

## **Donald MacPherson (1887-1918)**

Donald was born in Dundee on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1887, the son of George MacPherson and Margaret Robertson. His parents originally hailed from Alvie and Weem respectively and were married in Moulin in 1878. His father George was a Wines & Spirits Dealer with shop premises at 45 Hilltown.

Donald was their only son. He had five sisters, one of whom was his twin, Isabella. The three older siblings were born in Pitlochry; and the twins and a younger sister were born in Dundee. Donald was born at 36 North Lindsay Street, and the family would later move to 20½ Caldrum Street.

He attended Morgan Academy, and became a journalist with the Courier in Dundee and Arbroath, first as a reporter and then on the editorial staff. A 'crack shot', Donald gained many honours in miniature rifle competitions prior to enlisting into the Black Watch, 13th (Scottish Horse) Battalion in 1914. In 1914 he was promoted to Corporal, and by the time of his death in 1918 he had been promoted to Sergeant. He served first of all in Gallipoli, and after a bout of illness contracted there, returned to service in Egypt, the Balkans and France.

During his war service, he was mentioned in despatches of 7<sup>th</sup> June 1918 by Lt. Gen. George Milne "for gallant conduct and distinguished services rendered during the period from the 21<sup>st</sup> September, 1917, to February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1918." This related to his work as a scout leader in the Allied campaign in Salonika. As a known marksman, he was often called upon for sniping duties.

On a fortnight's leave after the Salonika campaign, he returned home to Dundee and on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1918 married Eleanor Sharp Peebles, a Milliner. Eleanor's father Thomas was a Watchmaker at 15 Union Place. They were married at 1 Fort Street, Dundee by Rev. Hugh Watt of St Enoch's Parish Church. The couple's last known address in Dundee was 5 Westfield Lane.

After his marriage Donald returned to the front in France and was killed in action, at the Battle of the Beaurevoir Line (part of the Hindenburg line) on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1918 - a mere six weeks later. He was 31. He was reportedly killed instantaneously by a shell fragment, and Eleanor was given the news by her younger brother George, who was a Corporal in the same Company (but not Unit) as his brother-in-law. An extract from George's letter to Eleanor reads,

"He suffered no pain whatever, and died like a soldier with his face to the front. Some of the scouts brought his body in yesterday, and we buried him to-day in a little village. The minister rendered the service beautifully. After putting a cross over his head we came away and left him sleeping peacefully. All the Dundee boys ask me to send their deepest sympathy, and I know they mean it, as Donald was one of the best".

*Evening Telegraph and Post, October 18 1918*

Donald is buried in Templeux-Le-Guerard British Cemetery in the Somme region of northern France. George was wounded in November 1918, but went on to survive the war. Prior to the war he had worked in the offices of M. & C. Hill, jute spinners.

Tragically, Donald would never see his son (also Donald), who was born posthumously in 1919. Donald and Eleanor had been married for only two months before his death. Eleanor moved back in with her parents at 321 Blackness Road after Donald's death.

She went on to endure the additional tragedy of losing her son, also to war. Donald was a wireless telegraphist in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, and was aboard naval trawler HMS Alouette when it was torpedoed by a U-boat and sunk in the Atlantic Ocean on 19th September 1942. 17 of

her 44 crew, including Donald (aged 23), were lost. Eleanor died in Dundee in 1980 at the age of 91. She never remarried.

The First World War also had an impact on the wider MacPherson family. Donald's uncle, James McPherson, emigrated from Scotland to Australia, and in 1890 married Helen Stevenson (also a Scot, born in Stirlingshire). They settled in Rockdale, a suburb of Sydney. Their two oldest sons, Thomas and George, were also killed in WW1 having enlisted in the Australian Infantry. They were both killed in the Somme Campaign in 1916, that regiment having returned to operations in France after taking part in the Gallipoli campaign aged 23 and 25.