

Sergeant William George Edmondston

William's grandfather, Robert Stuart, was born around 1834 in Edinburgh to John Edmondston and his wife Marion (nee Scott).ⁱ At the age of seventeen, Robert was recorded in the 1851 census as a 'tailor's apprentice' and lodged with Peter Scott, a tailor, (possibly his grandfather) and his wife Caroline in the High Street in the town of Tranent, East Lothian.

Four years later on the 22nd June 1855 Robert married Isabella Minto in Edinburgh. By 1861 the couple were lodging in Prestonpans, East Lothian with their two children George Minto (born 3rd April 1858, Jedburgh) and John (born on 10th April 1860, Prestonpans). Robert was described as a 'tailor journeyman'. Robert and Isabella went on to have four more children: Robert Stuart, Agnes Elizabeth, Margaret and Marion Isabella.ⁱⁱ

George Minto Edmondston, Robert and Isabella's eldest son, served his apprenticeship as a tailor with his father in Castlegate, Aberdeen, before moving down to Edinburgh where he was employed by various firms before moving to Glasgow where he worked for Forsyth and Sons for a time. Around 1878, George married Wihelmina Scott, (known as Minnie) a school mistress from Dundee.ⁱⁱⁱ

MR GEORGE EDMONDSTON.

We regret to learn of the death of Mr George Minto Edmondston which occurred suddenly at his place of residence at 12 King Edward Road, Moseley, Birmingham, on November 24th. He had been in good health for a man of his years and his death, due to heart failure, came as a sudden shock.

Mr Edmondston was a native of Jedburgh, being a son of the late Mr R. S. Edmondston who used to be in business as a tailor in Castlegate. He served his apprenticeship with his father, but left the town when quite a young man. He went to Edinburgh where he learned the cutting and afterwards was employed with various firms in the city. Subsequently, he followed his trade for a time in far-north Lerwick, but later returned to Edinburgh. The West claimed him next and he saw service with Forsyth and Sons in Glasgow. Then over the Border and away down to Birmingham where he entered the service of Curtis and Curtis. When he forsook the last-mentioned firm he set up in business for himself and, up till lately, carried on in a successful way.

It may be recalled that Mr Edmondston was one of the early members of Jed-Forest Instrumental Band. In 1870, at the age of 12 years, he was playing the cymbals, and three years later was a cornet player. Mr T. Armstrong was the leader then. Mr Edmondston never forgot his early connections with the Band, and it is only a matter of three weeks since the *Gazette* received a note from him recalling his associations with the Band and bandsmen in the seventies.

Mr Edmondston was in his 74th year and is survived by three sons and two daughters. There were two further sons in the family—the two eldest—both of whom were killed in the war.

Figure 1: Obituary notice of William's father, George Minto Edmondston

George and Minnie had seven children. Their eldest two sons were Robert born 26th July 1878 and William George born 25th March 1881 in Maxwellton, Dumfries.^{iv}

Robert and William attended school in Whitehaven, Cumberland, where the family had briefly lived before they moved to Hawick, Scotland where they continued their education.

In the 1891 census, the family were living at 4 East Street, Hawick, Scotland. George was away from home leaving Minnie to look after their five children, Robert and William together with three further children Mary, George Minto and James who had been born around 1885, 1888 and 1889 respectively.

By the time the 1901 census was taken, George and Minnie had relocated to Birmingham where George had found employment as a tailor's cutter with the firm Curtis and Curtis. The family lived at 60, Mary Street, Balsall Heath with their four youngest children George and James and Ronald and Minnie who had been born around 1897 and 1898.

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Speciality Tailors—Established 70 years,
**EXCHANGE BUILDINGS, NEW STREET,
BIRMINGHAM.**

Figure 2: Advertisement for Curtis and Curtis, Exchange Buildings, New Street, Birmingham



Figure 3

The Edmondston family. Minnie is holding her youngest daughter also called Minnie, with George holding his youngest son Ronald. The other children from left to right are George, James, William, Robert and Mary

By 1911, George and Minnie had moved to 89 Eastwood Road, Balsall Heath with George, Ronald and Minnie (known as Queenie). George was a 'master ladies and gentleman's tailor'.

William was not on the 1901 census as he went out to South Africa and became a member of the South African Constabulary serving throughout the Boer War from 1899 to 1902. He received the Queens Medal with three clasps, when he returned to England in 1903.^v William became a member of the Warwickshire Yeomanry as a private and rose during his time there to Sergeant, No 2389.^{vi}

When war was declared in 1914, William re-enlisted in September and after a period of training was posted to Galipoli as a Sergeant, to serve with the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force as a member of the cavalry unit in the 19th Squadron, Machine Gun Corps (MGC). He was allocated a new Regimental Number, 110791. The MGC (Cavalry) Squadron consisted of 8 officers and 203 other ranks, equipped with 299 horses, 18 limbers, 1 General Service wagon and 1 water cart. These were formed up into six two-gun sections each of a

Subaltern, 33 men and 46 horses. The Squadron was commanded by a Captain or Major.^{vii}

Having survived the Galipoli Campaign, William proceeded to Egypt where he would have initially been deployed in the defence of the Suez Canal before the start of the Palestine Campaign in the spring of 1917. The first two battles failed to achieve their objectives but in June 1917 the strategy changed under the direction of General Edmund Allenby. This focussed the Allied attack on the eastern extreme of the Ottoman Empire and the capture of Beersheba.

The Third Battle of Gaza was fought on the night of 1st and 2nd November 1917 between British and Ottoman forces.

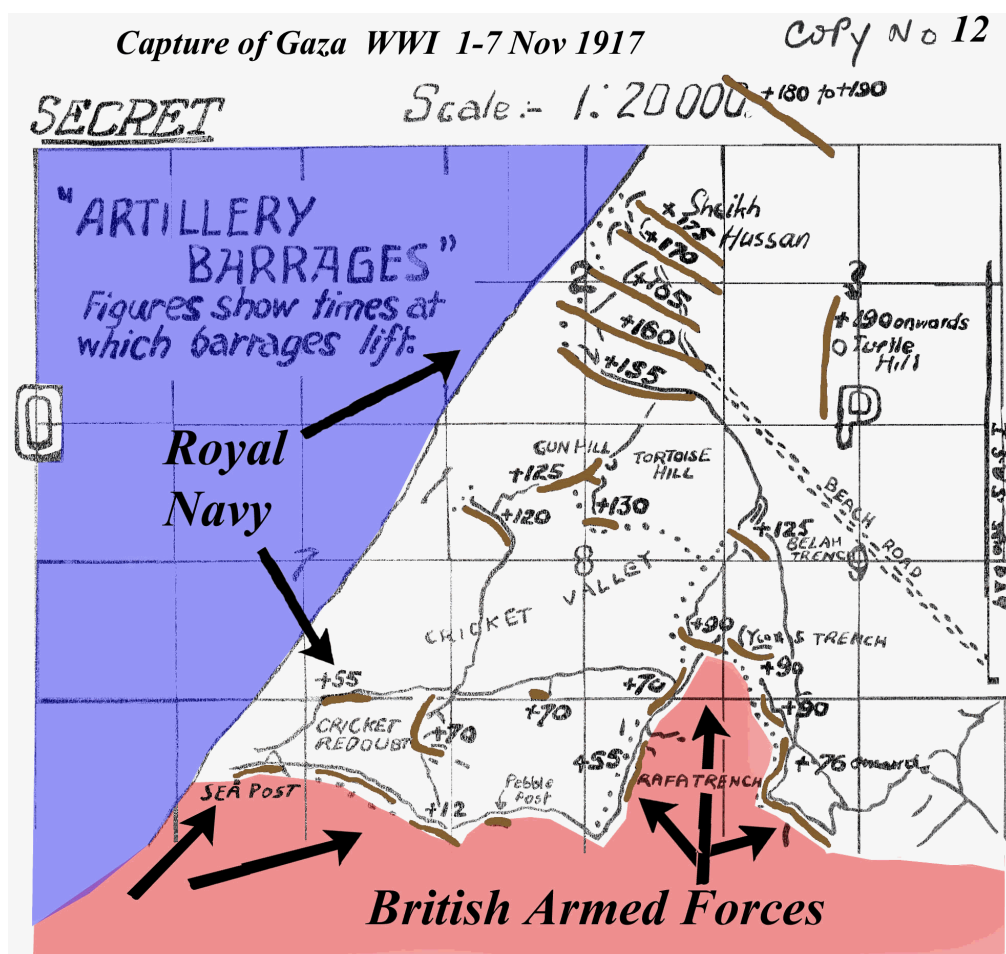


Figure 4: Map of the Palestine Campaign in November 1917

It eventually broke the Gaza to Beersheba line defended by the Yildirim Army Group. Despite having held this line since March 1917, the Ottoman Army was forced to evacuate Gaza and Tel el Khuweilfe during the night of 6/7 November. Only Sheria held out for most of the 7th November before it too was captured.

The circumstances surrounding William's death on 12th November 1917 are not known but Sir General Edmund Allenby gave William a Mention in Despatches on 12th November for '*gallant and distinguished service in the field*'. William was subsequently awarded the Serbian Gold Medal for gallantry.^{viii}

William's Commanding Officer wrote of him:

Sergeant W G Edmondston was my best non-commissioned officer and a man who served with me throughout the war and during that time I learnt what a fine fellow he was, one whom I could always rely on to do his utmost both in times of great danger and in peace.

William was thirty-six years old when he was killed in action. He was entitled to the 1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

At the time of his death William's father and mother lived at 12 King Edward Road, Moseley. They received a second blow a month later when their eldest son Robert Stuart Edmondston was killed on 14th December 1917 at Bullecourt.

William is buried at Gaza War Cemetery. He is also commemorated at St Mary's Church, Moseley and is on the Roll of Honour at Birmingham's Hall of Memory.



Figure 5

(Left) Gaza War Cemetery

(Right) St Mary's Church WW1 memorial

Written and researched by Edwina Rees

Moseley Society History Group

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Endnotes

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- i Johnston family tree, Ancestry
 - ii Select Births 1564-1950
 - iii 1881 census for Altringham, Cheshire lodging with James and Martha White of the Fulshaw Wilmslow Evangelist Congregational Church
The 1911 census records the couple had been married for 33 years
 - iv De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour
Lives of the First World War
<https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/lifestory/5312209>
 - v De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour
 - vi British Army Medal WW1 Index
 - vii Machine Gun Corps(Cavalry) <http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/machine-gun-corps-in-the-first-world-war/machine-gun-corps-cavalry-squadrons/>
 - viii De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour.
London Gazette, 16th December 1917

Illustrations

Figure 1 *Jedburgh Gazette*, 9th December 1932

Figure 2 Birmingham Daily Gazette, 6th August 1906

Figure 3 Shortt-Smith family tree, Ancestry

Figure 4 Map of the Third Battle of Gaza
Denis Percy Frederick Tall's War
http://www.grahamtall.co.uk/family_history/Tall%20Family/Tall%20Family%20page%207.htm

Figure 5 Commonwealth War Graves Commission