

James Edwin KERSWELL

Born April 10, 1878, Ballycastle
Sapper no. 182777

Died October 25, 1918, Palestine, aged 40
Royal Engineers, Signal Squadron

James Edwin Kerswell was the grandson of William Kerswell (1804-1871), a general labourer, and Elizabeth (nee Haydon)(1814-1897). William was born and lived in CREDITON where they had seven children. The oldest was also William (1833-1888) who married Sarah Ann Jarman in 1859. This marked the start of connections with the Holcombe family of Jarman. The next son was James Kerswell (1837-1908) the father of **James Edwin Kerswell**.

James Kerswell was born on 5 September 1837 and was baptised in CREDITON on 13 September. In 1841 the family were living at Hook, Colebroke with the first three children, William, 8, James, 3, and Mary, 1. By 1851 James had left school, aged 14 and was a farm labourer at Higher Mounsden, CREDITON. He left CREDITON to join the Royal Navy on 1 July 1859, aged 21 and on 16 December 1863 volunteered for ten years service, being rated Able Seaman. The census of 1871 shows him serving aboard H.M.S.NARCISSUS in the year of his father's death. The census records him as married but there is no other reference to a marriage by this time.

On 16 December 1873 he engaged to serve for a further period of ten years as a Boatman in the Coastguard Service and was borne on the books of the district ship VALIANT. He did marry Fanny Little Rickard (1856-1935) in Dromore West, Sligo, Ireland in 1875. Fanny (Frances) Rickard was born in Looe, Cornwall. They had eleven children (eight surviving by the 1911 census). The first six were born in Ireland where James was serving as a Coastguard until September 1887 when he became eligible for pension at the age of 50.

Ten children have been identified (*Knight/Tapper family tree – Ancestry*):

William Joseph Kerswell	1876-1883	born	Dromore West, Sligo
James Edwin Kerswell	1878-1918		Ballycastle, Belderrig, Mayo
Mary Ann Elizabeth (Minnie)	1879-1934		Belderrig, Mayo
Frederick Charles Kerswell	1883-1962		Killala, Mayo
Augusta May Kerswell	1883-1942		"
Alfred George Kerswell	1885-1889		Newport, Ireland
Isabella Annie Kerswell	1885-1951		Dawlish
Colin Rickard Kerswell	1891-1893		"
Sydney Harold Kerswell	1894-1915		"
Edith Maud Kerswell	1896-1983		"
Olive Edna Kerswell	1898-1961		"

Their youngest son, Pte Sidney Harold Kerswell died on 14 October 1915, aboard a Hospital Ship en route to Malta, of wounds received at Gallipoli. (*see separate Dawlish WW1 casualty record*).

James Edwin Kerswell was still at school when the family were living at 5 Alexandra Place, Dawlish, in 1891. He was shown in 1901 to be boarding with Susanna Thompson at Stalybridge, Cheshire. He was there with his brother, Frederick Charles Kerswell, also working as a 'sorting clerk & telegraphist'. In June 1901 **James Edwin Kerswell** enlisted with the Army Post Office Corps when he signed on for three years service and three years in reserve. On 22 April 1904 he signed on for a further period of 3+3 years. It seems possible that after the death of his father in 1908 he returned to live with his mother. It is his signature which completes the 1911 census return.

Dawlish World War One Project

From other sources it appears that **James Edwin Kerswell** may have returned to Dawlish to work for the civilian Post Office. The report in the *Dawlish Gazette* (see *Documents*) shows that **James** had been working at Dawlish Post office for some years as chief clerk. A photograph shows him standing on the extreme right of a group outside the Post Office. His father had worked for a while as a gardener on retiring (1891 census) and then shows as a naval pensioner (1901 census). He died in Dawlish, on November 19, 1908.

By 1911 Fanny was a widow and living at 20 Hatcher Street. Younger brother Sidney was 17 and an apprentice grocery worker, living at home with his mother, brother **James Edwin** and three sisters, Isabella, Edith and Olive Edna.

James Edwin Kerswell is reported (*Dawlish Gazette, see in Documents*) to have been a prominent member of the Freemasons and to have contributed to the life of Dawlish.

We do not have a date for **James Edwin Kerswell** enlisting with the Royal Engineers, but we may assume that it was early in the War, having volunteered in the Army Post Office Corps during the Boer War.

He is shown as being attached to the Signal Squadron of the Yeomanry Mounted Division of the Royal Engineers. Signals units were attached to every Division and in his case they were engaged in the campaign in Egypt and Sinai under General Allenby. His death is described as being by a 'fever' without more detail.

James Edwin Kerswell is inscribed on the Devon Roll of Honour, and on the Dawlish Boys' School Roll of Honour.

Dawlish War memorial inscription: KERSWELL J.E. SPR. R.E.

Devon Heritage site info:

182777 Sapper James Edwin Kerswell of the Yeomanry Mounted Division, Signal Squadron, the Royal Engineers. Born in Ballycastle, Co. Mayo in 1879. Died 25 October 1918 aged 39.

Commonwealth War Graves entry: KERSWELL, J E Sapper 182777
25/10/1918 Royal Engineers, Yeomanry Mounted Div. Signal Sqdn.
Grave Ref: A. 15. [Haifa War Cemetery](#), Palestine

Last known address: 20 Hatcher Street, Dawlish

Next of kin: Mother, Fanny Little Kerswell.

References:

The Book of Dawlish by Frank Pearce – Post Office personnel photo page 69

Free BMD refs

Dawlish Gazette, 2 November 1918

Refs via subscription website:

 Census records

 Knight/Tapper family tree- Ancestry

 Military records