

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

Published in the Timaru Herald 12 May 2018

By Teresa Scott

Rifleman James Munro Williamson, No.21948

James Munro Williamson, known as Jim, was born on 5 July 1875 at Ashburton, the younger son of Donald and Elizabeth (née Reid) Williamson. Donald and Elizabeth, who had married in 1858 in Caithness, Scotland, came to New Zealand in 1865 and were early settlers in the Ashburton district.

In 1871 Donald was instrumental in establishing a school in Ashburton, and in January 1890 he was appointed a member of the Ashburton High School Board. Mr Donald Williamson served on the Ashburton Borough Council from its inception (1878) until 1891, was Ashburton's second mayor for two years in 1879-1880, and from 1893 the Wakanui Riding representative on the Ashburton County Council. He built the Ashburton Hotel (about 1870); in 1874 he was on the committee to build the first specifically Presbyterian church; he was a member of the first Ashburton Agricultural and Pastoral committee (1878); and he also served as a Justice of the Peace in Ashburton from the mid 1880s through into the early 1900s.

James Munro Williamson married Ethel Mary Flatman, of Woodbury, on 26 December 1900 at St Thomas's Church, Woodbury. Three children followed - Elizabeth Marjory Sarah Williamson (Marjory) born on 29 November 1903 at Ashburton, Hamish Donald Williamson born 13 November 1908 at Gisborne, and Allan Sinclair Williamson born on 30 June 1915 at Geraldine.

In 1900 J. M. Williamson was elected a committee member of the Ashburton A. and P. Association. James and Ethel lived most of their married life in the Ashburton area, and from a young age he owned land. In mid 1902 his farm of 410 acres, situated in Lauriston Road, was sold. Also in 1902, James was one who subscribed to the Fallen Troopers' Memorial at Ashburton. Throughout his working life Jim Williamson had a close association with horses. By 1903, when he was still farming at Lauriston, he had acquired his purebred Clydesdale stallion "Sandow". Sandow was shown in the A. and P. Association's annual parade of horses in 1903, and again in 1904.

The 1906 Ashburton Trotting Club Autumn meeting saw Mr Williamson in the role of steward. In October 1906, soon after he had attended the North Otago Agricultural and Pastoral Association horse parade with his draught Sandow, he sold Sandow to a Southland client for 285 guineas. Later in the month he was back in Oamaru for the North Otago Jockey Club Spring meeting, where his horse Bantam Shot came

third in the Spring Handicap. At the 1911 Ashburton Trotting Club's Winter meeting, he won 5 sovereigns when his Prince Gift came in second in the Wakanui Handicap.

Another of Mr Williamson's interests was hunting with the hounds. In May 1905 he and other locals provided an excellent *al fresco* luncheon when the Christchurch Hounds visited Dromore. Riding Jack, he was also one of the Ashburton huntsmen,, and Mrs Williamson was driving. A month later he participated, again on Jack, when the South Canterbury Hunting Club held a meet at Tinwald.

The family was living at Allenton in 1913 when Ethel's mother died at their home. They had been briefly in Dunedin where Marjory (Madge) started school before stints at Mangapapa in the Gisborne area, Opawa in Christchurch and Orari Bridge. From 1915 Marjory and Hamish attended Timaru Main and Timaru West schools, the family then living in Seddon Street.

Nominating his wife Mrs E. M. Williamson, of 11 Seddon Street, Highfield, Timaru, as his next-of kin, James Munro Williamson enlisted on 3 May 1916. Thus he was 40 years old and married with two children. A third child was born after enlistment but before embarkation. James left Timaru by the express for Trentham on 3 May 1916. Rifleman Williamson embarked on 21 August 1916 at Dunedin, with the New Zealand Rifle Brigade, on the Mokoia, destined for Plymouth, England. He marched out of Sling on 15 November for France, where he was attached to the the New Zealand Infantry at Etaples, before joining his battalion in the Field in early December. On 7 January 1917 he was detached with the Railway Construction Party, in the field, rejoining his unit two months later. 30 April saw another detachment, this time to the Fascine Building Party, in the field. Only 23 days back with his unit, James Munro Williamson was killed in action at Messines on 15 June 1917, when a bullet passed through his neck. His comrades buried him, probably where he fell. He is commemorated on Messines Ridge (New Zealand) Memorial, Messines Ridge British Cemetery, Belgium. He is remembered also on the Timaru Memorial Wall, the Woodbury War Memorial, the Ashburton War memorial, and on his parents' headstone in the Ashburton Cemetery.

"I can truthfully say that I know I had in Jim as staunch a friend as anyone could wish to have . . . Jim did not suffer any pain. It was caused by a sniper and the bullet passed through his neck thereby making death instantaneous. All our mates speak very highly of Jim. He was ready at all times to do his duty and you have consolation in the fact that he died a noble death in the service of his king and country." wrote J. N. Wallace from the field. Timaru man James Norman Wallace, who had embarked with Jim and was himself killed in action later in 1917, had been a mutual friend of both Jim and Ethel.

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