

Private John Burt[©]
Regimental number: 353468
2nd Battalion, Royal Scots (Lothian Regiment)

born: 25 September 1891 - died: 23 May 1918

Private John Burt was the son of William and Janet Burt of Dunfermline, Fife, Scotland.¹ He died at No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 23 May 1918. He had been gassed before being admitted to the station three days earlier.² His battalion's war diary records the tragic events of 20 May—the day he was gassed:

10.15 am [Officer in Charge of] "D" company came to Battalion Headquarters and reported about 10 of his men "sick" but he did not consider that it was anything serious. He was instructed to return to his Company and to send down to the R.A.P. [Regimental Aid Post] only those who were incapacitated through sickness and were of no use as fighting man; this order was sent to all Companies.

11.30 am The Medical Officer intimated that there were about 40 cases, not serious, but suffering from gas; he agreeing that most of the cases were only slight.

12.45 am A large number of cases from other Regiments passed Battalion H.Q., and the situation is considered rather serious, owing to the weakness of our line. . . .

Most of the men of the Left Company were incapacitated from the effects of the gas poisoning, many of them being sick and most of them temporarily blind. These men proceeded to their Company Headquarters and it was arranged that runners would be sent up to guide them back to the R.A.P. Equipment, rifles, etc. were found all over the trenches, the men being unable to carry them, also two Vickers Guns and spare parts and two bodies of men who have been killed in the early morning. 30 to 40 men of the Right Company only slightly gassed were found and still able to carry on, and these men were ordered to collect the two Vickers Guns and spare parts and take them back to Bn H.Q. and also to collect, ready for removal, all salvage equipment etc. All Company Headquarters were visited and with the exception of 2 officers the remainder were quite blind, and an able [sic] to guide their man or themselves. Guides were sent up to bring everyone back to the SHROPSHIRE LINE and this was completed by about 6.30 p.m.

...

This gas poisoning is believed to have been caused by the men removing the Box Respirators sometime after the gas bombardment. Careful enquiries were made to find out if Box Respirators were being worn and it seems that they were worn continuously during the gas shell bombardment but were removed after the bombardment had ceased. The heat of the sun was beginning to make itself felt, and during the time the men were taking food a certain amount of gas had apparently been inhaled as no sickness was reported until after 8:30 am, and from 8:30 am onwards men were feeling sick but did not come down in large numbers until about noon.

There was then a lull till about 2 pm when large batches of other Regiments passed down which seemed to point to the fact that the gas must have been taken in when the masks were removed at meal times, or the food had been affected.

Box Respirators had now been worn for about 10 hours and men were suffering very much from the heat.

Chloride of Lime [*sic*] was used very fully but its effect was only very local the gas hanging in the wheat and thick vegetation ground and near the trenches which are situated in very close country.

The gas was just as bad in rear and all troops had been informed that under no circumstances was there to be any withdrawal and that the line had to be held at all costs, consequently the Battalion was not withdrawn earlier.³

John was buried on 24 May in Pernes British Cemetery (Plot 2, Row C, Grave 10) with the Canadian chaplain R. K. Lambert presiding. This military cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when No. 1 and No. 4 CCCSs came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.⁴ There were nearly 4,000 soldiers admitted to No. 1 CCCS in the month of May and 115 died.⁵

John was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).⁶

His parents had probably both predeceased him, because his sister Janet (now Mrs. Janet Gibson, living at 24 McAslin Street, Townhead, in Glasgow) was his next of kin. The chaplain sent her a letter to notify her of her brother's death.⁷

John's parents were William and Janet (nee Allan) Burt living at 6 Canmore Street in Dunfermline in 1891.⁸ They were both born in Dunfermline in about 1854.⁹ They married there on 26 November 1884 and John, their first son, was born there, at 10 James Place, at 10:40 a.m. on 25 September 1891.¹⁰ The couple had at least five more children: Mary (born in about 1889), John, William B. (born in about 1892), Christina A. (born in about 1894), Janet B. (born in about 1898) and Margaret D. (born in about 1900).¹¹

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¹ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 3 December 2018), entry for Burt, John, Service No: 353468

² "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 11 April 2018), entry for Burt, J.

³ "UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 April 2018), Regiment or unit: Royal Scots (Lothian Regiment), Sub-unit: 2nd Battalion, Division: 3rd Division, Diary dates: 1914 Aug 1–1914 Dec 31, Piece description: Piece 1423/1-7: 8 Infantry Brigade: 2 Battalion Royal Scots (1914 Aug–1919 May), Piece number: 1423

⁴ "Pernes British Military Cemetery," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/11600/PERNES%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>: accessed 13 January 2015)

⁵ "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13–1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN>)

http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G: accessed 15 December 2014)

⁶ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 30 April 2018), entry for John Burt

⁷ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 11 April 2018), entry for Burt, J.

⁸ "1891 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 April 2018), entry for John Burt, Enumeration district: 9, Household schedule number: 259, Line: 19, Roll: CSSCT1891_128

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 19 May 2018) entry for Burt, John, Reference: 424/ 730, Registration district: Peterhead. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission's record of John's death indicates that he was 38 when he died, which would mean he was born in 1880. However, the only likely record for a John Burt, son of William and Janet Burt from Dunfermline, with a sister Janet, is this one, in which John was born in 1891.

¹¹ "1891 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 April 2018), entry for John Burt