

Remembering the sacrifices of those with SC connections who served their country 100 years ago.

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Private William Watson, No.14171

William Watson was born on 16 June 1878 at Eastwood (Cathcart), Renfrewshire, Scotland, the third son of William Watson and his wife, Margaret Aitkenhead, who had married in 1873 in Renfrewshire. William was at home at Eastwood, Renfrewshire, with his parents and siblings in 1881 (at Cowglen), 1891 (at Pollockshaws) and 1901 (at Cowglen). In 1901 he was engaged in farm work. His mother died in 1912 at Cathcart and his father in 1915 at Pollok, by which time William and his sister Jeanie would have been in New Zealand. He had brothers still living in Scotland. William and Jeanie (Jane) appear to be of similar age, Jeanie being maybe the only daughter of the family. His sister Jeanie who was living at Kurow in 1916, and later at Patoka, Hastings, was William's next-of-kin.

William, a ploughman, had been working on Mr R. J. McKeown's estate "Kinoull" at Tycho for two years, and prior to that for Morrison Bros. at Levels Valley. He had served in the Territorials for three years at home in Scotland. Enlisting with the New Zealand forces in March 1916 he left ten days after his 38th birthday in June 1916 for England. After a brief period at Sling camp he went overseas and joined his battalion at Rouen in October. It appears that thereafter he remained in the field.

William Watson was reported missing on 14 June 1917; then missing believed killed; and after a Court of Enquiry declared to have been killed in action. Although the Battle of Messines was a striking success, the New Zealanders paid a heavy price for success – one of that heavy price, Scotsman William Watson, a "very fine type of man and well liked in the Tycho district".

William's oldest brother, Robert, who was born in 1874 at Pollockshaws, set out for South Africa in 1899 – Robert Watson, of Mueza Farm, Kalonia, Northern Rhodesia, was another of William's next-of-kin, and it was to Robert that his medals (British War Medal and Victory Medal) were to be sent, and the plaque and scroll.

His sister, Jeanie Watson, and his employer, Robert James McKeown, were the trustees of his estate as named in the will he left in 1916. Both Jeanie and R. J. McKeown had seen a letter written by Private William J. Blackwood to his brother Walter at Tycho. William Blackwood of the same company as William Watson and a mate of his, stated that he had seen Private William Watson killed and asking that Mr McKeown be advised at once. In his will W. Watson again showed his generous spirit, leaving the proceeds of his personal effects and his watch to the Red Cross Fund, before the residue of his property was to be divided among his brothers and sister(s).

William Watson is remembered on the Messines Ridge (New Zealand) Memorial, Belgium, a memorial to 827 New Zealanders with no known grave; and on the Timaru War Memorial Wall, the Taiko District War Memorial and the Taiko Hall Memorial Plaque.

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