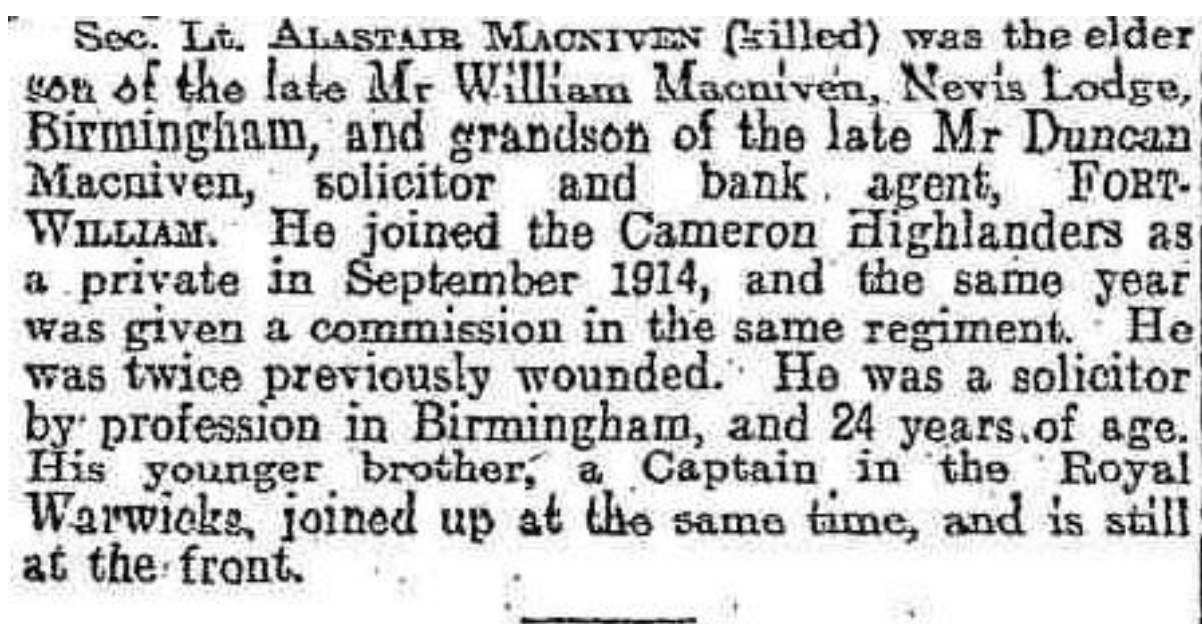


## Lieutenant Alister\*MacNiven

(\*This is the spelling of his name on his Birth Certificate)



Sec. Lt. ALASTAIR MACNIVEN (killed) was the elder son of the late Mr William Macniven, Nevis Lodge, Birmingham, and grandson of the late Mr Duncan Macniven, solicitor and bank agent, FORT-WILLIAM. He joined the Cameron Highlanders as a private in September 1914, and the same year was given a commission in the same regiment. He was twice previously wounded. He was a solicitor by profession in Birmingham, and 24 years of age. His younger brother, a Captain in the Royal Warwicks, joined up at the same time, and is still at the front.

Figure 1: Second Lieutenant Alistair MacNiven was related to Duncan MacNiven through his mother, Annie MacNiven.

Alister's mother, Annie, was the daughter of Duncan MacNiven. Duncan was born around 1829 in Perthshire, Scotland. At an early age he elected to join the legal profession and served his apprenticeship with Messrs J & J Mackie in Stirling.<sup>i</sup> On 28<sup>th</sup> April 1859, Duncan, by then a writer in the legal profession, married Isabella Coline Maclulich, the eldest daughter of Duncan Maclulich Esquire, Procurator at Inveraray. They were married by her uncle, the Reverend Duncan McCallum.<sup>ii</sup>

Following the marriage, Duncan continued working at Inveraray.<sup>iii</sup> By 1861, the couple had a one year old daughter, Annie, born in 1860. The census for that year records them resident with Isabella's siblings at Cuil, Kilmorich. Annie was most likely looking after them while her parents were away from home. Ten years later, the 1871 census records Duncan and Isabella living in Newtown, Inverary with their six children and two domestic servants.

By 1881 the family had grown to nine children (there were only 7 children named on the census as Agnes and Isabella were elsewhere on the day). Their address was The National Bank of Scotland, 4 High Street, Fort William, Kilmallie, which remained their home for the rest of their lives. Duncan is described as a 'Solicitor and Bank Agent'. On 1<sup>st</sup> July 1894 Isabella died aged 58 and Duncan,



**Figure 2: The National Bank, Numbers 4, 6 and 8, High Street, Fort William**

ten years later on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1904, aged 76. He had fallen ill two months previously.<sup>iv</sup> At the time of his death, Duncan had held the post of Procurator Fiscal at Fort William for more than 30 years.<sup>v</sup>

Mr Duncan Macniven, of the National Bank House, Fort-William, bank agent there, and Procurator-Fiscal for the Fort-William division of Inverness, who died intestate on the 25th August 1904, left personal estate in the United Kingdom valued at £3543, 17s. 9d., exclusive of trust funds amounting to £2577, 3s. 4d. Administration of his estate and effects has been granted to Miss Ella Colina Macniven, Mrs Agnes Maria Macniven or Moir, wife of Mr James Moir, of the National Bank House, Fort-William; Mrs Annie Macniven, wife of Mr William Macniven, of Nevis Lodge, Moseley; Birmingham; and Mr Donald Colin Macniven, of 8 Cromer Road, Moseley, Birmingham, as next-of-kin.

**Figure 3: The will of Duncan MacNiven confirming that Annie was his daughter and husband to William MacNiven**



**Figure 4: A postcard postmarked 1910 of a farmer and his sheep near Luss, Loch Lomond**

Alister's father, William, was born in 1857 in Luss, Dunbartonshire to Alexander and Rachel MacNiven (née Orr). Alexander was a farmer and grazier of 4000 acres on the Hill of Camstraddenin on the western shore of Loch Lomond near the village of Luss.<sup>vi</sup>

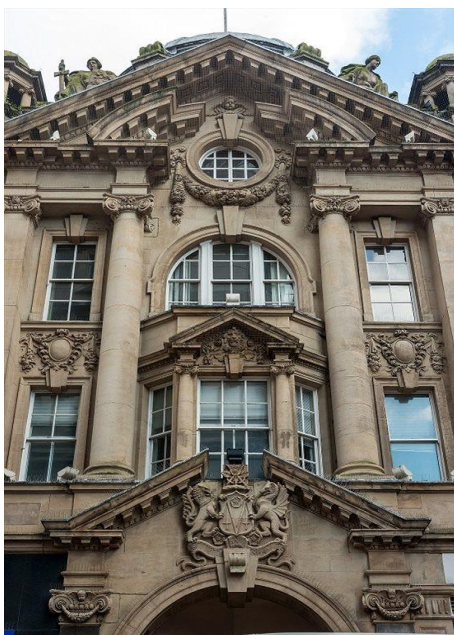
The farm still exists today as a centre for sheep-dog demonstrations. A particular favourite with tourists is the herding of Indian Runner Ducks. The ducks are described as 'great characters' and 'natural entertainers' providing great amusement for visitors to the farm<sup>vii</sup>

To assist him on the farm, Alexander employed a shepherd, a ploughman, two agricultural labourers, a dairy maid and a housemaid.<sup>viii</sup>

Alexander married on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1851 in Edinburgh.<sup>ix</sup> The couple went on to have ten children, but Rachel and the children did not live on the farm and resided

elsewhere. In 1868, Rachel gave birth to the last of her ten children. The effect of producing 10 children over 13 years must have taken its toll, as Rachel died on the 28<sup>th</sup> August 1870 at Landour, Largs. She had moved there from Shemore, Luss.<sup>x</sup> This explains why the youngest eight children are recorded in the 1871 census as living in Luss with their Aunt Margaret (Alexander's sister). The two eldest boys, Alexander and James, stayed with their father on the farm.

In 1881, William the 4<sup>th</sup> born child and third son of Rachel and Alexander was working as an Insurance Agent and lodging with his brother James, a solicitor, at 3 Weymouth Terrace, Glasgow.



**Figure 5: Numbers 18 and 19  
Bennetts Hill, Birmingham**

William married Annie MacNiven around 1888<sup>xi</sup>. The couple relocated to Birmingham soon after the marriage as William had secured the office of secretary to the Glasgow Life Assurance Company at its Head Quarters in Bennetts Hill.<sup>xii</sup> They lived at 5 Clarence Villa's, Clarence Road, Moseley where their first two children were born., Isabella Elizabeth in 1888 and Alister on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1890.<sup>xiii</sup>

By the following year, 1891, the family had relocated to 275 Trinity Road Wandsworth, London. As William went on to become the Chief Superintendant of the Equity and Law Life Assurance Society, it is likely that this move was prompted by William taking up new employment as an 'insurance agent' with this

Society, whose Head Quarters were in London.<sup>xiv</sup> Three years later, if not before, the family were back in Birmingham as their next two children, twins Annie Ethel and Duncan, born in the autumn of 1894 had a Kings Norton registration for their birth. Kelly's Directory for 1896 records William's new address as Nevis Lodge. The directory, however, records the Lodge in Anderton Park Road, Moseley and not Oakland Road, No 19 as registered in the 1901 and 1911 census.

In 1901, the census records a visit by Annie's sister, Agnes Maria Moir. She had married James Moir, a doctor, in Fort William, on the 6<sup>th</sup> September 1888.<sup>xv</sup>

**EQUITY and LAW**  
 Life Assurance Society.

ESTABLISHED 1844.

**NEW SCHEME**  
 OF  
**WHOLE LIFE ASSURANCES**  
 WITHOUT PROFITS

at Rates lower at the principal  
 Assuring Ages than those of  
 any other Office.

**EXAMPLES :—**

Age next Birthday.	Premium for £1,000.
25 - -	£14 : 19 : 2
35 - -	£20 : 4 : 2
45 - -	£28 : 19 : 2

TOTAL FUNDS 31st Decem-  
 ber, 1914 .. .. . £5,160,832

SURPLUS DIVIDED in  
 respect of Five Years ending  
 31st December, 1914 .. £551,166  
 (The Largest in the history of the Society.)

For Full Prospectus, or Prospectus of New Scheme,  
 write to—  
**THE ACTUARY, 18, Lincoln's Inn  
 Fields, London, W.C.**

Figure 6: An Equity and Law Life Assurance Company advertisement appearing in the Birmingham Daily Post in 1915

William and Annie's eldest son, Alister, went to Wintersloe School, Moseley at the age of nine where he remained until 1905.<sup>xviii</sup>



Figure 7: Alister and his siblings: Left to right: Isabella, Ethel, Alister, Duncan

The 1911 census confirms that William was working for Equity and Law Life Assurance Society. Only two years later, on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1914, William died aged fifty-seven, leaving an estate of £2,774 17s 4d to Annie (around £294,000 in today's money).<sup>xvi</sup> After the death of her husband, Annie moved to 46 Woodstock Road, Moseley.<sup>xvii</sup>

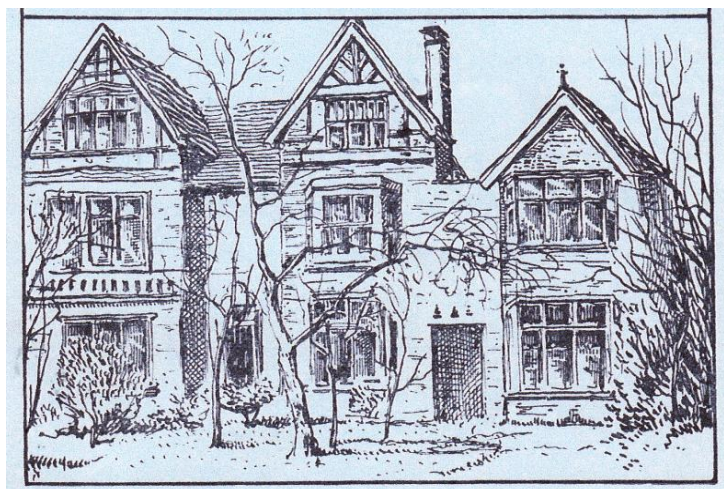


Figure 8 Wintersloe School, Moseley

On leaving school he became a law student. By the time war was declared on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914, Alister had completed his articles and had become a solicitor. He enlisted in the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion Cameron Highlanders in September 1914, when the Battalion was raised in Inverness.<sup>xix</sup> The 7<sup>th</sup> Cameron Highlanders moved to Salamanca Barracks Aldershot for training in November, and joined the 44<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 15<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division on the 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1915. From billets at Liphook, Hampshire in January the battalion moved to Cirencester, Gloucestershire a month later, Chisledon, Wiltshire in April, then Parkhurst, Tidworth in May. While at Cirencester, Alister received a commission dated 17<sup>th</sup> March 1915.<sup>xx</sup> The 7<sup>th</sup> Cameron Highlanders proceeded to France on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1915 and landed at Boulogne. The battalion saw action in the Battle of Loos in 1915 and the Battle of the Somme in 1916.<sup>xxi</sup> Although twice wounded during his time in France Alister was back in action in April 1917.<sup>xxii</sup> His battalion was about to mount another attack on the German lines in the Second Battle of the Scarpe, part of the Battle of Arras.

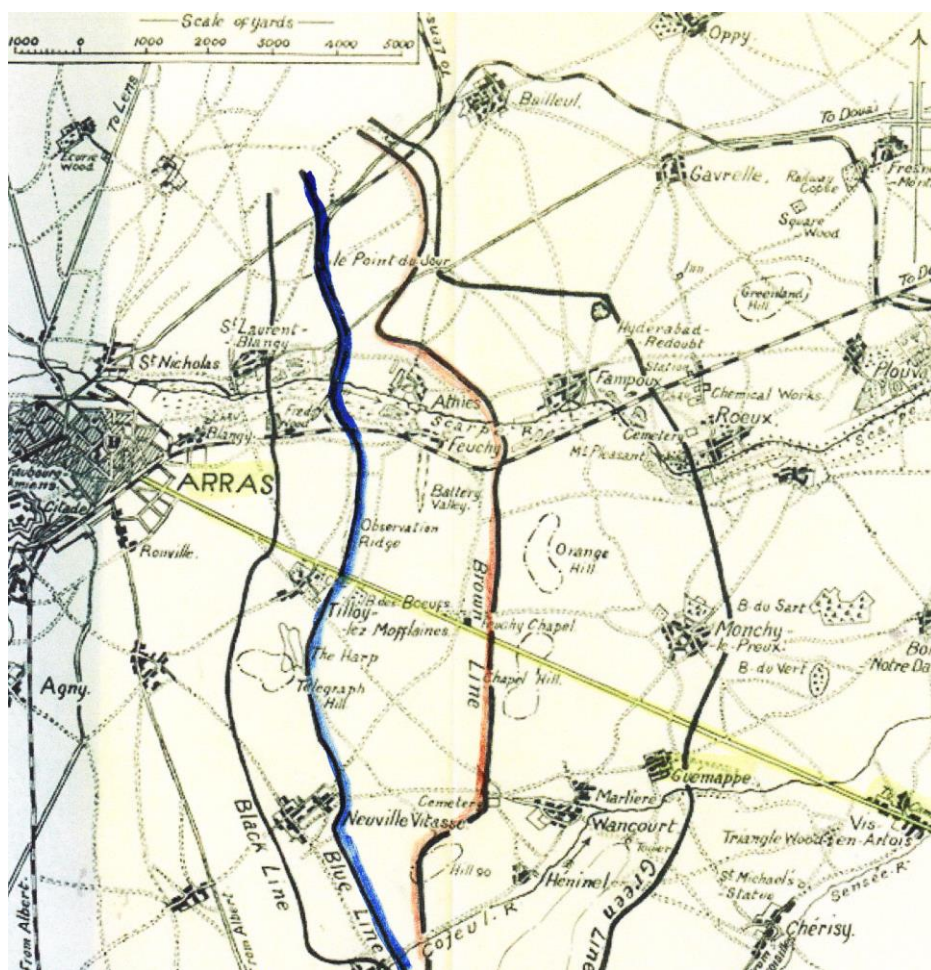


Figure 9: Map showing the blue and brown lines in the Second Battle of the Scarpe, part of the Battle of Arras. Guémappe and the Cambrai road are highlighted in yellow

On Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1917, the 7<sup>th</sup> Cameron Highlanders moved out of billets in Grand Place, Arras to relieve the 8/10<sup>th</sup> Gordon Highlanders in the Front Line trenches ready for an attack on Guémappe. The War diary for the 7<sup>th</sup> Cameron Highlanders on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1917 records:

At zero hour, 4.45 am, the battalion attacked the first line German Trench, their objective being the blue line (see Figure 9). Almost immediately the enemy put a barrage on our front line trenches, falling a little short of it.

This was followed by:

intense machine-gun fire from a German Strong Point on our immediate front and also from the high ground south of the River Scarpe.. The strong point was rushed at the point of the bayonet and as our men reached it the Germans attempted to surrender but were apparently overwhelmed in the rush. Our right company suffered very severely from machine-gun fire from a strong point on the right and another on the north side of Guémappe. Our left pushed on reaching the south side of Bullet Trench, clearing it of Germans and taking about 40 prisoners.... About 5.45 am the centre battalion which had been held up was able to advance as the enemy gun had evidently been knocked out. It got as far as the Sunken Road without much opposition. Here they came in touch with Germans lying in shell holes and as the party was weak and unsupported they dug themselves in..... at 10 am an officer reported small parties of Germans to the east of Guémappe. He was given orders to return and hold his post at all costs. This he did and with a Lewis gun was able to break up parties forming on the east of Guémappe..... At 10.30 am a few Stokes Mortar Shells and Rifle Grenades were able to clear the trench northwards to the main Cambrai Road and with 12 men. There was no serious attempt by the enemy to retake this trench

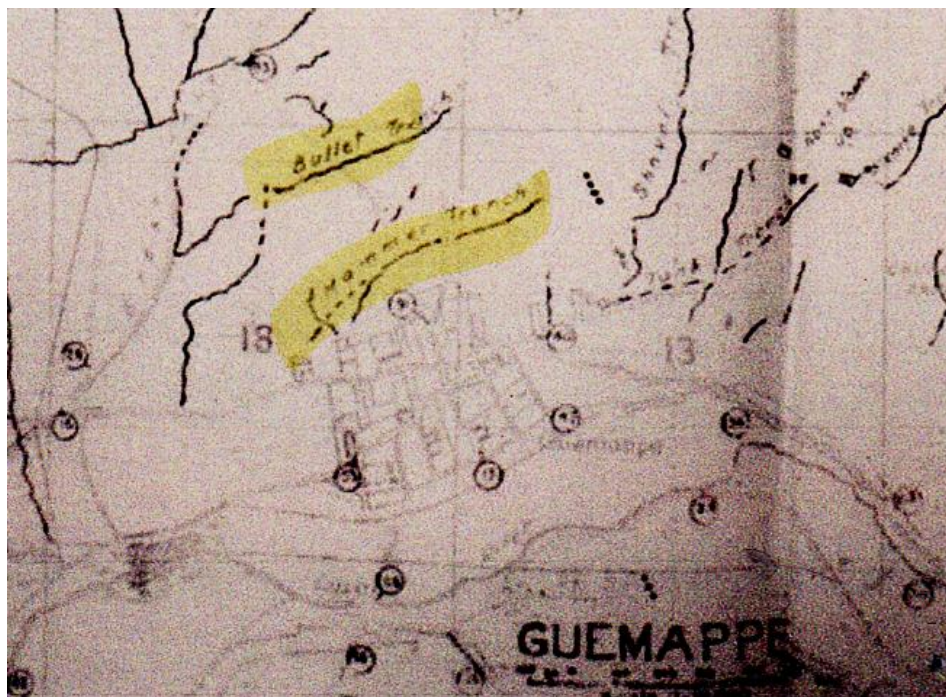


Figure 10: Trench map north of Guémappe showing the position of Bullet Trench and Hammer Trench (highlighted)

At 12 pm a new barrage was opened for a fresh attack. The officer in the Strong Point advanced his post as the barrage commenced and set up a new Strong Point, possibly part of Hammer Trench where he remained the rest of the day sniping using a Lewis gun

At 6 pm as the 46<sup>th</sup> Infantry advanced, the enemy began to retire from their trenches. Some were caught by the Lewis Gun, others surrendered. At 2pm on the 24<sup>th</sup> April, after re-organisation, the Battalion moved back to the Brown Line.

During the attack nearly half the officers became casualties, of which, 4 were killed and 3 wounded. Of the O R's, 369 casualties were reported out of 570 men of which 79 were killed. Alister was one of the officers wounded. He was taken to Duisans Casualty Clearing Station, near Etrun, 9km west of Arras. He died and was buried there a week later, on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1917.<sup>xxiii</sup> It is now known as Duisans British Cemetery. Alister was 27 years old<sup>xxiv</sup>

Alister is also commemorated on the WW1 memorial at St Mary's Church and St Columba's United Reform Church, Moseley.

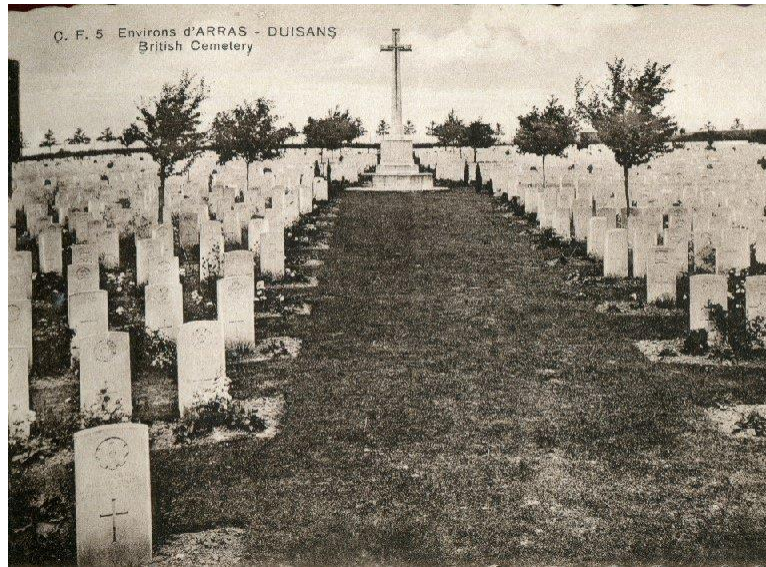
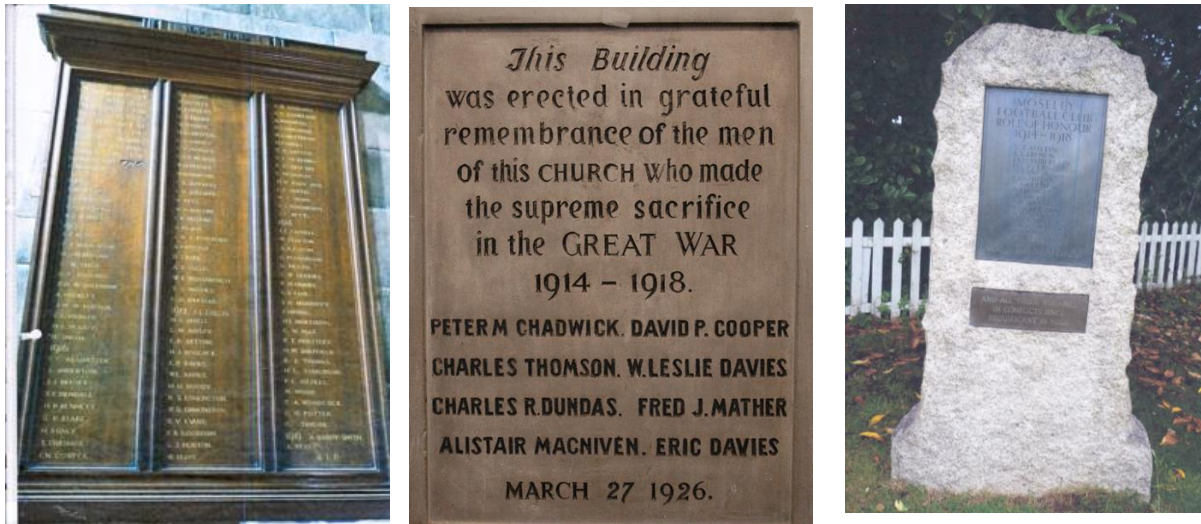


Figure 11: A 1928 postcard of Duisans British Cemetery



Figure 12

Alister's headstone at  
Duisans British  
Cemetery



**Figure 13: (Left) St Mary's Church WW1 memorial  
(Middle) St Columba's WW1 memorial  
(Right) Moseley Football Club (Rugby Union)**

Alister is also named on the Moseley Football Club (Rugby Union) WW1 memorial once in the grounds of Moseley Ashfield Cricket Club but now relocated to Moseley Rugby Club grounds in Billesley. He is also on the Roll of Honour at the Hall of Memory, Birmingham.

Alister left £75 5s 9d (about £6,000 today) to his younger brother Duncan. His address was given as 49 Wheeleys Road, Edgbaston.

Duncan joined the 8<sup>th</sup> Royal Warwickshire Regiment and was made 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1914. He went on to be a Captain in the Special Reserve and went to France on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1916. Duncan survived the war.



Annie died on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1916, while Alister and Duncan were in France. She left Alister £1793 8s 10d (about £143,000) and Duncan £742 14s 7d (about £59,000). Duncan applied for Alister's medals and his own. The address he gave on the application record was, Crown Mines Ltd, PO Box 103, Johannesburg, South Africa,

**Figure 14**

**Alister's mother Annie MacNiven**





## Mr. John Barton Williams

The death has occurred of Mr. John Barton Williams, of Knightlow Road, Harborne, founder and till recently managing director of J. Barton Williams and Co. (Birmingham) Ltd., metal merchants and refiners, of Leopold Street, Birmingham. He was 70. He was also one of the founders of the Birmingham Athletic Club.

During the second World War Mr. Williams was awarded the B.E.M. for his services as a warden. He was one of the first men to join the Birmingham Civil Defence (then A.R.P.) service and was head warden of the Holloway Head district. During an air raid he was injured when he was knocked down by blast from a bomb while on his way to assist in rescue work.



Figure 15

(Top left) Isabella's husband, John Barton Williams as a reservist in the Denbighshire Hussars

(Above) Newspaper obituary for John Barton Williams, 1955

(Left) Alister's sister, Isabella, known as Bella  
(Below) News of Isabella's death in 1977

WILLIAMS. — Isabella Elizabeth, widow of the late John Barton Williams, of Harborne, passed peacefully away in Queen Elizabeth Hospital, on May 26. Private funeral on June 2. No letters, please.

Alister's sister Isabella married John Barton Williams in late 1916. John was awarded the BEM for his services as an Air Raid Warden in WW2. He died in 1955. Isabella survived another twenty-two years. She died peacefully at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1977.<sup>xxv</sup> Duncan's twin sister Annie remained unmarried and died in 1950, leaving her estate of £458 3s 4d to her sister, Isabella and Marjorie Orr, a widow.



Alister's, cousin, Alister Orr MacNiven, son of his Uncle James (his father's brother) joined the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Highland Light Infantry before transferring to the Royal Flying Corps as an observer. He was believed killed on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1917, a few months after Alister. The news of Alister Orr MacNiven's death was from information obtained from a German message dropped into the British lines.<sup>xxvi</sup>

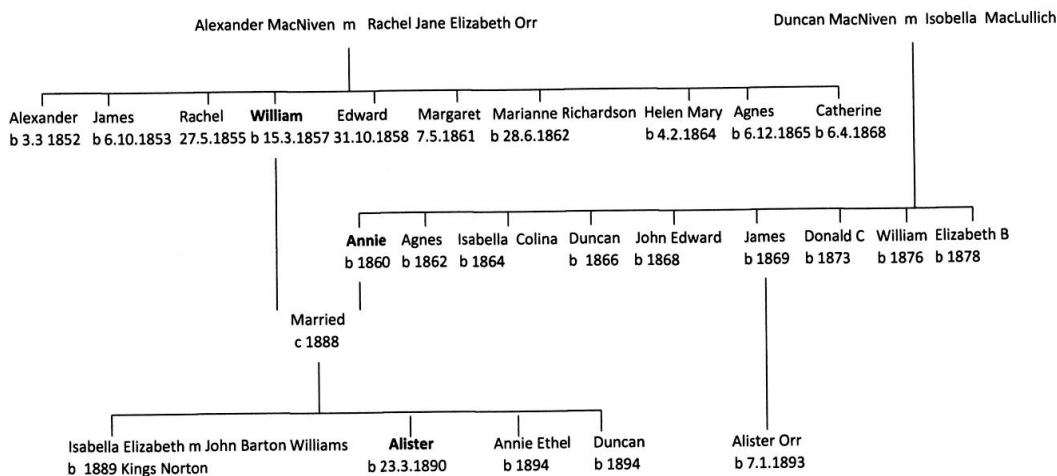
Figure 16

Lieutenant Alister Orr MacNiven 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion Highland Light Infantry attached to the Military Wing of 45<sup>th</sup> Squadron RFC as an observer

Researched and written by Edwina Rees Moseley Society History Group with thanks to Alister's great-niece Jane Lewis for the family photographs

### The MacNiven Family tree

### The MacNiven Family Tree



The tree is based on census information for 1871/1881, Scotland, Births and Baptisms 1564-1950, the birth certificate of Alister MacNiven and newspaper articles

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## Endnotes

- 
- i *Dundee Evening Post*, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1904
  - ii *Greenock Telegraph*, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1859
  - iii 1861 census
  - iv *Dundee Courier* 4<sup>th</sup> July 1894  
*Dundee Evening Post* 26<sup>th</sup> August 1904
  - v *Edinburgh Evening News*, 25<sup>th</sup> August 1904
  - vi 1901,1911 census
  - vii Hill Of Camstraddenin Farm  
<http://www.bordercollierescue.org/FandM/Content/Diversify.html>
  - viii 1851/1861 census
  - ix Scotland, Select Marriages, 1561-1910
  - x *Paisley Herald and Renfrewshire Advertiser*, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1970
  - xi The 1911 census records the couple had been married for 23 years.  
*Greenock Telegraph*, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1859  
*The Scotsman*, 18<sup>th</sup> September 1905
  - xii Kelly's Directory 1990
  - xiii England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index 1837-1915, Kings Norton, 1888, ¾, 6C, 404  
Birth Certificate of Alister MacNiven  
Kelly's Directory for 1888
  - xiv Kelly's Directory 1912  
1891 census

- 
- xv *The Morning Post*, London, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1888
- xvi England & Wales National Probate Calendar 1858-19666
- xvii Probate records
- xviii Wintersloe Magazine, No LX, July 1917
- xix British Army WW1 Medal Index  
*The Scotsman*, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1917
- xx *London Gazette*, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1915, Issue 29106, p2745
- xxi Unit History, Cameron Highlanders, Forces records  
<https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk/units/291/cameron-highlanders/>  
Wartime Memories Project  
<http://www.wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/allied/battalion.php?pid=481>
- xxii *The Scotsman*, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1917
- xxiii *The Scotsman*, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1917 and the *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1917 both state 30<sup>th</sup> April 1917 as Alister's date of death although the Commonwealth Graves Commission shows 1<sup>st</sup> May 1917. His name is spelt incorrectly in all three pieces of data
- xxiv *Birmingham Mail*, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1917
- xxv England and Wales Marriage Index 1916-2005, 1916, Kings Norton, 4/4, 6D, 253  
*Birmingham Daily Post*, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1977
- xxvi The National Archives, Officers after 1913, Ref WO 374/45269. A copy of this is available from the Moseley Society History Group

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- Figure 1 *The Scotsman*, 18<sup>th</sup> September 1905
- Figure 2 Scotland's Places  
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- Figure 3 *The Scotsman*, 18<sup>th</sup> September 1905
- Figure 4 Postcard from the personal archives of Edwina Rees
- Figure 5 Property Works  
<https://property.works/office/pw/18-19-bennetts-hill-birmingham-central-birmingham-b2-5qr>

- 
- Figure 6 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1915
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Photographs of Isabella MacNiven and her husband John Barton Williams with thanks to Jane Lewis
- Figure 16 *The Sphere*, 10<sup>th</sup> November 1917