

*Irene McCardle writes about her father, **Andrew Leishman** and her uncle **John Robertson** and living in **Balerno** during the Second World war*

My father **Andrew Leishman** was a motor cycle despatch rider with the Kings Own Scottish Borderers in the First World War. He was seriously injured but then went on to become an ambulance driver with the Royal Army Medical Corps. He told of a trick to get the ambulance out of the mud when it was stuck at Passchendaele; fill the holes in the roads with tins of bully beef!

After the First World War he stayed in Cologne in what became West Germany after the Second World War, working as a driver for Officers. He then returned to Britain and worked in London as a taxi driver before returning to Scotland in the late 20s when he married Jean Russell, lived in cottages at Malleny Mills and made bungs for whisky barrels.

My uncle, **John Robertson**, was from a Currie family. His mother's name was Bryce, and I think was linked to the naming of Bryce Avenue. The family had a flour mill business. John Robertson was a great bowler at Balerno; I have a medal of his dating from 1908. He worked as a clerk in the Paper Mill office, married Jenny Russell and lived in Stoddart's building (above the present chemist's shop in Main Street, Balerno). Stoddart was a grocer licensed to blend his own whisky – medicinal comfort – which could be bought by the gill (quarter of a pint or 0.14 of a litre).

John Robertson did not want to go to war, but he did in 1916-17 and was sent to Palestine to fight the Turks. It seems he was 'blown to smithereens'; when the telegram came his widow went to stay at Malleny Mills.¹

John was known as an excellent fiddler at local dances.

During the (Second) World War there was an old green bus – Johnnie Wilkie's bus – which used to take women and children up to Colzium to gather sphagnum moss which was used for wound dressings; it was kept damp in breathable hessian bags. Women also knitted socks and fingerless gloves and possibly also balaclavas.

I remember the two Misses Thomson who lived in Glenpark – their father had owned Ben Line Shipping. They and Oddie opened their gardens for teas to raise money for the war effort. My husband Jack was a Ship's Captain and on one visit to Hamburg when I was on board I met someone who had known Mr Thomson of Ben Line. Polish ships had brought steel to Hamburg, and it was being taken to Iran.

I can also remember very high poles like telegraph poles being set up in fields possibly to prevent parachute landings I think. I also remember evacuees sent from Edinburgh.

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¹ John Robertson was a Private in 1st/4th Kings Own Scottish Borderers and was killed at Ramleh on 13 November 1917. The Battle of Mughar Ridge, officially known by the British as the Action of El Mughar, took place on 13 November 1917 during the Pursuit phase of the Southern Palestine Offensive of the Sinai and Palestine Campaign following the Third Battle of Gaza.

Ramleh, now Ramla, lies on the route of the *Via Maris*, connecting old Cairo with Damascus, at its intersection with the road connecting the port of Jaffa with Jerusalem. The town had an Arab majority before most of its inhabitants were expelled or fled in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.