

The Cranston Family of Haddington, East Lothian



***Standing (L-R): William (b.1884); Mary (b.1891); James (b.1887); Agnes (b.1885); Adam (b.1889)
Seated (L-R): John (b.1882); Father Alexander (b.1854); Angus (b.1901); Mother Elizabeth
(b.1855) and son Alexander (b.1879)
Centre: Robert (b.1899)
Front (L-R): Andrew (b.1895) and George (b.1892).***

Alexander and Elizabeth Cranston arrived in Haddington, East Lothian as a young married couple in the early 1880s. Alexander was originally from the Borders and Elizabeth had grown up in Scotland's northeast. The two had met in Edinburgh, but the death of their second child, a daughter, caused a deep sense of loss. To start again, the couple moved to East Lothian, where Alexander sought work as a poorly paid itinerant forester.

The growing family regularly relocated to different cottages and tenements in and around Haddington, from where the father would journey throughout the district for employment. Eventually, eleven children would be raised in this rural town.

In 1907, Alexander Cranston was diagnosed with terminal intestinal cancer, yet the studio portrait (above) taken in Haddington in 1908 shows a family that looks proud, strong and confident. The Cranstons had no idea that in a little over a decade from the date of the photograph only one family member would be left in Scotland. The rest would be dead or scattered to the ends of the earth.



*Last known photograph of
Elizabeth and Alexander
(c.1908)*

Life was so difficult for the Cranstons financially that one of the eldest boys elected to join the Army and send back a little of his pay each month to help the family's finances. The other sons all took up trades and contributed to the family's upkeep whenever possible. For example, the eldest son, also named Alexander, paid half the annual rent on his parent's flat until other brothers took over.

On 9 October 1911, Alexander finally succumbed to his cancer. He was buried in the graveyard of St. Mary's Kirk, Haddington.

Alexander left behind a hard-working wife and 11 surviving children ranging in age from 32 down to 10, with the eldest sons already married with young children of their own. Everyone had to take on extra duties to support the family. At 56 years of age, Lizzie, now became the lynch-pin holding the family together.

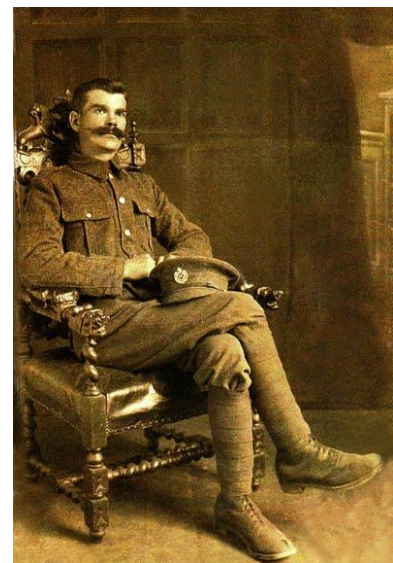
In World War One, seven Cranston sons went off to fight for God, King and Country. Four died and two more were horrifically wounded. Only one son returned home unscathed. According to the Scottish National War Memorial, 'The Cranston family was one of a few who made such a great sacrifice and suffered such a significant loss.' – Lt Col R Binks, the Scottish National War Memorial, Edinburgh.

What happened?

Sapper James Buchan Cranston (Royal Engineers).

James was a stonemason. When War was declared in August 1914, Jim held off joining as he had a young family to take care of, but he could not resist the patriotic urge for long and on 1 March 1915 he walked into the recruiting station at Haddington and enlisted. By this stage of the War the need for engineers to assist with trench construction and battlefield infrastructure was crucial. He was sworn in as a Royal Engineer, given the Service Number 69417, assigned to 127th Field Company and sent to a newly constructed army camp in Alfriston, Surrey for basic training.

It was during basic training in the cold and cramped conditions of a bell tent where he and too many others slept, that he became ill with what people thought was bronchitis, He was transferred to a hospital in nearby Seaford to recover, but his condition grew worse. The doctors decided to conduct further tests.



Weeks later in May, James was given the terrible news that the bronchitis was in fact pulmonary tuberculosis, which at the time was a disease that had no known cure. He was discharged from the Army medically unfit and returned to Haddington, where he died ten months later. To save costs, he was buried in the same grave of his father. He left a widow and five young children under eight.

Even though Annie received a war widow's pension, she still had to work to earn enough to raise the family. Living next door to the Plough Tavern in Court Street, Haddington made the choice of employment easier.

In 1923, Annie Bird Cranston married Laurence Wallace and raised another family of children. The two sets of children knew each other, but the Cranston children knew little about the extended Cranston family.

One of James' children grew up to serve with the Royal Scots during WWII. Captain James Bird Cranston died in 1945 of wounds inflicted during the D-Day landings at Normandy in 1944. His name is proudly displayed alongside that of his father and uncles on the War Memorial at Haddington.



Company Sergeant Major John Buchan Cranston (Queens Own Cameron Highlanders). John joined this Highland Regiment in 1900 when still a lad to become a professional soldier. He saw duty in Gibraltar, Malta, South Africa (putting down a native rebellion) and finally in Hong Kong and China. John eventually returned to Scotland in 1908 and was placed on the reserve list.

He then took up a position as Forester at the newly-opened Bangour Village Asylum, near Dechmont, West Lothian. It was there that he met and married a local girl, Agnes Thomson who was working as a domestic. They were married in February 1913 and had two children over the next two years.

John was recalled to active duty on 4 August 1914, the same day that war was declared between Britain and Germany. He was re-assigned to his old unit of the Queens Own Cameron Highlanders (1st Battalion) and immediately shipped off to Belgium to face the advancing Germans in the fields of Flanders.

He was then a Lance Corporal. For two years he fought in some of the bloodiest battles ever faced by British soldiers. He passed through the great retreat from Mons and the struggle on the Marne and finally the Battle of Aisne where he was promoted to Corporal.

But even the Battle of Aisne was overshadowed by the horrific fight that followed - the First Battle of Ypres (October-November 1914). Over a million men from both sides of the conflict threw themselves at each other, resulting in the combined loss of 300,000 dead, wounded or missing. Corporal John Buchan Cranston wrote in his diary of the events of 22 October 1914.

The Germans seemed to come at us like bees. After letting them have it from a range of 800 yards they came to about 50 yards of us before we retired, as we had no chance up against that number. Before I left, I fired my last round, having sent 170 rounds into them in half an hour. I just got out of my trench and turned to retire when I felt my hand struck and two or three holes drilled through my coat on my left side.



The gunshot wound to Corporal Cranston's left hand was so severe doctors at one stage thought of amputation. He was evacuated to London, where he spent several months recovering. When he reported for duty again in early 1915, John was transferred to the newly-formed and inexperienced 7th Battalion of the Queens Own Cameron Highlanders. He must have been a welcome addition to the Battalion's ranks as he was a battle-hardened and wounded veteran of five horrendous battles. John helped the 7th Battalion prepare for its deployment to the front.

In July 1915, the Battalion moved to France and just over a month later were thrown into the Battle of Loos (a small French town near the Belgium border) in which Corporal Cranston conducted himself with considerable bravery and leadership. During the two week battle, which at times descended into barbaric hand to hand fighting, the 7th QOCH lost over 700 men killed, wounded or missing. John Cranston considered he was lucky to be alive as did all the remaining officers and troops.

For his conduct in the battle, John was promoted in the field, from Corporal to Company Sergeant Major, "D" Company. This was a very unusual "double jump" in rank past Sergeant to Company Sergeant Major.

In April 1916, the Battalion was finally returned to active duty in the Hulluch-Loos sector of the British front, not far from where the Battalion had been almost totally wiped out during the Battle of Loos only six months earlier. In the same month, John was part of a raiding party to gather intelligence and capture prisoners from the German front lines. The raid consisted of over a dozen men and was led by a relatively inexperienced Lieutenant. Unfortunately, the party became separated and the Officer's small detachment encountered heavy resistance when they entered the German front trench.

Company Sergeant Major John Cranston was leading the other section and effected a rescue of the men trapped in the German lines. For his cool-headedness under fire he was Mentioned in Dispatches and recommended for the Distinguished Conduct Medal. In June 1916, he had some more great news to share with his wife. He wrote a letter saying,

My Dear Wife,

Just a few lines trusting that you are keeping well, also the children... I have in my name to get home as an Instructor. The Commanding Officer put through my name seeing I have been so long out here.

In fact I have more active service than any man in the Regiment. So I will stand a good chance of getting home perhaps the matter of a month or two.

However, three weeks later John Cranston was killed by a random artillery shell from the German lines. He is buried at Vermelles Military Cemetery in France about 6km from Albert.

Life was difficult for many families of those killed in War. In John Buchan Cranston's case, his wife Agnes was left a widow at the age of 25. Not only did she bring up two small children without a husband's support, but Agnes also looked after her own mother who was blind; her bedridden father; her sister Lena who was disabled and never worked and finally her sister Jessie who had learning difficulties.

Private Adam Lindsay Cranston (Royal Scots Fusiliers). Adam grew up to become a baker by trade and by the time he was qualified (at the age of 21 in 1910) he was employed by the Haddington Co-operative Society in its main bakery in Tranent, 10 kilometres away from Haddington.



There, Adam met Margaret (Maggie) Hoggan, a young woman from Slammanan, Stirlingshire, who was working as a domestic in the town. They were married in June 1913 and the young couple returned to Haddington.

When War was declared, brothers John, George and William went off to fight immediately. James and Alexander enlisted the following March and June 1915, respectively.

For the first year or so of the War, Adam continued to work as a baker and financially support the wives and children of those serving. However the British Government was so desperate to replace extraordinarily high battlefield casualties that they introduced conscription in early 1916. At first married men were exempt, but this restriction was removed in May 1916 and Adam was among the first draft of married conscripts in June 1916 when he became a Private in the Royal Scots Fusiliers and after initial training was shipped off to France. He had become the sixth Cranston son to serve.

On the 13 November 1916, Private Adam Cranston and the 1,000 men of 1st Battalion, Royal Scots Fusiliers, slowly rose out of their trenches in silence at 05:30 hours on a dark moonless night. It was to be part of a larger British offensive involving 100,000 troops from the British 5th Army that would be known as the Battle of Ancre, named after the river that ran through the area.

The Royal Scots Fusiliers objective on this day was to capture the town of Serre, France, a heavily fortified settlement that held significant strategic importance for whichever side possessed it. The weather conditions were atrocious, but heavy snow drifts and fog did manage to mask the movement of soldiers who were slowly beginning to enter No Man's Land and cross the 150 metres to the German trenches.

The soldiers of the 1st Battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers reached the lightly defended German front line with relative ease, but as Adam and his fellow soldiers began to move forward to the German second trench German machine guns suddenly cut through the silence and the enemy's tracer bullets lit up the black night. This was swiftly followed by a prolonged and devastating artillery barrage. Within seconds men started falling around Adam, yet he pressed on to the German's well defended second line and straight into a vicious entanglement of impenetrable barbed wire.

Adam Cranston could not move forward, nor could he find his way back in the pitch black of a moonless, foggy November morning. He was last seen struggling to extricate himself from the clutching embrace of barbed wire. The Battle of Ancre failed on the first day with thousands of British casualties, including Private Cranston whose disappearance was officially described as '*Missing presumed Killed in Action*'.

Adam's body was eventually recovered in late February 1917 when the entire German army retired to a new defensive position several kilometres to the east known as the Hindenburg Line. Maggie Cranston finally received the news that she dreaded, her husband's remains had been identified from personal affects and the identity disks found on the body. Adam was then buried at Serre Road Cemetery No.1 in France.

After Adam was buried, Maggie returned to live with her parents in Slamannan, Stirlingshire with their one child. In 1925, Maggie remarried and died in 1974, at the age of 85.



Sergeant Alexander Cranston (Royal Engineers).

Alexander was a Cartwright at George Maxwell & Son, Hercus Loan, Musselburgh and lodged with the Dickson family nearby in Carlyle Place, when in 1901 he married the Dickson's daughter Roseanna ("Annie"), then an 18-year-old dressmaker. They settled down to live in Musselburgh and over the next seventeen years had seven children.

In 1902, Sandy as he was known to family and friends to differentiate himself from his father of the same name, enlisted in the 6th Battalion of the Royal Scots (a part-time, local reserve force) and conducted monthly training exercises for the next 13 years until he was called up for full-time service with the British army on June 1915.

Sandy was attached to the Royal Engineers (84th Field Company), given a new six-digit army service number (103604) to replace his old 4-digit regimental service number and sent to the battlefields in France and Belgium.

His service record shows that Sandy was considered an excellent soldier and a natural leader of men. He received regular promotions from the time he arrived in France on 29 September 1915. Sandy spent six months in a Hospital in Britain between January and July 1916 recuperating from a serious wound.

In April 1917, Sandy returned home on leave for two weeks to attend the funeral of his son, James, who had died of acute bronchitis at only 10 months of age. His eldest daughter, Ann Brown Cranston, then aged thirteen, remembered walking along the Old Roman Bridge at Musselburgh with her father just before he was due to return to the front. Sandy said to Ann, *'Nan if anything happens to me, you have to look after your Mum and help her bring up the bairns.'*

In March 1918 the Germans launched their last offensive of the War with a million men they had transferred from the Eastern front. They created dangerous breaches in the British lines and the whole front threatened to collapse. Sergeant Alexander Cranston was given charge of a small section and ordered to demolish a bridge over the Somme canal, near the French village of Dury (20kms from Saint-Quentin).

As work neared completion, German stormtroopers suddenly appeared unexpectedly to the rear of Sandy's small detachment, completely cutting them off from being able to return to the British front lines. Sergeant Alexander Cranston made the decision to blow the bridge up while he and his troops fought off the Germans. The force of the explosion tore the bridge apart and killed the three other Royal Engineers that had been fighting there. Sandy's body, along with the others who died on the bridge that day, was never recovered.

After Sandy's death, Roseanna stayed on in the family home at Musselburgh, where she struggled to raise a family of one son and five daughters under sixteen years of age. She suffered from poor health later in life and died in 1961 while visiting the home of her youngest daughter Jean in England. Her body was returned to Scotland and she is buried in the churchyard of St. Michael's Parish Church, Musselburgh.



Private William Cranston (Seaforth Highlanders).

William left school at seventeen and was apprenticed as an Ironmonger in 1901. In 1907, when William was 23 years old and now an Ironmonger's Salesman in Glasgow, he married Christina Herbertson from that city, but she died later the same year in childbirth, along with the baby which was still born.

William returned to the family home in Haddington after hearing the sad news that his father had terminal cancer. At this early stage of the disease, his father was still working and William left Ironmongery to take up Forestry to help his father out. It would appear that William assumed the duties of Head of the House from about 1908 on, while his father slowly died of cancer.

As soon as War was declared in August 1914, William rushed off to enlist. The pay for an enlisted private in the British army was poor, but it was still more than an itinerant forester. Still thinking of his mother and the large family he was trying to support he joined the 7th Seaforth Highlanders and was issued with the usual four-digit regimental service number.

The Battalion received its basic training in Aldershot, and before moving off to France, was billeted among the local inhabitants of nearby Alton for about two months. To keep the troops occupied there were a number of activities organised by the locals, including musical concerts. During one of these concerts it is thought William (an accomplished violinist taught by his father) must have met Martha Arnold, who was also a very good violinist in her own right.



William and his Battalion moved off to France in May 1915 to become part of the build-up to the Allies first big offensive of the War, The Battle of Loos. In this engagement, which lasted from September to October 1915, just under 90,000 British soldiers threw themselves at well-prepared German trenches manned by well-trained German soldiers.

The British casualty rate was appalling, with almost 60,000 soldiers killed, wounded or missing. However, what was even more shocking for the British public was that no ground was captured at all. As the winter of 1915 turned to the spring and then the summer of 1916, the positions of the British and German troops remained unchanged.

Field Marshal Haig's main strategy was now to wait until he had overwhelming military advantage before engaging the enemy. The build-up would take months and would strike at the point where the British and the French allies met along the quiet and peaceful Somme River.

The Battle of the Somme was to last four of the bloodiest months in the history of the British Army. There would be over 400,000 British and Empire casualties, of which almost 100,000 died. It was not one single battle, but a series of offensives that ranged up and down the entire length of the British sector of the Western Front.

On 14 July 1916, William's 7th Seaforth Highlanders and the rest of 9th Scottish Division attacked the Germans who were heavily fortified in the small village of Longueval, 11 kilometres east of Albert, France. The attack started at 03:25 hrs and met with fierce resistance on the outskirts of the town because the Germans had converted many of the house cellars into defensive strong-points manned by machine guns and grenade-throwers. By mid-morning house-to-house fighting had developed. William was attacking a strong point when he was severely wounded by a German stick grenade that exploded close to him.

Luckily he was not closer to the exploding grenade, as it would have killed him. Nevertheless, Private William Cranston lost three fingers from his right hand, a section of his face was sliced open and his eye socket was smashed. He also took shrapnel down the inside of his arm and to the right hand side of his body.

William was transferred away from the battlefield as quickly as possible. Within a week he was a patient at 1st London General Hospital where surgeons delicately sutured his face back together again and cleaned up the other fragmentation wounds to his body, but the eye itself had become infected and had to be removed.

Within days of arriving at the military Hospital in London, William asked for Martha and without hesitation, she rushed to his side. There, William asked Martha to marry him and even though his wounds were ghastly, Martha said yes. A few weeks later, William managed to get leave and journey to Alton, Surrey, where the couple married in August 1916.

William spent another 15 months recovering at the hospital, though for the rest of his life he would bear scars and wear an eye patch. In mid-1918, William was transferred to a relatively new organisation called the Labour Corps. It is understood he was relocated to Government pine plantations in the Scottish borders to help with forestry work.

After the War, William continued living and working in the district on Government-paid forestry work as he and Martha raised three children.



Martha and William in the early 1940s at their residence on the estate of the Earl of Lauderdale. William is dressed in his World War Two "Home Guard" uniform.

Prior to WW2, William secured a job as assistant forester on the Earl of Lauderdale's estate in Lauder, where he became the Head Forester a short time later. William and Martha lived on the Earl of Lauderdale's estate until his retirement in the early 1950s and then moved to the nearby town of Lauder to stay in a small cottage.

Martha died in 1953 of a cerebral thrombosis and William passed away in 1957 from a heart attack.

Private George Cranston (various units)

George was already serving part time with 8th Royal Scots at Haddington when War broke out in August 1914. He was issued his mobilisation orders the same day War was declared spent the next three months training around the Haddington area.

On the afternoon of 1 November 1914 the 8th Royal Scots paraded in the town square of Haddington on the afternoon prior to being shipped overseas. They were then piped to the town's railway station to the cheers and hurrahs of many well-wishers.



Of all the Cranston sons who enlisted, George's record is the most difficult to clarify because he served in four separate units during his time in the Army and his individual Service Record was destroyed in the Second World War.

However, George's Medal Card and newspaper articles about him printed in the *Haddingtonshire Courier* during the War offer some assistance.

George's army service seems to have followed this pattern:

August 1914-May 1915	8 th Royal Scots
May 1915-Sept 1915	In hospital
Oct 1915-Oct 1916	Machine Gun Corps
Nov 1916-Late 1917	Scottish Rifles
Dec 1917-Feb 1918	In hospital
Mar 1918-Nov 1918	Royal Fusiliers



As a Private with the 8th Royal Scots, he arrived on the continent on 5 November 1914 at the port of La Havre on SS *Tintoretto*. The Battalion was attached to the 7th Division, which was rushed up to the line to join the rest of the British Expeditionary Force that was fighting desperately to repel a major German Offensive known as the 1st Battle of Ypres in Belgium (Nov-Dec, 1914).

In the course of a month, George and his Battalion fought three separate battles in quick succession, yet they managed to achieve the impossible and halt the German advance. As Christmas 1914 approached, both Armies were badly mauled and seriously depleted in numbers. The 8th Royal Scots had lost forty per cent of their number to death, wounding or capture. Both sides stopped, exhausted and started to dig in.

The real war resumed for George in 1915 when his Battalion went into battle, first at Neuve Chapelle (Mar-Apr 1915), then the Battle of Aubuers (early May 1915) and finally the Battle of Festubert (late May 1915). It was during this battle that George and some of his comrades were pinned down by a German artillery barrage that lasted two days.

At one point the High Explosive shells were landing at the rate of one every 10 seconds. When the 8th Royal Scots were finally relieved, senior Officers were appalled by the numbers of soldiers who were suffering from shell shock. Lance Corporal George Cranston was among them.

George spent about five months recovering, after which he was transferred to the newly formed Machine Gun Corps. There he learned to use the Lewis machine gun to deadly effect.

At the end of the Battle of the Somme (Nov 1916), many infantry units were so dangerously under strength that they needed reinforcements urgently and George was transferred yet again, this time to the Scottish Rifles. It was about this time that George was demoted from Lance Corporal back to Private. It is only speculation, but perhaps George may have lost his rank and been transferred at the same time.

In November 1917, George was seriously injured for the second time. According to the notice in the *Haddingtonshire Courier*, George was, 'wounded in France by shrapnel in face, head and hand'. George was evacuated to England and admitted to the Lord Derby's Hospital in Winwick, Lancashire.

Finally, in March 1918, when George was discharged from hospital he was transferred yet again to the Royal Fusiliers, which was unofficially known proudly as the City of London Regiment. Descendants know that after he returned to France, George was badly gassed in the final weeks of the conflict. George was evacuated and hospitalised for the third time trying to recover from the agonising effects of mustard gas.

By the time that he was demobilized and returned home to Haddington, he was still in poor health and eventually he, along with his mother Elizabeth and brothers Robert and Angus, emigrated to Australia aboard the TSS *Euripides*, arriving in May 1920.



In Sydney, George was incapable of earning a regular income. Every nine months or so, parts of his skin peeled off exposing raw flesh underneath. During these times he had to remain submerged in an oil bath to avoid infection.

In 1925, George met Matilda West, who had spent the latter part of the War serving in the Queen Mary Army Auxiliary Corps in Britain. They married and had one child, Nora, who was born in 1926.

George Cranston died on 19 July 1963. Matilda followed a year later with cancer.

Airman Robert Cranston (Royal Air Force). Robert tried to live as normal life as possible while the Great War swirled around the Cranston family. He joined the local football club and in early 1917 was photographed with the rest of his team

In September 1917, only a month after Robert turned 18, he was conscripted into the British Armed Services. Robert was a fully qualified Joiner in civilian life and found himself needed in the fledgling Royal Flying Corps (RFC) as a "rigger aero" (a person who performs repairs and maintenance on the wooden and canvas airframes of planes).

He was given the Service Number 94664 and the rank of Airman (1st Class), the lowest rank in the RFC. Robert was trained on bombers and specifically the newly-commissioned Airco DH9 Heavy Bomber. On 1 April 1918, the Royal Flying Corp was renamed the Royal Air Force (RAF).



After training, Robert was attached to 99 Squadron RAF (a newly-formed bomber squadron), which was equipped with the Airco DH9. On 20 April 1918, he and the other 200 or so men of 99 Squadron were sent to France where they were based at Ochey, near Nancy in north-eastern France.

There, 99 Squadron joined two other squadrons (55 Sqn and 104 Sqn) to become the VIII Brigade of the RAF's fledgling bomber command.

According to Royal Air Force history, 99 Squadron flew its first mission on 21 May 1918 (one month after Robert and the Squadron transferred to France). 99 Squadron took part in large scale daylight raids against targets in Germany, sustaining heavy losses both due to the unreliable nature of the DH9 and significant German opposition. During one raid against Saarbrücken on 31 July 1918, seven out of nine aircraft from the squadron were shot down. In September 1918, the Squadron was withdrawn from the front line to be re-equipped with an improved bomber. This changeover was still in the process when the First World War ended.

Robert stayed in France attached to 99 Squadron for several months after the war as the squadron was now flying daily missions over Germany to verify that the ceasefire was still holding and report any infractions to authorities. In late January, 1919 news was received that the entire Squadron was to be transferred to India to patrol the troubled Waziristan region on the North West frontier. All conscripted airmen in the Unit were asked if they wished to stay on, or be sent home and demobilised. This included Robert, who was young, single and freshly promoted to Airman (2nd Class).

It seemed like a wonderful opportunity to continue with the RAF and even see exotic locations, but he had received further news from home about how poorly the family was doing and he knew where his real duty lay. Robert turned down the once in a lifetime offer and was discharged from the RAF, returning to Haddington in February 1919.

What he found at home must have shocked him. His mother was now deeply traumatised at the loss of so many sons and George was in a terrible way. His skin was blistering and peeling from his groin, neck and arms where the gas had seeped through his clothes and into his skin.

It is believed Robert wrote urgently to his sister Agnes in Australia pleading to bring out his mother and brothers to Australia. Agnes obviously responded quickly and positively, for Robert and other immediate members of the Cranston family left Scotland for new lives in Sydney, Australia. Robert was only 20 years old at this time. Only injured brother William remained at home as he had just married and had to continue with medical treatment that was only available there.

Robert secured employment immediately in the nascent air transport industry thanks to his war-time skills learnt maintaining heavy planes. He married Janet Rankin ("Jean") Rew on 18 December 1926. They had one son, Ian Rew Cranston, in October 1927.

Robert Cranston died of a heart attack in Sydney on 5 November 1950 and Jean passed away in 1974. Robert was the only Cranston to return home unscathed from service in the Great War, yet his only son, Ian, died during the Korean War while a fighter pilot for the Royal Australian Air Force.

Agnes Howden Cranston

Agnes moved out of the family home in her early twenties to earn money for the family. In the 1911 census, she was 25 and working for a Bank Manager's family in Musselburgh as a housekeeper.

At the weekend she would return to Haddington and help her mother with the chores and where she could ride her bike and socialise like any mid-twenty year old.

Her brother James introduced her to his Foreman, John McDowall, age 27, who was born in Kirkcudbrightshire. John McDowall and Agnes Cranston were instantly attracted to each other and married on New Year's Day in 1912 at Forester's Hall, Haddington.

By prior arrangement they left for Australia from London a few weeks later in February 1912 aboard the SS *Osterley*. The newly-weds arrived in Sydney on 8 April 1912.



Before the start of WW1, Agnes' younger brother, Andrew, came to live in Australia and stay with the McDowalls in the inner city suburb of Balmain, until they purchased land to build their new home. For three years from 1915, the McDowall couple hewed sandstone from the site and built a family home with their own hands.

In 1919, when younger brother Robert wrote to Agnes from Scotland outlining the plight of the remaining Cranstons and the poor mental condition of their mother, Agnes agreed for the remaining three brothers and Elizabeth, the mother, to come and live in Australia.

Agnes passed away suddenly from a massive heart attack in 1951 at the family home at Gordon.



Andrew Cowan Cranston left school to become a butcher like his brother George. While still an apprentice, it is believed he suffered from several debilitating bouts of bronchitis and by the time he had qualified as a butcher at the age of 18 in late 1913, the Cranston family doctor advised him to move to a warmer climate. Andrew's sister Agnes had already emigrated to Australia a year earlier in 1912 and arrangements were made for Andrew to go there also. In May 1914, at the age of 19, Andrew arrived in Sydney aboard the SS *Otway* from London. When War was declared three months later, Andrew knew his brothers back in Scotland would be called up to fight. Andrew tried to enlist in the Australian Army. However, he was rejected for service on medical grounds for having emphysema.

Andrew worked successfully as a butcher and made enough money during the War to open his own Butcher's shop in partnership with another. He also married his partner's sister, Elsie Ball in 1921 but three months after the wedding, Andrew was diagnosed with Pulmonary Tuberculosis. His condition deteriorated quickly and he died 18 months later on 3 January 1923 at Waterfall Sanatorium, in the South of Sydney.



Mary Ann Cranston was educated at the Haddington Public School, where she won prizes for perfect attendance over a five year period (1901-1904 inclusive). After leaving school Mary started a career as a domestic servant in and around Edinburgh and by 1911 she was working as a cook to a wealthy family in Cramond, Edinburgh.

With the advent of War however, and her mother's deteriorating mental condition, Mary had returned to the family home in Haddington by 1915 where she secured employment as a cook to Dr Wallace-James a local medical practitioner who lived a large Georgian mansion called Tyne House.

It was while she was helping her mother prepare Christmas dinner in December 1916, that she met Private John James (Jim) Weir, an infantryman with the Canadian Expeditionary Force who was a distant relative of the Cranston family and visiting on leave. They struck up a strong friendship and Jim promised to write.

Jim was invalided off the battlefield during the Battle of Vimy Ridge (April-May 1917), suffering from the effects of gassing. While convalescing, he wrote constantly to Mary and when he was finally well enough to travel, he obtained leave to visit Scotland where he asked Mary to marry him. Mary accepted.



After their brief honeymoon, Jim returned to France, where according to his service record, he worked behind the lines with the 2nd Canadian Infantry Works Battalion until the middle of June 1918.

In January 1919 he was transferred to Witley in England, which was one of the major depots for the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Britain, in readiness for repatriation back to Canada.

In late March 1919 Jim and Mary boarded the SS *Melita* and Jim was discharged from the Canadian Army upon arrival at the port of St. John, New Brunswick. Afterwards, Jim obtained a modest War Veteran's loan from the Canadian Government and in 1920, purchased a small 50 hectare farm near Priceville, Ontario about two kilometres away from his parents and family.

However, the farm was located in poor farming country and the harder that Jim worked, the worse his health became. Beginning to suffer from uncontrollable shakes and lameness in one leg, Jim's attempts to earn a living from farming proved ultimately fruitless. He finally managed to obtain a small Invalid pension.

In 1932, during the worst financial crisis the world had seen, the Weir family found themselves virtually penniless. The tenant on the Weir farm was a year behind in his rent; Jim's health had broken down completely and he was incapable of any work. Mary was trying to look after her husband as well as five children under twelve. The partial War Pension was no longer enough to pay for everything and Jim still owed money on a mortgage they could not repay.

The farm would remain in the family's possession until finally sold in 1969, but the family's financial crisis in the early 1930s almost drove the family into bankruptcy. Facing mounting debt, with virtually no income Mary suffered a complete mental breakdown. She was admitted to the Hamilton Asylum, Ontario suffering from Manic Depression and spent the next seven and a half years receiving treatment.

Jim Weir died in October 1938 at the age of fifty from asphyxiation due to partial paralysis of his throat muscles. Mary, who was still a patient at the Asylum, was not informed about Jim's death until the day of the funeral and could not attend. He received a military funeral and was buried in the Priceville cemetery. Soldiers and schoolchildren marched to the cemetery, a firing party discharged three volleys and a lone bugler played the Last Post.

It was not until 1939 that Mary was eventually discharged from the Asylum, fully recovered. After years of housework, Mary died in August 1962 from a heart attack. She was buried alongside her husband in the Priceville cemetery, Ontario, Canada.



Angus Mitchell Cranston was never old enough to serve during the Great War. He emigrated to Australia with other members of the surviving Cranston family in 1920. At the age of 23, when Angus was a plumber living with his brother George in Milsons Point, he married Annie Pullar Morrison in Leichhardt, New South Wales. It is thought that Angus was mentally scarred by what happened to his older brothers, and he became an alcoholic.

He did manage to enlist in the Australian army during WW2 and saw service from November 1940 to October 1945. However, more than a quarter of his time in the Army was spent Absent Without Leave, or sick, or in the stockade charged with Drunkenness and at other times also fighting.

After WWII, Annie took the unusual step of divorcing Angus to protect herself and her three children from his alcoholic episodes, which had become periodically violent. Angus died of respiratory arrest in May 1951, just 9 days prior to his 51st birthday. He is buried in Rookwood Cemetery, Sydney.

What happened to the Mother?

Elizabeth Cranston, the mother of the family, never recovered from the deaths and wounding of her boys. She was also impoverished, earning no money from the time her husband Alexander died in 1911.

The year 1916, must have been a particularly difficult year for the whole Cranston family and Elizabeth in particular. Three sons died and another three were severely wounded. This was not going unnoticed in Haddington and in December 1916 the *Haddingtonshire Courier* ran a feature article about the Cranston family hardships.

A NOBLE HADDINGTON RECORD - THE SERVICE OF SIX BROTHERS
Intimation has been received that Private Adam Cranston, aged 23, Royal Scots Fusiliers, son of the late Mr. Alexander Cranston and of Mrs. Cranston, St. Martin's Gate, Haddington, has been missing at the front since November 13. In civil life, Private Cranston was in the service of Haddington Co-operative Society as a baker, and was greatly liked and esteemed. Naturally the intimation now received raises grave anxiety as to his fate.

The event adds another fact to a noble family record. Six brothers in all have joined the colours, and within the past six months death has claimed two, while, in addition, Adam has now been missing since November 13. In May, Private James Cranston, RE, died from a chill, just as he was about to leave for the front.

In July, Company Sergeant Major John Cranston, Cameron Highlanders, fell on the field after a magnificent record, he having gone out at the beginning of the war, and having undergone all the terrible experiences then involved. He passed through the great retreat from Mons and the struggle on the Marne, coming right down to Loos, through which battle he passed with only a scratch.

He was to be released for recruiting and other service at home, but was killed in what was to be, for a time at least, his last week of active service.

Private William Cranston, Seaforth Highlanders, has also seen much fighting. He has been in hospital since July, suffering from serious bullet wounds in the head involving the loss of an eye, he also having other injuries. Lance-Corporal Alex, Cranston R.E., after having been for some time in hospital, has again returned to the front. Lance-Corporal George Cranston, Royal Scots, was seven months at the front, and was invalided home, his health having broken down from trench hardships, thus rounding off for the time being a truly remarkable record of patriotic devotion. Much sympathy is felt with Mrs. Cranston in the new and grave anxiety regarding the fate of Adam.

On top of everything else that happened during 1916, Elizabeth learned on the last days of the year that her mother had just died at the age of 81. Grief overtook her and she suffered a complete mental breakdown.

Prior to her departure to Australia in March 1920 (organised between her son Robert and daughter Agnes), the *Haddingtonshire Courier* published the following farewell.

It is with feelings of regret that we parted with our esteemed friend, Mrs Cranston on Monday, who, with three of her sons were to leave Waverley Station with the night train for London with the expectation of sailing for Australia on Wednesday [31 March 1920]. Mrs Cranston has been long well-known in Haddington.



She came with her late husband and took up residence in the town forty years ago and had a large family, who were mostly grown up when she was left a widow ten years ago.

The family consisted of nine sons and two daughters. The daughters are both married - one in Australia and the other in Canada.

Of the nine sons, seven joined the colours in the early stages of the War, three fell on the battlefields of France and more badly wounded.

Mrs Cranston's long stay in Haddington was that of great activity and hard work and many who knew her can testify to her unselfish and noble life in seeking to help and serve others with little or no thought that she too required rest, which she was often deprived of in attending the sick.

We wish her safe voyage to the distant land, where we trust she will have many happy days to spend in peace and tranquillity.

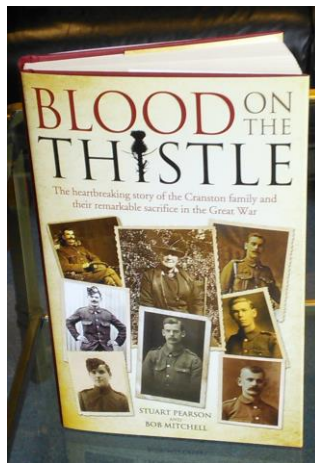
Unfortunately her mental health continued to decline in Australia. Elizabeth used to wander through the bush and get hopelessly lost. Several times she ended up at the nearby railway station telling people that she was waiting for her "boys to come home".



She proved too difficult to manage for all three adult children and the family was forced to take the unprecedented step of having her committed to a mental institution.

Elizabeth was examined by doctors and in June 1927 she was taken to the Lunacy Court in Darlinghurst, Sydney, to be committed. Collectively, the doctors recorded that she was *"disoriented; confused; restless; wanders and often needs to be found by the Police; undresses in public, has no knowledge of her age, name, date of birth or country of origin; defective memory; quite incapable of taking care of herself and talks to imaginary people"*.

After two years at Rydalmere Mental Hospital, Elizabeth died from heart failure and senile dementia in March 1929 at the age of 74.



Reference: © Stuart Pearson (Grandson of Agnes Cranston). The full Cranston family story, *Blood on the Thistle*, written by Stuart Pearson with Bob Mitchell, published by John Blake Publishing Ltd, London (2014).