

THE MURDUCK NET

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Family Histories

of people who have used the surname MURDUCK through the ages

William Edgar Elliott's letter to William George Murduck July, 1918

In early August of 1918, William George Murduck, of East Toronto, received a letter from England. The letter had been written by his friend and neighbour William "Bill" Edgar Elliott, who was a soldier serving with the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). This letter is significant because we find here one of the very few extant references to Frensham Pond, one of the CEF segregation camps set up for Canadian soldiers during the Great War. Frensham Pond and other locations were established as places to isolate arriving Canadian soldiers from the general British population, in an effort to reduce the potential transmission of disease. Bill also mentions by name many of the men he and George knew from East Toronto whom he met at Frensham Pond Camp, at Witley Camp, and at local English villages.

The contents of the letter follow:

From P[riva]te W. E. Elliott, No. 3233397¹
12th Res[erve] B[attalio]n
No. 5 Co[mpan]y
Witley Camp²
Surrey England

14 July 1918

Dear George,

Just a few lines to let you know that I am well, hoping you are the same. Well, George, I received your letter today, July 14th, and I was glad to here [sic] from you. Well, George, I think England is worst than the west be leave me. I do not like it a bit and it is so cold and wet it is just like the west. Well, Charlie your brother is in this camp³. He comes down to my hut every night. Be leave me we stick to geather pretty good. Say George, he is the only trueFriend I have in this country. I would give him my shirt if he wanted it. Well George,

Charlie is looking pretty good and he told me that Canada would look pretty good to him and I gess it would to. Well George, I have meet a lot of the Boys [Page 2] over here From home, and they were glad to see me. Dat Gilding⁴ is only three huts away. Bill Applebe⁵ is here. Art Brown⁶, Charlie Stabler⁷, Harry Abbott⁸, Wibern Woods⁹, Tom Walton¹⁰ and last night I was to town and I met Rick Foster the fellow that worked over at the Brick Yard with is Brother E. Foster¹¹. His Brother has gone back to Canada. Well George, a week ago last Saturday, Charlie your Brother and I went over to Frensham Pond Camp¹². That is where we were for twenty eight days. All Canadian troops go there first when they come from Canada for twenty eight days. Well, Saturday when we went over we seen a lot more of the Boys over there From east Toronto. I will just give you some of the names of them Jim [Twylar ?], Vick Cook¹³, Alf [Bengay ?], [Page 3] Mark Marshall, Tom [Witham ?], Simpsons Driver John Brown and there is a lot more there to But I cant give you all the names just know. Well George, we got five days leave so I went to London and I had a pretty good time. Say, it is some place Be leave me. And girls, why you can't move for them. All I could hear was hello Canada – but I kept away from them do you Be leave that George. Say I [?] them in the parks till I got sick of them and [dat ?] Gilding just looked at me. He would not go near them. Say George, there is a girl down near where Charlie's girl lives¹⁴ and she writes to me. The other day she sent me her picture and I don't think much of her. She looks like a pure bronk. [Page 4] She lives at Sittingborne, Kent, England. But don't give any of that news at home, will you. Say George, I got a letter from Mrs. Best and she said she would like to see me back home again. She has moved now. I got a letter from Pearl Carlton last week and she said that Mrs. Best was over here in England. But that is a damn lie. Say George, Sid Elliott¹⁵ was over at [Frensham ?] Camp, but he came over here last week so last Charlie and I went over to see him and he was glad to see me and your Brother. Well George, I think this is all this time so Good By from your Friend Bill.

PS Say George, this is bad writing but I guess you can make it out all write and don't say any thing about the girls at home please.

Wm E Elliott

**** Please note, some punctuation has been added, and some spelling has been corrected, where it seemed reasonable to do so. The general tone and 'jist' of the letter and Bill Elliott's manner of writing and speaking remain nonetheless.*

Bill Elliott sealed the envelope on 13 July 1918, addressed it to

*William G Murduck
Hagerman PO
Markham Ont Canada*

and posted it as a ‘free frank’ letter – a “Canadian Soldier Letter”.

The envelope was postmarked at Godalming 7:45pm 14 July 1918, and it was back stamped at Markham, Ontario, on 31 July 1918.

At Markham, ‘Hagerman’ and ‘Markham’ were crossed out with a pencil, and ‘Coleman’ was written in. The letter was re-directed to Unionville, where it was front stamped 1 August 1918. But, there is nothing on the envelope to indicate when it was finally delivered to the Coleman Post Office and placed in to William George Murduck’s hands.

¹ **William Edgar Elliott, Service No. 3233397.** He was the son of William James and Isabella Elliott, of Coleman Post Office, East Toronto. He was drafted on 27 March 1918, and remained at Witley Camp until September, when he was transferred to the 15th Infantry Battalion. He arrived in France after Armistice Day, then was returned to Canada and was discharged at Toronto on 10 May 1919, and was ever a presence in William George Murduck's life.

² Witley Camp was established for Canadian service men during the war. It's located just a bit south and west of Guildford, County of Surrey, which is itself several miles south and west of London, England.

³ **Charles Henry Murduck, Service No. 454705.** He was the second (of two) and youngest son of George Thomas and Kate Frances Murduck. Charlie appears to have 'run away from home' to Smiths Falls, Ontario, where he attested on 26 June 1915. Once struck off strength because of shrapnel wounds received, and again because of serious trench fevers, he died in the final push for the French/German border on 11 October 1918 – just one month before Armistice Day.

⁴ Probably **Frank Gilding, Service No. 3230517.** Frank's home was located at 1636 Danforth Ave, east Toronto, just a bit east of where Bill Elliott and George Murduck lived. Frank was drafted on the 8th of January 1918, and died within minutes of reaching the front lines on 29 August 1918 – sitting down to rest on a packing crate, a German shell exploded and killed him instantly.

⁵ Possibly **William Henry Appleby, Service No. 237510.** He attested at Toronto on 12 April 1916, when he was living on Ethel Avenue, Coleman Post Office, east Toronto. William H. was posted to Witley Camp in early April, 1918, at which place he remained until early November later that year. He survived the war and was discharged at Toronto on the 24th of May 1919.

⁶ A total of 121 men named "Arthur Brown" enlisted for C.E.F. Service, one of whom gave his surname as Brown. At present it is not known which of these men Bill Elliott might have been referring to.

⁷ Possibly **Charles Thomas Stabler, Service No. 665643.** This man was living at 10 Winston Avenue, Toronto, when he attested for service on 7 February 1916. He died in Buckinghamshire, England, on 21 January 1933.

⁸ The author has no idea who this man might have been.

⁹ Nor do does the author have any sense of who this might have been.

¹⁰ Similarly, the author has been unable, so far, to ascertain without doubt who this man might have been.

¹¹ It's not been possible to easily and readily establish who Rick Foster and his brother were.

¹² A 'Segregation Camp' designed to prevent the spread of disease from the newly arrived troops to those troops at the Reserve Battalion camps. New arrivals normally spent 28 days at these camps. Frensham Pond Camp was on the Frensham Common, a few miles west of Witley.

¹³ This was most likely **Victor Barker Cook, Service No. 3230520.** Born in Scarborough Township in 1892, he was living at 161 Kingston Road, Toronto, when he was drafted in to CEF service at Toronto on 8 January 1918. He was transferred to the 12th Reserve Battalion and stationed at Witley Camp from 28 June until 12 October, 1918. This man returned to Canada, married in 1925, and died in Toronto in 1953.

¹⁴ 'Charlie's girl' is known only as **Dorothy Foster.** She and Charlie became engaged to marry at Christmas, 1916. They met while Charlie was recuperating from shrapnel wounds suffered a few months earlier. Several photographs of Dorothy exist, but until this letter surfaced, even the approximate location of her residence has been unknown. Unfortunately, a couple of girls named Dorothy Foster were enumerated during the 1911 Census of England and Wales living in the broad area around Sittingbourne, and it has so far been impossible to establish which one of these she might have been.

¹⁵ This was most likely **Sidney Arthur Elliott, Service No. 238115,** although we can not at this time be certain.