

## Lance Corporal Eric Bernard Beston

William Beston. Eric's grandfather was born on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1818 at the Old Bailey, in the Parish of St Sepulchres, Middlesex to Thomas Beston (born around 1801) and his wife Frances (nee Sturges<sup>i</sup>). William's birth was eventually registered on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1837 in the Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Registers at Zion Chapel in New Hall Street, Birmingham<sup>ii</sup>

The 1841 census confirms that Thomas, a butcher, and his wife Frances had relocated to Birmingham and resided with six of their children in one of the houses at Court 9, Bristol Street.



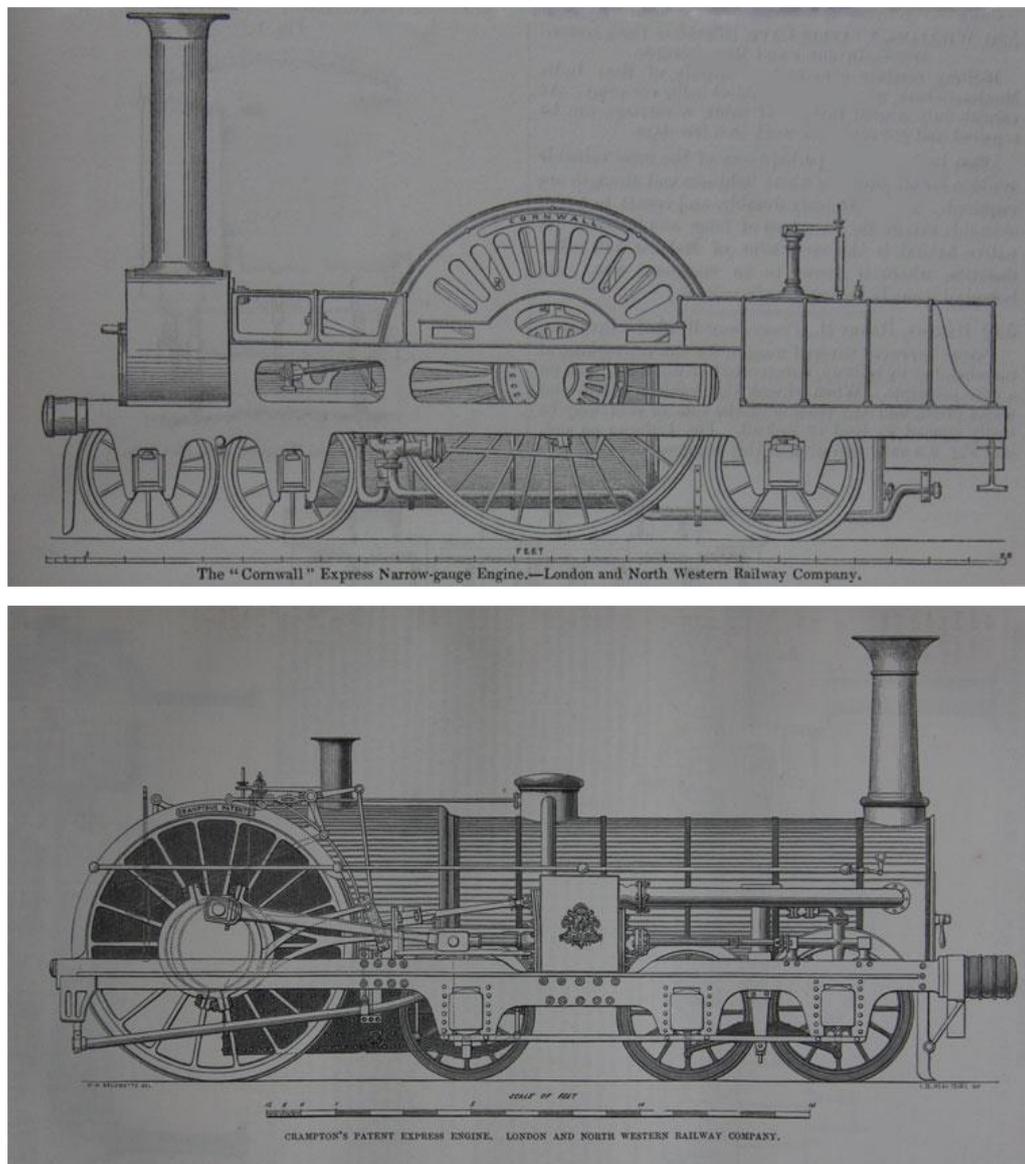
**Figure 1: 1838 sketch of St Bartholomew's Church, Edgbaston**

Thomas's eldest son, William, married Ann, daughter of Joseph Adcock, a 'plater' living in Lionel Street, on Christmas Day 1838, at St Bartholomew's Church, Edgbaston. In the 1841 census, William and Ann's recorded address was Court 15, No 16 Lionel Street. William's occupation on his marriage certificate is described him as a 'plater', like his father-in-law. Their first three children Joseph Thomas, Ann and Frances were born in Birmingham in 1842, 1847 and 1849, respectively.

Around 1848, William became a member of staff at the London and North Western Railway Company (LNWR), founded two years earlier in 1846. During his first year as a trainee driver he was involved in two accidents, one on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1848 - 'Engine 46' and two months later, on 9<sup>th</sup> May - 'Collision engine No 170'. A year later, on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1849, William was on the register of train drivers

operating out of Birmingham Station and received a driver's wage of six shillings a week rising to seven shillings as he became more experienced. On 12th October 1850, William transferred to the LNWR station at Bedford where a line to Bletchley had been constructed two years earlier. William received an increase in his wages to seven shillings and six pence a week at his new work place.<sup>iii</sup>

The 1851 census confirms William and Ann's relocation to Bedford where their fourth child, Isabella Elizabeth, was born in 1850.<sup>iv</sup> The census records their address as Ampthill Street.



**Figure 2**

**Two of the engines in service with the LNWR when William was an engine driver  
(Top) 'Cornwall' Express Narrow-gauge Engine designed by Mr. Trevithick, c1847  
(Bottom) Crampton's Patent Express Engine, 1848**

William and Anne's eldest child, Joseph, was nineteen years old when the next census was taken in 1861. Joseph began work as a clerk in Birmingham and left the family home to lodge with the Bailey family in Wheeler Street, Aston. On 12<sup>th</sup> December 1866, Joseph married Elizabeth Ann Hutchinson at St George's Church, Birmingham.<sup>v</sup>

The 1871 census records Joseph as a 'clerk and traveller for a button manufacturer'. His address was Rose Place, Gower Street, Aston where he was living with Elizabeth and their two children, George William and Alice Maud born in 1867 and 1870 respectively. Another daughter, Miriam, was born in 1872 and sons Ernest and Harold in 1875 and 1879. Around this time Joseph went into partnership with John S. Wright & Co, at 13 Corporation Street, Birmingham and represented the company as a South American general merchant and spent much time there when visits were rarely made. John S. Wright died in 1880 and the partnership was eventually dissolved in 1882.<sup>vi</sup>



Joseph was closely associated with John Skirrow Wright, one of the prominent pioneers and social improvers of the 19th century in Birmingham.

**Figure 3**  
**Cartoon of John Skirrow Wright, 1876. His scroll lists his core political principles: 'Free Trade; Ballot; Extended Suffrage; Religious Liberty; Progress'. The footman in the background has the head of a button, in allusion to Wright's commercial roots. A statue was raised in his Honour in 1883 and sited in Victoria Square. In 1913 it was moved to Chamberlain Place where it remained until 1951. It was eventually scrapped and replaced by a bronze bust in 1956. Its current location is in a niche in the Council House**

In the 1881 census, Joseph, Elizabeth and their five children lived at 168 Brearley Street West. The running of the household was supported by the employment of two domestic servants.<sup>vii</sup> Joseph still worked as a 'South American and general merchant.' Two further children, Eric Bernard and Herbert, were born in 1881 and 1883 respectively.

By 1891 the family resided at 70 Victoria Road, Aston. Joseph was recorded in the census for that year as a 'commissioning agent for metal'.

Joseph and the family had moved to Handsworth by the time the 1901 census was taken and lived at 56 Hampton Road. Joseph's occupation was recorded as an 'iron plate worker and Japanner'.



**Figure 4: No 188 should be two buildings along to the left of the one on the corner, currently the 'Boston Tea Party', part of a complex with the building to its left referred to as 'The Citadel' No 190 Corporation Street, founded by the Salvation Army in 1892**

Eric Beston, Joseph and Elizabeth's sixth child, became a clerk in a newspaper office when he left school. He initially worked in the commercial department of the Birmingham Gazette Office at 186-88 Corporation Street for a period of ten years before joining the offices of the Daily Argus as a journalist. Eventually he joined his brother in business. Eric, like his father, became a member of the Birmingham Board Guardians, part of an *ad hoc* authority that administered Poor Law in the United Kingdom from 1835 to 1930.<sup>viii</sup>

In 1907 Eric's father, Joseph died. He was a renowned speaker in the cause of the poor. He became associated with the Birmingham Liberal Association from its foundation and was influential in the formation of the Agricultural Labourers League supported by Mr Joseph Chamberlain. He was also a Birmingham Poor Law Guardian and on the North Birmingham Relief Committee. Joseph was also interested in political affairs in Aston where he had previously resided. He was at one time a member of the Aston Local Board and stood for but unsuccessfully contested St George's Ward as a candidate for the Birmingham City Council. Joseph was deeply interested in educational matters from a Non-Conformist standpoint and was a principal figure in the early stages of the passive resistance movement.

Figure 5: Newspaper obituary for Joseph Beston, Eric's father

## DEATH OF MR. J. T. BESTON

### BIRMINGHAM POLITICIAN AND GUARDIAN OF THE POOR.

By the death of Mr. J. T. Beston, which occurred at his residence, 43, Fentham-road, Birchfield, on Sunday, at the age of sixty-five, Birmingham loses an interesting personality. He was connected in one way or another with the Birmingham Liberal Association since its foundation, being intimately associated with Mr. J. S. Wright, its early president, and Mr. Frank Schnadhorst, the famous organiser. By these gentlemen he was employed in many political matters requiring keen observation and practical sagacity. For instance, he was sent over into the Barford district to inquire into the condition of the agricultural labourers following Mr. Joseph Arch's first visit to Birmingham. On the report he gave to Mr. Wright and Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, Birmingham Liberals heartily supported the movement, which resulted in the formation of the Agricultural Labourers' League.

Both as a Birmingham poor-law Guardian and in connection with the North Birmingham Relief Committee, Mr. Beston took a deep interest in the problem of the poor. He very conscientiously performed his duties on the Board of Guardians, and in cases of doubt he never failed personally to investigate the facts. The death of few men would be a greater loss to the deserving poor of Birmingham than that of Mr. Beston. He was a man of wide information, and possessed keen powers of criticism. Mr. Beston saw many parts of the world as a business man, and spent much time abroad, paying long visits, especially to South America at a time when such visits were very rarely made. No one loved a political fight more than Mr. Beston, and his opposition was the more spirited when he must have felt that he was upon the losing side. He possessed considerable power as a speaker, and was in the habit of giving and receiving hard knocks.

Mr. Beston was for a long period prominently interested in political affairs in Aston, where he previously resided, though the principal field of his activities was Birmingham. He was at one time a member of the Aston Local Board, and he unsuccessfully contested St. George's Ward as a candidate for the Birmingham City Council. He was deeply interested in educational matters from a Nonconformist standpoint, and was one of the principal figures among those who took part in the earlier stages of the passive resistance movement.

At the age of thirty-two, Eric married Ada Margaret Reaney on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1913 in Wasperton, a village in Warwickshire.<sup>ix</sup>

In 1916, when conscription was introduced to make up numbers for Lord Kitchener's New Army, Eric enlisted in the Army Service Corps (ASC) as part of their Mechanical Transport Company. He was given the Regimental Number M2/267236. The ASC Mechanical Transport Depot Companies filled a variety of administrative, recruitment, induction, training and re-supply roles. The Depots were based in the United Kingdom or at the port of entry to a theatre of war. Advanced Depots were located further up the lines of communication.

It is not clear whether Eric saw action abroad or not, as there is no WW1 British Army Medal Index for him. The exact date of his death is not clear either. It was variously recorded as the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> December 1917. What is known is that he died after an operation at the Royal Herbert Military Hospital, Woolwich, at the age of thirty-six.<sup>x</sup>



**Figure 6:**  
**(Left) Royal Herbert Hospital around 1906**  
**(Right) WW1 memorial at St Mary's church, Moseley**

Eric was buried at Brandwood End Cemetery, Birmingham. He is also commemorated at St Mary's Church, Moseley and is on the Roll of Honour at Birmingham Hall of Memory.

Eric left an estate of £4,638 about £369,000 in today's money for his two brothers William and Ernest to administer. At the time of his death Eric and his wife, Ada, lived at 13 Chantry Road, Moseley.<sup>xi</sup>

Ada was recorded in the 1939 Register as a widow, living on 'private means' at 31 Sandon Road in Harborne. She died in 1958.

Eric's youngest brother Herbert was conscripted into Kitchener's New Army on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1916 and was posted initially to the North Staffordshire Regiment as a Private, No 32593. Five months later he was posted to the Army Pay Corps based at Canterbury. He was given a new Regimental Number 10067. Herbert stayed on after demobilisation in May 1919 and continued to serve until 31<sup>st</sup> March 1920.<sup>xii</sup>

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### Endnotes

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- i Marriage date, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1817. Woodhouse, Leicestershire for Thomas Beston and Frances Sturges  
England Select Marriages 1538-1913  
England & Wales Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Registers 1567-1970
  - ii England & Wales Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Registers 1567-1970
  - iii UK, Railway Employment Records, 1833-1966, pp 98, 104
  - iv England & Wales Civil Registration Birth Index, Bedford, 1850, 4/4
  - v Birmingham, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1866
  - vi *Bradford Observer* 29.4.1882  
*Birmingham Daily Post* 29.4.1882
  - vii *Birmingham Gazette and Express*, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1907
  - viii *Birmingham Gazette and Express*, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1907

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- ix Warwickshire Marriages
- x *Birmingham Gazette*, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1917  
*Birmingham Daily Post*, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1917
- xi *National Probate Calendar 1858-1966*  
*Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 13.12.1917
- xii British Army Service Records 1914-1920

## Illustrations

Figure 1 St Bartholomew's Church, Edgbaston, Mary Whitaker 1838 sketch  
<https://ahistoryofbirminghamchurches.jimdo.com/edgbaston-st-bartholomew/>

Figure 2 Grace's Guide

Figure 3 Cartoon of John Skirrow Wright  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Skirrow\\_Wright](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Skirrow_Wright)

Figure 4 Birmingham Forum  
<http://www.birminghamforum.co.uk/index.php?topic=5446.33>

Figure 5 *Birmingham Gazette and Express*, 20.8.1907

Figure 6 Royal Herbert Pavilions  
<http://www.royalherbert.co.uk/>