



ELLESMERE PORT WAR MEMORIAL PROJECT

20473 Private HENRY 'HARRY' GRIFFITHS
3rd Battalion Cameron Highlanders
Died 24 October 1920 Aged 35

Henry Griffiths was born in 1886 in Ellesmere Port to parents Robert and Harriet. Robert was born and brought up working on a farm, the son of a farm labourer, Thomas in Saughall, a village in deepest South Wirral, a couple of miles north of Chester, situated on the old course of the River Dee. It had been a tough start for young Robert, his mother dying while he was just into his teens. By 1881, Robert was living with the Carter family on their farm, in Coal Pit Lane, just outside Saughall village, on land now dissected by the M56 motorway. He soon abandoned the poorly paid agricultural work and moved to Ellesmere Port, where he found work as a waterman, on the dock estate, then met and married his wife Harriet, a local girl. They moved into 17 Church Street, just behind Christchurch, and had two children, **Henry**, in 1886, and Beatrice four years later.

When Henry was of age he found work in the leadworks, joining his father who was also now working there. In the Port he met and married Martha on 28 October 1908 in Christchurch, the local parish church, and moved into 11 Cook Street nearby. By 1911, Henry was in the Iron works where he trained as a crane driver. Two children were born before the war, George William in 1911 and Gladwyn in February 1914.



Left: Men of the 6th Battalion, Cameron Highlanders during training in Scotland

When the war came, Henry, married with two young children, continued in his job until the following year when he was encouraged to volunteer by a possible friend Private 16423 D. MacGregor of the Cameron Highlanders, who was recorded on Henry's attestation on 11 August 1915 as having handing him a recruitment notice (although of course he could have been handed this outside the recruitment office). He was posted to the 3rd Battalion for training. This was a reserve Battalion which supplied troops to the Battalions in action overseas. The 3rd Battalion,



11 Cook Street, Ellesmere Port (blue door)



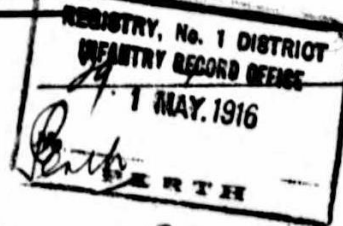
*Station Road just before WW1
– Cook Street is off this road to the right of the handcart in the centre.*

Cameron Highlanders

(11000) W 0004-1901 50,000 pads 1914 J.P. & Co., Ltd.

MEMORANDUM

29
11



1916

From Regl Paymaster
To O/S Records. No. 1 District

20473 Re H Griffiths
Letter from wife of above passed to
you please, this man was discharged
31/12/15. Separation also paid up to
4 for 2/1/16

Deitch
Acting Paymaster,
for Registrar & Paymaster.

Cameron Highlanders

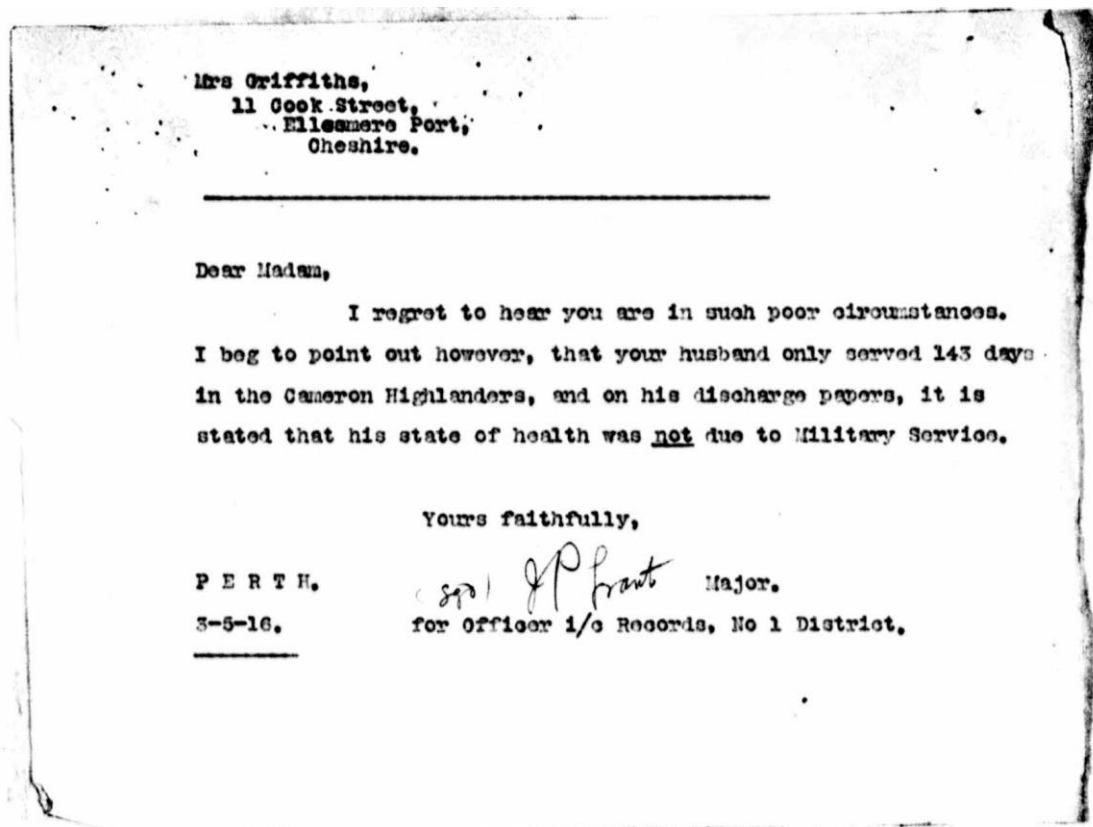
Griffiths wife states depending on charity.
Doctor says not able to work for months.
wants help.

Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders was based at Inverness when war broke out in August 1914, it moved on mobilisation to Cromarty and then Invergordon, remaining a depot and training unit which was where Henry was despatched to in August 1915. Unfortunately, heavy casualties at the front meant that men from the reserve Battalion were soon posted overseas, and on 29 March 1916 men of the 3rd left Scotland to join the 7th Battalion of the Queens Own Cameron Highlanders in France.

However, Henry was not with them. He was not a well man, and had been showing signs of acute fatigue as training stepped up. Time spent out in the field in the harsh Scottish winter had led to further exposure. By late 1915, it was clear he could not carry on, and on 31 December 1915 he was discharged under King's Regulations, as 'not likely to become an efficient soldier'. He had served a total of 143 days. There was no shame in this. The government were become acutely aware of the numbers of volunteers who were proving to be not fit enough for the front line, giving clear evidence of the poor health of much of the working population. By late 1915, on average two in five men were so unfit they were having to be discharged. It would not be until 1 September 1916 before the Silver War Badge and certificate were issued to such men to show they were officially ineligible. Until that time, hundreds had already been presented with a white feather. Henry was issued with an armlet on 26 January 1916, which was likely to show he had volunteered and had been discharged medically unfit.

Returning home in January 1916, he was never the same man. So much so, that he was so ill he could not hold down a full time job and the family began to depend on friends and family, and local charity. It seems the last army pay was in January 1916, and as the family were beginning to suffer acute hardship, Martha wrote to the Army Office for the Cameron Highlanders in Perth, appealing for help.

The army began to investigate the case, but were of the view that his illness was not due to military service. However, although they were following regulations to the letter, they did try to find an agency that could give support;



An initial appeal was made to the Soldier's and Sailors' Family Association, but they were unable to take their case on, but did forward Martha's letter to the Chester Branch of the Soldier's and Sailor's Help Society, who did give support for a few months in the hope that Henry could gradually support his family.

The Secretary,

S.S.S. F.A.

22 Queen Anne's Gate,
Westminster. S.W.

The attached letter is from Mrs Griffiths, the wife of
No 5/20473, Pte Harry Griffiths who joined the Cameron Highers
11-8-15 and was discharged as not likely to become an efficient
soldier on 31-12-15.

On his discharge paper it is stated that his state of
health was not due to military service, and I therefore regret
I can do nothing for himself or his wife.

I am forwarding you this letter however, on the chance
that you Representative in Cheshire may be able to do anything
in this matter, after making of course, any investigations which
may be deemed advisable.

Should your Association not be able to deal with this
matter, perhaps you would kindly forward the correspondence
to the Charity Organization Society or any other similar
society which may have a branch where the ~~soldier~~ is.

in the locality of

P E R T H.
3-5-16.

(Sgt) J P Pratt Major.

for Officer i/o Records, No 1 District.

TELEPHONE: VICTORIA 285.

TELEGRAMS: GILDEA VIC. LONDON.

THE SOLDIERS' & SAILORS' FAMILIES ASSOCIATION.

All Communications to be addressed to

"THE SECRETARY"

RESERVE S.F. DISTRICT
INFANTRY RECORD OFFICE.

PLEASE QUOTE AT THE HEAD OF
ANY REPLY

3645

No. 5 MAY 1916
PERTH



23, QUEEN ANNE'S GATE,
WESTMINSTER, S.W.

4th May, 1916.

Mrs. Griffiths,
wife of S/20473 Private Harry Griffiths,
late Cameron Highlanders.

Dear Sir,

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your communication of yesterday's date, respecting the case of the above.

As the Soldiers' and Sailors' Help Society deals with the cases of discharged men and their dependants, I have forwarded the correspondence on to the District Head of that Society, The Castle, Chester, and have asked him to deal with the case.

Yours truly,

John A. L. L.

Captain,

Secretary.

The Officer in charge of Records,
No. 1 District,
Cameron Highlanders Section,
Record Office, Perth.

L/W 13.

The Secretary,
Soldiers & Sailors Help Soc.,
District Headquarters,
The Castle,
CHESTER.

Copy

Dear Sir.,

In May 1916. I had a letter from a Mrs Griffiths, wife of S/30473. Pte H. Griffiths, Late Cameron Highlanders, complaining of the hard circumstances in which she and her husband were placed.

This letter I forwarded (in error) to the Secretary, S.&S. F.A. Queen Anne's Gate, London S.W. on 3-5-16 but I heard from them (4-5-16) that they had passed the letter to you.

I have now had another letter from Mrs Griffiths, saying her husband had never been able to do a day's work since discharge, had had all his teeth extracted while in the Army, and none replaced, and was practically in a dying condition. In addition, she states that he has a wife and 3 children dependent upon him.

I should be much obliged if you would kindly ascertain whether this woman's statements are true, and if, in your opinion the husband has suffered in consequence of his 4½ months' service in the Army.

It is quite possible that even if he is really ill now, he may have been ill, long before he ever enlisted.

If you consider that he has suffered in health, from being in the Army, could you please obtain a Doctor's Certificate to that effect, and forward it to this Office. If possible, the Doctor should be one who examined the man before he enlisted.

Yours faithfully,

P E R T H.

14-7-16.

(Sd) *J. A. Grant*
Major.

for Officer i/c Records, No 1 District.

Name	Corps	Reg. No.	Rank	Date of Discharge	Cause of Discharge
Griffiths Harry	Cameron Highlanders 3 Bn.	5/20473	Private	31.12.15 Enlistment 11.8.15	Para 392 iii H.R. (C.C.) Sickness
Date of application	(a) Badge	(b) Medal			
No. of File	"	"			
Address of applicant :—					
Action taken		Dist 9/220.			
W5658—8733 60/000 8/16 HWV(P915) G16/1202 9189—H23 S 200,000 11/16					

Medal Card showing discharge and no medals issued

In July, the situation was so desperate that Martha Griffiths again wrote to the Army Pensions Office,

11 Cook St
Ellesmere Port
Cheshire
4th October 1916

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you on behalf of my husband H.Griffiths No.20473, late of the 3rd Cameron Highlanders, who was discharged on 31st of December last after serving 5 months and has not been able to do a days work since. When he was passed he was medically fit and was never under a doctor, but he came home a dying man and has never been able to get his strength back yet, and I think it is about time that something was done for cases like his as he has got a wife and 2 little children depending on him, and only for a little help from the Help Society we would have been starving, and they have stopped that for 2 months now.

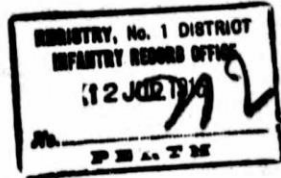
He has been under Doctor Finney, and he says it was due to the cold as he got up in Scotland. He has tried to do a light job to get a few shillings, but has had to give it up and there is nothing but the workhouse staring him and his children in the face and that is after him trying to do his duty for his King and country but they have not done their duty to me, since they also took all his teeth out but never replaced them. Hoping you will be able to do something for him,

I remain your obedient (servant)

Mrs H. Griffiths

When Henry was medically examined at the time he signed on, the doctor noted that his teeth were in a dreadful condition, Henry having only one in the upper jaw, and this was at the age of only 32, suggesting his general health was already poor, despite being passed fit.

Yours Obedient
Mrs Griffiths
11 Cook St.
Ellesmere Port
Cheshire



11 Cook St
Ellesmere Port
Cheshire

Dear

Sir

I am writing to you
on behalf of my husband
H. Griffiths No 20473
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who was discharged on the
31st of December last after
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country but they have not
done their duty to me
since they also took all
his teeth out but never
replaced them hoping you
will be able to do some
think for him & remain



(Form D.9)

WAR PENSIONS, &c., STATUTORY COMMITTEE,

AS.

22 Abingdon Street,

Westminster. S.W.

21st October, 1916.

Ref. No. D/2374

Sir,

I am directed by the Statutory Committee
Pte. H. Griffiths, to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the
S/20473, 4th instant with reference to the man named in the
late margin, and to say that the case is being investi-
Cameron High- gators.
landers.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

H. W. Russell
Secretary.

Officer i/o Records,
No. 1 District,
Cameron Highlanders Section,
Record Office,
Perth.

Further correspondence resulted, before the Army Medical Board decided to meet with Henry to resolve the issue. The board members actually travelled to him, rather than the other way around, which may indicate how ill he was at the time. The board agreed to meet at the mutually convenient venue of the Wolverhampton Iron Works, his former employers, a couple of streets from Henry's home, where they determined,

‘After examination by all the members of this Examining Medical Board assembled at the Refectory of the Wolverhampton Corrugated Iron Company, Ellesmere Port on the 22nd day of May 1917, it is unanimously agreed that the man stating himself to be Harry Griffiths 11 Duke [Cook] Street, Ellesmere Port described on this army form, is suffering from Glycosuria and in consequence is permanently and totally disabled for military service’

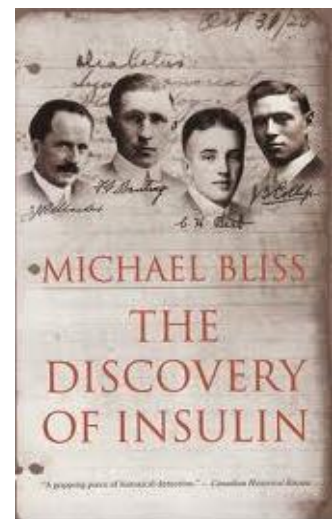
(signed by all)

Glycosuria is nearly always caused by high blood glucose levels, most commonly due to untreated diabetes. In the opinion of the medical board this wasn't caused by his army experience, but was a long term problem.

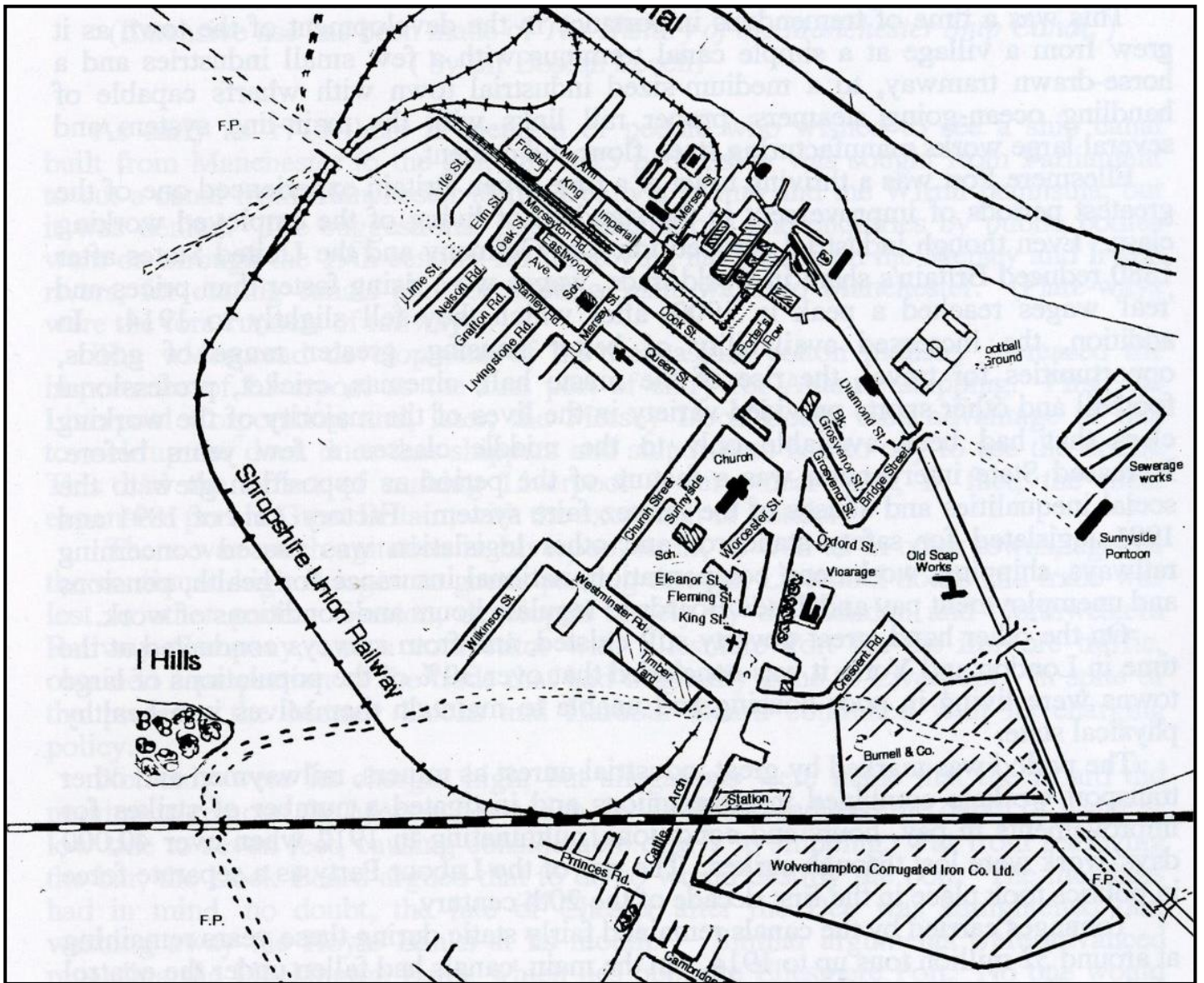
How the family supported themselves from then on is not recorded, but Henry's condition was only going to deteriorate. In the early 20th century, physicians could do little to combat diabetes and patients remained little more than human guinea pigs. Some doctors prescribed low calorie diets with as little as 450 calories per day. This diet prolonged the life of people with diabetes but kept them weak and suffering from near starvation. Pity poor Henry if this was his treatment considering what he had already endured.

In his book, *The Discovery of Insulin*, Michael Bliss describes the painful wasting death of the diabetic before insulin:

‘Food and drink no longer mattered and often could not be taken. A restless drowsiness shaded into semi-consciousness. As the lungs heaved desperately to expel carbonic acid (as carbon dioxide), the dying diabetic took huge gasps of air to try to increase his capacity. ‘Air hunger’ the doctors called it, and the whole process was sometimes described as ‘internal suffocation.’ The gasping and sighing and sweet smell lingered on as the unconsciousness became a deep diabetic coma. At that point the family could make its arrangements with the undertaker, for within a few hours death would end the suffering.’



Tragically for Henry Griffiths, it would not be until 1921 before the miracle extract, insulin, would be discovered and ensure diabetes was no longer a terminal disease. He passed away on 24 October 1920, aged only thirty-five, and was buried in Christchurch cemetery, the local parish churchyard for Ellesmere Port. [Another soldier, Arthur Williams, also lies in the same churchyard, having also succumbed to complications caused by diabetes].



Above: Ellesmere Port in 1910. Cook Street is the small street immediately above the station.

Right: The Wolverhampton (Merseyside) Iron and Steel Works



CHRISTCHURCH PARISH CHURCH CEMETERY, ELLESMERE PORT



Researched and written

by

Mike Royden

www.roydenhistory.co.uk