

## A POEM : WW 1 : and Family BEATON

**William BEATON**, an Aberdeenshire lad, settled in 'Forfarshire' with his wife **Ann** in the early **1870s**. Many of their years together were to be spent in **Southmuir, Kirriemuir**, firstly in **Sawmill Row** and later in a cottage in **Mill Street** where they raised their **10 children**.



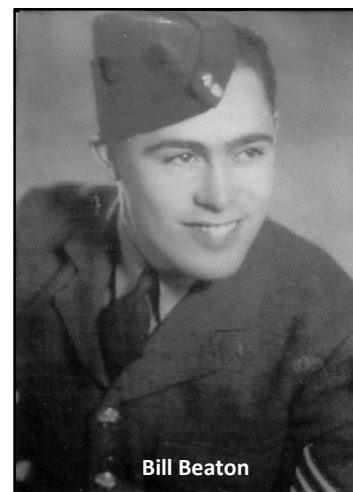
Their youngest child was named **John McHardie Beaton** born on **17 July 1894** at **Sawmill Row**. The poem which is so central to this story was written by John shortly before he was killed on **9 May, 1915** when serving with the **5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Black Watch in France**.

The existence of the poem was first brought to the notice of the Westmuir Village website in the **summer of 2011** by an earlier resident, **Margaret Gray**. In **1957** **Margaret emigrated to Australia** with her husband, children and mother, **Mary Beaton**. Soon Australia became home to all the family although Margaret and her husband Ron enjoyed a visit back to Scotland in 1996 when they visited **Edinburgh Castle** to seek out **John Beaton's name in the Black Watch records**.

Margaret kindly sent a copy of the poem and the details of where Lance Corporal John Beaton (her mother's cousin) was **buried at Fleurbaix, France**. With the information now to hand it was decided to include the story of John Beaton in the village website.

At much the same time however an article appeared in the local **Courier and Advertiser** stating that a **Mr William (Bill) Beaton**, from **Ottawa in Canada** had kindly gifted part of his collection of **Rabbie Burns books to Southmuir Primary school**, where many of **Bill's ancestors** had been taught. The article also mentioned that an **uncle of Bill's** had been **killed in France during the First World War**. There had to be a family connection here and quite heart warming to find that **two distant branches** of the Beaton family should be **remembering and protecting the memory of young John Beaton**. The **commemorative scroll** as issued by King and Country came to mind.

*'Let those who come after see to it that his name be not forgotten'*



Margaret (Australia) tells us that her mother **Mary** was the daughter of **Carl Beaton**, a **Norwegian**. There were two Beaton families in Kirriemuir in the early 1900s and **Carl's** family lived in the **Knowehead** area. **Mary's** sister, **Karen Beaton** (and family) also moved to **Australia** whilst their three brothers **Archie, Bob** and **Jock** remained in **Kingoldrum, Kirriemuir** and **Westmuir's Roman Road / Main Road** cottages.

**Bill (Canada)** finds his **family tree** is directly traced to **Mill Street, Southmuir** as revealed in the **1891** and **1901 census**. Sadly, as was often the case in those early days, **three of the children** were to **die in infancy** prior to 1891. **Bill's** father **David** was born in **1887** the **8<sup>th</sup>** child of the family and he chose to emigrate to Canada some time after his marriage in **South Parish Church, Kirriemuir** on **8<sup>th</sup> October 1918** thereby following in the footsteps (in 1910) of **Maggie** the eldest child and **Archie**. **Bill** remembers his Aunt **Maggie** well as she enjoyed a good long life in Canada. **Archie** however also **fought in WW1** having returned to fight with the **29<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force**. He was **killed on 26 May, 1916** - one year after the loss of his young brother **John Beaton**. **Archie** is **buried at Poperinghe in Belgium**. The eldest brother **William** **emigrated to Canada**. **Thirty years later (in 1933)** he returned to Scotland.

The **Black Watch Museum in Perth** already have records and details of **Lance Corporal John Beaton**. The copies of **John's poem, military burial details** and **family photographs** given to the **Westmuir Website** by **Bill** and **Margaret** will be presented to the **Kirriemuir Museum** for safekeeping.



Lance Corporal John BEATON

5<sup>th</sup> Battalion

Black Watch (Royal Highlanders )

Killed in action, France & Flanders, 09/05/1915

Born: Kirriemuir, Forfarshire. Enlisted: Kirriemuir.



*"He whom this scroll commemorates was numbered among those who, at the call of King and Country, left all that was dear to them, endured hardness faced danger and finally passed out of the sight of men by the path of duty and self-sacrifice, giving up their own lives that others might live in freedom".*

*Let those who come after see to it that his name be not forgotten.*

Please 'click' to read the poem written by John in 1915, a few days before he was killed in action.



John, Unknown child, Maggie and Archie

Photo taken in 1910 prior to Maggie and Archie's departure to Canada.

John 16 yrs of age

Archie 19 yrs of age.

LC. CPL. John Beaton

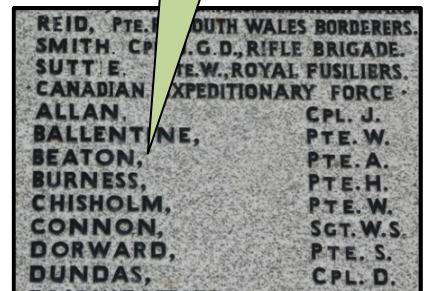


South panel



Kirriemuir War Memorial

PTE. Archie Beaton

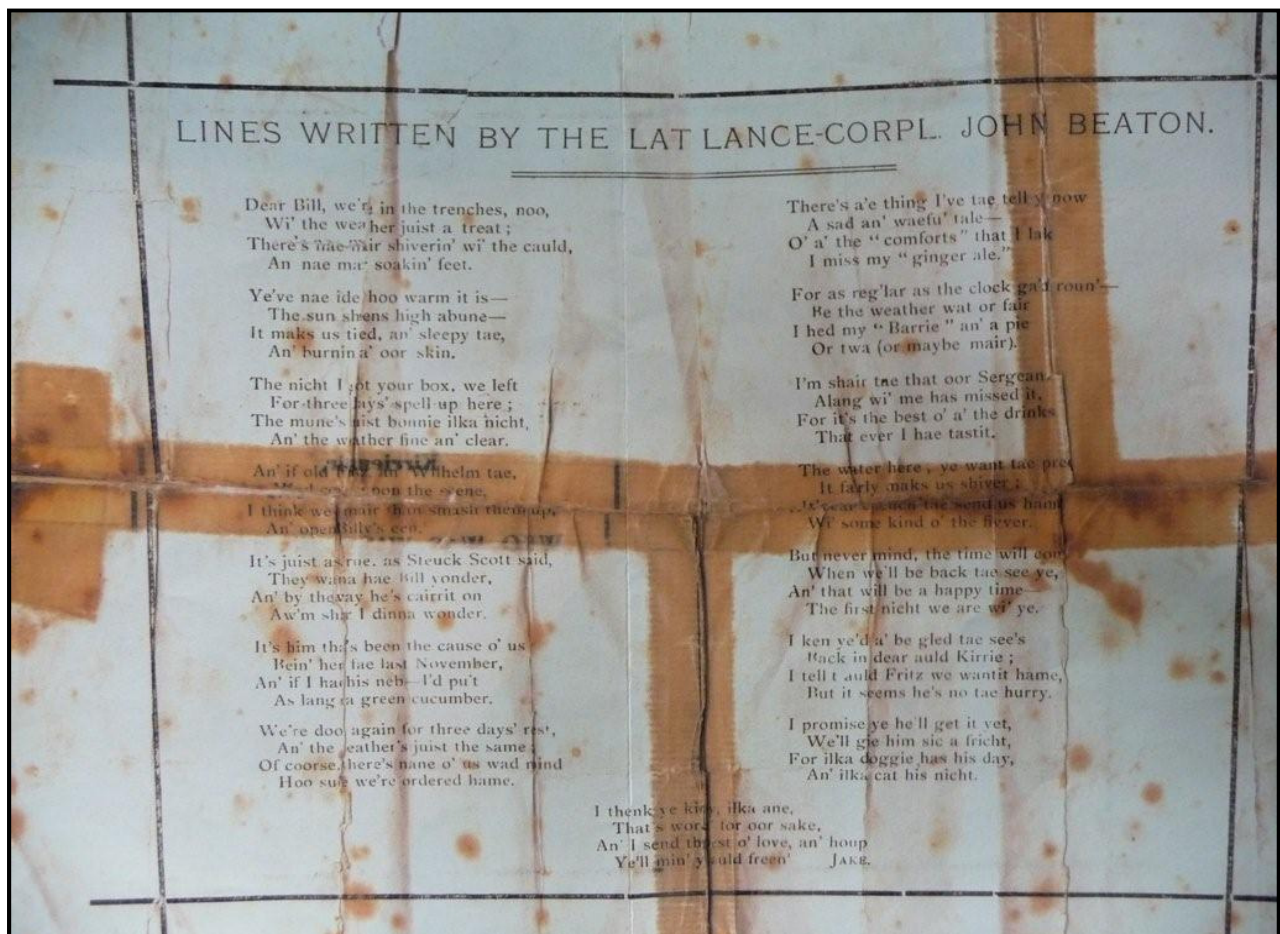


West panel

Earlier this year the story of **Lance Corporal John McHardie Beaton** was added to the **Past and Present** pages of the Westmuir village website. **John Beaton's extended family** were well known in and around Kirriemuir and as already mentioned in the website article, some of his siblings **emigrated to Canada in the early 1900s**. Having continued to **maintain contact with John's nephew, great nephews and a great niece** it now seems **quite timely to take a fresh look at events since then**.

Particularly important was an email received from Ian Small of the **Commonwealth War Graves Commission**. Mr Small was keen to **add the details of Lance Corporal John Beaton to a WW1 Commemorative Multi Media Trail in readiness for 2014**. This has since been prepared and **both of John's poems can now be accessed and heard online**. **John's brother Archie** who was killed on **26<sup>th</sup> May 1916** is also on the **CWGC website** and the names of both young soldiers appear on the **Kirriemuir War Memorial**. **John's name** is on the **south panel** and **Archie** (who served with the **Canadian Expeditionary Force**) on the **West panel**. The **excellent articles about John Beaton** which appeared in the **Courier and Advertiser (11 May 2012 & June 5 2012)** written by Journalist **Richard Watt** were much appreciated. In fact it was Richard who was **first contacted by the CWGC**.

The **Beaton family** have continued to send papers which they felt might be relevant and amongst these were (i) The **Statement of Service** for Archie confirming that he **enlisted on 11 May 1915**. (ii) A **Report from 29<sup>th</sup> Vancouver Battalion** which provides **details of Military engagement** and the **Weather Report at Voormezele** on the day Archie was killed. (iii) **'Memories' from Bill Beaton**, born 1920 (John and Archie's nephew). In recent months Bill has written an **account of his early childhood, school years and later life in Canada**. These papers and perhaps a **further initiative with John's poems in the future** (more on that later) **will continue to ensure that 'John, Archie and their many comrades in WW1- are not forgotten**.



A recent request to submit a short article about John Beaton for the **Black Watch Regimental Journal** required a little more research. The most likely source for more personal reports about John was in the old Newspaper Records on **microfilm in Kirriemuir Library**. Spending a few hours there seemed the only answer. There would be mention of John in the obituary column after 9<sup>th</sup> May 1915 but it was perhaps possible that more information about him could be found. Here is a summary of the articles featured in the Kirriemuir Free Press and in the Kirriemuir Observer (1915).

**30<sup>th</sup> April 1915: Observer/** Lance Corporal **John Beaton**, Kirriemuir, acknowledged boxes of gifts and private parcels sent through the Unionist Club for Kirrie men at the front, **John wrote:-** *“We are down for a short rest now and we were inspected by Commander-in-Chief Sir John French yesterday. He thanked us very much for what we had done and said we had proved ourselves to be very good soldiers and thought us as good as the regulars every bit. We are having lovely weather just now, so warm that some of the boys are bathing in a canal beside our billets”.*

**21<sup>st</sup> May 1915: Free Press/ Our Fallen Heroes.** A leading article in the Free Press records the fierce fighting at Ypres on 9<sup>th</sup> May, and adds the names of those killed, Lance Corporal John Beaton, Private James Scott and sixteen year old Private A Wallace. We learn that John Beaton, prior to joining the 5<sup>th</sup> Black Watch, had been employed as a **chauffeur at Platten**, Brechin Road. *“John was well known by a very large circle of friends in the town, his cheery nature making him a great favourite with all who knew him”.* An article on the same page mentions that the 5<sup>th</sup> Black Watch were suffering a serious reduction in the number of officers at the front. Replacements to be sent out included **Second Lieutenant G. S. Wilkie**, son of **James Wilkie, Platten**.

**From Private S. Scott:** *“I suppose you will have heard about poor Jock (Beaton) and A. Wallace also about the rest of the Kirrie boys who were laid out in the last fight. We have got the highest praise from our General for our work but we have indeed suffered heavily. I am sure you will be like us, mourning the loss of a good pal and cheery comrade”.*

**28<sup>th</sup> May 1915: Observer/ Comforts for our Kirrie Lads at the Front.** .... *“Members of the Boys Brigade will go round the town today and tomorrow, with copies of the last set of poems written by Lance Corporal John Beaton a few hours before he laid down his life for his country”.*

**4<sup>th</sup> June 1915: Free Press/** Less than one month after John's death the 1<sup>st</sup> Kirriemuir Company of the Boys' Brigade were asked *“To distribute copies of the last verses sent from the firing line by the late Lance Corporal John Beaton”.* The boys *“realised the handsome sum of \*£21. 7s. 4d. for the Comfort Fund parcels containing Cigarettes, Tobacco, Chocolate and Puddings which were already being sent from Kirriemuir to the soldiers on the front line. \*The equivalent of 6 months average wage in 1915.*

**The Wilkie Family who lived at Platten** and had engaged the young John McHardie Beaton as a chauffeur also suffered their share of heartbreak due to WW1. Lieut. George S. Wilkie was killed at Flanders in 1915 and his brother Major David Wilkie was killed in France in 1917. Both men served with the 5<sup>th</sup> Black Watch.