

## **Biog 17 McWhirr Brothers text to go**

**Morag Cross 24 Jan 2014**

### **\*\*\*17.1**

Among the thousands of children who passed through the Orphan Homes of Scotland, now Quarrier's Village at Bridge of Weir, were the four McWhirr brothers from Glasgow, nephews of Thomas H McWhirr (see separate story). His own childhood experience of poverty and a strong Christian commitment inspired successful Glasgow shoemaker and retailer William Quarrier (1829-1903) to found his charity in 1871, to care for abandoned and destitute children.

### **\*\*\*17.2 a and/or b**

He later opened a children's home designed as a countryside refuge for city children, 'a number of cottages built near each other ... with a father and mother at the head of each household; playground ... with a school ... the father ... to teach a different trade, such as tailor, joiner, printer'. The central workshop would offer a range of training, the aim being to fit children to earn their own livings while in Quarrier's family-styled environment, underscored by a strong religious ethic. [Sources: Josie Bell, Quarriers, Bridge of Weir, personal communication; Quarriers, *A self-guided walk of historical Quarrier's Village*, undated, pp1-2; 'The History of William Quarrier', *Quarriers: Who We Are*, at [www.quarriers.org.uk](http://www.quarriers.org.uk)].

### **\*\*\*17.3**

Stonemason William McWhirr married Annie Houston in Polmadie, Glasgow in 1880. Both were from very modest backgrounds, his father being a miner-turned-coachman, while hers was a handloom weaver. By 1895, their circumstances were desperate. William was 'in poor health and fears consumption following pneumonia ... Wife drinks badly'. Because the father had been unemployed for two years, the eight children received 'parochial assistance' from Govan Poor Board, but their mother still pawned clothing to make ends meet. William died of TB in 1897, his widow was unable to cope, and 'though friends helped in every way she would not reform'. Annie had been smoking in bed when she set fire to the blankets, and died of her injuries in 1900. Relatives could afford to look after the girls, but the four boys were taken to the Quarrier's reception centre and hostel at James Morrison St, Glasgow. [Sources: Statutory Register of Marriages, Births at [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk); Census 1881, 1891 at [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); Josie Bell, Quarriers, Bridge of Weir, personal communication].

### **\*\*\*17.4**

James and John McWhirr (1893-1942) entered care in April 1900, and William (b 1887) and Thomas (1889-1968) that June. James (1885-1915) and William were placed on the sail-training 'ship on land', the SS James Arthur, to train them for a career in the merchant navy. This was a fully-rigged, prefabricated brig, set in concrete so that the boys could learn seamanship while on dry land.

### **\*\*\*17.5 a-e use one of statue pics AND use 17.5g [ship picture must be used-important to story]**

James and William both went to sea in 1903, the latter on 'Celticburn', a four-masted ship owned by a Greenock merchant, whose vessels visited India and San Francisco. [Sources: Josie Bell, Quarriers,

Bridge of Weir, personal communication; Quarriers, *A self-guided walk of historical Quarrier's Village*, undated, pp5-6; 'Springburn' and 'Celticburn' , *The Maritime History Virtual Archives*, at [www.bruzelius.info](http://www.bruzelius.info)].

### \*\*\*17.6

Thomas and John lived in Cottage 22, the 'Marshall Home', before John was 'reclaimed' by his now-married sister and went to live with her in Johnstone, Renfrewshire. Thomas however, was part of an emigration party to Canada, a practice that continued into the mid-twentieth century. Over 7,000 children were sent from Quarriers, in the hopes they would have more opportunities, although the children's own testimonies reveal mixed feelings about their involuntary exile. [Sources: Josie Bell, Quarriers, Bridge of Weir, personal communication; *The Golden Bridge: Child Migration from Scotland to Canada*, IRISS, Glasgow 2008-2011, at <http://content.iriss.org.uk/goldenbridge/index.html>].

### \*\*\*17.7

Older children were committed as indentured labourers and domestic servants. On some rural farms harsh supervision and bitterly cold weather were countered by luckier emigrants who found genuine happiness with substitute families. [Sources: Josie Bell, Quarriers, Bridge of Weir, personal communication; *The Golden Bridge: Child Migration from Scotland to Canada*, IRISS, Glasgow 2008-2011, at <http://content.iriss.org.uk/goldenbridge/index.html>].

### \*\*\*17.8a and b use both

The annual report, or 'Narrative of Facts' for 1905, contains a pictures of Thomas's child migration party arriving at the receiving home in Brockville, Ontario. However, the adult Thomas had returned to Scotland by 1911, when he was a quarry labourer in Beith, aged 22. William was now in America, and John, the only one to remain in Scotland, was still boarding with his sister in Johnstone and working in a flax mill. In 1912, John joined The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Special Reserve, a part-time service recently-established to support the regular army. [Sources: *Narrative of Facts ... Orphan Homes of Scotland ... 1905*, p60; 1911 Census, at [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk); John McWhirr, *British Army WWI Pension Records 1914-1920*, at [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)].

### \*\*\*17.9a and b

Life had been crueller to James, the eldest brother, who had left the merchant navy and was working as a railway porter, when he married at Cathcart in 1907. His first wife, Isabella, had died of tuberculosis in 1909, the same disease which had killed James's father. The following year, James remarried, to Susan Dennison, and took a job as an engineer's storekeeper. In April 1915, James took ill with pneumonia, and died in Glasgow's Western Infirmary, a civilian casualty of the limited treatment options then available. [Sources: 1911 Census, Statutory Registers of Marriages, Deaths, at [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)].

### \*\*\*17.10 a and b

On 29 September 1914, in the second month of the war, the 'Orphan Homes' held an open day with special trains met by 'conveyances' to take 'all friends interested' to see the village, now having

grown to 42 cottages, laundry, hospital, sanatorium for tuberculosis sufferers, and 'Colony of Mercy for Epileptics'. This was a fundraising venture, which also enabled supporters to see how their money was being spent. Meanwhile, as a reservist attending annual training, former Quarriers boy John McWhirr had been called up. [Source: *Glasgow Herald*, 24 Sept 1914, p1].

**\*\*\*17.11 a or b or c or all as required**

John disembarked with his regiment in France on 11 November 1914. The 2nd Battalion, The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were part of the 6th Division, arriving to 'reinforce the hard-pressed British Expeditionary Force on the Aisne, before the whole army was moved north into Flanders'. McWhirr was seriously incapacitated (either wounded, or suffering from illness) just three weeks later, on 12 December. [Sources: John McWhirr, *UK, Silver War Badge Records, 1914-1920*, and *British Army WWI Pension Records 1914-1920*, at [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); 'The 6th Division in 1914-1918', 'The Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders', at [www.1914-1918.net](http://www.1914-1918.net)].

**\*\*\*17.12**

He was taken by motor ambulance to the 'Women's Hospital, Boulogne', possibly the Women's Hospital Corps detachment at Wimereux, run by Dr Louisa Garret Anderson. This was quite separate from the Scottish Women's Hospital (see Dr Louise McIlroy's story), but there was an enormous concentration of medical facilities around Boulogne, and casualties like McWhirr were evacuated from here. He was taken by hospital ship to England, and was honourably discharged from the army in July 1915 under King's Regulation 392 (xiv). This stated that he was 'No longer physically fit for war service', and when the Silver War Badge was instituted in 1916, McWhirr applied for one. Wearing the badge (inscribed 'Services Rendered') demonstrated to civilians that the holder had already served overseas and was now physically unable to do so. [Sources: 'Women's Organisations', 'Records of the Silver War Badge', at [www.1914-1918.net](http://www.1914-1918.net); *UK, Silver War Badge Records, 1914-1920*, *British Army WWI Pension Records 1914-1920*, *British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920*, all at [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)].

**\*\*\*17.13 a and/ or b**

William McWhirr had stayed in America until April 1917, the date of that country's entry into the conflict, after remaining neutral. William was living in the Scottish-sounding Wallace, Calaveras County, California working as a labourer, but on his Draft Registration Card, he gives an incorrect date of birth. This was the so-called 'Third Draft', in September 1918, and as a non-citizen, he was not liable for service in the American military. However, the 'First Draft' of 1917 had been for males born after June 1886, which should have included William. It therefore seems more likely that he was trying to reduce his chance of conscription, than not knowing his own birthday. [Sources: 'American Entry into World War I, 1917', *US Department of State, Office of the Historian*, at <http://history.state.gov>; *US, World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918*, at [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)].

**\*\*\*17.14 and / or b**

The fourth brother, Thomas was a farm labourer during the war. In some cases, this was a 'reserved' or 'restricted' occupation, deemed essential to the national interest, and therefore the workers could not be called up. He married in 1917, to Margaret Gillick, while working at Netherholm Farm

near Stonehouse, Lanarkshire. [Sources: 1911 Census, Statutory Registers of Marriages, Deaths, at [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)].

**\*\*\*17.15 a and/ or b and c**

After leaving the army, John McWhirr married in 1915, while he was a sawmill worker. He planned to use his army pension to emigrate to Canada with his two children, and begin farming in 1921. The couple had returned to Ayrshire by 1942, when they were walking along a country road near Fenwick at 9 pm during a dark winter's evening. The blackout of the Second World War was strictly enforced, and in the darkness, they were both hit by a passing car, dying instantly from multiple injuries. After surviving the trenches, John McWhirr was killed as an indirect result of the Second World War. [Sources: Sources: 1911 Census, Statutory Registers of Marriages, Deaths, at [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk); *Canada, Ocean Arrivals (Form 30A), 1919-1924*, at [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)].

**\*\*\*17.16**