

James Johnston

James was the son of James Johnston and Alice Kerr. He was born in Burnmouth on the 23 of December 1881. He served in the Durham Light Infantry from the outbreak of war and later he was with the Royal Defence Corps.

Before the war he had been a baker with Mr Armitage of Ayton and later worked in Leith, Berwick and Leicester.

When he was with the Royal Defence Corps he was stationed at Donnington Hall, a POW camp for German officers. These elite prisoners had their own quarters and servants who lived in separate huts in the grounds of the hall which was a former stately home. Donnington Hall was heavily guarded. It was surrounded by a 6 foot high wire fence and an inner electrified fence. It was the British equivalent of Colditz.

Two days after his birthday, on Christmas day 1916, James and a sergeant were examining a revolver when he accidentally shot himself.

His body was brought home to Burnside Cottage in Cowdrait where the Rev. John MacLaren of Ayton conducted a service in the house. The funeral was held in Ayton Cemetery where the Rev. Aiken said a prayer at the graveside and a military funeral followed. A party of soldiers had come from Berwick as well as the Royal Scots pipe band. Three volleys were fired over the grave as a last tribute. Among the mourners was Pte. Thomas Johnston, James's brother.

James's parents had celebrated their golden wedding earlier in the year. There are articles about James and Alice Johnston and Tommy Johnston elsewhere on the Family History Forum.

James's surname is spelled Johnston on his birth certificate but an e has been added to the CWGC headstone in Ayton cemetery.

Private James Johnstone 41656 Royal Defence Corps



When the photograph below was taken the Johnston family headstone was badly damaged but still legible.

