

## **Private Robert Melville Caple©**

**Regimental number: 28781**

**1st Battalion, Hampshire Regiment**

**born: about 1899 - died: 16 May 1918**

Private Robert Melville Caple was born in about 1899,<sup>1</sup> the son of Francis Henry and Grace Elizabeth Caple.<sup>2</sup> Francis was born on 29 September 1862 in Stogursey, Somerset, and his wife, the former Grace Elizabeth Penna, in about 1865 in Perranzabuloe, just outside Truro, Cornwall.<sup>3</sup> They married in Cardiff, Wales, in 1887<sup>4</sup> and had nine children: Thomas James (born in about 1890),<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Grace (born in about 1891),<sup>6</sup> Charles Henry (born on 12 December 1892),<sup>7</sup> Wilfrid Francis (born on 17 April 1896),<sup>8</sup> Joseph John (born in about 1897 but died the following year),<sup>9</sup> Robert, Sydney John (born on 5 January 1901),<sup>10</sup> Edwin Llewellyn (born on 13 November 1903)<sup>11</sup> and Josephine Teresa (born on 2 March 1906).<sup>12</sup>

Robert's father had different occupations and moved around—perhaps following the work. In 1891, Francis was a labourer and he, Elizabeth and their first son Thomas were living at 60 Bedford Street in Cardiff, Wales.<sup>13</sup> They probably left Wales a few years later and, in 1901, the family was living in Newlyn, over 200 miles away, close to Penzance, Cornwall. Francis was now a quarry man.<sup>14</sup> By 1911, the family had moved about 30 miles to Stairfoot Street in Trispen (near Truro) in Cornwall and Francis was a farm labourer.<sup>15</sup> Towards the end of his life, Francis was a rabbit trapper.<sup>16</sup>

Robert probably enlisted as a private in the Hampshire Regiment<sup>17</sup> in about April 1917.<sup>18</sup> He served with the 1st Battalion and, in mid-May 1918, his battalion was stationed about four miles north-west of Bethune in northern France.<sup>19</sup> About 10 a.m. on 16 May, a house near the front lines caught fire accidentally and 14 enemy soldiers ran out. Some men from Melville's battalion ran forward and fired on the fleeing soldiers. The enemy thought it was under attack and opened fire with rifles, machine guns and heavy artillery. This was kept up all day and throughout the following night.<sup>20</sup> Melville may have been killed in these exchanges. He was dead when he was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 16 May with shrapnel wounds to his head, back and left leg.<sup>21</sup> He was one of eight soldiers from the battalion killed or wounded that day.<sup>22</sup>

Melville was buried the following day in Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 1, Row E, Grave 24) with the Canadian chaplain R.K. Lambert presiding.<sup>23</sup> This cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when No. 1 and No. 4 CCCSs came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.<sup>24</sup> Melville was one of 198 admissions to No. 1 CCCS on 14 May but, in the whole month, a total of nearly 4,000 soldiers were admitted and 115 died.<sup>25</sup>

The chaplain sent a letter to his next of kin, his father, who was living on Highway Street in Erme, near Truro.<sup>26</sup> His father had the following inscription included on Robert's gravestone:

HE NOBLY ANSWERED  
HIS COUNTRY'S CALL  
HE GAVE HIS LIFE  
FOR ONE AND ALL<sup>27</sup>

Robert was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).<sup>28</sup>

Three of Robert's brothers also enlisted to serve in the Great War. Wilfred, who was a miller, was the first to sign up early in the war. He enlisted in December 1914 in Truro, joining the 3rd Battalion of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (regimental number: 17243).<sup>29</sup> However, in February 1915, he was declared medically unfit for military service because of a congenital deformity of his left arm. Wilfred probably married Violet Helen Broad Cole in 1920<sup>30</sup> and in 1939, was living in Tavistock, Devon,<sup>31</sup> where he was a dockyard fitter and boiler engineer. He died in 1961.<sup>32</sup>

Robert's brother Charles did not enlist until February 1916.<sup>33</sup> He was unmarried and a rabbit trapper when he enlisted as a private. He served in three different regiments: the Wiltshire Regiment (regimental number: 30210), the Worcestershire Regiment (regimental number: 70310) and the 2nd Battalion of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (regimental number: 27882). He remained in the United Kingdom until October 1916 and then may have gone to Egypt. He came home again in June 1918 and was demobilized in September 1919. Charles probably did not marry. In 1939, he was single and living in Truro, where he was a heavy worker on a farm.<sup>34</sup> He died in 1975.<sup>35</sup>

Robert's eldest brother Thomas married Mildred Goodman in 1912 in Truro<sup>36</sup> and immigrated to Canada sometime between 1912 and 1914,<sup>37</sup> when he lived in Cobalt, Ontario. However, it appears that Mildred did not go with him and he did not remain long, because his first two children were born in Truro: Kathleen Hester (also known as Esther) (born in 1913)<sup>38</sup> and Thomas Henry (born in 1914).<sup>39</sup> He returned to England to join the army, according to one record, in November 1912.<sup>40</sup>

Thomas may have served in the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (regimental number: 17241), enlisting early and going to France in March 1915.<sup>41</sup> After the war, he and Mildred went to Canada, sailing on the SS *Megantic* and arriving in Quebec on 23 May 1920. Thomas' brother Sydney was travelling with them.<sup>42</sup> Mildred must have been expecting their third child, because their daughter, Margaret, was born in about September 1920.<sup>43</sup> Thomas stated that he was returning to Cobalt, but later probably moved to Hamilton, Ontario.<sup>44</sup> Their fourth child, a son, Robert Melville—presumably named after his uncle—was born in about February 1924 in Canada.<sup>45</sup> However, by 1925, the family had moved to Buffalo, New York. As with the move to Canada, Thomas, then a factory hand, had preceded the family, arriving in May 1923.<sup>46</sup> Mildred followed in June 1924 with the four children.<sup>47</sup> They remained in the United States<sup>48</sup> where their last child, Charles Francis, was born on 25 April 1935.<sup>49</sup> Thomas died at the age of 59 in 1939.<sup>50</sup>

Thomas' brother Sydney did not remain in Canada. In 1926, he married Mildred Lobb in Newlyn (near St Columb-Major) in Cornwall<sup>51</sup> and, in 1939, was living at Governs Cottage in Truro, where he was a market garden labourer.<sup>52</sup>

All Robert's other siblings remained in England. Elizabeth married Philip Whitford in 1912 in Truro.<sup>53</sup> The last two children married in 1925, also in Truro—Edwin married Katie F. Julian<sup>54</sup> and Josephine married William T. Johns.<sup>55</sup> In 1939, both couples were living in Truro.

Robert's mother probably died in 1937.<sup>56</sup> In 1939, his father, a widower and retired rabbit trapper, was living at 29a St Clement Street in Truro.<sup>57</sup> He probably died in 1942.<sup>58</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 7 March 2018) entry for Caple, Robert Melville, Registration district: St Columb, Volume 05C, Page 82. Robert was known as Robert or Melville in different records.
- <sup>2</sup> *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org): accessed 3 December 2018), entry for Griffin Caple, Melville Robert [*sic*], Service number: 28781
- <sup>3</sup> "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Robert M Capell [*sic*], Registration district: St Columb, Sub-registration district: Newlyn, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 3, Piece: 2208, Folio: 24, Page: 3, Household schedule number: 17
- <sup>4</sup> "England & Wales Marriages 1837–2005," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Frances Caple, District: Hackney, County: Glamorganshire, Volume: 11A, Page: 574. Grace is known as Grace Elizabeth or Elizabeth Grace in different records.
- <sup>5</sup> "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 7 March 2018) entry for Caple, Thomas James, Registration district: Cardiff, Volume 11A, Page 296. A US social security record indicates that he was born on 16 June 1892 ("U.S., Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936–2007," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Thomas James Caple, SSN: 071030435). However, this is inconsistent with his UK birth record and subsequent census records.
- <sup>6</sup> "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 7 March 2018) entry for Caple, Elizabeth Grace, Registration district: Cardiff, Volume 11A, Page 295
- <sup>7</sup> "1939 Register," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Charles Henry Caple, RG101/6736E/002/20, Letter code: WBOH
- <sup>8</sup> "1939 Register," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Wilfred F Caple, RG101/6837A/023/29, Letter code: WGBD
- <sup>9</sup> "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 7 March 2018) entry for Caple, Joseph John, Registration district: Truro, Volume 5C, Page 296; "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 21 January 2018), entry for Joseph Caple, Registration district: St Columb, Inferred county: Cornwall, Volume: 5c, Page: 76
- <sup>10</sup> "1939 Register," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 22 February 2018), entry for Sydney J Caple RG101/6738I/003/4 Letter Code: WBPE
- <sup>11</sup> "1939 Register," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Edwin L Baple [*sic*], Ref: RG101/6738A/013/4, Letter code: WBOW
- <sup>12</sup> "1939 Register," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Josephine T Johns [*sic*], Ref: RG101/6736E/006/32, Letter code: WBOH
- <sup>13</sup> "1891 Wales Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Francis H Caple, Registration district: Cardiff, Sub-registration district: Cardiff, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 19a, Piece: 4390, Folio: 116, Page Number: 88
- <sup>14</sup> "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Robert M Capell [*sic*]
- <sup>15</sup> "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Bruno Whittle, Registration district: Truro, Registration district number: 296, Sub-registration district: St Clement, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 3, Household schedule number: 4, Piece: 13842
- <sup>16</sup> "1939 Register," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Francis H Caple, Ref: RG101/6709C/016/29, Letter code: WAXD
- <sup>17</sup> "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 6 December 2018), entry for Melville R [*sic*] Caple
- <sup>18</sup> Based on "War Gratuity Calculator" (<https://wargratitude.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/gratuity-calculator/>: accessed 18 May 2018); "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 6 March 2018), entry for Melville Robert [*sic*] Caple
- <sup>19</sup> "UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914–1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), Regiment or unit: Hampshire Regiment, Sub-unit: 1st Battalion, Division: 4th

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Division, Diary entry start date: 1914, Diary dates: 1914 Aug 1–1914 Dec 31, Piece description: Piece 1495/1-6: 11 Infantry Brigade: 1 Battalion Hampshire Regiment (1914 Aug–1919 Jun), Piece number: 1495

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* ([www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca): accessed 28 February 2018), entry for Caple, R. M.

<sup>22</sup> “UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914–1920,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), Regiment or unit: Hampshire Regiment

<sup>23</sup> “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* ([www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca): accessed 28 February 2018), entry for Caple, R. M.

<sup>24</sup> “Pernes British Military Cemetery,” *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/11600/PERNES%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>: accessed 13 January 2015)

<sup>25</sup> “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&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202\\_e.html&r=1&f=G](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&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G): accessed 15 December 2014)

<sup>26</sup> “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* ([www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca): accessed 28 February 2018), entry for Caple, R. M.

<sup>27</sup> *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org): accessed 3 December 2018), entry for Griffin Caple, Melville Robert [sic]

<sup>28</sup> “British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 6 March 2018), entry for Robert R [sic] Caple

<sup>29</sup> “British Army WWI Pension Records 1914–1920,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Wilfred Caple, Form title: Short Service Attestation

<sup>30</sup> “England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 26 November 2018), entry for Wilfred F Caple, Registration district: Bodmin, Inferred county: Cornwall, Volume: 5c, Page: 123

<sup>31</sup> “1939 Register,” *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Wilfred F Caple

<sup>32</sup> “England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Wilfred F Caple, Registration district: Tavistock, Inferred county: Devon, Volume: 7a, Page: 760

<sup>33</sup> “British Army WWI Service Records, 1914–1920,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 6 March 2018), entry for Charles Henry Caple

<sup>34</sup> “1939 Register,” *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Charles Henry Caple

<sup>35</sup> “England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Charles Henry Caple, Registration district: Bodmin, Inferred county: Cornwall, Volume: 21, Page: 0003

<sup>36</sup> “England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 26 November 2018), entry for Thomas J Caple, Registration district: Truro, Inferred county: Cornwall, Volume: 5c, Page: 273

<sup>37</sup> “Canada, Ocean Arrivals (Form 30A), 1919–1924,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Thomas James Caple; “1921 Census of Canada,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 March 2018), entry for Thomas Caple, Province or territory: Ontario, District: Temiskaming, District number: 129, Sub-District: Cobalt (Town), Sub-district number: 6, City, Town or Village: Town of Cobalt; Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865–1935,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Thomax [sic] James Caple

<sup>38</sup> “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 March 2018) entry for Caple, Kathleen Hester, Registration district: Truro, Volume 5C, Page 207

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- <sup>39</sup> "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 March 2018) entry for Caple, Thomas Henry, Registration district: Truro, Volume 5C, Page 199
- <sup>40</sup> "Canada, Ocean Arrivals (Form 30A), 1919–1924," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Thomas James Caple. This record suggests he was in Canada between March and November 1912, which corresponds to the time when he probably married in Truro.
- <sup>41</sup> "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Thomas J Caple
- <sup>42</sup> "Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865–1935," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Thomax [*sic*] James Caple; "Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865–1935," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 March 2018), entry for Mildred Caple
- <sup>43</sup> "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 March 2018), entry for Thomas Caple
- <sup>44</sup> "U.S., Border Crossings from Canada to U.S., 1895–1960," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 March 2018), entry for Thomas James Caple
- <sup>45</sup> "U.S., Border Crossings from Canada to U.S., 1895–1960," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 March 2018), entry for Mildred Caple
- <sup>46</sup> "U.S., Border Crossings from Canada to U.S., 1895–1960," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 March 2018), entry for Thomas James Caple
- <sup>47</sup> "U.S., Border Crossings from Canada to U.S., 1895–1960," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 March 2018), entry for Mildred Caple
- <sup>48</sup> "1930 United States Federal Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Thomas James Caple
- <sup>49</sup> "U.S., Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936–2007," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 March 2018), entry for Charles Francis Caple, SSN: 063280500
- <sup>50</sup> "New York, Death Index, 1880–1956," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 March 2018), entry for Thomas Caple, Certificate number: 56904
- <sup>51</sup> "England & Wales Marriages, 1538–1988," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Sydney Caple
- <sup>52</sup> "1939 Register," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 22 February 2018), entry for Sydney J Caple
- <sup>53</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 26 November 2018), entry for Elizabeth G Caple, Registration district: Truro, Inferred county: Cornwall, Volume: 5c, Page: 273
- <sup>54</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 26 November 2018), entry for Edwin L Caple, Registration district: Truro, Inferred county: Cornwall, Volume: 5c, Page: 299
- <sup>55</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 26 November 2018), entry for Josephine T Caple, Registration district: Truro, Inferred county: Cornwall, Volume: 5c, Page: 205
- <sup>56</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Elizabeth G Caple, Registration district: Truro, Inferred county: Cornwall, Volume: 5c, Page: 97
- <sup>57</sup> "1939 Register," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Francis H Caple
- <sup>58</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 March 2018), entry for Francis Caple, Registration district: St Austell, Inferred county: Cornwall, Volume: 5c, Page: 246