

The King's Shilling

The King's Shilling

by

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In Jan 1813, age 14 and 4ft. 10ins. tall, the diminutive John Reid took 'the king's shilling' and marched off to war. The grey-eyed, brown-haired boy was a labourer in the Ayrshire village of Dalrymple when he went to Glasgow to enlist in the Cameron Highlanders, the 79th Regiment of Foot, by making his X mark on the attestation papers. How did he get to Glasgow? Did he walk all the way?

In fact, the 'shilling' was £3.12.6 which must have seemed like a fortune to him, but from it he had to buy his uniform. A few months later, the record tells us that age 15 he was now 5ft. 2ins. Was this an error in measurement or the good food in the army? John Reid went off to Europe to join the *The Cameron Highlanders* who were engaged in the fight to overthrow Napoleon.

The regimental records show John Reid was present at the battles of Toulouse, Quatre Bras and Waterloo, and that there was a Private of that name among the injured at Waterloo. John Reid obviously survived and in 1822 at Templemore in Ireland, age 25, he signed up again this time for an indefinite period, 'to continue to serve the king until such day as he was legally discharged'.

Records show he was a Private till 1819, then a Drummer 1819-1821 and thereafter once again a Private.

During this period in Ireland, from 1822 till August 1825, the 79th were quartered at Fermoy, Limerick, Templemore, Naas, Dublin, and Kilkenny, furnishing detachments at each of these places. Around this time, it seems John acquired a wife — Mary Carroll, an Irish lass whose birth country is known from the 1841 census. It was common for wives and family to accompany the regiment on their travels.

In 1825 the regiment embarked from Cork and sailed to Quebec.

While in Canada, Mary and John had at least three children: James Frederick, born 1827 in Garrison of Quebec.

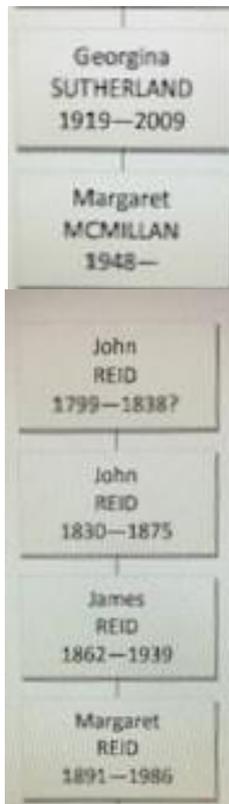
John seems to have been born 1830. His daughter's 1855 birth certificate states that he was born on Isle in Clove, Quebec. This is a mystery as there is no trace of such a place. Perhaps this was a mistranslation of Isle aux Noix, where there was a fort garrisoned by the 79th at that time. 1871 census says John was born in Toronto.

Joseph, was born 1831 in Kingston and in 1840 he appears in the Royal Military Hospital School Chelsea, London, England, as a pupil aged 9 and is still there in again in the 1841 census. He is



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discharged from the School in 1845, aged 14 to become an army volunteer, the same age at which his father enlisted!



Several other 'Reid children' were born into the 79th regiment during this period and it is likely they belong to John and Mary. However, these children do not appear in any other records and it is quite possible they died young.

A child called Mary C Reid (maiden surname Carroll) appears in these records which state she was born in Amherstburg in 1833, although there is no other evidence to tie her to 'our' John and Mary Reid.

During his time in Canada, 'our' John was sent with various detachments to locations around Upper Canada: Fort George, Kingston, Quebec, Amherstburg, Isle aux Noix, Toronto, Montreal and Grosse Isle. There were repeated cholera epidemics and fatalities over the years, but it seems John Reid with most of his family survived.

In September 1836, after 10 years 10 months in Canada, the regiment set sail from Quebec back to the UK in the "Maitland", a troop transport ship. These troop transports were notoriously overcrowded. On delivering the regiment which relieved the 79th in Quebec, the Maitland was described as 'packed as in a slave ship' with 6 men in a berth sized 6ft. x 6ft. The report also states that it was 'literally alive with bugs and the children had for weeks after landing all the appearance of smallpox having been nearly devoured by these noxious vermin'.

The following passage is from the Quebec "Mercury" of Sept.1st 1836.

"This gallant corps will embark for England on Saturday Sept. 3rd should the weather prove fair; and we learn that Sir John Colbone has determined to take upon himself chartering of another vessel to convey a portion of the Regiment in order that the health and lives of these gallant fellows may not be endangered by being stowed in less space than a slave dealer would allot to his living cargo".

I don't know if another vessel was in fact successfully chartered, so it was possibly not a comfortable voyage home. The Regiment arrived in Leith on 4th October and then marched to Glasgow where, in May 1837, John and Mary had a daughter, Ann. The regiment moved to Edinburgh in June 1837.

In June 1838, John aged 40, appears in front of a regimental board to assess his health and is then discharged, having served for a total of 24years and 178 days. His inability to serve further is attributed to chronic rheumatism caused by exposure to extreme cold on night duty in Canada. He was awarded a pension of one shilling, and a penny halfpenny. Was this per day?

He accepts this pension and sells back his regimental clothing to the army and this time he signed his name!

What happened to John Reid and his family then? Apparently, it usually took some time to process these pension awards, but perhaps the pension was not needed for long?

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Scotland's People has an OPR record for a death in Edinburgh— John Reid, Lauriston Street, December 1839, age 42, caused by inflammation of brain. With a common name like John Reid, the proof this is 'our' John Reid remains circumstantial, but the age fits and Lauriston Street is close to Fountainbridge where Mary and her family were living at the 1841 census. This record shows Mary had with her James, **John**, Ann and two further children born in Edinburgh in 1839 and 1840.

John Reid born 1830 was my great-great-grandfather. This trail began with his death certificate which held the information about his father; John Reid, 'Private , 79th regt.'

Footnote 1: In 1923 my great uncle John Reid (known as Jack) emigrated to Ontario Canada. He settled in Oshawa, near Toronto and started a thriving chapter of the Reid clan in Canada. Unfortunately, throughout his life, Uncle Jack had no knowledge that his Great Grandfather had travelled the area before him, and that his Grandfather was born there.

Footnote 2:

This is a screenshot from a website I came across recently,(apologies for the poor quality). It shows a Waterloo medal of the kind awarded to all who fought at Waterloo, this one inscribed to a 'John Reid of the 79th Regiment'. We know there were two John Reids in the 79th at Waterloo so we cannot be certain this medal belonged to 'our' John Reid.



Footnote 3:

John Reid joined the 79th regiment in 1813 stating that he was 15 and born in Dalrymple, Ayrshire .

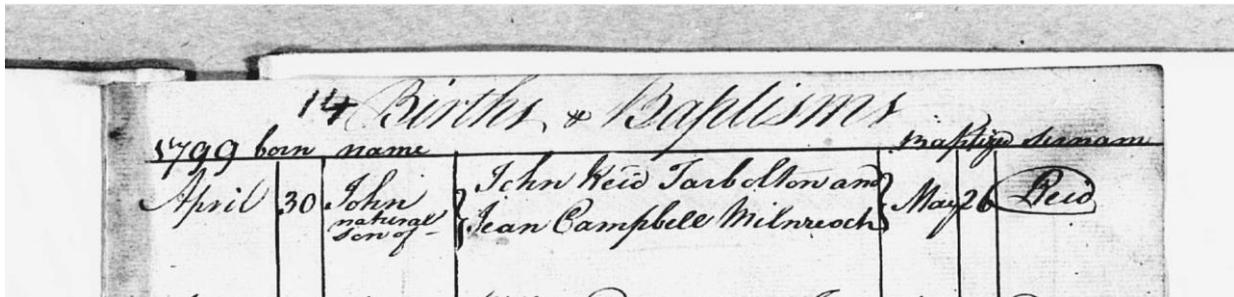
The only recorded birth that might fit is this one – meaning that he added a year to his age, being actually 14 at the time.

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*Birth April 30 1799, (OPR 588.000.0020.00292) Dalrymple
John, natural son of John Reid, Tarbolton and Jean Campbell, Milnreoch.*

Baptismal Record, 26th May

26/05/1799 REID, JOHN (Old Parish Registers Births 588/ 20 29 Dalrymple) Page 29 of 99
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Footnote 4:

The Kirk Session records for Dalrymple report on the circumstances of this baptism and the indications are that 'our' John Reid was born out of wedlock His mother was Jean Campbell and when it became obvious that she was pregnant but unmarried, she was called to account by the Kirk Session of the Dalrymple Church, the body responsible for upholding the moral standards in the community.

(These records shown below, were released for general inspection in March 2021 and cover the whole of Scotland. Dipping into them is very revealing of the intrusive nature of the probing and questioning the members of the Kirk Session who were, in those far off times, all men. 'Our' John Reid was one of many, who, without the intervention of the Kirk Session would have remained unbaptised and therefor, technically a bastard.) In those times, the crime of 'fornication', (sex out of wedlock), was widespread, usually punishable by a expensive fine levied on the father.)

The records below have been sourced and downloaded, fee paid, from the following source at Scotland's People.

Dalrymple kirk session, Minutes (1783-1846). CH2/87/3. Image CH000200087-00003-00133- National Records of Scotland. Copyright restricted. For enquiries regarding the re-use of this image contact National Records of Scotland.

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1799
John Reid
& Jean Camp-
bell summoned
to the ses-
sion

accused is now residing, requesting they
will cause the said John Reid to be sum-
moned here this day fourtnight - She
was rebuked, exhorted to repentance,
cited a pua acta, to appear here this
day fourtnight with said John
Reid, and dismissed for the time

April 28th 1799

Sederunt of the Minister and
all the Elders.

Jean Campbell & John Reid, as men-
tioned in our last, came before the session.
Her former accusation being read in
their hearing, and she being asked if she
still adhered thereto, she said she did.

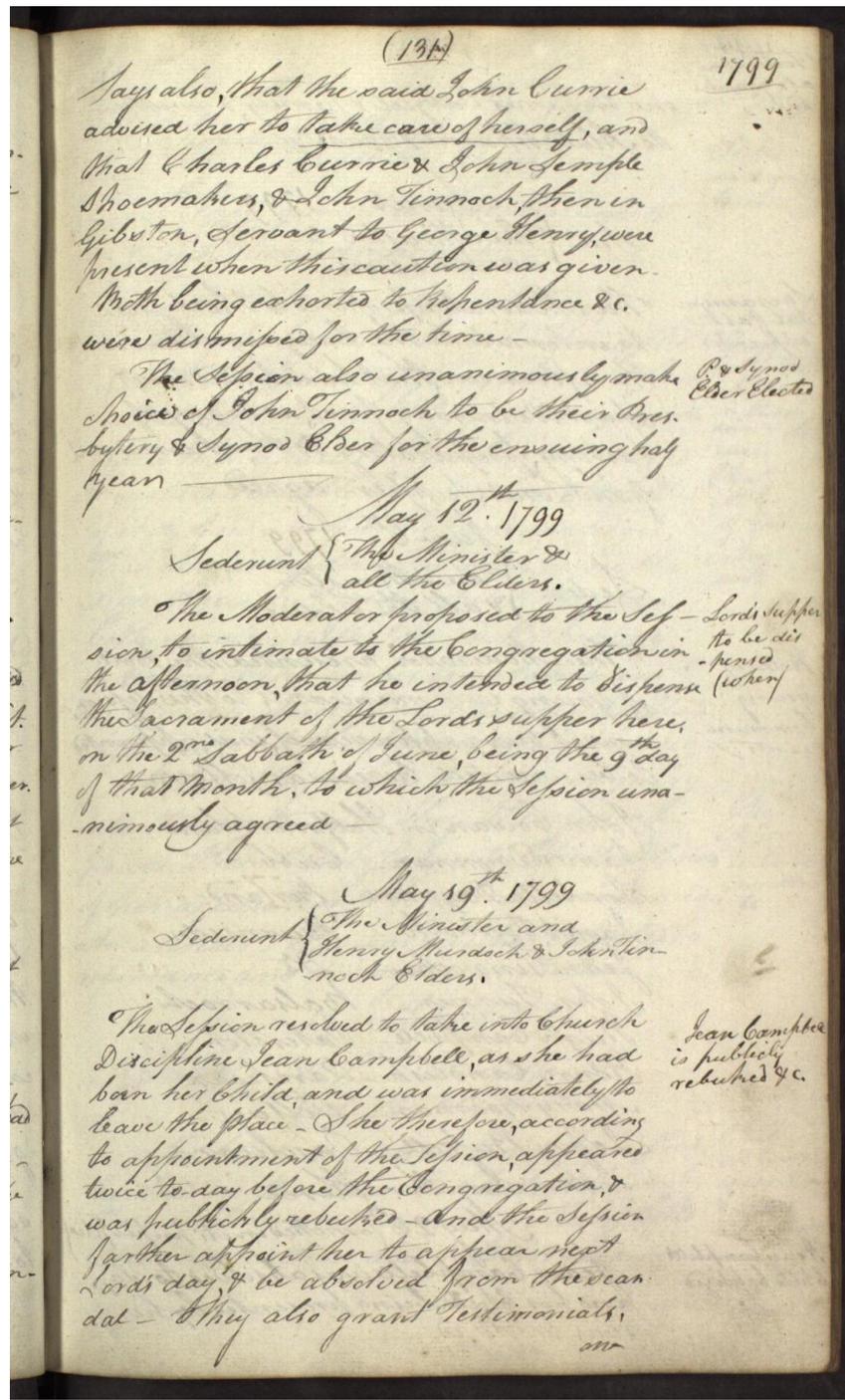
The Moderator exhorting John
Reid to be candid & tell the truth, asked
if he confessed the guilt? He denied it.
Being asked if he was acquainted or
had been in company with her former-
ly? declares that he met with her at
Gibston, Parish of Ochiltree, some time
last year, but does not recollect the
month, & conveyed her to Lawhill,
Parish of Waipr, some time betwixt
Sun-set & Eleven o'Clock, but that,
previous to this meeting, he had not
known her, or so much as seen her,
and farther acknowledges, that he had
no business at the time at that place.
In answer to this, she says, that she
had met & spoke with him in the
house of John Currie, Shoemaker, Gibston.

Jays

Jean
Campbell
John Reid
appear
in the
session

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1794
Testimoni
aliquid
2

(172):
one to James Dabziel & family, & another
to Alex. Wharrie & family

June 2nd 1799
Sed. { The Minister &
all the Elders.

Sacramen-
tal fast
appointed

The Moderator proposed to the Session
to intimate to the Congregation in
the afternoon, that he intended to set
apart Wednesday first, as a day of
fasting preparatory to the Sacrament
of the Lord's Supper - agreed -

June 6th 1799
Sedert. { The Minister
& all the Elders.

Roll of
young
communi-
cants

The Moderator presented the Roll
of young Communicants to the Session,
and it being approved of, was appointed
to be inserted herein as follows:

John Cowan in Halfmerkland
James Drynman - Cubb
Isabella Drynman - Morland
Janet Finnoch - Muirside
Jean Finnoch - D.
John Turner - Malsarroch
Hugh Campbell - Paterston
Henry Candlish - Parshuan
Mary Rodman - Village
John Russell - Parshuan
John Smith - Herre

May 26th committed in its proper place

Jean Campbell
Child baptized

Jean Campbell was absolved to-day,
and her Child, being presented by her,
was baptized -

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What follows are the words of a song which has the title, *The King's Shilling*, usually sung as *The King's Shillin'*.

It was written in the 1970s by Ian Sinclair from Caithness.

It makes reference to the drums being beaten during a battle scene.

'Our' John Reid was a Drummer for around two years.

Drummers were paid extra because of their skills and because they were called to lead out front when the soldiers were ordered to advance.

Attached with this PDF is a sound file of John Bonthron singing a version of this song.

You may also wish to visit YouTube to hear it sung by Karan Casey and James Taylor, recorded during a Transatlantic Sessions event.

<https://youtu.be/VDhfqy4S6hI>

The King's Shilling

Original lyrics by Ian Sinclair of Caithness circa 1975.

Sad he has left her, with bairnies twa,
And that's the last of him, she ever saw,
He joined the army, and marched to war,
He took the shillin' - He took the shillin' and went off to war,
Come laddies, come, hear the cannon's roar:
Take the King's shillin' and you're off to war.
Braw he did look, as he marched along,
With his kilt and sporran and his musket gun,
The ladies tipped him, as he marched along,
He sail-ed out by - He sail-ed out by the Broomielaw.
The pipes did play, as he marched along,
And the soldiers sang out - a battle song,
"March on, march on, " cried the Captain gay,
For King and country, For King and country - we will fight today.
Come laddies come, hear the cannon's roar:
Take the King's shillin' and your off to war
Well the battle rattled to - the sound of guns,
And the bayonets flashed in - the morning sun,
The drums did beat and the cannon roared,
But the shillin' didn't seem - Oh the shillin' didn't seem - much worth the war
Well the men they fought and - the men did fall,
Cut down by bayonets - and by musket ball,
And many of these - brave young men,
Would never fight for - Would never fight for - the King again
Come laddies, come, hear the cannon's roar:
Take the King's shilling and you'll die in war -
Come laddies come, hear the cannon's roar;
Take the King's shillin' and you'll die in war -
Come laddies come, hear the cannon's roar:
Take the King's shillin' and you'll die in war.
Die in war, Die in war;
Take the King's shillin' and you'll die in war.

Try this version by Karan Casey & James Taylor at Transatlantic Sessions:

<https://youtu.be/VDhfgy4S6hI>