

Private Andrew Gunning

Private Andrew Gunning (regimental number 907622) emigrated from Ireland to Canada, presumably to make a new life for himself. Sadly, he was killed during the battle for Hill 70 on August 15/16, 1917.

Andrew was born in Newtownards (spelled Newtonards in some records), Ireland, a community in what is now Northern Ireland on November 20 in either 1885 or 1887. Although his attestation record has 1887, all other documents give 1885 as his birth year. It is interesting to note, however, that his "apparent age" at attestation was 29, which would support 1887 as his birth year.

At some point, Andrew moved from Ireland and to Colonsay, Saskatchewan, to work as a Farm Labourer. On March 31, 1916, he enlisted at Vicount, Saskatchewan, a small community close to Colonsay. According to his Attestation Paper, as stated above, his apparent age at enlistment was 29 years and 5 months (supporting a birth year of 1887). He was not a large man, standing 5' 5 1/2" tall and weighing 150 lbs. He had blue eyes, black hair, and a dark complexion. His Medical History Sheet stated he was of good physical development and had no Small-Pox Marks. He was vaccinated on his left arm three years prior, in 1913. He did not exhibit any marks indicating congenital peculiarities or previous disease nor did he show any slight defects that were not sufficient to cause rejection. After enlistment and before leaving Canada for Europe, he received vaccinations and anti-typhoid inoculations.

Andrew listed his brother, Samuel, as his next-of-kin. At the time of Andrew's enlistment, Samuel was living in Hollywood Arches, Newtownards Road, Belfast, Ireland. Interestingly, Andrew made a will on September 26, 1916 and named James Cranch as the beneficiary. Although no information was provided in Andrew's military records regarding James, a James Cranch was found on the 1916 census (although listed as James Craner on the search page, the digital photo of the census page shows Cranch). This James was a 47 year old who had his occupation listed as horse hire (corrected on the page from livery man). It is not certain this was the James Cranch listed as beneficiary, however it was the only James Cranch on the census for Colonsay.

Upon enlistment, Andrew joined the 195th Battalion. He arrived in England on November 11, 1916 and, at East Sandling Camp, was transferred to the 32nd Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Forces.

On December 18, 1916, we are given a brief look into Andrew's personal life when he was given permission to marry. Although no other information is given other than this note on his records, he did change his will on April 19th, 1917 to list his beneficiary as Miss Mary Bowman of 16 Cheviot Street, Hollywood Road, Strandtown, Belfast, Ireland. An interesting side note, this new will does not appear to be in his handwriting, as the signature does not look the same as his previous will nor his attestation paper. A search of the 1911 Irish Census shows Mary Bowman, living with her family, at this address. In 1911, Mary was 28 years old, single, and worked as a linen weaver. Although we are not provided with a street address for Andrew's brother, Samuel, his partial address and Mary's address are near each other, both in Strandtown. A search of the 1911 and 1901 Irish censuses were not able to identify Andrew or Samuel. Their forenames were common in the Newtownards/Belfast area and searching was not able to identify if any names referred to them. In addition, a search of the Canadian censuses of 1901, 1906, 1911, and 1916 did not yield any results for Andrew.

Andrew's service records show he transferred to the 15th Reserve Battalion on January 4, 1917. This Battalion was formed by amalgamating the 32nd and 188th Battalions initially and then expanded to absorb other battalions. On May 10, 1917, Andrew was transferred to the 5th Infantry Battalion, presumably with the rest of the 15th. Andrew was then sent to France, as indicated by Field as the place of transfer on his service record.

On August 15th, the 5th Battalion was one of the battalions charged with taking Hill 70 from the Germans. The loss of life was high on both sides. After an intense battle, the Canadians had captured the strategic location.

Sadly, Andrew was one of the soldiers who did not survive. Initially, he was reported missing; however, that was upgraded to Killed in Action with a date of death ambiguously August 15/16, 1917.

Andrew's body was exhumed from an isolated grave, 1 ¼ miles north west of Lens, and re-interred at the Provincial Communal Cemetery, Plot 3, Row B, Grave 2, later called Loos British Cemetery.

At his death, his brother, Samuel, had moved to Scotland and, presumably, moved again as his address is crossed out with the note address not known written above. A half-brother, David, is listed as living in Newtownards and reports were to be sent to him. Miss Mary Bowman was the recipient of Andrew's medals. He was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. Presumably his mother was not living as a Memorial Cross was not awarded.

I don't know if he had any other family or if he had anyone who mourned his death besides Mary Bowman. I'm thankful for this opportunity to have his memory live on, even if only with strangers.