

In Commemoration of the Ultimate Sacrifice of James Clark of the 1st Black Watch (Royal Highlanders)
World War I Centennial
By His Distant Cousin, Michael T. Tracy

The immortal lines: “They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old, Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.” “For the Fallen” written and first published in the *Times Newspaper* on Monday, 21 September 1914 this poem captures the dead of the war and the sacrifice these men ultimately gave. A fitting poem to all those men who served in France and Flanders during the Great War, soldiers like Private James Clark of the 1st Black Watch who fought on the battlefields of Flanders. This is his story.



Fig.1. In the Trenches, Photograph Courtesy Imperial War Museum, London (FWWG, Charles Bean image)

Early years

James Clark was born on Tuesday, 27 December 1887 at 149 High Street in Newburgh, Fife.¹ He was the second son of John Clark, a bleacher, and Margaret Simpson, both of Newburgh.

¹ Birth Record of James Clark, 27 December 1887, Newburgh Parish Records, Statutory Births 450/00 0003

	James Clark	1887	M	John Clark Baxter	Margaret Clark Mrs X Mark	1888
		December			Mother	January 1888
		Twentyseventh		Margaret Clark	Thomas Wilson	Newburgh
		5 th 8 th 12 th		Mrs Simpson	Registrar	
		High Street			Witness	
		Newburgh		1878 September 20 th		
				Newburgh		

Fig.2. Birth Record of James Clark, 27 December 1887, Newburgh Parish Records, Crown Copyright

The Clark family is found residing at 59 High Street in Newburgh, Fife. According to the 1901 Scotland Census for Newburgh, young James Clark is listed as being 13 years of age and going to school.²

The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the												[Page 9								
Civil Parish of	Parish Ward of	Ecological Parish of	Second-Class Parish of	School Board District of	Parliamentary Borough of	Parliamentary Division of														
Newburgh	Newburgh	Newburgh	Newburgh	Newburgh	Newburgh	Newburgh	No. of	ROAD, STREET, No. and No. or NAME of HOUSE.	ROOSES	NAME and Surname of each Person.	RELATION to Head of Family.	CONNECTION as to Marriage.	AGE (last Birthday)	PROFESSION or OCCUPATION.	Employer, Worker, or on Own Account.	If Working at Home.	WHERE BORN.	Qualif. or O. & E.	Whether married, single, widowed, or divorced.	Rooms with one or more Windows.
							53	59 High Street	1	John Clark Margaret Clark James Clark George Clark Mary Clark	Head Wife Son Son Daughter	Married Married S S S	72 72 17 17 17	London Worker Walter John Worker Walter Scholar	Walter Walter Walter Walter Walter		Newburgh Newburgh Newburgh Newburgh Newburgh			3
							54	63 Do	1	Robert Clark	Head	Married	75	Inspector of Police	Walter		Newburgh			1
							55	65 Do	1	Mary Clark	Wife	Married	75	Wife of Robert Clark	Walter		Newburgh			1
							56	69 Do	1	William Clark	Head	Married	75	Wagoner	Walter		Newburgh			1
							57	69 High Street	1	William Clark Mary Clark John Clark William Clark Mary Clark	Head Wife Son Son Daughter	Married Married S S S	75 75 17 17 17	Wagoner Wife of William Clark Scholar Scholar Scholar	Walter Walter Walter Walter Walter		Newburgh Newburgh Newburgh Newburgh Newburgh			2
							58	71 Do	1	John Clark	Head	Married	75	Wagoner	Walter		Newburgh			1
							71	80	1	Mary Clark	Wife	Married	75	Wife of John Clark	Walter		Newburgh			1
							6	Total of Houses...	62											Total of Windows, Rooms, 26

Fig.3. 1901 Scotland Census for Newburgh, Fife (James Clark listed on Line 4) Crown Copyright

² 1901 Scotland Census for Newburgh, Fife, Scotland; Enumeration District Number 1, Page Number 9, Line Number 4



Fig.4. High Street, Newburgh, Fife, Photograph Courtesy of Michael T. Tracy © 2003 Michael T. Tracy

Military Service

James Clark enlisted in the 1st Battalion of the Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) at a young age. With the destruction of many World War I military service records in England, an exact year of his enlistment cannot be determined. However, he is listed in the 1911 England Census for military personnel stationed in India. According to the census, James Clark is listed as 23 years of age and born in Newburgh, Fife.³

³ 1911 England Census for Military Personnel Stationed in India; Page Number 6, Line Number 28

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Return of all Commissioned Officers, Warrant Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers, Trumpeters, Drummers and Rank and File.

LINE NUMBER	NAME IN FULL		RANK	AGE Last Birthd ^y	CONDITION as to MARRIAGE		UNIT, or ARM OF SERVICE	TRADE or OCCUPATION if any	BIRTHPLACE	If absent on Census Night write "Absent" and for those in the United Kingdom specify whether in England, Wales, Scotland, or Ireland
	L	F			a	b				
1	Robert	Buair	Private	21 years	Single		Black Watch		Montrose Scotland	
2	Charles	Burrows	"	21	"		"		London "	
3	David	Burrows	"	21	"		"		London "	
4	James	McLaren	"	25	"		"		Stroudhampton "	
5	David	McLaren	"	23	"		"		Highland "	
6	William	Gombell	"	25	"		"		Edin "	
7	John	Spicer	"	23	"		"		London "	
8	Thomas	Criger	"	27	"		"		Edin "	
9	John	Milly	"	25	"		"		Stroudhampton "	
10	Richard	McLaren	"	21	"		"		Edin "	
11	Alexander	Wright	"	23	"		"		Stroudhampton "	
12	William	Burrows	"	23	"		"		Stroudhampton "	
13	Richard	Burrows	"	28	"		"		Stroudhampton "	
14	August	Edin	"	24	"		"		Stroudhampton "	
15	George	Burrows	"	22	"		"		London "	
16	William	Burrows	"	21	"		"		London "	
17	Robert	Burrows	"	24	"		"		Edin "	
18	David	Edin	"	23	"		"		London "	
19	James	Burrows	"	24	"		"		London "	
20	William	Burrows	"	21	"		"		Stroudhampton "	
21	Robert	Edin	"	23	"		"		Edin "	
22	Richard	Edin	"	24	"		"		Highland "	
23	David	Edin	"	23	"		"		Edin "	
24	Richard	Edin	"	24	"		"		Edin "	
25	Robert	Burrows	"	24	"		"		Edin "	
26	David	Burrows	"	21	"		"		Highland "	
27	John	Edin	"	23	"		"		London "	
28	James	Edin	"	23	"		"		Stroudhampton "	
29	John	Burrows	"	23	"		"		Edinburgh "	
30	William	Edin	"	23	"		"		London "	
			Total	30						

Fig.5. 1911 England Census for Military Personnel Stationed in India (James Clark listed on Line Number 28) Crown Copyright

By August of 1914 he is back in England with his regiment at Aldershot. When war broke out the 1st Battalion of the Black Watch proceeded to France almost at once, landing at Harve on the 14th, being amongst the first troops of the British Expeditionary Force.

The Battle of Mons

Mons is a small town in Belgium and was the site of the first major action of the British Expeditionary Force in the First World War. On Sunday, 23 August 1914 the 1st Black Watch took up positions along the Beaumont-Mons Road.⁴ The British Army attempted to hold the line of the Mons-Conde Canal against the advancing German armies. According to the 1st Black Watch War Diary of Monday, 24 August 1914: "Due to the vastly superior German armies, the Black Watch withdrew before noon and rejoined 1st Brigade near Bettignies."⁵

⁴ Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) 1st Battalion War Diaries, National Archives, War Office, Ref WO95/1263/3

⁵ Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) 1st Battalion War Diaries, National Archives, War Office, Ref WO95/1263/3

Hour, Date, Place	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
	<p style="text-align: center;">WAR DIARY or INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY. (Erase heading not required.)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Army Form C. 2118.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">51</p> <p><i>8 miles on all and the men under arms for 27 hours.</i></p>	
<p><i>Sunday, Aug 28</i></p>	<p><i>Ground at 6 pm. to take up a position between kilometre 19½ + 17½ on the BEAUMONT-MONS road. 3rd Inf. Bde right about TEISSANT.</i></p>	
<p><i>Monday, Aug 28</i></p>	<p><i>About ½ miles N. British artillery engagement visible from night of the position on the morning between MERBES STE MARIE and MERBES LE CHATEAU. Withdrew before noon and rejoined 1st Bde near BETTIGNIES. Marched through FEIGNIES to held at LA LOUVEVILLE.</i></p>	

Fig.6. War Diary of 1st Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) 24 August 1914, Photograph Courtesy of the National Archives, Kew, Crown Copyright

The British retreat from Mons lasted for two weeks and took the British Expeditionary Force to the outskirts of Paris.

The Miracle of the Marne

When the British and French Armies retreated from Belgium into France, they stopped at the River Marne, where they prepared to defend Paris. The strategic plan was to counter-attack the Germans along the Marne which would hopefully halt the German advance.

The 1st Black Watch and Private Clark moved east through Rozoy towards Voinsles on Sunday, 6 September 1914.⁶ They were met with considerable opposition from the German infantry units. 1st Black Watch came under heavy shell fire and were lucky to have only 5 casualties.⁷ By evening they camped at La Gloise farm.⁸ On Monday, 7 September 1914 1st Black Watch noted that the Germans were retreating hastily near Choisy.⁹ As such they were ordered on the next day to take positions near Bellot as the advance guard. According to the War Diary for Tuesday, 8 September 1914: "On reaching the heights above Bellot, we came under heavy shell fire. Found Bellot occupied by French cavalry who had suffered severely from shell fire."¹⁰

⁶ Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) 1st Battalion War Diaries, National Archives, War Office, Ref WO95/1263/3

⁷ Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) 1st Battalion War Diaries, National Archives, War Office, Ref WO95/1263/3

⁸ Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) 1st Battalion War Diaries, National Archives, War Office, Ref WO95/1263/3

⁹ Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) 1st Battalion War Diaries, National Archives, War Office, Ref WO95/1263/3

¹⁰ Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) 1st Battalion War Diaries, National Archives, War Office, Ref WO95/1263/3

The 1st Black Watch crossed the Marne River on the early morning of Wednesday, 9 September 1914 at Nogent and did not meet any German opposition.¹¹ They had halted any future German advancement and thusly saved Paris in the long run by doing their small part during the Battle of the Marne.

The First Battle of the Aisne

Between Compiègne and Berry-Au-Bac, the Aisne River winds westward and is about one hundred feet wide, ranging from twelve to fifteen feet deep.¹² The advancing German First Army immediately seized the higher northern side of the steep cliffs.

With little rest since the Battle of the Marne, 1st Black Watch was now moving toward the Aisne River. The British High Command ordered all British Expeditionary Forces to attack the right wing of the German First Army. This offensive began on the evening of Sunday, 13 September 1914.

According to the War Diary of the 1st Black Watch: “Sunday, 13 September 1914. Marched via Vauxcère-Longueval and crossed Aisne River. Becoming engaged from the direction of Moulins...”¹³ Engagements like these all along the Aisne River became known as the First Battle of the Aisne. Many British soldiers would lose their lives in futile attempts to break through the German lines of shallow trenches dug along the Chemin des Dames ridge. Opposed by machine gun fire and howitzers, British troops were unable to penetrate the German positions on the heights north of the Aisne River. As a result the war would descend rapidly into stalemate and both sides began to consolidate their ground by digging trenches. The first trenches of the Western Front were dug along the Chemin des Dames and would eventually stretch across Europe.



Fig.7. British Expeditionary Force Trenches along the Aisne River, France, Photograph Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum, London, © The Imperial War Museum, London

¹¹ Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) 1st Battalion War Diaries, National Archives, War Office, Ref WO95/1263/3

¹² Wikipedia.org. Assessed at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Battle_of_the_Aisne

¹³ Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) 1st Battalion War Diaries, National Archives, War Office, Ref WO95/1263/3

As for the 1st Black Watch and Private Clark they advanced up to the Chemin des Danes on Monday, 14 September 1914 and pushed back the German attack on Beaulne Ridge.¹⁴ After the attack the 1st Black Watch dug in at Chemin des Dames.¹⁵

A Place called Langemarck: Private James Clark's Final Battle

The First Battle of Ypres was a strategic battle for the Belgium town of Ypres and lasted from October to November 1914. The 1st Battalion of the Black Watch were ordered to Langemarck, a small town to the north of Ypres. The subsequent battle of Langemarck began on Wednesday, 21 October 1914 as an encounter battle, between the troops of the British I Corps which included the 1st Black Watch and German troops, both advancing to make an attack. The Black Watch had orders to build a series of trenches around the town which was under constant artillery attack from the Germans. These trenches were not yet connected in a continuous defensive line around Langemarck.

Death of Private James Clark

With his position noted in a defensive trench around Langemarck on Thursday, 22 October 1914 and Friday, 23 October 1914, Private Clark died on Friday, 23 October 1914. He was killed in action at the age of 26.¹⁶ He was later buried in the Artillery Wood British Cemetery near Ypres, Belgium.

25. *BOESINGHE JS-126^E*

CONCENTRATION OF GRAVES (Examination and Re-burials).

BURIAL RETURN.

Name of Cemetery of Re-burial ARTILLERY WOOD BRITISH CEMETERY. SP. 22.C.1.0.7.B.

Plot	Row	Grave	Map Reference where body found	Was Cross on grave?	Regimental particulars.	Means of Identification.	Were any effects forwarded to Base?
MEMORIAL ROW.		Mem. Cross No. 1.			✓ Capt. E. P. URQUHART, 1/Black Watch.		
					✓ Lt. C. L. C. BOWEN-LYON, -do-		
					✓ Sgt. A. McGUIRE, 7655. -do-		
					✓ Pte. J. POY, 9454 -do-		
					✓ Pte. A. BISHOP, 2112 -do-		
					✓ L/C. R. GEARY, 884 -do-		
					✓ Pte. G. PATERSON, 2450 -do-		
					✓ Pte. F. J. SMITH, 1787 -do-		
					✓ Pte. J. SHEPHERD, 550 -do-		
					✓ Pte. A. CAIRNS, 2257 -do-		
					✓ Pte. J. CLARK, 434 -do-		
					✓ Pte. G. DAVIDSON, 8678 -do-		
					✓ Cpl. W. SCOTT, 1101 -do-		
					✓ Pte. W. HAMILTON, S/2894 -do-		
			3. 28. C. 19 2-7. b.		✓ 17945 Pte. W. C. STEWART, 1/Gord. Hrs. 30.7.17. } <i>buried Dec 5/1914</i>		

MEMORIAL CROSS

Fig.8. Burial Return of Private James Clark (Entry Number 11), Commonwealth War Graves Commission

¹⁴ Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) 1st Battalion War Diaries, National Archives, War Office, Ref WO95/1263/3

¹⁵ Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) 1st Battalion War Diaries, National Archives, War Office, Ref WO95/1263/3

¹⁶ UK, Soldiers Who Died in the Great War, 1914-1919. Ancestry.com. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2008

The Clark family of Newburgh, Fife would record the memory of their son and brother on the family gravestone at Newburgh Parish Churchyard. The gravestone reads: "Also their son James killed in action 23 October 1914 aged 26."



Fig.9. Clark Family Gravesite, Newburgh Parish Churchyard, Newburgh, Fife, Photograph Courtesy of Michael T. Tracy © 2003 Michael T. Tracy

Newburgh itself would remember its war dead many years later. The Newburgh war memorial is a tall freestone pedestal of classical design supporting a highland infantryman. The names of the World War I dead are listed on stone tablets set into the faces of the pedestal with one stone tablet inscribed "Black Watch and J. Clark." The dedication tablet on the face of the pedestal is inscribed with the words: "Remember with thanks, giving the true and faithful men who in the years of war went forth from this parish for God and right. The names of those who returned not again are here inscribed to be honoured for evermore, 1914-1919."



Fig.10. Newburgh World War I Memorial, Newburgh, Fife, Photograph Courtesy of the Scottish War Memorials Project

The Last Post, Menin Gate, Ypres

Since 1928 a moving ceremony takes place every night in all weathers at 8:00 P.M. to honour the fallen. The Last Post Ceremony has now become part of the daily life in Ypres as the buglers sound the “Last Post” call. The tradition of the final bugle call of the day signaling the end of the soldier’s day dates back to the 17th century in the British Army. It symbolizes the ‘end of the day’ in so far as the dead soldier has finished his duty and can rest now in peace. In Bay 37, Stone S there is inscribed a name “Clark, J. 424.” Private James Clark and his fellow 1st Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) who perished gave the ultimate sacrifice for freedom. James Clark answered the Call of the Empire in the battlefield of Ypres in that long ago war. The tears and sorrows have long faded and yet the poet John McCrae immortalized the sacrifice of these many soldiers with the words: “To you from failing hands we throw the torch; be yours to hold it high. If ye break faith with us who die, we shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flanders fields.” Thus is the story and contribution of Private James Clark from Newburgh, Fife. He is

warmly commemorated in this Centennial year of World War I in grateful esteem and recognition by his distant cousin, Michael T. Tracy.

Memoratus in aeternum (Forever Remembered)

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