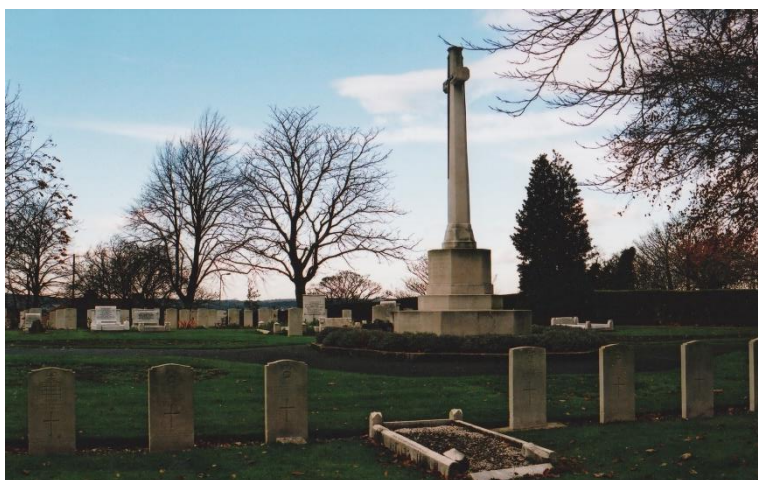


SHOCKING DEATH UNDER CANVAS

Frank Medicott was born on the 10th December, 1881 at Walsall, Staffordshire the third son of Joseph and Charlotte Medicott. The family were living at 24 De Beauvoir Square, Hackney, London in 1891 and the household members were Joseph aged 40, Charlotte aged 42, Sarah (daughter) aged 14 and sons Albert aged 16, Sidney aged 11 and Frank aged 9.

Joseph, a leather bridle cutter by trade was born at Kidderminster, Worcestershire in 1851. Charlotte was born on the 5th January, 1849 at Sedgley, North Staffordshire and her children were all born in Walsall. Albert, their eldest son was an easy chair and couch maker and his sister Sarah, a bridle stitcher, Sidney and Frank were attending school. Joseph had married Charlotte (née Jones) on the 14th April, 1873. Sometime after their last child was born the family left Staffordshire and moved south to London. Frank and his brother Sidney were baptised by the curate at St Peter's Church, Hackney on the 30th August, 1889.

The Census for 1901, recorded that the family were still living at 24 De Beauvoir Square. Joseph's occupation was given as a general bridle cutter, Charlotte, a shirt machinist, Sidney and Frank, bridle cutters, all working from home, and Albert, a chair maker.



Fort Pitt Military Cemetery Chatham Kent

Living with them was Sidney's wife Charlotte, who had been born at Islington, London. Joseph died on the 10th July, 1905 in the London County Lunatic Asylum, New Southgate, Middlesex aged 54 years. When probate was granted he left £455 10s 4d to his wife.

Frank at the age of 24 married Sarah Ann Wagner at St Peter's Church, Hackney on the 31st March, 1907. The vicar, Charles Finch M.A., officiating. Their marriage certificate recorded that Frank was an bridle cutter living at 5 Benyon Road and Sarah aged 19, was the daughter of Charles Wagner, a baker living at 118 Culford Road, West Hackney. In 1911, Frank and Sarah were living at 1 E Block, Peabody Buildings, Hackney. At that time Frank was making leather accessories for cycle manufacturers. His mother, Charlotte at the age of 60 years was employed in 1911 as a harness maker. She died in January 1919 aged 70 years.

After outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, Frank responded and joined the Middlesex Regiment at Mill Hill on the 25th August, 1914. He was described as being 5ft 7-

inches in height, had a chest measurement of 33-inches with 1½-inch expansion, dark hair, grey eyes, a fair complexion, weighed 134lbs and had two small moles on his left cheek. His physical development was described as 'Good' and he had been vaccinated in infancy.

Frank attested for 'Short Service' – three years with the Colours. His age was recorded as 28 years and 9 months, five years younger than his actual age of 32 years. He gave his occupation as a harness maker and was living with his wife at 61 Lea Bridge Road. On the 28th August, he swore an oath to faithfully to serve his country. If the war lasted less than three years he would be 'Discharged with all convenient speed'!

His service record of fifteen pages has survived in fairly good condition, though the edges are tattered and torn. Some pages are blank and although the entries are written in black ink many are faded and practically illegible. However, Private Frank Medicott, service number G/1183 was posted to the 6th (Reserve) Battalion, Middlesex Regiment. Men who enlisted in Home Counties battalions during the 1914-1918 war for General Service were given a service number with the prefix 'G'.

The 5th and 6th (Reserve) Battalions were training units, with their depot at Mill Hill. On mobilisation the 5th Battalion moved to Rochester and the 6th to Gillingham in Kent. In November 1915, the latter moved to Chatham and the 5th Battalion joining them in March 1916. They subsequently became part of the Thames and Medway Garrison.

The dates on which Frank Medicott was promoted through the ranks to Acting Sergeant is unclear as the writing on his service record is unreadable. Whilst he was at Chatham on the 20th December, 1914 and again on the 28th June, 1915 he was charged 'when on active service duty — — — was in neglect of duty as Orderly Sergeant'. Whatever punishment or admonishment he received the written entry has faded away over time.

It is absolutely clear, however, that Acting Sergeant Frank Medicott's army service ended after 313 days on the 2nd July, 1915, when he took his own life.

Chatham, Rochester & Gillingham Observer ~ 10th July, 1915.

Tragedy On The Lines – Sergeant Commits Suicide – Shooting Affray In London Recalled

The Widows Story

A shooting affray at Shoreditch some months since was recalled at an inquest at Old Brompton on Monday afternoon on Sergeant Frank Medicott, of the 6th Battalion, Middlesex Regiment, who, shot himself in a tent at the camp on the Great Lines the previous Friday evening. The

deceased joined up for the period of the war in August last, and by close application to his duties he rapidly rose to the rank of sergeant. Recently his whole demeanor changed and it was attributed by his comrades to domestic trouble, his wife having in been shot at by another man. In the last few days the deceased had complained of pains in his head, and was subject to fits of depression. The end came on Friday evening. A rifle shot was heard, and on several brother sergeants hurrying to deceased's tent the unfortunate man was found in a sitting position on a camp bed with a Service rifle between his knees and a piece of wood in his right hand. The top of his skull was blown clear off, and he was quiet dead.

Mrs Medlicott and the deceased's mother were present at the enquiry. The widow was in a most distressed state and had to be assisted from the Court several times. It was not until the close that she was able to give evidence, and it was then with the greatest reluctance she spoke of the unfortunate occurrence in which she was injured four months ago. Kindly but pointedly the Coroner put his questions, but did not enter into any details of the sad affair.

"Were you Hit?" enquired Mr Harris and the witness threw her head back sobbing. Her mother-in-law tenderly raised her veil and pointed to an injury at the side of the head and the witness, somewhat recovering her composure explained in terms of bitter agony, "Yes in the head." Husband and wife, however, had been on affectionate terms since the occurrence and it is only five weeks ago Mrs Medlicott paid a visit to her husband at Chatham. Her explanation of her husband's depression was that he was worried by his military duties.

The Inquest

The inquest was held at the Holy Trinity School, Old Brompton, on Monday afternoon before Mr C.B. Harris (Coroner) and a jury of whom Mr G.B. Knight was chosen as foreman.

Acting-Sergeant Thomas Charles Beck, 6th Battalion, Middlesex Regiment, gave evidence of identification. The deceased, he said was 32 years of age and joined on the 17th August last, at Mill Hill for three years. He was formerly a saddler. Witness had known deceased about three months and latterly considered him strange. He went sick on the 26th June from pains in the head and depression. He also had a bit of trouble at home.

The Coroner: "What was that?"

Witness: "A shooting affair – a man shot his wife."

Witness added that deceased returned to duty on the 28th June. On Friday evening he saw him sitting outside his tent alone. He then appeared as usual. Witness left at 7.55 to warn men for duty and saw no more of deceased.

Story Of The Tragedy

Sergeant Henry Smith Peachey, Middlesex Regiment, said he had known the deceased for about nine months, and lately had noticed he was very depressed.

The Coroner: “What was the reason for his depression?”

Witness: “He was depressed over a shooting outrage at his home in Shoreditch.”

Proceeding, witness said about 8 p.m., he was in camp in the Great Lines when he heard the report of a rifle. He went to the tent from which the report proceeded, and saw the deceased with part of his head blown off. He was in a sitting position on a camp bedstead, and had a rifle between his knees and a piece of stick in his right hand.

The Coroner: “Was there any indication where the charge entered his head?”

Witness: “I should think it went through his mouth.”

The Coroner: “Could a person sitting on a camp bedstead in that position pull the trigger of a rifle with the aid of a stick?”

Witness: “Yes.”

The Coroner: “Was there anything found among the deceased’s effects to throw any light on his death?”



Grave Of Sergeant Frank Medlicott

Witness: "Not to my knowledge."

The Coroner: "Was a search made?"

Witness: "I couldn't say."

The Coroner: "He was quite dead, I suppose?"

Witness: "Death must have been instantaneous."

The Coroner: "The charge went right away?"

Witness: "Yes, there were several holes in the tent."

Witness said the deceased had an ordinary Service rifle and the cartridge was of cordite. He last saw the deceased live at the pay table at 4 p.m. He then seemed very miserable, and did not answer when spoken to.

The Coroner: "Was there any trouble then at home?"

Witness: "Not that I know of."

Family Trouble

Sergeant William Stone said he had known the deceased about seven months. He was a man of good temperament at first, but had altered of late.

The Coroner: "In what way did he alter?"

Witness: "He seemed very depressed and worried."

The Coroner: "Did you know the cause of that depression?"

Witness: "Not actually. I know he had family trouble which occurred in London."

The Coroner: "Had he any regimental troubles?"

Witness: "None to my knowledge."

The Coroner: "Did he ever threaten to do anything rash?"

Witness: "No."

The Coroner: "Can you account for him taking his life?"

Witness: "No."

Witness said he heard the report of the rifle and on going to the tent saw the deceased as described by last witness.

In reply to the Coroner, P.C. Knight said he searched deceased's effects and found nothing amongst them to throw any light on the tragedy.

"I Am Queer"

Company Sergeant-Major George Alfred Comber said he had known the deceased since joining the Training Depot at the end of August last. He was a very good man up to the last six weeks.

The Coroner: "Do you know the cause?"

Witness: "The only thing I can attribute it to is family trouble at home."

Witness added that it was the deceased's intention to go home and see his wife at the week-end, and he produced his pass signed by the officer. Deceased was entitled to leave in the ordinary course, but he did not actually know that his pass had been signed. Witness said on Friday morning he saw deceased in the company tent when he should have been on parade. He asked what he was doing there, and he simply nodded his head and said, "I am queer."

Witness did not think deceased was in a proper state of mind at that time. Later he went on parade, came over faint and had to be assisted off the field. On the 29th June deceased was reprimanded for a slight offence and witness believed this prayed on his mind. He was relieved from duty and sent to see the doctor. His nerves seemed completely shattered.

The Medical Testimony

Lieutenant Robert Edward Franklyn Pearse, R.A.M.C., said he was called to the tent at 8.30 p.m., and saw deceased in a reclining position on a wire mattress. His mouth was lacerated and the upper jaw smashed to pieces. A gunshot wound extended up to the brain and the top of the skull was blown clean away.

Death must have been instantaneous. Witness observed that he thought the deceased must have made an extended cartridge, for he had never seen such severe injuries from a gunshot wound before.

The Coroner: "In your opinion, was the injury self-inflicted?"

Witness: "Yes."

The Widow's Story

Sarah Medlicott, of 61 Lea Bridge Road, Shoreditch, said the deceased was her husband. He was 32 years of age.

The Coroner: "Can you give us any reason why he should have been found with a bullet wound to his head?"

Witness: "He told me his duties were very troublesome to him, and he thought he could not do them."

The Coroner: "When did you last see him alive?"

Witness: "On Saturday week. He said he got mixed up with his figures and wanted to revert back to a private. I said I did not mind, as it would not make much difference to my money. Previously I think he had had a bit of sunstroke on the Lines. He said he was awfully hot and he put some ice on his head.

The Coroner: "Had he any other trouble that you are aware of?"

Witness: "He also said he seemed as if he had something growing at his chest. He had such a pain there."

The Coroner: "Was there anything else?"

Witness: "He said all the sergeants got more or less, in a similar state to himself and he believed if he could get home for a month's rest he would be better."

The Coroner: "Was there any other worry?"

Witness: "No."

The Coroner: "Was there anything about you being shot at?"

Witness: "No."

The Coroner: "Was there anything in it?"

Witness: "It never upset him, but it must have come as a shock to him."

The Coroner: "Were you actually shot at? That is four months ago. It was in February. Were you shot at?"

Witness: "Yes. I am getting well now."

“Were you actually hit?” the Coroner asked, and the deceased’s mother raised the witness’s veil and pointed to a wound in her head.

“Yes,” Mrs Medicott sobbed. “I am attending hospital now.”

Witness said she had had affectionate letters from her husband since the occurrence.

The deceased’s mother produced one, which the Coroner read privately. Witness said she received it only on Tuesday last.

Mrs Medicott also told the jury that she stayed a fortnight with her husband at Chatham five weeks ago, and it was during that he complained of having caught sunstroke on the Lines.

The Verdict

The Coroner briefly summed up and towards the close of his remarks he was interrupted by a painful appeal from the widow. “He didn’t do it himself, did he?”

The jury returned a verdict of “Suicide whilst of unsound mind.”

Sergeant Frank Medicott was buried in Fort Pitt Military Cemetery, Chatham, Kent with military honours. Grave Location: Plot 1328.

Fort Pitt was built between 1805 and 1819 on high the ground boundary between Chatham and Rochester in Kent. Its primary function as a fort was not fulfilled and instead it became a

hospital used between the 19th and early 20th

Centuries. Queen Victoria visited the hospital on three occasions to see the wounded from the

Crimean War. Florence Nightingale chose the Fort for an Army Medical School prior to its move to Netley in 1863. During the First World War it was a



garrison hospital which Grave Of Sergeant Frank Medicott ~ Fort Pitt Military Cemetery
King George V and Queen Mary visited in 1914 to meet wounded servicemen. The hospital closed in 1919. Gradually over a period of time from 1879 onwards various buildings in the Fort

were demolished allowing the capacity of the hospital to be enlarged. By the early 1930s the Fort, including all the buildings had been demolished and the ground cleared. In 1929 the Chatham Education board purchased the land from the War office and a Girls Technical School was built, now known as Fort Pitt Grammar School.

The Fort Pitt Military Cemetery was established in the mid-19th Century to bury the deceased from the hospital. It is situated beside the A229 (City Way) Rochester to Maidstone road. Dominating the entrance is a large stone memorial in memory of soldiers who died for their country between 1854 and 1858. The southern section of the cemetery is the oldest part, now sparsely populated with 19th Century gravestones. To the north is the large Commonwealth War Graves Commission section with a Cross of Sacrifice overlooking 584 casualties from the First World War, Second World War and Post War.

A letter dated the 27th April, 1916 from the War Office authorised all the personal possessions and property of Acting Sergeant Frank Medlicott to be forwarded to his wife who was living at 21 Elm Park Road, Leyton, London. She received Frank's War Gratuity of £6 and the balance of his pay amounting to £5 9s in January 1919. There is no record of Frank receiving any of the First World War campaign medals. In his service record is a letter dated April 1920 which was sent out from the War Office's Record Department concerning Frank Medilcott's Bronze Memorial Plaque and Scroll. The letter was sent to 67 Lea Bridge Road, Leyton. Although the writing to the addressee has the surname Medlicott is faded and the letter was returned as 'not known'. The record office, were perhaps unaware that if it was addressed to Sarah, she had remarried and had moved from her previous residence in Elm Park Road.

On the 25th October, 1916 Sarah had married John Joseph Masterson at All Saints Church, Leyton. He was a soldier serving with the 10th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force. As a widow, Sarah made a claim for a dependant's pension. It is possible that initially this was rejected but was subsequently reconsidered in November 1916. She received 16/- per week from the 10th January, 1916 to the 24th October 1916, the day before she remarried. In November 1917 authorisation was granted for a gratuity payment of £52, to Mrs Masterson who was living at 67 Lea Bridge Road, Leyton, London, E10. There is no information as to why the latter payment was made on the pension record card. Sarah died in October 1977 aged 89 years.

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Source

Newspaper ~ Chatham, Rochester & Gillingham Observer ~ 10th July, 1915.

Wikipedia Web-Site ~ www.wikipedia.org

Ancestry Web-Site ~ www.ancestry.co

Commonwealth War Graves Commission Web-Site ~ www.cwgc.org

British Army WW1 Medal Rolls Index Cards 1914-1920 ~ Ancestry

Dependants Pension Records ~ Ancestry/Western Front Association

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