on the Somme front stopped over the winter of 1916. They were reduced to surviving the rain, snow, fog, mud fields, waterlogged trenches and shell-holes. As preparations for the spring offensive at Arras began, the 1/4th Battalion of the Leicestershire Regiment prepared to capture the village of Gommecourt. The attacks commenced in January and February, in the Ancre Valley against exhausted German troops holding poor defensive positions left from the fighting in 1916.

John can trace his family origins to Linwood, Lincolnshire, where his great-great grandparents Jasper Husbands, a labourer, and his wife Sarah (née Osborne) lived.ⁱ The baptism of their son, William, is recorded in the Parish records of Middle Rasen, Drax on 26th November 1820.ⁱⁱ William became a publican and 'spirit merchant'.ⁱⁱⁱ



Figure 1: All Saints Church, Gainsborough

On 24th May 1849, William married Lucy Parker at St James Church, Louth, Lincolnshire.^{iv} John's grandfather, William Henry Husbands, was born on 1st April 1853, the second of three children. He was baptised a few weeks later at All Saints Church Gainsborough on the 22nd May^v

By 1871, William Henry had left school and become a 'merchant's clerk'. Later that year his father died and was buried at Holy Trinity Church, Gainsborough 13th September. He was only 51 years old.^{vi}

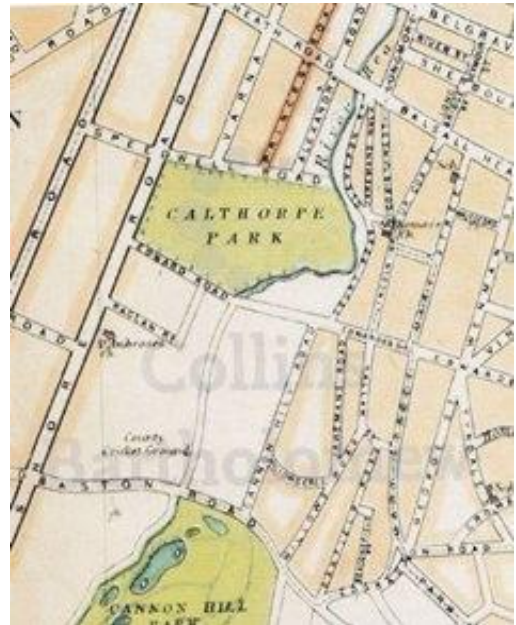
Six years later, at the age of 23, William married Theresa Pearson in Sheffield on 23rd February 1877.^{vii} In the 1881 census William is recorded at his mother's home in Back Street, Gainsborough with his brother, Joseph, a machinist making precision parts in an engine shop. Where William's wife, Theresa, and their sons John William and George were on the census day is not known.

By 1891 William and Theresa had five children. John William, their eldest child, was born on 9th December 1877 and baptised six weeks later, on 20th January 1878 at the Cathedral Church of St Peters and St James, Sheffield.^{viii} Their address was given as 21 Trent Street, Gainsborough At the age of six years, John attended Gainsborough Trinity School.^{ix}

On leaving school, John became a journalist/reporter and in 1901 he is listed as such in Burton upon Trent, Staffordshire census.



Figure 2: Above The Kings Arms Tavern, Dewsbury, now demolished to make way for the M1
Right : Highlighted, Princess Road, Edgbaston



On 25th September 1902, at the age of 24, John married, Edith Healas, whose father Joseph ran the Kings Arms Tavern on the Dewsbury Road near Leeds. John's address at the time of his marriage was 53 Princess Road, Edgbaston (see map above)^x. Shortly after their marriage John and Edith set up home together in Birmingham. In 1904, John joined the staff of the Birmingham Daily Mail. He was a versatile journalist specialising in dramatic criticism. After the death of Mr T Edgar Pemberton, John took over the weekly article 'Flashes from the Footlights'. In 1907 he became a member of the Birmingham Branch of the National Union of Journalists. He was also a member of the Newspaper Press Fund.^{xi}

In the 1911 census, John and Edith had moved to 44 Cambridge Road, Moseley. They had two children, Irene, born 2nd June 1903 but baptised in All Saints Church, Dewsbury, two months later on 2nd August, and Joseph Henry Lincoln, born on 9th October 1904 in Dewsbury.^{xii} The family employed the services of a general domestic servant, Mary Ann Berrington.

When war was declared in August 1914, John joined the Leicestershire Yeomanry as a Territorial Reservist, No7510. With the need for more men to serve at the front, John heeded the call of Lord Kitchener in 1916 and signed up for active service joining the 1/4 Leicestershire Regiment as Private J W Husbands, No 202898.^{xiii}

The 1/4th Battalion of the Leicestershire Regiment formed part of the 138th Brigade, 46th (North Midland) Division from 12th May 1915. They were part of the disastrous diversionary attack on Gommecourt on the 1st day of the Battle of the Somme under the leadership of Major-General the Honourable E. J. Montagu-Stuart-Wortley, which led General Haig to accuse the 46th Division of having a 'lack of offensive spirit'.^{xiv}

The 4th Leicester Regiment overwintered in billets in Souastre (about 23 km SW of Arras) in between time in dug-outs in Hannescamps and Crawlboys Lane, near the Battalion HQ at Fonquevillers. The terrible weather had made the trenches knee deep in water and liquid mud in most places and in spite of continuous pumping and drainage their condition did not improve any more than the weather. As a result the Battalions were relieved every four days instead of six.

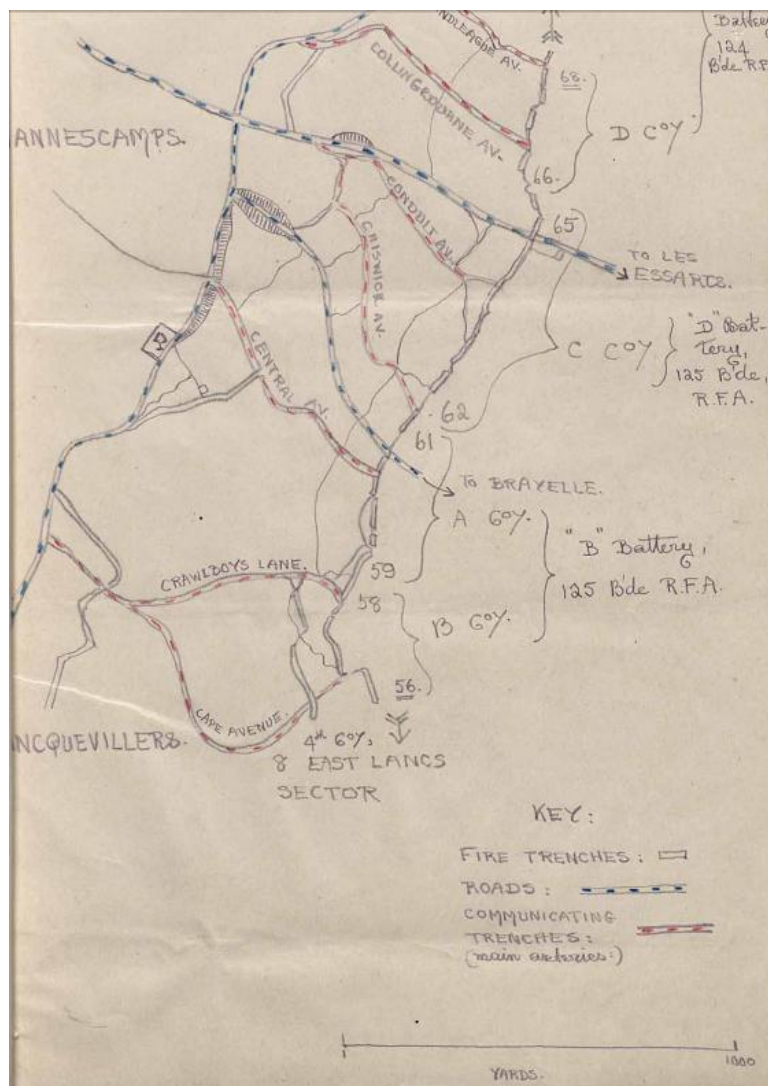


Figure 3: Map showing the trenches at Hannescamps and Crawlboys Lane near Fonquevillers



Figure 4: Postcard of Hannescamps 1914-15

On the 18th February, after a pleasant stay in some 'excellent' billets at Grenas and a ten day period of training, orders were received to return to the trenches at Hannescamps. The sector was a quiet one as a rule, as rifle fire was practically absent in some places, the enemy front line position being nearly 1000 yards away, but on 21st February, from 3 am to 4 am, a very heavy bombardment by enemy artillery with shells of all calibres on the right sector was carried out. Material damage was considerable but just one man was wounded by a shell.^{xv} The unlucky casualty was John. He was taken to Warlincourt Casualty Clearing Station, but sadly died there 11 days later on 4th March 1917. John was 39 years old when he died.^{xvi}

Ironically, on 27 February, a two-man patrol of the 18th Battalion, Durham Light Infantry, 93rd Brigade, 31st Division went through Gommecourt Park and found the village deserted. The Germans had withdrawn to positions SW of Gommecourt.^{xvii}



Figure 5: Warlincourt Halte British Cemetery near Saulty, Pas de Calais



When news reached home of John's death, his colleagues wrote of him:

He was popular amongst his colleagues by reason of his public spirit and camaraderie. He was endowed with a facile and clever pen and ranked high as a descriptive writer.^{xviii}

Figure 6: (Left) St Mary's Church WW1 memorial

(Right) Post and Mail memorial at Fort Dunlop, Birmingham

(Below) Names on the Post and Mail memorial at Fort Dunlop

NAMES ON THE MEMORIAL		
1914 – 1918	Pte JA Page	Gnr G Brown
2nd TWJ Wilson	Cpl EV Parker MM	F/Sgt DA Bullock
Pte W Allbutt	Pte GO Sanders	Cpl GP Coffey
Pte RC Chapman	Pte F Smith	L/Cpl HF Docker
Pte B Clanchy	Rfmn WH Smith	Gnr JG Dodd
Pte BW Davis	Pte T Street	Sgt BJ Landley
Pte H LePelliott	Pte A Tyler	Sgt HD Newey
Pte J Garner		Cpl RE Sturdy
Pte AJ Giles	1939 – 1945	Tpr WGG Wilkinson
Pte S Hodson	F/OAH Carver	Sgt C Woodward
Typr JW Husbands	Lt PC Pirkins	J Bailey
Pte J Jenks	F/OE Hadley	M E Bates
Pte E Lister	L/Cpl FA Bailey	G Green
Pte D Oldaker	Sgt RP Broadbridge	H J Sweet

John is also commemorated at St Mary's Church, Moseley and on the Birmingham Post and Mail Employees WW1 memorial on the 6th Floor of the Fort Dunlop building. It was unveiled on 15th May 2009^{xix} John is also listed on the Roll of Honour in Birmingham's Hall of Memory.

At the time of his death Edith and her two children were living at 95 Church Road in Moseley.^{xx}

Researched and written by Edwina Rees

Moseley Society History Group

With thanks to Marianne Husbands, grand-daughter of John Husbands

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Endnotes

- i A transcriptional error in Find My Past, names Williams father as Joseph instead of Jasper. The will of William's father in the archive of Marianne Husbands has the signature 'Jasper Husbands'. The Lincolnshire Baptismal Registers record William's parents as 'Jasper and Sarah' (see ii)
- ii Lincolnshire Baptisms. William's birth is recorded as 1821 in the 1841 census but as he was baptised in November 1820 it is more likely to have been 1820 which tallies with his age at death, 51 years in the Lincolnshire Burial records
- iii The Marianne Husbands archive
1841 census.
- iv Lincolnshire marriages index
Lucy Parker was resident at Faldingworth at the time of her marriage as was William according to the 1841 census
- v Lincolnshire baptisms
The archive of Marianne Husbands records that the other two children from the marriage were: Mary, born in 1852 in Gainsborough and Joseph, born in 1855 in Scotter, Lincolnshire 1871 census.
Mary is not in the census as she is away at Diocesan Training School in Lincoln in 1871, run by Hector Nelson
- vi National Burial Index 1538-1991 records his age as 51 when he died which is correct if he was born in 1820.
- vii English marriages 1538-1973
Marianne Husbands archive records Theresa's parents as John and Sarah Ann (née Darby) Pearson. Theresa was born 1st April 1852 in Sheffield and died in March 1917, aged 64 This is confirmed in
- viii Yorkshire baptisms

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- England & Wales births 1837-2006, Ecclesall Bierlow, 1878, 1/4, 9C, 310
Marianne Husband's archive names the other children as George Henry, born 10th
December 1880, Bernard Pearson, born 12th December 1885, Edith Mary, born 10th
December 1886 and Dorothy Theresa born 11th October 1890
- ix National School Admission Registers and log book, 1870-1914
- x Marriage certificate of John William Husbands to Edith Healas
- xi *Birmingham Daily Post*, 9th March 1917
Data base of Journalists
https://www.scope-database.com/list/atoz_journalist/h
- xii England, West Yorkshire, Church of England births and Baptisms, 1813 -1910
England & Wales births, 1837-2006, 1904, Dewsbury, 4/4, 9B, 603
Archive of Marianne Husbands
- xiii *Birmingham Daily Post*, 9th March 1917
GRO Deaths Army other ranks 1914-1921
Soldiers who died in the Great War 1914-1919
- xiv MacDonald, Alan 2008. A Lack of Offensive Spirit?: The 46th (North Midland) Division
at Gommecourt, 1st July 1916
- xv *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 9th March 1917
- xvi Sandall, T E, 1922. *History of the 5th Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment*. B Blackwell,
Oxford. pp 100-104
National Archives. WarDiaries of the 1/4th Leicestershire Regiment. Ref WO95/2690/1
- xvii The Gommecourt Salient
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attack_on_the_Gommecourt_Salient
- xviii *Birmingham Mail* 8th March 1917
- xix Birmingham Mail and Post employees WW1 memorial
<https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/251418/>
- xx Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Illustrations

Figure 1 All Saints Church, Gainsborough
http://graville.com/gainsborough_all_saints_a_magnif.htm

Figure 2 The Kings Arms Tavern
http://www.closedpubs.co.uk/yorkshire/leeds_ls11_kingsarms3.html

Map showing Princess Road, Edgbaston
<https://mapseeker.co.uk/geneology/?id=114>

Figure 3 Trenches at Hannescamps
<https://www.loyalregiment.com/trenches-at-hannescamps/>

Figure 4 Postcard of Hannescamps
<https://www.loyalregiment.com/photo-hannescamps-during-ww1/>

Figure 5 Warlincourt Cemetery
<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/8700/WARLINCOURT%20HALTE%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY,%20SAULTY>

Figure 6 Post and Mail WW1 memorial, Fort Dunlop, Birmingham
 Birmingham Mail, Richard McComb, 10th November 2011
<http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/tribute-to-20-birmingham-post-and-mail-164921>

The newspaper item below is with thanks to Tony Wooley



Proud moment: Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Councillor Chauhdry Rashid and his wife Shafait are joined by military veterans to mark the placement of the Birmingham Post and Mail War Memorial in its new Fort Dunlop home. Picture: Dale Martin

By Patrice John

FORMER employees of the Birmingham Post and Mail who lost their lives during the two World Wars were honoured at a ceremony at the newspaper's new offices.

Lord Mayor of Birmingham Coun Chauhdry Rashid attended the offices of BPM Media, in Erdington, to unveil a memorial to former staff members.

The bronze which is displayed on the sixth floor of Fort Dunlop, commemorates the 20 men from the company who died in World War One and the 19 who died in World War Two.

Speaking at the ceremony, Coun Rashid, said: "I am grateful to have been invited here on this historic occasion.

"This memorial has been placed here to be seen and for as long as this building stands and as long as the people work here it will be. We would like to thank the Birmingham Mail for

NAMES ON THE MEMORIAL

1914 – 1918
 2nd TWJ Wilson
 Pte W Allbutt
 Pte RC Chapman
 Pte B Clancy
 Pte BW Davis
 Pte H LePelliot
 Pte J Garner
 Pte AJ Giles
 Pte S Hodson
 Trpr JW Husbands
 Pte J Jenks
 Pte E Lister
 Pte D Oldaker

Pte JA Page
 Cpl EV Parker MM
 Pte CO Sanders
 Pte F Smith
 Rfmn WH Smith
 Pte T Street
 Pte A Tyler

1939 – 1945
 F/OAH Carver
 Lt PC Firkins
 F/OE Hadley
 L/Cpl FA Bailey
 Sgt RP Broadbridge

Gar G Brown
 F/Sgt DA Bullock
 Cpl GP Colley
 L/Cpl HF Docker
 Gar JG Dodd
 Sgt BJ Landley
 Sgt HD Newey
 Cpl RE Sturdy
 Trpr WGG Wilkinson
 Sgt C Woodward
 J Bailey
 M E Bates
 G Green
 H J Sweet

this honour. This memorial is for the people who gave their lives for their country and for the freedoms which we now enjoy. More than 30,000 British allied soldiers lost their lives in the Great War and 900,000 British

troops were killed in World War One. Among those were 39 workers from the Birmingham Post and Mail.

The plaque is at the entrance to the editorial floor at BPM Media's office.

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