

Capt. Gordon Campbell BLAIR



Born: 9 March 1883

Died: 26 December 1912

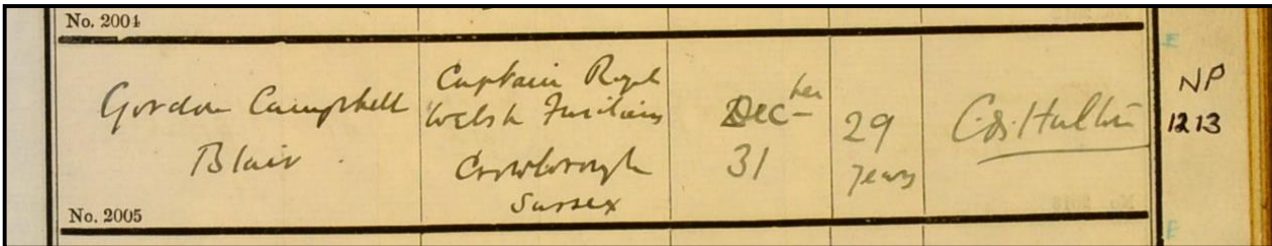
*Captain Royal Welch Fusiliers
Served in South Africa and India*



Gordon Campbell BLAIR
(1883-1912)

Along the northern perimeter of the churchyard, approximately 20 yards from the boundary with the M60 motorway, lies a broken cross flat on the ground, with only the top half visible, bearing the inscription "**GORDON CAMPBELL BLAIR - CAPTAIN ROYAL WELCH FUSILIERS - BORN MARCH 1883 DIED DECEMBER 1912**". Clearly, this is not a World War I grave; but why is this soldier buried here? Who precisely was he? And did he die overseas or on home soil? What conflicts, maybe, had he been involved in?

The parish burial record shows:



So we know his age, 29, that he was indeed buried here, and that the cross is not just a memorial stone, and that he died in Sussex. But where did he come from? And, with such a Scottish-sounding name, why that regiment?

First of all, he was born on 9 March **1883** in Eccles; his home address most likely was Park Road, Pendleton. He was the son of **Arthur Macdonald Blair** and **Annie Gertrude Langworthy**. They

1871. Marriage solemnized at <u>St. Mary's Church</u> in the Parish of <u>Eccles</u> in the County of <u>Lancashire</u>							
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.
240	September 27 1871	Arthur Macdonald Blair	36	Bachelor	Solicitor	Chatterton on Greenbank	Harrison Blair
		Annie Gertrude Langworthy	30	Spinster		Shearness Park Eccles	Lewis Langworthy

Married in the above Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by James G. Thompson or after James G. Thompson by me,

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Arthur Macdonald Blair In the Presence of us, Lewis Langworthy James G. Thompson By Benjamin Trappes

were married by licence at St. Mary, Eccles, in September 1871. The information given in the marriage register is, in itself, both interesting and informative. Arthur's father was Harrison Blair, a

solicitor, and Annie's father was a Gentleman of Ellesmere Park. They were to have 8 children: -

- Ethel Gertrude (b. 1873; bp. 5 October 1873) - Eccles
- Lilian Mary (b. 1874. bp. 6 August 1874) - Holly Bank, Eccles New Road
- Beatrice Helen (1876; bp. 22 March 1876) - Park Grove, Eccles Old Road
- Harrison Macdonald (b. 1877; bp. 8 December 1877) - Park Road, Pendleton
- Douglas Alexander (b. 1879; bp. 23 August 1879) - Greenbank, Eccles Old Road
- Duncan Stuart (or Stewart Duncan) - (b. 1881; bp. 14 December 1881) - Park Road, Pendleton
- Gordon Campbell** (b. 9 March 1883)
- Annie Vera (b. 1890; bp. 12 September 1890) - Oaklands, Hope

Of these, 6 were baptised at St. Mary, Eccles - the exceptions being **Gordon Campbell**, for whom no evidence has been found, and Annie Vera, who was baptised at St. James, Hope. The addresses given above appeared in the Baptismal Records at the respective parishes. Arthur's will revealed

WILL 1911

BLAIR Arthur Macdonald, of 78 King Street **Manchester**, and of 2 Cambridge Road Southport, **Lancashire**, died 1 December 1910 at 2 Cambridge Road, Southport. Probate **London** 6 April to Annie Gertrude Blair widow. Effects £3575. 5s. 9d.

The Baptismal Registers and the censuses show that the family moved house on many occasions, so varied are the addresses. The censuses of 1881, 1891 and 1901 confirm some of the addresses above. In 1871, just a few months before his marriage, Arthur was at 209 Brunswick Street, Chorlton. **A. Macdonald Blair** (24), was recorded as Boarder and Solicitor, with 1 clerk (Francis Reginald 19) and 1 articled clerk (Hugh Gordon 17) - both brothers. In 1911, following the death of Arthur in 1910, his widow, Annie Gertrude, was living at 65 Hoghton Street, Southport. It was a very small dwelling, having only 3 rooms, according to the record. She was there with her daughters Lilian Mary (36), Annie Vera (21) and Christiana Vera Spafford (21), her niece - all single. Annie Gertrude died in Paddington, London, on 7 February 1923. She was by then living at 48 Moscow Court, Bayswater. Probate was granted to Harrison Macdonald Blair, Merchant, Lilian Mary Blair and Frank Jervis Seddon, solicitor.

It can be seen in the record above that Gordon Campbell's father (Arthur 1847-1910) was a Solicitor, as indeed was his grandfather, Harrison (1812-1866), who was also a well known Solicitor in Manchester. They had a total of 11 children, whose names included, amongst others, Harrison, Gordon and Macdonald. Sadly, the family suffered a great tragedy with this report in the *Carlisle Journal* of 27 July 1866. He had died on 20 July.

SUICIDE OF A SOLICITOR.—On Saturday morning a painful sensation was caused in Manchester by the announcement that Mr. Harrison Blair, a well-known solicitor, had committed suicide at his house in the Polygon, Ardwick, by shooting himself through the head. The deceased gentleman had become connected with some ironworks, and it is rumoured that losses connected with these had given him much uneasiness of mind.

In fact, the Blair family originated from Cumbria, with Joseph marrying Sarah Falkner on 15 November 1794 at Manchester Cathedral. So the family was well established in Manchester by the time of Gordon Campbell's birth.

GORDON CAMPBELL BLAIR

Such, then, is the background to **Gordon Campbell Blair**, an officer in the British Army who predated World War I but who served in the Second Boer War and in India. The broken cross which



marks his grave lies along the northern perimeter of the churchyard, approximately 20 yards from the boundary with the M60 motorway, Sadly, it is broken, cracked and lies flat on the ground, partly hidden by brambles and weeds and other greenery. The information that is etched into the cross gives essential information about him, whilst at the same time telling so little. The inscription says: "**GORDON CAMPBELL BLAIR, CAPTAIN ROYAL WELCH FUSILIERS - BORN MARCH 9th 1883 DIED DECEMBER 26th 1912**".

The first mystery about this man is that there seems to be no evidence of his baptism - strange since his 7 siblings are all present. The national censuses give us some information about him, but they mainly refer to his time at home with the family. He was born just two years after the 1881 census, so the first time we meet him is in **1891**. Not at home, but at Stanley Villas, St. Anne's Road East, Lytham. He is there, **Gordon C. 8**, with his sister Beatrice H. 15, Sarah A. Blair, 54 (an aunt). They were staying at

the home of Eliza Jarratt, 43, Lodging House Keeper. Gordon and Beatrice were both described as scholars. This census was taken on the night of 5 April 1891.

As we move on to the census of **1901**, we find that he is at home at 11 St. George's Crescent, Pendleton. His parents are there, **Arthur M.** (54) and **Annie G.** (51), as are Ethel G. (28), Lilian M. (27), **Gordon C.** (Lt. in Militia, **18**), + 4 servants. The 1901 Census for England was taken on the night of 31 March 1901. What we do know now is that he was a Lieutenant in the militia. Coupled with the inscription on the cross headstone, we can see that he was to follow a career in the British Army.

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ARMY BOOK 83.

RECORD OF SERVICES OF *Lieutenant Gordon Campbell Blair*
(Christian Names in full).

1st Battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers Regiment.
W. & Sons Ltd.

Qualifications.			Qualifications—continued.		
Course of Examination.	Year or No.	Year.	Nature of Certificate or Distinction.		
If passed Royal Military Coll. ...				Any other Qualifications and Certificates, such as those granted by the Royal Geographical Society, Shorthand, etc.	
If passed from a University ...				If served as Adjutant (of Regulars or Auxiliary Forces) or as Assistant Adjutant (Period to be stated.)	
If passed from Militia ...	Yes	1903			
If passed from Colonial, Local Forces, or Universities ...					
If passed for Promotion to—					
Lieutenant ...	Yes	1903	Passed in (a) & (b) N.W.B. Order No. 5		
Captain ...	Yes	1908	Subj. (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f), (g), (h), (i), (j), (k), (l), (m), (n), (o), (p), (q), (r), (s), (t), (u), (v), (w), (x), (y), (z)		
Major ...					
Lieut.-Col. ...					
(Authority to be quoted in each case).					
If passed Staff College ...					
Gymnastics ...	Yes	1904	Aldershot	Date and Place of Birth ... 9th March 1883 Eccles	
Musketry ...	Yes	1906	Advanced Class (Maximum etc) 21.9.06. C.O. No. 2+4. a. a. c. of 24/9+ 26/9/06.	Where educated, specifying School or University ... Harrow	
Military Engineering ...				Height ... 5' 4 1/2"	
Signalling ...				Married or Single ...	
Cavalry Pioneer Class ...				Name and Address of relative ... Father. am Blair, the Elms, Moore, Warrington	
Veterinary Class ...				If Married, specify—	
Supply Course ...				When and Where. To whom. The Wife living at the date of. Minister who Married the Parties, and of what Church.	
Transport Course ...					
Riding Class ...					
Ballooning ...					
If he has commanded a Company or Section of Mounted Infantry on Active Service or during a course of instruction.	Yes	1901	Longmoor	If the Officer has any legitimate children, specify—	
Foreign Languages				Names. Dates of Birth. Where Baptised.	
If "Interpreter" or "Passed" (see King's Regulations) in any Language to be stated.					

UK Army Records, held at the National Archives at Kew, show that at the time of the publication of the lists, he was a 2nd Lieutenant in the 1st Battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers. He passed from the Militia in 1903, and then passed examinations for promotion to Lieutenant on 29 September 1903. Later, in 1908, he passed for promotion to Captain on 29 January. On a personal level, it tells us that he was 5ft 7½ins tall and that he was educated at Harrow. It confirms that he was born Eccles on 9th March 1883 and that his father was A. M. Blair, his address being The Elms, Moore, near Warrington. He passed examinations in Gymnastics at Aldershot in 1904, and in Musketry, Advanced Class, on 24 and 26 September 1906. He commanded a Company or Section of Mounted Infantry on Active Service or during a course of instruction in 1904 at Longmoor.

The Militia, mentioned earlier, was a part-time voluntary force organised by county. Modern militias were

created by the Militia Act of 1757. They became the Special Reserve in 1908. In 1881, the army was reorganised and militia regiments were attached to units of the regular army, taking on the new regiment's name in the process.

The Guardian, on 12 April **1900**, announced that **Mr. Gordon Campbell Blair** was to become a Second Lieutenant in the 5th Battalion, the Lancashire Fusiliers. Then, *The London Gazette* of 27



January **1903** promulgated the news that Lieutenant Gordon Campbell Blair, from 5th Battalion the Lancashire Fusiliers, was to be Second Lieutenant with *The Royal Welsh Fusiliers*. This was dated with effect from 28 January 1903. Hart's UK Annual Army List - **1908** - showed that Gordon-Campbell Blair received 6 years' service on full pay, firstly as 2nd Lieutenant 28 January 1903, and later as 1st Lieutenant on 8 February 1905.

Being an officer in the infantry, one can expect that he served overseas in some capacity. Various Army Orders relating to Service Medals have helped to track some of his movements, between Regiments and Battalions, and around the world. On 7 July **1902**, he was entered into the *Roll of Individuals Entitled to the South Africa Medal and Clasps*, for service in the Second Boer War. At that time, he was with the 5th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers and the award was for action at Naamopoort on 5 September 1901. His deployment took him to Cape Colony and Orange Free State. At this time, he was

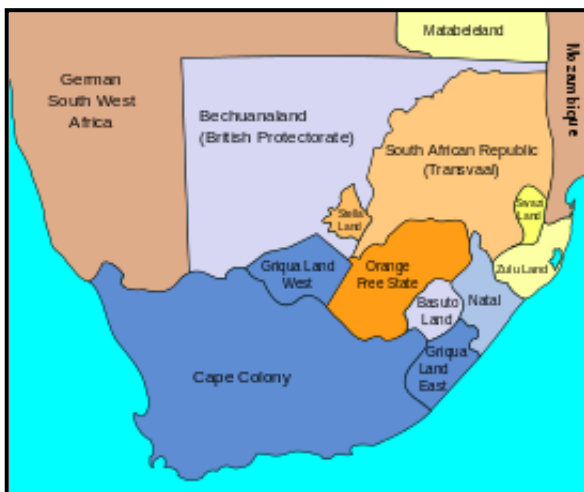
barley 19 years of age.

The next reference was dated 12 January 1903. This was a ceremony at Bury, presumably the Headquarters of the Regiment at that time. Thereafter, he was posted from the 5th to the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers. This clearly stated that he was entitled to South Africa Medals 1901 and 1902, and was also entitled to the King's South Africa Medal. The *London Gazette* confirmed this appointment on 27 January 1903:

The Royal Welsh Fusiliers,

Lieutenant Gordon Campbell Blair, from 5th Battalion the Lancashire Fusiliers, to be Second Lieutenant.

Dated 28th January, 1903.



A further Army Order 29 of **1911** stated that Lt. G. C. Blair, Royal Welch Fusiliers Special Service Officer, was entitled to the South Africa General Service Medal. This was in recognition of service in Berbera, Somaliland. So clearly he spent a considerable amount of time in that Colony.

The 1st battalion R.W.F. did serve in the Second Boer War from 11 October 1899 to 31 May 1902. *"The war had a lasting effect on the region and on British domestic politics. For Britain, the Second Boer War was the longest, the most expensive (£211 million, £202 billion at 2014 prices), and the bloodiest conflict between 1815 and 1914, lasting three months longer*

and resulting in more British combat casualties than the Crimean War (1853–56), although more soldiers died from disease in the Crimean War." [By courtesy of Wikipedia]. This war is what Gordon Campbell Blair had to endure whilst still a teenager!

Berbera, Somaliland, is the former capital of the province. It has a hot desert climate, with average high temperatures consistently exceeding 40 °C. It has long, very hot summers and short, hot winters, as well as very little rainfall. British Somaliland was firstly administered by the Foreign Office until 1905, and afterwards by the Colonial Office. The British Somaliland protectorate gained its independence on 26 June 1960 as the State of Somaliland, before uniting as planned five days later with the Trust Territory of Somalia (the former Italian Somalia) to form the Somali Republic.



The three medals above are, from left to right:

Africa General Service Medal. The clasp would have said Somaliland.

Queen's South Africa Medal.

King's South Africa Medal.

By the time of the **1911** census, we find that Gordon Campbell was still serving with the 2nd Battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers, but he is now in India, at Roberts Barracks, Quetta, India. His rank was Lieutenant, Infantry, when the census was taken on 5 April 1911. He was now aged 28. It was not until 1876 that Quetta came under full British control. Today, it is the tenth largest city in Pakistan. The Army Staff College moved to Quetta in 1907. Established in 1905, it was a training college for existing officers to become eligible for Staff appointments. It is now the Command and Staff College and is the most prestigious institution of the Pakistan Army. There is no record of his time served there or of his duties.

Then, suddenly, there was an announcement of his death in the *Manchester Guardian* on 28 December 1912.

BLAIR - On December 26, at Crowborough, GORDON CAMPBELL BLAIR, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, aged 29 years. Funeral at St. Mark's Church, Worsley, on Tuesday, at 2.45pm.

Currently, it is not known why he was in Crowborough, or the cause of his death. Suffice it to say that his death on the 26th was followed five days later by his burial here. Neither is there any evidence to suggest why it was that he came to be buried here.

Probate for his will simply stated: **BLAIR** Gordon Campbell of Quetta **India** died 26 December 1912 at Crowborough Sussex Probate **London** 22 February to Harrison Macdonald Blair merchant. Effects £1218. 1s. 11d.

The London Gazette on 7 March 1913 reported:

GORDON CAMPBELL BLAIR, Deceased. Pursuant to the Act of Parliament of the 22nd and 23rd Vict., c. 35.

NOTICE is hereby given, that all creditors and other persons having any debts, claims or demands against the estate of Gordon Campbell Blair, late of Quetta in India, deceased, who died on the 26th day of December, 1912, and whose will was proved in the Principal Registry of the Probate Division of His Majesty's High Court of Justice, on the 22nd day of February, 1913, by Harrison Macdonald Blair, the executor therein named), are hereby required to send in the particulars of their debts, claims or demands to us, the undersigned, the Solicitors for the said executor, on or before the 18th day of April, 1913, after which date the said executor will proceed to distribute the assets of the said deceased amongst the persons entitled thereto, having regard only to the claims and demands of which he shall then have had notice; and he will not be liable for the assets of the said deceased, or any part thereof, so distributed, to any person or persons of whose debts, claims or demands he shall not then have had notice.

Dated this 4th day of March, 1913

BLAIR and SEDDON, Solicitors for the said Executor, 78, King-street, Manchester.

Postscript.

The following article appeared in the *Shipley Times and Express* on Friday 3 January 1913.

Ran in Pyjamas Along Piccadilly

A story of the terrible effects of a love disappointment was told on Monday at an inquest at which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was foreman of the jury , held at Crowborough on the body of Captain Gordon Campbell Blair, aged 29, late of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

The dead officer had served in Somaliland and Burma , and according to a brother, who gave evidence, in September, when home on leave, he was worried by a love affair. While staying at the Junior Naval and Military Club in October he cried throughout one night, and in the morning jumped from his bed and ran through Piccadilly in his pyjamas.

The *Gloucester Journal* of Saturday 4 January 1913 added to this story:

Afterwards he was taken to different parts of the country for his health, and on Christmas Day, while at Crowborough, he became so excited, and violent, that it was found necessary to tie his hands to the bed with towels. The following morning he died. The medical evidence showed that death was due to exhaustion following cerebral excitement. The jury returned a verdict of death from natural causes.

The *Manchester Courier* of Saturday 4 January 1913 gave more information.

Great sympathy is felt in the Eccles and Worsley District with the relatives of the late Captain Gordon Campbell Blair, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, who died a few days ago, and was buried at St. Mark's Church, Worsley. The deceased officer was the son of the late Arthur Macdonald Blair of Manchester, and though only twenty-nine years of age, had achieved a fine record and done value service for his country. He served throughout the South African War with the militia battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers, and for this service held the King's Medal with four clasps. In 1903 he joined the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and served in the Somali campaign, 1909-1910. Just before his death Captain Blair, who was home on leave, was taking up military aviation, prior to being appointed to the Royal Flying Corps.

As a sportsman the deceased officer was well-known in his regiment, in the Army, generally, and elsewhere. He won the Regimental Trophy in both battalions of his regiment in one year for point-to-point races. He was also on more than one occasion in the semi-finals at Aldershot for the Army and Navy Light-Weight boxing championship. While serving with mounted infantry at Longmoor he was recommended for the Albert Medal for an act of bravery. The funeral was attended by a cortege of officers and non-commissioned officers from the deceased's regiment. The coffin was covered with many beautiful wreaths, among them being four from the battalions of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

