

William Curtis of Kilnsey, Photographic Postcard Maker

Bob Richardson

In 1920, William Curtis, a resident of Kilnsey, described his occupation as a 'Photographic Postcard Maker'

William Curtis produced his photographic postcards whilst living in Kilnsey between approximately 1910 and 1920. (It is difficult to establish the exact dates for this period).

Much of his work was based in the Upper Wharfedale area. His postcards and photographs are well known to collectors, but little seems to be known about the man himself. This article attempts to provide some biographical details.

1869 - 1914

William Curtis was born in Leeds on **June 8th 1869**, son of Edward and Elizabeth Curtis. Walter, his brother was seven years older than William. He also had a sister, Sarah, who was born in 1863. At the time of the **1871 census**, the family lived at **6, Armley Road, Wortley, Leeds**.

In **1881**, the family had moved to **43, Burley Road, Leeds**. Edward, his father, was a butcher, and Walter was his apprentice. The 12-year-old William is listed as a scholar.

On the **1891 census**, William is living with his parents and sister at **215, Burley Road**. (On the same road as in the 1881 census). His father is now listed as a 'Bone Merchant' and William is a 'Wool Cloth Designer'. Next door at number **213, Burley Road**, Annie Hampshire lived with her parents. A romantic attachment between William and Annie was formed, and the Non-Conformist Registers show that on the **September 19th 1895**, William married Annie Hampshire at Queen Street Chapel Leeds. William's occupation is listed as Pork Merchant, so he must have given up on cloth design and followed his father into butcher related work. His new address, at the time of his marriage, was **243, Burley Road**. (This was the third house on Burley Road William had lived in).

William and his wife Annie cannot be found on the **1901 census**. Following the lead given in the newspaper article (**Fig.7**), William was found in the Population

Registers for the Netherlands (See Figs.1&2). In the returns, he is listed as living in Amsterdam in 1900 and he is still living there in 1904, living and working in **Amsterdam**:-

“For some years prior to 1899 he was in partnership with his father, Edward Curtis of New Park Street, Leeds, as Fat Refiners and Soap makers. He then retired due to ill- health and went to Holland, having got the sole agency for the sale of Messrs. Bibby’s cattle cakes. He traded under the style of J. Bibby and Sons, at Amsterdam. This was a success but in 1908 he had to retire for a time due to ill- health. He returned (to Amsterdam) later, but in 1910 came back to England.” (See Fig.7)

William therefore **lived in Amsterdam between 1899 and 1910** and so was not on the UK 1901 Census.

Documenten (5 Resultaten)

Achternaam	Voornaam	Patroniem	Plaats	Datum	Documenttype	Scan
Curtis	William		Amsterdam	1921	Bevolkingsregister	
Curtis	William		Amsterdam	02-03-1900	Vestiging en vertrek	

Vreemdelingenregister met William Curtis

Geregistreerde	William Curtis	Documenttype	Vreemdelingenregister	
Geboorteplaats	Leeds	Erfgoedinstelling	Stadsarchief Amsterdam	
Gebeurtenis	Inschrijving	Plaats instelling	Amsterdam	
Datum	02-03-1900	Collectiegebied	Noord-Holland	
Gebeurtenisplaats	Amsterdam	Archief	5225	
		Registratienummer	871-975	
		Registratiedatum	02-03-1900	
		Akteplaats	Amsterdam	
		Boek	Registers van verstrekte reis- en verblijfpassen	

Fig.1 Netherlands Population Register 02/03/1900

Documenten (5 Resultaten)						
Achternaam	Voornaam	Patroniem	Plaats	Datum	Documenttype	Scan
Curtis	William		Amsterdam	1921	Bevolkingsregister	

Overgenomen delen met William Curtis			
Geregistreerde	William Curtis	Documenttype	Overgenomen delen
Geboortedatum	08-06-1868	Erfgoedinstelling	Stadsarchief Amsterdam
Geboorteplaats	Leeds	Plaats instelling	Amsterdam
		Collectiegebied	Noord-Holland
Gebeurtenis	Registratie	Archief	5416
Datum	1904	Registratienummer	71
Gebeurtenisplaats	Amsterdam	Pagina	26
		Registratiedatum	1921
		Akteplaats	Amsterdam
		Boek	Registers van tussen 1904-1910 afgedane gezinskaarten

Curtis	William	Amsterdam	02-03-1900	Vestiging en vertrek	
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Fig.2 Netherland Population Register 1904

The **1911 census** shows that William had returned to England, and was residing with Annie in **Kilnsey**. They had been married for fifteen years, and William lists his occupation as ‘Private Means’. The third person living in the same house was Elizabeth Summerskill, aged 24, who was William’s cousin, (born in nearby Rylstone). It can be said with some certainty that his photographic postcard career started in Kilnsey in 1910, after his return from the Netherlands.

Examples of William Curtis Photographic Postcards



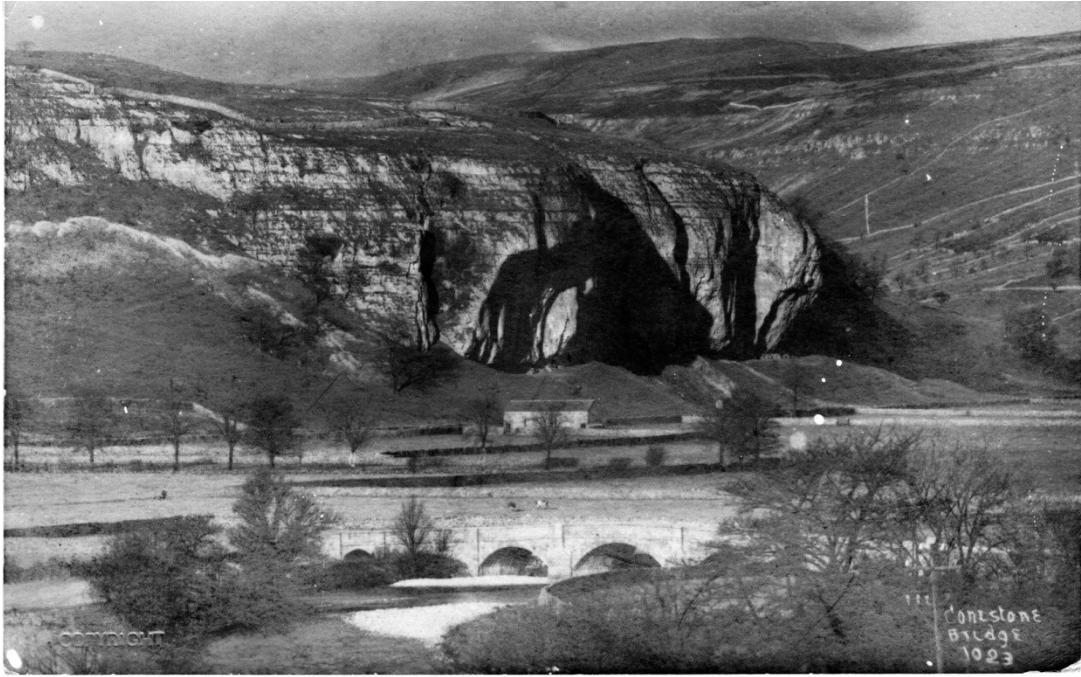
Homeward Bound



Mothers and Children



Throstle Nest Falls



Conistone Bridge



Conistone

1915-1917 The First World War

On the **18th March 1915**, William volunteered to join the Army. His partial service records survive; he enlisted in Keighley, joining the 25th Battalion Royal Fusiliers (Frontiersmen). The service record (see **figures 3-6** below) reveals that he was 44 years and 8 months old; he describes his occupation as 'Postcard Publisher'. His height was recorded as 5' 4" his army number was **14908**.



SHORT SERVICE.

(For the Duration of the War).

4221 RFGS
No. 14908

ATTESTATION OF
Name William Curtis 25th Service Batt. Frontiersmen
Corps Royal Fusiliers

Questions to be put to the Recruit before enlistment

1. What is your name? 1. William Curtis
2. What is your full Address? 2. 11, Ave. of Wood, Depton
3. Are you a British Subject? 3. Yes
4. What is your Age? 4. 24 Years 8 Months
5. What is your Trade or Calling? 5. Photo. Copy. Card. Publisher
6. Are you Married? 6. No
7. Have you ever served in any branch of His Majesty's Forces, naval or military, if so, which? 7. No
8. Are you willing to be vaccinated or re-vaccinated? 8. Yes
9. Are you willing to be enlisted for General Service? 9. No
10. Did you receive a Notice, and do you understand its meaning, and who gave it to you? 10. Yes (Name W. J. Marshall Corps R.F.L.)
11. Are you willing to serve upon the following conditions provided His Majesty should so long require your services? 11. Yes
For the duration of the War, at the end of which you will be discharged with all convenient speed. If employed with Hospitals, depots of Mounted Units, and as Clerks, etc., you may be retained after the termination of hostilities until your services can be spared, but such retention shall in no case exceed six months.

I, William Curtis do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and that I am willing to fulfil the engagements made.

William Curtis SIGNATURE OF RECRUIT.
W. J. Marshall Signature of Witness.

OATH TO BE TAKEN BY RECRUIT ON ATTESTATION.

I, William Curtis swear by Almighty God, that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs and Successors, and that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, in Person, Crown, and dignity against all enemies, and will ob-serve and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and of the Generals and Officers set over me. So help me God.

CERTIFICATE OF MAGISTRATE OR ATTESTING OFFICER.

The Recruit above named was cautioned by me that if he made any false answer to any of the above questions he would be liable to be punished as provided in the Army Act.
The above questions were then read to the Recruit in my presence.
I have taken care that he understands each question, and that his answer to each question has been duly entered as replied to, and the said Recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the oath before me at KEIGHLEY on this 18 day of March 1915
Signature of the Justice Robert Whittaker

† Certificate of Approving Officer.

I certify that this Attestation of the above-named Recruit is correct, and properly signed, and that the required forms appear to have been duly completed, and accordingly approve, and appoint him to the 25th Serv. Batt. Royal Fusiliers (No. 14908).
If employed in special duties Army Form B. 203 (or other authority for the enlistment) will be attached to the original attestation.

Date 20 MAR 1915
Place Keighley
H. Jackson for Chief Recruiting Staff Officer, Approving Officer.

* If so, the Recruit is to be asked the particulars of his former service, and to produce, if possible, his Certificate of Discharge and Certificate of Character, which should be returned to him conspicuously endorsed in red ink, as follows, viz.—(Name) _____ on the (Date) _____

Fig.3

DESCRIPTIVE REPORT ON ENLISTMENT.

Applicable to all ranks. To correspond with entries on the Medical History Sheet.

Name William Curtis 114908
 Apparent age 44 years 9 months. Height: 5 feet 4 inches.
 Chest measurement { Girth when fully expanded 36 1/2 inches.
 Range of expansion 3 1/2 inches.
 Distinctive marks ✓

INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY RECRUIT.

Name and Address of next of kin Annie Curtis
Kilnsey near Skipton | Relationship: wife

Particulars as to Marriage.

(a) Christian and Surname of Woman to whom married and whether spinster or widow. (b) Place and date of marriage.
 (c) Present address. (d) Initials of Officer verifying entry.
Annie Hampshire 19 Sep 1895
Spinster near Skipton N.A.

Particulars as to Children.

Christian Names of wife	Date and Place of Birth
<u>Annie Hampshire</u> (in above)	<u>19 Sep 1895</u> <u>near Skipton</u> <u>Leic.</u>

STATEMENT OF THE SERVICES.

Corps in which served	Regt. or Depot	Promotions, Reductions, Casualties, &c.	Army Rank	Dates	Service not allowed to reckon for fixing the rate of pension		Service in Reserve not allowed to reckon towards G. O. Pay		Signature of Officers certifying correctness of entries
					years	days	years	days	
Service towards limited engagement reckons from				18.3.15					
	Joined at <u>Kilnsey</u> (London)			20.3.15					
	<u>R. Regt. 25</u>	<u>Post 5</u>	<u>Pte.</u>	18.3.15					<u>W. J. ...</u> <u>... ..</u> <u>... ..</u> <u>... ..</u> <u>... ..</u> <u>... ..</u>
		<u>Embarked F. Africa</u>		10.12.15					
		<u>Applied</u>	<u>L. Col.</u>	7.2.15					
		<u>Posted</u>	<u>---</u>	10.6.14					
		<u>Tealia</u>	<u>G/Cpl</u>	23.6.17					
				11.5.17					
Address of Recruit compulsorily posted for service under the Military Service Act 1917, in accordance with sub-section 105. 24. 1917									
	<u>R. S.</u>	<u>Discharged</u>		<u>1.9.17</u>					
Total Service forfeited as above									
Total Service towards Engagement to				1.9.14	(date of discharge)	2	years	165	days
" " " Pension				1.9.14	"	2	"	168	"

Fig.4

MILITARY HISTORY SHEET.

1. Service at Home and Abroad (including former service of re-enlisted men, when allowed to reckon towards G. C. Pay or Pension).

COUNTRY	FROM	TO	YEARS	DAYS	N.B.—The Country only to be shown—it is not necessary to show separately the service in the different stations of the same Country. England, Scotland and Ireland to be shown under the general term "Home." For mode of computing Service abroad, see King's Regulations.
Home	18.3.15	9.4.15		23	
India & France B	10.4.15	9.6.17	2	61	
Home	10.6.17	1.9.17		53	
		Total.	2	168	

2. Whether educated at (Applies only to Boys) *Name of School to be stated.	Duke of York's Royal Military School, Royal Hibernian Military School, Queen Victoria School, Industrial School under Home Office or Local Government Board	Initials of Officer making the entry.
3. Army School and other certificates of education ...		
4. Passed classes of Instruction † † This includes any authorized class of instruction, e.g. in swimming, chiropody, &c.		
5. Campaigns ... (Including Actions)	India & France B. E. Africa.	B.S.
6. Wounded ...		
7. Effect of wounds ...		
8. Special instances of gallant conduct & mentions in public despatches		
9. Medals, decorations and annuities ...	Name of Medal: 1914-15 Star Clasp: Victoria Medal and G.I.M.	
10. Injuries in or by the service ...		
11. Name and Address of next of kin ...		

12. Particulars as to Marriage	(a) Christian and Surname of Woman to whom married, and whether spinster or widow, (b) place and date of marriage, (c) name of officiating Minister or Registrar, and (d) names of two witnesses.				† Date of being placed on Married Roll	Initials of Officer
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)		
13. Particulars as to Children	Christian Names	Date and Place of Birth	Date and Place of Baptism, and Name of officiating Minister			

Norm.—These entries are to be made from time to time as they occur, and initialled by the Officer making the entry.
 † To be ruled through (a) in the case of a soldier married without leave whilst serving with the Colours, who desires the entry to be made; (b) when a soldier is married whilst in the reserve.

Fig.5

22.8.1917. MINISTRY OF PENSIONS,
THE ROYAL HOSPITAL,
OHELSEA S.W. 3.

Week ending _____

Sir,
I am directed by the Minister of Pensions to inform you of the undermentioned decision in the case of a man whose discharge documents have been recently received with the view to having the claim to pension considered.

I have the honour to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,

To the Officer Commanding
Royal Fusiliers Regiment.
5th Bn

MATTHEW NATHAN,
Secretary.
80906/17
91452/E

Rank and Regimental Number L/Opl 14908

Name Wm Curtis

Regiment or Corps Ryl Fus. 5th Bn

Date of discharge 1/9/17

Address on discharge Kilnsey, nr Skipton, Yorks

Weekly Pension 8/3 To be reviewed in 52 wks

Disability Malaria

Noted

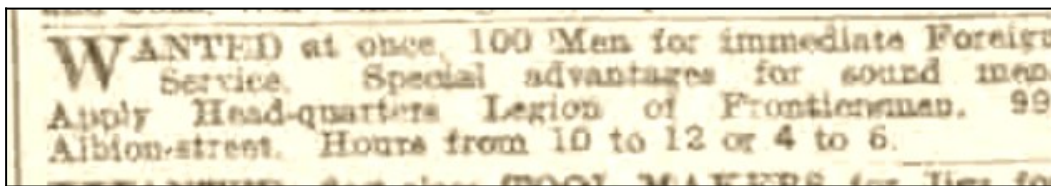
Fig.6

Why William joined such an unusual battalion is difficult to say.

“The Frontiersmen have long been regarded as exceptionally formed due to the quality and experience of the recruits, this being the reason for the battalion being sent overseas without significant formal training in Britain. The original battalion strength was largely comprised of older men, many with previous service in the Second Anglo-Boer War and other conflicts, who hailed from many diverse backgrounds and occupations. (William was one of the original battalion members). Besides the average stay-at-home Englishmen, there was more than a sprinkling of colonials and adventurers, men from Valparaiso to Alaska and from Rangoon to Fiji. Much emphasis has been placed on the more exotic characters of the battalion, the big game hunters, a naturalist, a famous photographer, a lion tamer, a few American cowboys, a lighthouse keeper, some circus clowns and acrobats, an Arctic explorer, an opera singer, a number of Russian exiles escaped from Siberia, a millionaire, a Buckingham Palace footman, some French Legionnaires and a General in the Honduras army. Whilst this is undoubtedly true, it does tend to create a romanticised picture of what the battalion was like. What mustn't be forgotten is that a large proportion of the battalion members, perhaps as many as 50% had no previous military experience and had never fired a rifle. These were recruits who, like the

bulk of the volunteers encouraged to enlist at Lord Kitchener's 'call to arms', and were just ordinary men from all walks of life united by a thirst for adventure and a common desire to put the 'Hun' in his place." (Extract from website 25throyalfusiliers.co.uk courtesy Steve Eeles)

Perhaps William joined the Battalion having seen one of the articles which appeared in the local newspapers in late 1914 and early 1915, and this appealed to his spirit of adventure.



This advert appeared in the **Leeds Mercury on 9th March 1915**, (The day before he enlisted!) and similar adverts appeared in other local newspapers.

Did he have previous contacts with the League of Frontiersmen in Yorkshire? Did he go hoping to use his experience in photography? All that can be said with certainty is that he volunteered in 1915, saw active service fighting in East Africa and was invalided home in 1917.

On **April 10th 1915**, William embarked for East Africa and the battalion arrived in Kilindini, British East Africa on **May 4th 1915**. On **7th August 1915**, William was promoted to Lance Corporal. He fought with the battalion until May 1917, when, suffering from Malaria, he was sent back to England on board the Hospital Transport 'Commonwealth', arriving on **June 10th 1917**. He was discharged in September 1917 as being no longer fit for army service.

William's pension records show that he was awarded a pension of 8 shillings (40p) per week for himself and 2 shillings (29p) for his wife Annie. The award notes that he had a 20% disablement. Perhaps this disablement hindered his photography activity.

1919-1950

There is a newspaper report involving William Curtis in the Yorkshire Evening Post on **June 18th 1919**. This article gives us information on William which has been used for details in the section 1869 -1914. **Fig.7** is the complete newspaper report about the bankruptcy proceedings in Bradford.

William Curtis seems to have ceased his photographic business in the early 1920's.

In 1939, he is recorded as living at **25, Valley Mount, Dacre Banks, Nr. Pateley Bridge**, with his wife Annie. His occupation is described as "Exporter of Cattle Foods (retired)". This seems to indicate that he had reverted to the work he did in the late 19th and early 20th century.

On **May 4th 1950**, William's wife Annie died in York Hospital, and was buried at Holy Trinity Church, Dacre on **May 6th 1950**. On **May 8th 1950**, two days after Annie was buried, William died at home on Valley Mount, Dacre. He was buried at Holy Trinity Church, Dacre on **May 11th 1950**.

DEBTOR WHO INSISTS ON OWING £1,000.

WILL NOT ACCEPT FIRM'S GIFT.

It is not often that people insist on accepting liabilities and on passing through the Bankruptcy Court, but a case of this sort came before Mr. Registrar Lee, at the Bradford Bankruptcy Court, to-day. The debtor's name is William Curtis, described as a photographic postcard maker.

In answer to questions asked by the Official Receiver (Mr. W. Durrance), the debtor said his gross liabilities were £1,032, and the amount expected to rank for dividend was the same. His assets were estimated to produce £182 2s. 7d., and the deficiency was £849 17s. 6d. For some years prior to 1899 he was in partnership with his father, Edward Curtis, of New Park Street, Leeds, as fat refiners and soap makers. He then retired owing to ill-health, and went to Holland, having got the sole agency for the sale of Messrs. Bibby's cattle cakes. He traded under the style of J. Bibby and Son, at Amsterdam.

This was a success, but in 1908 he had to retire for a time owing to ill-health. He returned later, but, in 1910, made an arrangement with Messrs. J. Bibby and Son, to whom at that time he was indebted to the extent of £2,500. It was that he should pay £1,500 on account, and the debtor said he left £1,000 owing.

Official Receiver: Did they accept that £1,000 in settlement of all claims against you by their agreement of the 9th of June, 1910?—No, it was paid on account, not in settlement.

They say you do not owe the £1,000, and you say you do?—Yes.

And you insist on owing them £1,000?—Yes. You have seen a letter from their solicitors in which they say they make no claim for a further payment from you?—Yes.

Why did you insist upon going into bankruptcy when you do not owe this money?—Because I only agreed to accept the gift of £1,000 on condition that they re-engaged my agents.

You filed your petition to help these Dutch agents?—I agreed to accept this £1,000 if my arrangement was carried out. They asked for arbitration to settle the whole matter between us.

Have this firm, out of gratitude for what you have done for them, offered to pay your 30s. per week for life?—Yes.

And offered you £500 as a present?—Yes. Then why insist on putting them down as creditors for £1,000?—Because I still owe it to them; I want the thing properly settled.

Apart from this £1,000 do you, according to the statement of affairs, only owe £32?—Yes, for solicitors' expenses.

And your assets have already realised over £300?—Yes.

I decline to realise anything further, unless you insist on continuing this mad career. Why cannot you have the bankruptcy stopped and the bankruptcy annulled? I will not be a party to this bankruptcy if I can help it. Something should be done to prevent you. It is wicked.

The Registrar: I understand the position is that the debtor has taken the indebtedness to a certain firm of £1,000, but they, having regard to the transactions between them in the past, make no claim. The debtor, however, still takes that indebtedness because he conceives he has something in the nature of a counter-claim. Is that so?

The Debtor: Yes.

The Registrar: That is the position you have taken up?—If they had re-engaged my agents the whole thing would have been settled.

Mr. T. K. Greenwood, who represented the debtor, said he had pointed out to the debtor that there was no claim against him by Messrs. Bibby and Son, and that there was no need for him to file his petition, but the debtor had insisted on going into bankruptcy.

The Registrar: This is certainly the most extraordinary bankruptcy that has come within my knowledge within my 40 years' experience. The debtor insists that he is owing money to people who make no claim. The debtor, however, insists on owing them £1,000 because he believes that the way to deal with other differences is to come into the bankruptcy court. I can only say that the examination will be closed subject to the order of the court.

