

Story of the Leith man who signed up 100 years ago today



Record reveals the story of a Scot who signed up on Boxing Day in the last century.

A hundred years ago today a young man from Leith registered to join the British Army, pledging to play his part in the war that was supposed to end all wars.

Scotland's national archivists this week unearthed his registration certificate, issued on Boxing Day 1914 by the Army Recruiting Office then based in Cockburn Street, Edinburgh.

The discovery of the certificate, 'of a man who is willing to serve his King and Country as a Soldier for the War' prompted record keepers at National Records of Scotland to find out more about John's First World War story.

By 13 January 1915, John, a 20 year-old butcher, had formally enlisted in the Army and went on to serve in the 9th Battalion, Royal Scots Regiment, then in the 12th Machine Gun Corps.



John was one of more than 650,000 Scots who served in the First World War, leaving his parents, George and Mary Clapperton and their home in Dalmeny Street behind him.

After three years stationed in Kilmarnock and Grantham, Private John Warnock Clapperton was sent on active service to France, where he was badly wounded and left with no option but to have his right arm amputated in the field hospital.

The operation prevented John from completing his duties overseas and forced his return across the Channel, to hospitals in Reading and later in Edinburgh where he underwent further treatment. John's devastating injury in the field may have saved his life.

In February 1919 John Warnock Clapperton was discharged from both the Edinburgh War Hospital at Bangour and the Armed Forces.

Unlike more than 100,000 Scots who never returned, John survived the First World War – returning to Leith where later in life he married Catherine Martin in 1941. John died in 1966, aged 71.

Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop, said:

“The First World War claimed the lives of more than 100,000 Scots and left many more, like Private John Clapperton, injured or disabled. No home, workplace or community was left untouched by the brutal effects of that war, leaving John's family, and families across Scotland with no option but to come to terms with the devastating consequences.

“John's is a story that will be familiar to many whose fathers, grandfathers, uncles and brothers went off to battle a century ago. Through the work of the Scottish Commemorations Panel, from 2014 to 2019 the Scottish Government is encouraging people of all ages across Scotland to recognise the significant and broad impact the First World War had on our nation and its people, and to reflect on its lasting social and civic legacy.

“John's registration certificate has given us an interesting insight into the life of a young Scot whose wartime Christmas a 100 years ago would have been quite different to ours today.

“The document is one of millions proudly preserved in our

national archive by National Records of Scotland. Its discovery demonstrates the rich heritage of Scotland's people and shows how powerfully archives connect us directly to people and events in our past."