

## Second Lieutenant James Mennie

The Mennie family can trace their origins to Rayne, a village NW of Aberdeen, Scotland. James' great-great-grandfather, John (born around 1760 in Rayne)<sup>i</sup> married Elizabeth Elmslie on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1781 in Rayne. John and Elizabeth's son, William (James' great-grandfather) was baptised at Rayne Parish Church on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1785.<sup>ii</sup>

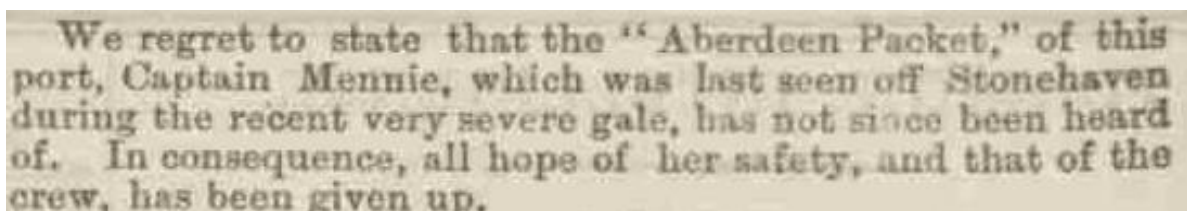
William became a house carpenter. On 5<sup>th</sup> December 1813, William married Liliias Gilchrist at Elgin, Moray, Scotland.<sup>iii</sup> There is little information available on William and Liliias (also known as Lily). The Scottish Birth and Baptism Records name William and Liliias as the parents of Adam, Anne, James and Jane (born 1826). Three further children are recorded in the 1841 census: Janet, George and Mary, born around 1830, 1832 and 1838 respectively.

On 1<sup>st</sup> March 1855, William and Liliias' youngest son, George (James' grandfather) married Elizabeth Stuart at St Nicholas' Church, Aberdeen.<sup>iv</sup>

The 1861 census describes George as a 'shipmaster.' He lived at 62 George Street, in the parish of St Nicholas, Aberdeen with Elizabeth and their two children, Elizabeth born in 1859 and James Gilchrist born on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1860.<sup>v</sup> Another child, David Stuart was born three years later in 1863.

Between 1860 and 1864 the shipping news in the *Aberdeen Press* records the comings and goings of the brig<sup>vi</sup> *Aberdeen Packet* along the east coast to ports such as Holy Island and Sunderland with George as its captain.

Tragedy struck the family in February 1864 when the *Aberdeen Packet* was lost with all hands in a severe gale off Stonehaven, leaving Elizabeth a widow with three children under five years of age.



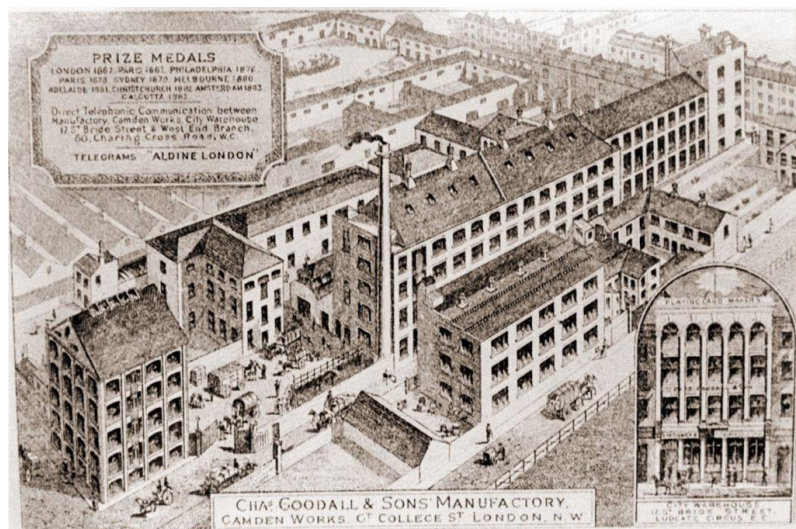
We regret to state that the "Aberdeen Packet," of this port, Captain Mennie, which was last seen off Stonehaven during the recent very severe gale, has not since been heard of. In consequence, all hope of her safety, and that of the crew, has been given up.

**Figure 1: *Aberdeen Press and Journal* report the loss of the *Aberdeen Packet***

On 16<sup>th</sup> November 1868, Elizabeth remarried at St Nicolas' Church, Aberdeen. Her second husband was Charles Florence, a roof slater. The 1881 census recorded that Elizabeth lived at 106 George Street, Aberdeen with her two sons by George, James, a stationer's clerk, and David together with her two sons by

her second husband, Charles, Charles Gordon Stuart, born 1880, and John, born 1881.

James (James' father) was employed as a commercial traveller for Charles Goodhall & Son, who had a factory in Camden, London, NW 8.<sup>vii</sup> During his time in London James met and married Caroline Overy in 1890.<sup>viii</sup>



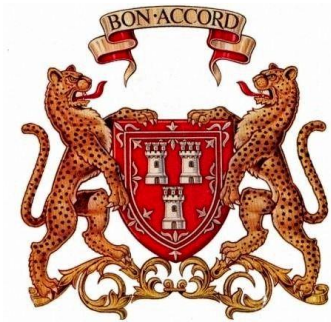
**Figure 2**  
**(Left) Advertisement for Goodhall's playing cards**  
**(Above) Goodhall & Son's Camden Works, London**

Goodhall & Son built a new works in 1868. It made a range of high-quality stationery, plus games, toys, fountain pens and even toilet paper. In 1879 new presses added a wide choice of multi-coloured calendars and almanacs together with Christmas and greetings cards to the factory's production capability. From 1885 the company started making playing cards. Over the years, because of their great clarity and beauty of design, these designs have been adopted or copied by manufacturers around the world. The factory ceased production in 1929.

The 1891 census records Caroline living with her one year old daughter, Elizabeth Stuart (known as Cissie) at 21 Dalmeny Road, Islington.<sup>ix</sup> James in 1890/1891 was recorded as a commercial traveller and a tenant at 117 George Street, Aberdeen.<sup>x</sup> During their residence in Islington James and Caroline had two further children, Dorothy Jessie in 1891 and Maria Stuart in 1892.

By the time their next child, Kathleen Mabel, was born in 1894, the family had relocated to the suburb of Basford, Nottingham. The 1901 census recorded the family resident at 21 Beech Avenue, Nottingham. Two further children had been born, Muriel Belle in 1896 and James on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1898.<sup>xi</sup> Over the course of

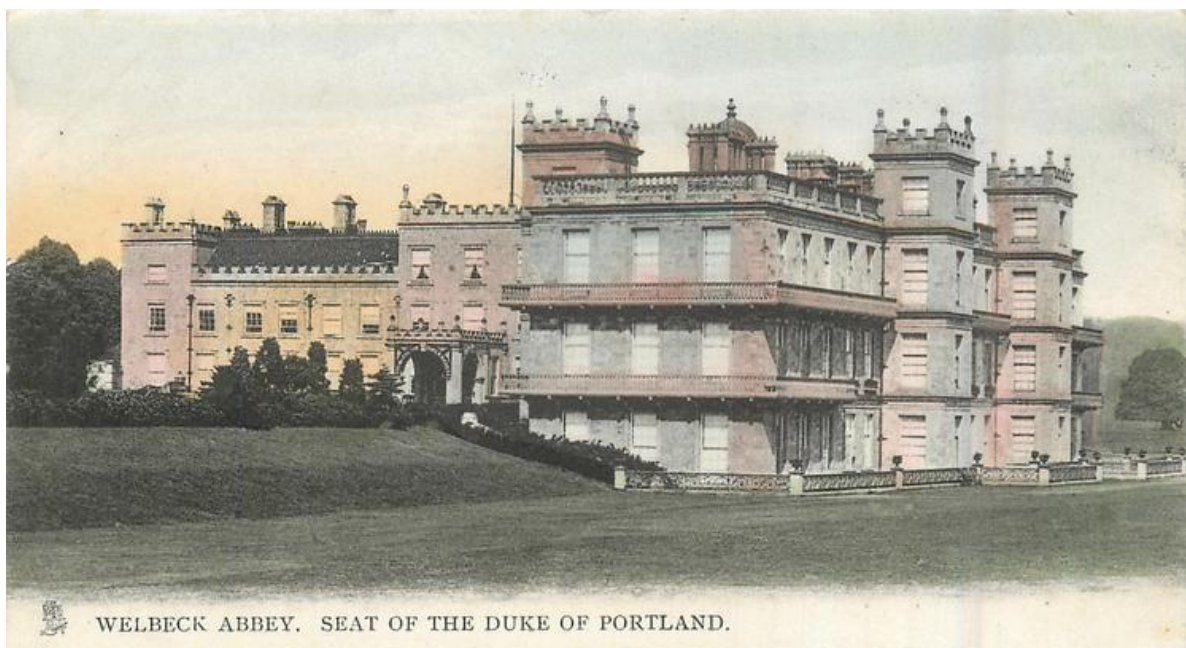
the next few years daughters Eveline Austin, Sybil Caroline and Caroline were born in 1903, 1906 and 1908 respectively.



By 1911 the Mennie family had relocated to Birmingham where the census for that year recorded them at 63 Mayfield Road, Moseley. The house was named 'Bon Accord'<sup>xii</sup>, as a reminder of James' links with Aberdeen for which it was the official motto (see left), meaning 'Good Agreement.' The city's official toast is 'Happy to meet, sorry to part, happy to meet again - Bon Accord!'

James and Caroline's only son, James, entered Kind Edward VI Grammar School, Camp Hill on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1912. The *School Chronicle* records that James won a 220 yards heat in 1913 and a 440 yards heat in 1914 but was unplaced in both finals. In 1914 James played for the 2<sup>nd</sup> XV Rugby team and the following year the 1<sup>st</sup> XV, winning his colours. In 1915 he was described as 'a resourceful half (back) - breaks through well: passing at times erratic.'<sup>xiii</sup>

On 29<sup>th</sup> March 1915 James left school and entered the office of the Duke of Portland as a clerk and Private Secretary at Wellbeck Abbey, Nottinghamshire.



**Figure 3 Wellbeck Abbey**

When war broke out, James joined the Officer Training Corps of Nottingham University and on reaching military age he enlisted on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1916 at Retford, Nottinghamshire into the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, as a Private, No. 25831.<sup>xiv</sup>

James was mobilised on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1917 and sent to No 13 Officer Training School at Newmarket. The training course lasted four and a half months. On 21<sup>st</sup> December 1917 James was gazetted Second Lieutenant with the Royal Sussex Regiment.<sup>xv</sup>



Figure 4: 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt J. Mennie

James' British Army Medal Index recorded 18<sup>th</sup> April 1918 as the date he joined his Regiment in France. He was attached to the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion at Acheux-en-Vimeu, a village in the Somme, east of Mailly-Maillet. The Battalion was part of the 12<sup>th</sup> Division. It remained in the region until July waiting for new drafts to make up earlier losses.

On 1<sup>st</sup> July 1918, two years to the day after the British offensive on the Somme in 1916, the 12<sup>th</sup> Division carried out an attack at Bouzincourt. It was initially successful, but a German counter attack drove them back at a cost of 680 casualties.

Between 8<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> August the Division played a part in the highly successful attack by the British Fourth Army, in the Battle of Amiens. Meanwhile the infantry of the Division continued to rebuild and train. On 30<sup>th</sup> July, the Division moved to the area of Vignacourt, Canaples and Pernois.

On 8<sup>th</sup> August, the Division took a part in the Battle of Albert. By the evening of 10 August, the old Amiens defence line had been recaptured. In all the Division had by now advanced almost two miles.

After a brief rest, the Division attacked again on 22<sup>nd</sup> August, pushing across the wilderness of the old Somme battlefield and after a week's fighting, captured Meaulte, Mametz, Carnoy, Hardecourt and Faviere Wood.

On 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> September 1918, the Division relieved the 18<sup>th</sup> (Eastern) Division east of the Canal du Nord and south of Manancourt, ready for an attack on the village of Nurlu. It was taken despite formidable wire defences and German counter attacks. The German army retreated in haste for several miles, pursued by the Division which reached the line of Sorel Wood. The advance was continued early on 8<sup>th</sup> September, capturing Guyencourt in spite of heavy casualties. The movement halted 1000 yards west of Epehy and Pezieres, where the Division was relieved. It was now some 17 miles ahead of where the offensive had opened on 8<sup>th</sup> August. More than 1000 prisoners had been taken, as well as 17 artillery pieces and dozens of smaller weapons.

After a rest in billets in the area of Manancourt, the Division was ordered to renew the attack on the village of Epehy. This took place on 18<sup>th</sup> September. The 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion War diary for the day records the action.<sup>xvi</sup>

Battalion attacked at dawn. Very heavy machine gun fire, owing to Epehy not being mopped up by the troops in the front line. Alpine Corps fought hard for the village. Our casualties about 200 OR's (Other Ranks). Officers killed in action, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt J Mennie... (12 other officers are named on the list). The Battalion finally established positions east of Epehy on the railway bank and remained under very heavy sniping and machine gun fire.<sup>xvii</sup>

The enemy strongholds held on stubbornly and caused heavy casualties but gradually resistance was overcome. Over the next few days further attacks were made against heavily defended posts and trenches; fighting was intense and progress slow.

James was buried in Epehy Wood Farm Cemetery (see right). He was just nineteen years old.<sup>xviii</sup>



The chaplain of the battalion wrote that 'James met his death with other officers and men while advancing on a village defended by heavy machine guns.'<sup>xix</sup>

The Duke of Portland sent a wire to James' parents saying: 'Deeply regret loss of your gallant son, whom we sincerely liked and respected.'<sup>xx</sup>

James is also commemorated in the chapel at Wellbeck Abbey and the WW1 memorial at St Mary's Church, Moseley and is named on the Roll of Honour at Birmingham's Hall of Memory.

Figure 5

(Near right)  
St Mary's Church  
Moseley WW1  
memorial  
(Far right)  
Wellbeck Abbey  
WW1 memorial



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## Endnotes

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- i Scotland, Select Births and Baptisms, 1564-1950. Film number 993358. Names William as John's father.
  - ii Scotland, Select Births and Baptisms, 1536-1950. FHL Film number 993358  
The Scottish Select Birth and Baptism Records name six other children born to John Mennie and Elizabeth Elmslie. They are: Isobel, Bathia, Alexander, John, William and Christian but there are no birth or baptismal dates.
  - iii Scotland, Select Marriages, 1561-1910. FHL film number 990798,990800
  - iv In Scotland, Select Marriages, 1561-1910, Elizabeth's last name is spelt Stewart. In the birth records for Elizabeth and James it is also spelt that way but for her third and last child David it is spelt Stuart. The name Stuart spelt in this way continued to be used in the family . For continuity this is the spelling I have also used for the earlier records
  - v The ages of George and Elizabeth have been erroneously transcribed as, 58 and 56. They should have been 28 and 26.
  - vi A brig is a sailing vessel with two square-rigged masts. During the Age of Sail, brigs were seen as fast and maneuverable. They were used as both naval warships and merchant vessels.
  - vii Officers after 1913, National Archives, Ref WO 339/99468
  - viii England & Wales Marriage Index, Pancras, 1890, 4/4, 1b, 314
  - ix Elizabeth was born before her marriage to James  
Civil Registration Marriage Index, Pancras, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 1890  
Civil Registration Birth Index, Pancras, 1890, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter

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- x Electoral Registers for Aberdeen 1832-1976
- xi See vii
- xii Record of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt J Mennie, Officers After 1913, National Archives, Ref 339/99468
- xiii King Edward School Archives. School Chronicle 60, 63 and 64
- xiv See vii
- xv The London Gazette,, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1917, Issue 30440, p 13356  
See vii
- xvi National Archives, War Diary of 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Sussex Regiment, Ref WO 95/1856/3  
The 12<sup>th</sup> (Eastern) Division, The Long, Long Trail  
<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/order-of-battle-of-divisions/12th-eastern-division/>
- xvii National Archives, War Diary of 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Sussex Regiment, Ref WO 95/1856/3, p 108
- xviii Commonwealth War Graves Commission
- xix *Birmingham Mail*, 4<sup>th</sup> October 1918, p 2
- xx See xix

## Illustrations

Figure 1 *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1864

Figure 2 Grace's Guide  
[https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Charles\\_Goodall\\_and\\_Son](https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Charles_Goodall_and_Son)  
Godhall & Son <http://www.wopc.co.uk/goodhall/index>

Figure 3 Wellbeck Abbey  
<https://tuckdb.org/items/64666>

Figure 4 *Birmingham Mail*, 4<sup>th</sup> October 1918, p 2

Figure 5 Welbeck Estate chapel, WW1 memorial, photo by Roger Capel  
<https://secure.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/RollOfHonour/WarMemorials/Details/298>