

**The Strange Presence
of
Frederick George Foley's
“Dead Man’s Penny”
in my Father’s Possessions**

Shortly before my father died in mid-1911, he gave me what is commonly referred to as a “Dead Man’s Penny”.

What is a “Dead Man’s Penny”? Thanks to Wikipedia, we know that it’s a Memorial Plaque, made of bronze, about 5” in diameter. These memorial plaques were issued to the next-of-kin of all British and Empire military service personnel who were killed as a result their participation in the Great War. Also known popularly as ‘death plaques’, they were designed in England, and between the fall of 1918 and December of 1919, were made at the Memorial Plaque Factory, 54/56 Church Road, Acton, W3, London. When sent to a surviving next-of-kin, each plaque was encased in a four-fold waxed card covering. Each plaque was accompanied by a small (perhaps about 3” x 6”) paper ‘scroll’ which remarked on the sacrifice made by the deceased service person. Those issued from Great Britain were under the seal of Buckingham Palace and King George V’s signature, while it’s believed that those issued to family of dead Canadian service personnel were issued under the crest of the Head of Militia and Defence. Individual plaques are known as a “Dead Man’s Penny” because of the similarity in appearance with the British penny in circulation at the time. 1,355,000 plaques were issued, which used a total of 450 tonnes of bronze. The plaques continued to be issued into the 1930s to commemorate people who died as a consequence of the war.

Each plaque was cast with the dead service person’s name boxed on the right side of the land. No rank or designation other than the service person’s name was shown, in deference to the notion no distinction was to be made in respect of those who died.

The plaque which my father gave to me had the following name cast in to it:

FREDERICK GEORGE FOLEY

(photo next page)



My father was born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, as was his father before him. My father's great-grandfather emigrated from London, England, to Toronto in mid-1869, and while ties with family back in England were maintained at least through about 1911, my extensive family history research has not shown a connection with anyone named Foley. Because of my father's and my grandfather's connection with Toronto, though, it has been presumed that Frederick George Foley was a Canadian service man who died during the Great War.

Curiously, Canadian Expeditionary Force (C.E.F.) service files exist for two men named Frederick George Foley, both of whom attested for C.E.F. service in Toronto.

One of the men named Frederick George Foley was a bricklayer who attested that he had been born in Kent, England, on 6 November 1881. By 24 July 1915, when he attested at the Armouries in Toronto for service with the C.E.F., he declared that he was married to a girl who was identified only as Mary Ann [*Service Number 135476; Library and Archives Canada Reference: RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 3168 – 10*].

Register records from St. Paul's Church, Marylebone (London) England, show that Frederick George Foley was married there to Mary Ann Yarnold on 3 February 1901. He reported that he was a resident of Herne Bay, Kent County, at the time of his marriage, and that he was employed as a bricklayer. Enumerated at Herne Bay during the 1901 Census of England and Wales, Frederick was indeed apparently working as a bricklayer. 1911 Census of England and Wales schedules show that Frederick George (still working as a bricklayer) and Mary Ann had two daughters – Dorthy Martha, and Lillian Daisy. Frederick George Foley appears to have emigrated to Toronto via Southampton, England, and Portland, Maine, USA, in March of 1912. It's probable that Mary Ann and their girls came along in a voyage, a little later, landing at Montreal, after Frederick George had accommodations and perhaps work in Toronto established. His father George appears to have followed them to Toronto in 1915, and a third daughter – Edith was born in that place about 1915 as well.

At the time of his attestation, Frederick George and Mary Ann were living at No. 14, Grove Avenue, in Toronto, although Mary Ann a short while later moved to No. 13, Seaforth Avenue. This Frederick George served with the 74th Overseas Battalion, and was gassed repeatedly in the days leading up to the Armistice on 11 November 1918.

But this man named Frederick George Foley was discharged to his residence at 133 Lansdowne Avenue in June of 1919, with no apparent disabilities. He was enumerated as a resident of Toronto during the 1921 Census of Canada, at which time he was still working as a bricklayer. This man named Frederick George Foley died at the Veterans' Home Hospital in Toronto on D-Day, 1945 – the 4th of June, 1945, and his remains were interred at Prospect Cemetery in that city. Mrs. Mary Foley was still residing at No. 133, Lansdowne Avenue at this time.

This man named Frederick George Foley did not die during the conflict, or within a short time thereafter, so we must presume (in the absence of other evidence) that Mary Ann Foley his wife was not issued with a memorial plaque. It would seem, then, that this was not the man for whom the plaque was issued.

That leaves one other possibility.

The second man named Frederick George Foley for whom a C.E.F. service file exists did die during the war, so it's probable that this was the man for whom the memorial plaque was issued.

This Frederick George attested that he had been born in Wentworth County, Ontario, on 29 August 1880, and one entry in his service file shows that he was the son of Thomas [*Service No. 249261; Library and Archives Canada reference: RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 3168 – 9*]. According to 1891 Census of Canada schedules, Frederick George Foley had seven siblings, and he, his brothers and sisters, his father Thomas, and his mother Ellen, were living in Beverly Township, Wentworth County, Ontario – not too far from the city of Hamilton, on Census Day in 1901 (31 March). When he attested for C.E.F. service in Toronto on 4 April 1916, he and his – said by him to be named Julia, were living at No. 128, Russett Avenue in Toronto. He was at that time employed as a 'lumber salesman'. Frederick George Foley suffered either shrapnel or gun shot wounds to his abdomen, leg and arm, on the 13th of August, 1918, and he died from these wounds in the Australian forces hospital at Abbeville, France, on the 24th.

This Frederick George Foley's wife Julia (nee Dowling – Frederick George Foley and she formally married in Toronto only on the 10th of June, 1916. She was a widow at the time of marriage, and no children are known to have issued from this marriage. Both Frederick George and Julia were said to be Roman Catholic) was to have received the memorial plaque bearing Frederick George's name – at that time she was reputedly living at No. 13 Murdock Avenue in Toronto (just below Danforth Avenue, between Coxwell Avenue to the west and Woodbine Avenue to the east).

The Memorial Cross Medals that both Frederick George Foley's mother Ellen Foley and his widow Julia Foley were each entitled to receive were despatched from Ottawa on the 24th of July, 1920, and there's every indication that Julia Foley the widow received her's while living at No. 13, Murdock Avenue.

The plaque and scroll are noted to have been sent to Julia, as well, on the 10th of April 1922, but for some reason the records in Frederick George's service file show that the plaque was returned to Ottawa on the 18th of April.

Then, the plaque and scroll were re-despatched on the 26th of June 1923, but there's no indication of the address to which it was sent.

As the dependent of a deceased soldier, Mrs. Julia Foley was also entitled to a War Service Gratuity. Records show that she was issued a cheque for \$100.00 on 18 August 1920. She was said to be living at that time at No. 32, Langley Avenue in Toronto (just north of Gerrard Street East, between Broadview and Carlaw, in the suburb of Riverdale). There is nothing in the service file records to indicate that the cheque was returned, so it may be that this is the address to which the plaque and scroll were sent in 1923.

All well and good, but what were the circumstances that lead to my grandfather, then my father, and then I possessing Frederick George Foley's Memorial Plaque? My father said that he found the plaque amongst his father's possessions when his house was cleared in the early 1990s. Otherwise, he said that he knew nothing about it (His father had died in Toronto in 1979, and his widow survived him for many years, with the house lying unoccupied for more than 10 years).

The Murducks and some relatives had lived in the Riverdale area of Toronto for several years after they emigrated from London, England, in 1869. But the last of the family to live in that area moved further east, to the Victoria Park/Danforth area of East Toronto, around the turn of the 20th Century.

The oldest boy in the Murduck family that emigrated was a bricklayer by trade, as had been most of his ancestral relations back as far as the turn of the 18th Century in the area east of London. Recognizing this, it would make sense if the plaque had memorialized the first mentioned Frederick George Foley, who was also a bricklayer, rather than a Roman Catholic 'lumber salesman' who had been born near Hamilton, Ontario.

Only one man in our ancestral family – John Murduck, is known to have lived briefly in Kent County, England – in the town of North Aylesford, some distance from Herne Bay. He was a bricklayer/builder like the first described Frederick George Foley. But, John died in North Aylesford in 1882, and no children from his sole marriage are known.

Very, very curious! I would like to unravel the mystery around my father's possession of Frederick George Foley's Memorial Plaque, if at all possible, and welcome any and all comments or observations on the matter.

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