

*EPG*  
*Robert Robertson*

**By Jeanette Lee**

While researching Enrolled Pensioner Guard Robert Robertson formerly of the 99<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> regiments I came across three envelopes addressed to his father and brother together with two of the letters which he had written while serving with his regiment in New South Wales and Tasmania.

These envelopes and letters were posted on a site run by philatelist the late Dr. Maurice Alan Mishkel and give a first-hand insight into the life of a soldier in the 1840s.<sup>1</sup>

The first letter was addressed to his father Robert Robertson, ESQ, Banker, Blairgowrie, Perthshire Scotland, it is dated 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1845 from Corporal Rt Wales. After inquiring after the health of his father and brother James, Robert told him he had two sons the elder was born at sea and was named Robert after his father and the younger Nicholas after his wife's father. He comments that despite his father's misgivings his marriage has turned out well. Days after arriving in New South Wales he was sent to Norfolk Island penal colony and was in charge of the Military hospital. After twelve months he returned to Sydney (February 1845) and was appointed to the Brigade office. He then mentioned different people they were acquainted with back in Scotland but he seemed to have been reluctant to approach them saying soldiers are not as respected as they are back home. He then went on to say "I am sure I do right in keeping aloof from all my former

Blairgowrie acquaintances for more reasons than one", a statement which to my mind raises some speculation of the reasons of his enlistment in the Army. He then wrote about the price of commodities and the war in New Zealand and although many of the 99<sup>th</sup> regiment were sent there he is exempt due to his work in the Brigade office.

He ended the letter inquiring about the health of his brothers James, Alex and David and his father's young family.

The second letter was addressed to Alexander Robertson, Banker, Blairgowrie, Perthshire, Scotland and the sender No 849, Robt. Robertson, 99 Regiment, V.D.Land from the GPO Hobart town 1850, 16 July. Unfortunately the letter was not in evidence just the envelope.

The third letter is rather short letter is also addressed to his brother Alexander Robertson Esq, Banker, Blairgowrie, Perthshire, Scotland from L(ance) Corporal Robt. Robertson, 1<sup>st</sup> Batt 12 Foot Tasmania and is dated Hobart Town 8th January 1856.

In this letter he mentioned his transfer to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 12<sup>th</sup> regiment and the depositing of one hundred pounds in the Union Bank and the interest due on a sum of money held by his brother.

He further mentioned his younger son James had broken his thigh when he fell down some steps making it impossible for his wife to contribute anything to the family's support, which showed that she was not only involved physically and emotionally as a wife and mother but also financially involved in the family's support. He ended the letter with the usual good wishes as to other members of the family.

These letters raise many questions as to why a member of a family who were obviously quite well to do should enlist as a common soldier. It is apparent from the appointments he had in the army that he

was well educated. From Robert's inquiry into the health of his father's young family it suggests his father may have remarried and that could have caused a division in the family.

From my research we know Robert Robertson married Janet Page at St. Mary's Chatham on 12 December 1842 which must have been shortly before sailing with his regiment to New South Wales.

Robert Robertson was discharged from the army on 15th June 1858 at Chatham Barracks and returned to live in Scotland. He and his family were living at Main Street, Kinnoull, Perthshire in the 1861 Census and we learn that the family consisted of five children. Son Robert was now 18 years of age and working as a brass journeyman, Nicholas aged 16 was a plumber, Alexander age 14 was a messenger boy while Mary Elizabeth aged 12 and James aged 8 who were both born at Hobart are still at school.

Retirement could not have suited Robert as he volunteered to be part of the convict guard on the Convict ship Merchantman in 1864, but this time he journeyed alone. Whether it was because Janet was ill or had died I do not know but at the time of the 1871 census Mary aged 21 and Alexander aged 23 are living with Mary Robertson at Duke Street, St. John's, Glasgow. Mary Robertson said she was a widow and her age is given as 56 she could have been Robert's second wife but alternately she could have been otherwise related. Nicholas was by this time the foreman in a chemical works and lived nearby with his family.

Meanwhile back in Western Australia Captain Finnerty had recommended that Robert be appointed schoolmaster at Rottneest Island in 1864, but whether this was taken up we do not know. Robert was paid in Western Australia to 30 November

1867 when he left Western Australia for Mauritius where he was paid until March 1869. Whether he returned to Scotland or died at Mauritius remains a mystery.

By looking at the later census records we can see the children back in Scotland did surprising well for themselves.

Robert continued in his career as a brass finisher, while Nicholas in the 1881 census was a mineral water manufacturer living at Toxteth Park, Liverpool, Alexander was a dentist at Gaurock, Renfrewshire and James was a surgeon at Gavan in Lanarkshire. Unfortunately I have been unable to find who Mary Elizabeth married.

Source:

Australian Postal History and Social Philately