

114: William George Baird

Basic Information [as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC]

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: William George Baird

Rank: Private

Battalion / Regiment: 12th South Wales Borderers

Service Number: 44638

Date of Death: 28 April 1918

Age at Death: 30

Buried / Commemorated at: Liverpool (Toxteth Park) Cemetery

Additional information given by CWGC: The son of Eugene Macgregor Baird and Caroline Baird of Deva Cottage, Ness

William George Baird was the 5th child of plumber Eugene Macgregor Baird and Caroline and he was born in July/September 1887.

Eugen Macgregor Baird married Caroline Vassalli (her name was also recorded as *Vassallitt*) at St Saviour's Church, Everton, in late 1878. Caroline was a daughter of John and Emma Vassalli of Everton; in 1871 it was recorded that John, a fireman with the Dock Board, had been born in Rome and Emma originated from London. It is interesting to note that William's father, Eugene, had been born in Russia.

In the 1901 census it is recorded that William was born in Little Sutton - the birth was registered at Eastham - although in the 1911 census his birthplace is recorded as Liverpool. The family were living in Toxteth in 1901 having moved, sometime after the 1881 census, from Copley Street, Everton:

Eugene McG Baird	Head	M	46	Plumber	Employer	Russia (British Subject)
Caroline E	Wife	F	40			Lancs; Liverpool
Emma A	Daughter	F	21			do do
Florence A	do	F	19			do do
Caroline E	do	F	18			do do
James John	Son	M	16	Plumber	Worker	Albion do do
William G	do	M	13			Cheshire Little Sutton
Charles A	do	M	10			Lancs; Liverpool
Eugene	do	M	9			do do
Georgina	Daughter	F	5			do do
Gladys	do	F	3			do do

1901 census (extract) – 270, Upper Parliament Street, Liverpool

Eugene McG. Baird	46	plumber	born Russia (British Subject)
Caroline E.	40		born Liverpool
Emma A.	21		born Liverpool
Florence A.	19		born Liverpool
Caroline E.	18		born Liverpool
James John	16	plumber	born Liverpool
William G.	13		born Little Sutton
Charles A.	10		born Liverpool
Eugene	9		born Liverpool
Georgina	5		born Liverpool
Gladys	3		born Liverpool

In 1911 the family was still living at 270 Upper Parliament Street in Toxteth (this housing no longer exists):

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.														
Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.											Number of Schedules <u>10</u> (To be filled up by the Enumerator after collection.)			
The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, as in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.														
NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family	AGE (Last Birthday) and SEX	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE				PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of Persons aged ten years and upwards.				BIRTHPLACE of every person.	NATIONALITY of every Person born in a Foreign Country.	INFIRMITY.	
			State, for each Married Woman entered on this Schedule, the number of—	Children born alive to present Marriage. (If no children born alive write "None" in Column 7.)	Completed years the present Marriage (names of all persons aged 10 years and upwards, if less than one year write "under one")	Total Children Born Alive.	Children still Living.	Children who have Died.	Personal Occupation.	Industry or Service with which worker is connected.				Whether Employer, Worker, or Working on Own Account.
1. <i>E. Baird</i>	Head	57	Married							Plumber	Home	Russia (Resident)	English	
2. <i>C. Baird</i>	Wife	51	Married 33	10	9	1				Special	Launce	do	do	
3. <i>C. Baird</i>	Daughter	28	Single							Special	do	do	do	
4. <i>W. Baird</i>	Son	26	Single							Special	do	do	do	
5. <i>W. Baird</i>	Son	23	Single							Special	do	do	do	
6. <i>C.A. Baird</i>	Son	21	Single							Special	do	do	do	
7. <i>E. Baird</i>	Son	19	Single							Special	do	do	do	
8. <i>G. Baird</i>	Daughter	15	Single							Special	do	do	do	
9. <i>G. Baird</i>	Daughter	13	Single							Special	do	do	do	

(To be filled up by the Enumerator.)

I certify that—		
(1) All the ages on this Schedule are entered in the proper columns.		
(2) I have read the notes and instructions in Column 2 and 4 personally, and have explained their meaning to the persons named in the Schedule.		
(3) After making the necessary inquiries I have completed all entries on the Schedule which appeared to be defective, and have corrected such as appeared to be erroneous.		
Initials of Enumerator	5	4
	9	

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling.)

Write below the Number of Rooms in this Dwelling (House, Tenement, or Apartment). Count the Kitchen as a room but do not count outhouse, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom; nor washhouse, cellars, &c.

Nine Rooms

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature *E. M. Baird*

Postal Address *270 Upper Parliament St*

1911 census (condensed) – 270, Upper Parliament Street, Liverpool

E.M. Baird	[overwritten <i>Edward</i>]	57	plumber	born Russia (resident)
C.	[overwritten <i>Catherine</i>]	51		born Liverpool
C.	[overwritten <i>Catherine</i>]	28		born Liverpool
J.J.	[overwritten <i>John</i>]	26		born Liverpool
W.	[overwritten <i>William</i>]	23		born Liverpool
C.A.	[overwritten <i>Charles</i>]	21		born Liverpool
E.	[overwritten <i>Edward</i>]	19		born Liverpool
G.	[overwritten <i>Gertrude</i>]	15		born Liverpool
G.	[overwritten <i>Georgina</i>]	13		born Liverpool

Eugene and Catherine had been married for 33 years and nine of their ten children had survived.

It appears that the census enumerator had not noticed that Eugene had failed to give the full name of each of the persons in the household and had sought later to correct this omission by contriving names which fitted the initials. Only *William* and *Charles* had been guessed correctly.

As William's Service Record has not been found it is not possible to give details of his life in the army or the precise circumstances of his death. However, it is known that he first enlisted with the Royal Engineers when his Service Number was 1332 before serving with the South Wales Borderers.

The 12th (Service) Battalion (3rd Gwent) was formed at Newport in March 1915 by the Welsh National Executive Committee as a Bantam Battalion and in March 1915 they came under the orders of the Welsh Bantam Brigade. In July 1915 they moved to Prees Heath and in September 1915 moved to Aldershot, where the formation was renamed as the 119th Brigade, 40th Division. The troops landed at Le Havre on 2 June 1916. The early history of the 12th (Service) Battalion has been summarised by the Regimental Museum of The Royal Welsh:

Summary of Service:

12th (Service) Battalion (3rd Gwent) was raised at Newport, Monmouthshire by the Welsh National Executive Committee in March 1915 as a 'bantam' battalion. July 1915: Moved to Prees Heath, Whitchurch, Shropshire as part of Welsh Bantam Brigade. September 1915: Moved to Aldershot and brigade became 119th Brigade, 40th Division. December 1915: Moved to Marne Camp, Blackdown, Hampshire. 2nd June 1916: Landed at Le Havre, France. 10th February 1918: Battalion disbanded in France at Le Havre, France.

The 12th (Service) Battalion was raised in Monmouthshire in March 1915, and became part of the Welsh Bantam Brigade. Recruits were confined to the height of 5 feet to 5 feet 3 inches. Progress in forming the battalion was slow, as many Monmouthshire men had already enlisted in the 17th and 18th (Bantam) Battalions, The Welsh Regiment. After training at Prees Heath, Shropshire and Aldershot it eventually went to France on 1st June 1916, in the 119th Brigade of the 40th Division. Its first serious action was at Gonnellieu in April 1917, when an attack was made by the 40th and 8th Divisions. The 12th Battalion carried the formidable defences of Fifteen Ravine with great gallantry and skill, securing all their objectives at a cost of 26 killed and missing and 45 wounded. They counted 40 dead Germans in the position and many more beyond it.

In May 1917, they carried out a most successful raid, winning a MC and eight MMs. They remained in the same sector throughout the summer, distinguishing themselves by capturing German patrols and by several raids. In one of these, carried out by two officers and 32 men, the Bangalore Torpedo which was to blow a path through the wire failed to explode. The officer in charge thereupon cut the wire himself, led his men through to the second trench and brought them out with only two casualties after inflicting heavy loss on the enemy.

BOURLON WOOD

The 20th November 1917 marked the opening of the great Battle of Cambrai, in which, the 2nd Battalion fought with such determination. On the second day of the battle efforts were made by two divisions to push northwards from the new salient against Bourslon Wood and village, a dominating feature on the northern edge of the battlefield whose capture was essential for the exploitation of the success already gained. This attack failed, and next evening (22nd November) the 40th Division took over the line with orders for a fresh attack to be made on the following day.

This attack would encounter the enemy first in Bourslon Wood, a thick wood with a sunken road running east and west through the middle of it, and then in Bourslon Village, which lay on the western half of the northern edge of the wood. The 12th Battalion was the left attacking battalion of the Brigade, and in turn had the 121st Brigade on its left. Its objective was the northern edge of the wood, east of the village, and the eastern part of the village itself.

At first the attack went well and the trenches outside the wood were easily cleared. Inside the Germans were in strength, but the 12th went for them with the bayonet and drove them back. There was sharp fighting at the sunken road where the Germans lost several machine guns and some prisoners. Then their resistance stiffened, especially on the left, but with the aid of the companies in support the northern edge of the wood was won, and on reinforcement by the Royal Welch Fusiliers, a footing was gained in the village also. But the 51st Division on the right had made little progress and when, at about 1 p.m., a heavy counter-attack developed, the right company, its flanks in the air, was driven back to the sunken road. Here the attack was held, as was another delivered at 4 p.m., although the flanks were unsupported and the pressure very great. In the nick of time two companies of the 18th Battalion, Welsh Regiment came up and a counter attack was staged which won back some of the ground. In this fighting great leadership was displayed by junior commanders and by private soldiers who had taken charge. Small parties cleared strong points and pushed forward, and eventually the high ground inside the wood was secured and advanced posts established on its northern edge.

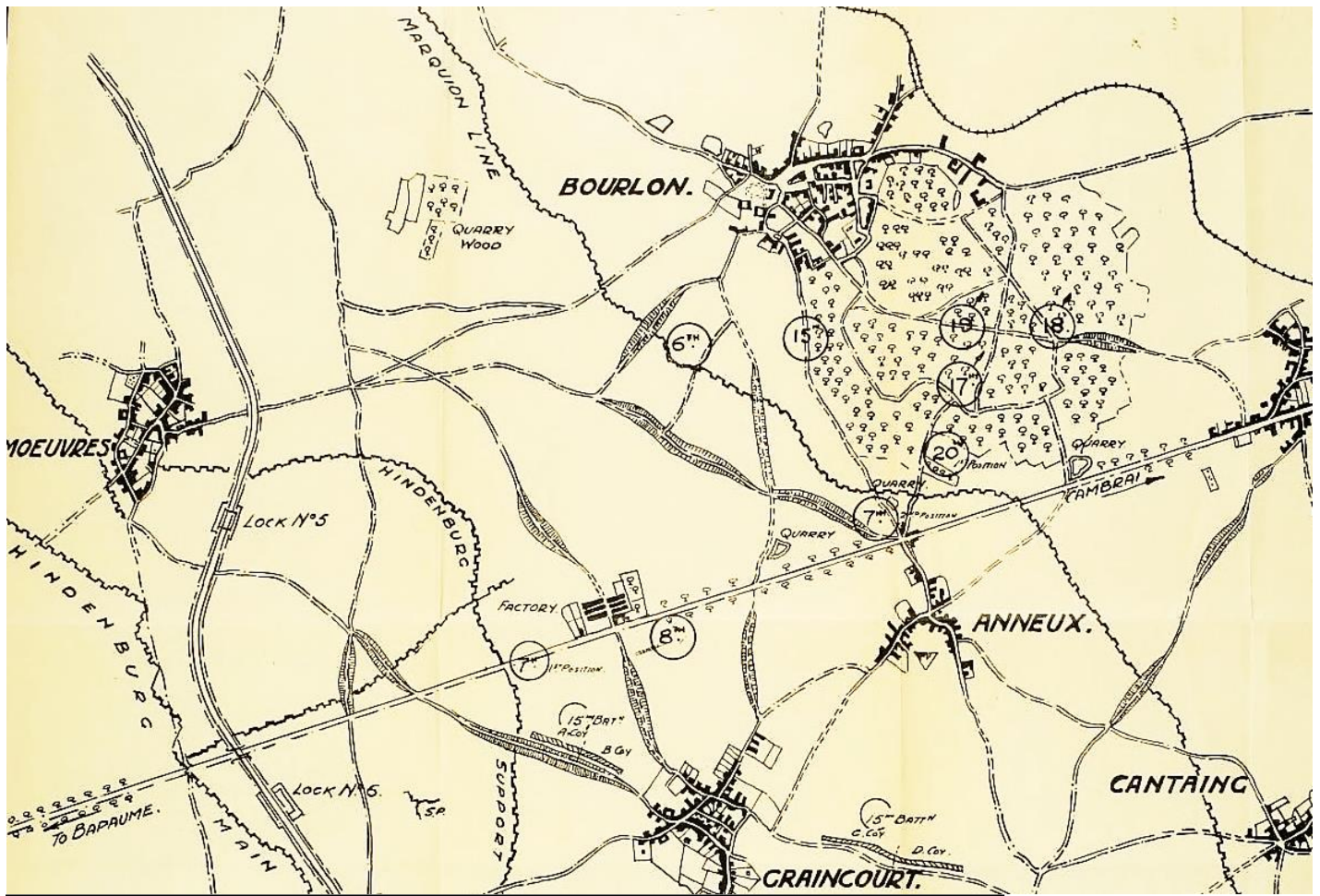
During the night the battalion was reorganised and beat off several small attacks. Next morning at 8.30 a.m., the enemy came forward in strength and drove in the advanced posts, but the 12th withheld their fire until the Germans were only 150 yards distant, when the attack melted away under the hail of bullets. A heavy artillery barrage then compelled withdrawal to the sunken road, but on the barrage lifting the 12th, reinforced by two companies of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and by the 15th Hussars on foot, recovered their old line. Further heavy fighting continued, but in the evening the remnants of the 12th, with the other troops, remained in occupation of the high ground inside the wood and part of the village.

Next day, 25th November 1917, a fresh attack was made which the 12th Battalion supported with fire. No great progress resulted. In the evening, the 61st Division came up to relieve the 40th. About 10 p.m. just as the 2nd/6th Duke of Wellington's Regiment arrived to take over from the 12th the Germans tried a fresh advance. This the 12th met with a great burst of fire, and after that the relief was carried out with no great difficulty.

The 12th Battalion had won great honour for itself at Bourslon Wood. In the three days' fighting it had lost 10 officers and 123 men killed and missing, and 12 officers and 243 men wounded, a total of 386 casualties of all ranks. It was rewarded with two DSOs, six MCs, six DCMs, and eleven MMs. This was the end of its heavy fighting. After a spell in the line in December and January, it met the same fate as the 11th Battalion and was disbanded on the reduction of the strength of brigades to three battalions. It had had a short life but a most distinguished one and the Twenty-Fourth are proud to number 'Bourslon Wood' amongst their Battle Honours.

It is known from the announcement of William's death in the *Liverpool Daily Post* that he was injured severely on 23 November 1917; this was at the Bourlon Wood engagement at The Battle of Cambrai, detailed above. Clearly, William was then repatriated to England for treatment at the 1st London General Hospital where he died of wounds some five months later. The actions of the Battalion at the time that William was injured are detailed in the Regimental War Diary:

GRAINCOURT	NOVR 22.	<p>Moved in the darkness to GRAINCOURT, 2nd Lieut. F.W.Pozzi reported back from leave. Lieut.H.R.Taylor (formerly Divisional Claims' OFFicer) reported for duty. Orders received for the Battalion to take part in the attack on BOURLON WOOD on the following day.</p>															
BOURLON WOOD.	23.	<p>At 10.30 our artillery opened an intense artillery xxxxx bombardment on the southern edge of BOURLON WOOD, and immediately afterwards the infantry advanced to the attack. The 19th R.W.F., were on the right of the Brigade sector, and the 12th S.W.B., on the left. Tanks went in advance of our left company, but there were none in front of our right company. No opposition was met with until we got into the wood, when our right company got into touch with the enemy and forced him back. We continued to push forward until we reached the middle of the wood, where our left company met with very strong resistance. Enemy machine gun fire was severe, and we sustained a large number of casualties, particularly among officers and N.C.O.'s. The right company reached the outskirts of BOURLON village, but had lost touch with both flanks and could not advance further. The left company, reinforced by one company of the 17th WALSHP at 12.45 and by a second company at 1.25 p.m., continued to press forward, but were held up inside the wood by heavy machine gun fire. At 1.30 p.m., it having been reported that nearly all our officers had become casualties, Major W.E.BROWN was sent up to reorganise. A strong enemy counter attack forced back our left company and we lined a road running East and West through the middle of the wood. One company was still cut off in BOURLON village, but with the aid of a tank they succeeded in forcing their way back and getting into touch with the rest of our line. About 3.0 p.m. Lieut W.M. EVANS was sent up to help Major W.E.BROWN -- all the other officers of the Battalion having by now become casualties. At 4.0 p.m. the enemy counter attacked heavily. Both our flanks were in the air at the time, but the 18th WALSHP came up just in time to prevent our being surrounded. The attack was beaten off and the 18th WALSHP advanced and occupied the high ground in front of the road.</p>															
	24.	<p>At 7.0 p.m. Lieut-Colonel R.BENZIE was put in command of all operations in the forward area on the Brigade front. From this time onwards the 12th S.W.B., formed part of a composite Battalion under Lieut-Colonel PLUNKETT, who was assisted by Major W.E.BROWN. Lieut W.M.EVANS was in charge of the 12th S.W.B. in the line.</p> <p>About 8.30 a.m. the enemy attacked very heavily, coming on in droves, without any particular formation. We waited until they were about 150 yards away, and then opened rapid fire with rifles and Lewis guns. They melted away completely, and not a single German reached our line. When the enemy was seen advancing a message was sent to our artillery, and about 9.0 a.m. they put down a heavy barrage which fell short and dropped dead on our line. We were compelled to retire, and took up a position on a sunken road, about 300 yards in rear of the</p>															
BOURLON WOOD	NOVR 24 (on)	<p>line. Here we were reinforced soon after 9.0 o'clock by 2 companies of the A&S HIGHLANDERS. The barrage lifted about 9.45 a.m. and we moved forward and occupied the original line -- the A. & S.H., in the front line, ourselves in close support about 50 yards behind.</p>															
	25	<p>The enemy sniped our line heavily throughout the day, but we had comparatively few casualties.</p> <p>At 4.0 p.m. as the A. & S.H., who were then holding line on right of battalion, had withdrawn xxxx xxxxxx xxxxx ix xxxx Lieut Evans withdrew to a sunken road in rear, but was ordered to reoccupy original line, which was done. At 11.15 p.m. the SCOTS GUARDS having come up, Brigade details were reorganised. R.O.S.H. were ordered to hold left front line, while the Brigade held the centre with SCOTS GUARDS on right. While this reorganisation was in progress Major W.E.BROWN was wounded by an enemy bombing party, which had succeeded in forcing one of our strong posts.</p> <p>At 2.0 p.m. we again attacked, but found the enemy counter attacking at the same time. One burst of rapid fire completely broke up his attack, and we tried to get on. Six separate attempts were made, all ranks displaying fine spirit and dash; but owing to the very heavy machine gun fire we were unable to take the strong point at the edge of the wood which were our objectives. In response to a message from the 2nd SCOTS GUARDS, who were attacking on our right, we took our Lewis guns and all our men directed covering fire on enemy, enabling the GUARDS to capture the high ground which formed their objective.</p> <p>All was quiet after this until about 10.0 p.m., when the enemy made another strong counter attack. His advance was observed by our forward posts and a terrific burst of fire was opened on him by rifles, Lewis guns and Vickers guns. The attack was completely beaten back, and our line on the high ground was handed over intact to the 2/6 DUKE OF WELLINGTON'S regiment, who relieved us about 11.0 pm.</p>															
		<p>Our casualties during the operations 23rd-25th November were as follows:-</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="367 1971 1197 2094"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>OFFICERS</th> <th>OTHER RANKS</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Killed or died of wounds</td> <td>9</td> <td>46</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Wounded</td> <td>12</td> <td>241</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Missing</td> <td>1</td> <td>77</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td><u>22</u></td> <td><u>364</u></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>(above are figures as known 30.11.17)</p>		OFFICERS	OTHER RANKS	Killed or died of wounds	9	46	Wounded	12	241	Missing	1	77		<u>22</u>	<u>364</u>
	OFFICERS	OTHER RANKS															
Killed or died of wounds	9	46															
Wounded	12	241															
Missing	1	77															
	<u>22</u>	<u>364</u>															



The area of Bourlon Wood, adjoining the village of Bourlon, in November 1917.
 [Source: thescribblerdotbiz.blogspot.com]



Changes in the position of the front line during the Cambrai engagement in late 1917.
 [Source: en.wikipedia.org]



A British tank knocked out in Bourslon Wood during the Battle of Cambrai. This vehicle was one of those assessed for salvage and repair by the German Army.
[Imperial War Museum (Q 45407)]



British troops moving into captured German trenches on 20 November 1917 [http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/

Having served on the Western Front the 12th (Service) Battalion was disbanded in February 1918, some two months before the death of William George Baird.

The 1st London General Hospital, based at St Gabriel's College, Cormont Road, Camberwell, was one of many Auxiliary Military Hospitals established in Britain during WW1. The Hospital was installed in August 1914, the College being a large modern building built in 1900, overlooking Myatt's Fields, a municipal park. The College had emptied of young male students, many of whom had enlisted to fight in the war. By 1917 the Hospital contained 231 beds for officers and 1,038 for enlisted men.

It is known that William is buried in the family grave in Toxteth Park Cemetery, Liverpool, where the inscription on the (now flat) grey marble headstone reads:

In loving memory of Arthur George, the beloved son of E. M. & C. BAIRD, who died 21st March 1890, aged 5 months. Also of William George, brother of the above, who died 28th April 1918, aged 30 years. Also of Caroline, beloved wife of Eugene McGregor BAIRD, who died 25th May 1925, aged 65 years. Also of the above Eugene MacGregor BAIRD, who died 24th March 1931, aged 76 years.

When Arthur George Baird died in 1890 the family was living at Greenfield Cottage, Little Sutton; when William George Baird was buried in 1918 the family was living at 122, Rosslyn Street [a terraced house in Aigburth, Liverpool]. When Caroline died in 1925, and when Eugene MacGregor Baird died in 1931, they were living at Deva Cottage, Ness Holt . [Source: www.toxtethparkcemetery.co.uk]

*Liverpool Daily Post - Friday 3 May 1918 and
Liverpool Echo - Wednesday 1 May 1918*

CONDOLENCE.

BAIRD.—Mr. and Mrs. F. M. BAIRD and Family desire to express their sincere thanks to all friends for the many kind expressions of sympathy and floral tributes received in their recent bereavement.—122, Rosslyn-street, Aigburth.

DIED FROM WOUNDS.

BAIRD—April 28, at 1st General Hospital, London, from wounds received in action November 23, 1917, aged 30 years. Private **WILLIAM GEORGE BAIRD**, L.P.R.E. (T.), and South Wales Borderers, the dearly-loved second son of Mr. and Mrs. E. M. Baird, 122, Rosslyn-street, Aigburth, and late 270, Upper Parliament-street. Interment at Smithdown-road Cemetery, to-day (Friday), at 1.30 p.m. (Inquiries: Porter's, 2628 Royal.)

Liverpool Daily Post - Monday 6 May 1918

Charles Baird, aged 69, in West Kirby in May 1961.



was the brother of Janet Scott who married John Platt, the eldest son of James Platt. The Platt family, after their move to Neston from Lancashire in about 1885, lived on Colliery Lane (now Marshlands Road) but after her marriage to Richard Scott Ruth moved to Colliery Farm where Richard had become the manager. Richard and Ruth had two children, Elizabeth (born 19 May 1891) and Andrew (born 16 July 1893) but Richard, unable to cope with managing the farm, hanged himself on 24 June 1895 when he was just 27. Ruth Scott, with

her two small children, had to leave the farm and initially lived with her parents on Colliery Lane before buying and running a tobacconist / stationers shop on Neston Cross where she lived above the premises. After the death of her father, James Platt, in June 1911, Ruth immediately bought a house named *Ivydene* in School Lane, Ness, for her widowed mother and an unmarried sister. This house, built in 1903, was renamed *Bickerstaffe* after the mining town in Lancashire from which the family originated. Although Ruth and her two children are not known to have lived at *Bickerstaffe* until early 1929 (after her mother's death in April 1919 Ruth ran the shop on Neston Cross) the house was next-door to *Deva Cottage*, the home of Eugene Macgregor Baird and his family until Eugene died in 1931. Charles Alexander Baird and Elizabeth Scott would, therefore have known each other because of the proximity of the two houses although they did not marry until 1938 when Elizabeth was nearly 47 and Charles was the same age. Charles Baird was a master-builder and, having built many of the houses on Beacon Drive in West Kirby, the couple moved there after their marriage. Charles died in early 1964, aged 72 and was cremated at Landican Cemetery. Elizabeth died on 25 April 1977 aged 85. They had no children.



In the 1939 Register Eugene Baird (born 19 December 1892, incapacitated), a brother of William George, was still living in the same house on School Lane although it was now called 'Deva'. Eugene married Eva M Bushell (born 29 April 1904) at St Matthew with St. James Church, Mossley Hill, Liverpool

in late 1931; no record of children has been found. Also in the household was Dora F Bushell (born 15 June 1915); a Reginald J Bushell (possibly Eva's brother) married Dora F March (or Murch) in Wallasey in early 1939. No details of the deaths of Eugene or Eva Baird are known.

The Scott / Baird grave, Neston Cemetery

In Loving Memory of our Dear Mother
RUTH SCOTT
Who Died 27th June 1929
CHARLES ALEXANDER BAIRD
Beloved Husband of Elizabeth Baird
1892 – 1964
Also ELIZABETH
Wife of the above Charles
And Daughter of Ruth Scott
Who Died 25th April 1977
Aged 85 Years