

Private Fred Curson

Regimental number: 150347

16th Canadian Infantry Battalion, Manitoba Regiment

born: 13 November 1891¹ – died: 10 March 1918

Fred Curson was just three years old when his mother Betsy died in 1894.² He would probably not have remembered her.

His father, John Curson (b. 1844)³, married his mother, the former Betsy Grindrod, (b. 1851)⁴ in December 1876 in Norden, near Rochdale, Lancashire.⁵ John was 28 and Betsy 24.⁶ Their first son, James Henry, was born six months later in the summer of 1877.⁷ In all, John and Betsy went on to have ten more children, eight of whom survived to be included in the 1911 Census.⁸ Fred was the youngest of the family. His siblings were: James Henry (b. 1877), George (b. 1878),⁹ William (b. 1881),¹⁰ Mary Alice (b. 1883),¹¹ Arthur (b. 1885),¹² John and Thomas (b. 1886),¹³ Mary Ann (b. 1887),¹⁴ Mabel (b. 1889)¹⁵ and Sydney (b. 1889).¹⁶

When Betsy died in July 1894, John was left to raise his children alone. Mary Ann was the only daughter still living by the time of the 1911 census. According to the documents located, the family always resided in Rochdale, Lancashire and, by the time of the 1891 Census, the three oldest boys still living at home were all working.¹⁷ John was employed as a carter; his sons, either in the mines or the cotton mills. The remaining children were all under ten years of age.¹⁸

It must have been difficult for Fred's father John to raise his family alone, but he appears to have done so. The family was still intact at the time of the 1901 Census.¹⁹ The 1901 Census shows Mary, the only daughter, living in a household of men.

By the age of 20, Fred, like his brothers, was working in the cotton mills, while his father was retired and his sister Mary was keeping house for her father and the three brothers who still remained at home.²⁰ Fred's older brothers, James Henry, George, William and Arthur had married and moved to their own homes. James Henry, George and Arthur remained nearby, while William had relocated to London.²¹ Fred's brother Arthur married Alice Bell in 1909²² and was working as a Cloth Stretcher in the 1911 Census²³

In the 1901 Census Fred's older brothers were all working either as carters or in the wool industry. By 1911 two of them, James Henry and William, had changed careers. James was employed as an insurance agent, while William was working as a police constable. In the summer of 1913, Fred alone sailed to Quebec on the SS *Teutonic* to seek a new life and work. He indicated on the passenger list that his ultimate destination in Canada was not known.²⁴

Two years later, in 1915, Fred was working as a farmer in Dunrea, Manitoba.²⁵ On 14 November 1915, he enlisted in the 79th Overseas Battalion, Manitoba Regiment.²⁶ He was described as 24 years old, 5 feet 9 inches tall, with a ruddy complexion, grey eyes and dark hair, streaked with grey. He listed his religion as Methodist and his next of kin as his sister, Mary Ann, living at 9 Grimes Cottages in Rochdale, Lancashire. Fred's father John had died nearly two years earlier, in 1914.

Just one week after his enlistment, Fred came down with a case of mumps and spent the next 16 days in hospital in Brandon, Manitoba.

On 24 April 1916, Fred and the rest of his company embarked in Halifax for England, on the RMS *Lapland*. They arrived on 4 May 1916 and, like many other Canadian soldiers, were dispatched for training in East Sandling. In late June, the 79th Battalion was transferred to the 16th Canadian Infantry Battalion and shipped to the field in France.²⁷ By the middle of July, they were part of the Battle of the Somme. This battle continued from the beginning of July through to 11 November 1916 and encompassed a number of smaller campaigns or battles. On 4 September 1916, when Fred was injured for the first time, the 16th Canadian Infantry Battalion was fighting alongside the Australian forces in one of those engagements—the battle for Pozières Ridge.²⁸

Fred was buried in a shell explosion at the Front and hit by either a bullet or shrapnel in the back of the neck. His fellow soldiers must have dug him out, because he was quickly evacuated to No. 11 General Hospital at Camiers, where his wound was diagnosed as severe. He was treated there and shipped on to Queen Mary's Military Hospital in Whalley, Lancashire. Fred spent the next 32 days in hospital, with his first 10 days restricted to bed rest. His wound healed well and he was then sent to the King's Canadian Red Cross Convalescent Hospital in Bushey Park, where he stayed for seven more days.²⁹ Finally, he was transferred back to the army, where he remained in England until May 1917 before returning to his battalion in France.³⁰



Norden Rochdale War Memorial

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Once back in the field, Fred successfully remained uninjured until late February 1918. Shortly after returning from 14 days leave, he was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 1 March 1918, suffering from dangerous shrapnel wounds to his back, chest, right leg and left foot.

The wound to Fred's back perforated to his left chest and he was in critical condition. He lingered for 18 days and died on 19 March 1918.³¹

He was buried the next day in Plot 2, Row E, Grave 23 of the the Barlin Communal Cemetery Extension, 2½ miles southwest of Noeux-les-Mines, France.³² Barlin is a village south-west of Bethune between the Bethune-Arras and Bethune-St. Pol roads. The Communal Cemetery and Extension lies to the north of the village on the road to Houchin. The extension was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and contains 1095 Commonwealth, 63 French and 13 German burials from the First World War.³³

Chaplain R. K. Lambert sent a letter to Fred's sister Mary Ann, who was still living at 9 Grimes Cottages in Rochdale, Lancashire, England.³⁴ By the time she received his medals and decorations in the early 1920s, Mary Ann had emigrated to Ninette, Manitoba, and was married to R. L. Hutchinson.³⁵ Fred's brother James H. Curson was living in Kidderminster, England, and received Fred's scroll and plaque.³⁶

Fred's brother Sydney, who had enrolled in the Royal Army Medical Corps, was killed in Greece on 2 January 1919. He is buried in the Mikra British Cemetery in Salonica.³⁷ Both Fred and Sydney are remembered on the war memorial in Norden, Rochdale, Lancashire.³⁸

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¹ "England and Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 23 February 2017), entry for Fred Curson, Inferred county: Lancashire, Volume: 8e, Page: 43

² "Manchester, England, Church of England Deaths and Burials, 1813–1985," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 February 2017), entry for Betsy Cursen [*sic*], Parish: Ashworth, St. James, Reference number: GB127.L101/1/3/4

³ "Norfolk, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 February 2017), entry for John Curson, Parish: Horningtoft, Norfolk, England

⁴ "England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538–1975," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 23 February 2017), entry for Betsy Grindrod, Baptism place: Ashworth, Lancashire, England, FHL file number: 1545705

⁵ "Manchester, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754–1930," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 February 2017), entry for John Kilson and Betsy Grindrod, Parish: Norden, St. Paul, Reference number: L249, Item number: 2, Archive roll: 900

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ "England and Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 February 2017), entry for James Henry Cursen [*sic*], Inferred county: Lancashire, Volume: 8e, Page: 58

⁸ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 February 2017), entry for John Curson, Registration district: Rochdale, Registration district number: 470, Sub-registration district: Spotland and Norden, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 15, Piece: 24649

⁹ "General Registry Office," (www.gro.gov.uk: accessed 11 September 2017), entry for George Curson, 1878, D. Quarter in Rochdale, Volume: 08E, Page 58

¹⁰ "General Registry Office," (www.gro.gov.uk: accessed 11 September 2017), entry for William Cursen [*sic*], 1881, M. Quarter in Rochdale, Volume: 08E, Page 52

¹¹ "General Registry Office," (www.gro.gov.uk: accessed 11 September 2017), entry for Mary Alice Cursen [*sic*], 1883, M. Quarter in Rochdale, Volume: 08E, Page 52

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- ¹² “General Registry Office,” (www.gro.gov.uk: accessed 11 September 2017), entry for Arthur Curson, 1885, M. Quarter in Oldham, Volume: 08D, Page 705
- ¹³ “General Registry Office,” (www.gro.gov.uk: accessed 11 September 2017), entry for John and Thomas Curson, 1886, S. Quarter in Oldham, Volume: 08D, Page 702
- ¹⁴ “General Registry Office,” (www.gro.gov.uk: accessed 11 September 2017), entry for Mary Ann Curson, 1887, D. Quarter in Rochdale, Volume: 08E, Page 45
- ¹⁵ “General Registry Office,” (www.gro.gov.uk: accessed 11 September 2017), entry for Mabel Curson, 1881, S. Quarter in Rochdale, Volume: 08E, Page 53
- ¹⁶ “General Registry Office,” (www.gro.gov.uk: accessed 11 September 2017), entry for Sydney Curson, 1889, S. Quarter in Rochdale, Volume: 08E, Page 53
- ¹⁷ “1891 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 February 2017), entry for Fred Curson, Registration district: Rochdale, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 8, Piece: 3335, Folio: 116, Page: 13
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ “1901 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 January 2017), entry for Fred Curson, Registration district: Rochdale, Sub-registration district: Scotland Further Side, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 07, Household schedule number: 40, Piece: 3838, Folio: 120, Page: 7
- ²⁰ “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 February 2017), entry for John Curson
- ²¹ “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 February 2017), entry for James Curson, Registration district: Burnley, Registration district number: 472, Sub-registration district: West Ward, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 29, Piece: 24852; “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 February 2017), entry for George Curson, Registration district: Bury, Registration district number: 462, Sub-registration district: Heywood, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 5, Piece: 23495; “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 February 2017), entry for William Curson, Registration district: Lambeth, Registration district number: 25, Sub-registration district: Lambeth Church, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 14, Piece: 1956
- ²² “Manchester, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754–1930,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 11 September 2017), entry for Arthur Curson & Alice Bell, Parish: Norden, St. Paul, Reference number: L249, Item number: 2, Archive roll: 900
- ²³ “1911 Census of England & Wales,” Family Search, (www.familysearch.org: accessed 18 September 2017), entry for Arthur Curson Registration District: Rochdale, Sub-District: Scotland and Norden, Parish: Norden, County: Lancashire
- ²⁴ “Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865–1935,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 February 2017), entry for Fred Curson, Date of arrival: 16 Aug 1913
- ²⁵ “Service Files of the First World War, 1914–1918 - CEF,” *Library and Archives Canada* (www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx: accessed 22 November 2017) entry for Fred Curson, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 2238—21, Item number: 130836, Digitized service file
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ “Service Files of the First World War, 1914–1918 - CEF,” *Library and Archives Canada* (www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx: accessed 22 November 2017) entry for Fred Curson, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 2238—21, Item number: 130836, Digitized service file
- ²⁸ *The History of the Battles of the 16th Battalion (the Canadian Scottish) Canadian Expeditionary Force in the First World War, 1914–1916*, (<https://books.google.ca/books?id=IgsaAQAAMAAJ&pg=PR11&lpg=PR11&dq=battles+of+the+16th+battalion&source=bl&ots=SpOLzGFmAm&sig=tj-1oA8l7n3kG5BW30G5DCMby9k&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiY7fa0yKbSAhXK6YMKHXiUCZc4ChDoAQguMAY#v=onepage&q=battles%20of%20the%2016th%20battalion&f=false>: accessed 23 February 2017), entry for The Battles of the Somme

²⁹ "Service Files of the First World War, 1914–1918 - CEF," *Library and Archives Canada* (www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx: accessed 22 November 2017) entry for Fred Curson

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 25 August 2016), entry for F. Curson

³² "Barlin Communal Cemetery Extension," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 25 July 2016)

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 25 August 2016), entry for F. Curson

³⁵ "Service Files of the First World War, 1914–1918 - CEF," *Library and Archives Canada* (www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx: accessed 22 November 2017) entry for Fred Curson, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 2238—21, Item Number: 130836, Digitized service file

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 February 2017), entry for Sydney Curson, Regimental number: 29480, Regiment: Royal Army Medical Corps; "UK, Commonwealth War Graves 1914—1921 and 1939—1947," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 February 2017), entry for S. Curson, Cemetery: Mikra British Cemetery, Salonica, Regimental number: 29480

³⁸ "Norden War Memorial," Rochdale, Norden Village War Memorial, Edenfield Road (http://www.mfhs.org.uk/data/war_memorials_images.php?memorial=8#Names: accessed 25 August 2016) list of names - Pte. Fred Curson, Manchester's Canadian Scottish