



Edward Waugh Atkinson – A Family Anti-Hero

Adam Winstanley looks at online newspapers to enhance family stories

THE RAPID EXPANSION OF ONLINE NEWSPAPER ARCHIVES HAS been a boon to genealogists. In Britain, the main online repository is the British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk) which taps into the vast collections of the British Library. There are currently over 50 million pages online dating from the 1700s to recent times. Using newspapers in conjunction with more traditional records can flesh out family history to give a more rounded, interesting picture of our ancestors. This can produce stories of adventure, bravery and self-sacrifice. Sometimes however we discover our ancestors were far from being role models. This is the story of a cousin of my 2nd great-grandmother as reconstructed from newspapers and other records.

The subject of this story, Edward Waugh Atkinson, was born in Blackburn, Lancashire in 1885. Births in England and Wales from 1837 can be found for free and indexed online by the General Register Office (www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/indexes_search.asp). This index also includes mothers' maiden names for all entries unlike on other web-sites. Census returns

in 1891 and 1901 show Edward's family was very respectable — his father William was an insurance inspector and Methodist preacher. His grandfather John Atkinson had been a respected teacher in the Endowed School in Hackthorpe, Westmorland where he was also the local registrar. Edward was the fifth of seven children. His sisters became music teachers and three of his brothers joined insurance firms.

Edward was set to follow his father into insurance and aged 15 was working as a junior office clerk. Edward must have been dissatisfied with these prospects. The war between the British Empire and the South African Boers was underway and, despite his age, Edward ran away north to Carlisle in Cumberland to join the Militia battalion of the Border Regiment. The Militia records survive in the National Archives and are online with FindMyPast among the British Service Records (search.findmypast.ie/search-world-records/british-army-service-records). He claimed on his attestation form that he was already 18 years old. He transferred to the Royal Army Medical Corps at Aldershot where his service records show he trained to be a medical orderly. Edward served in South Africa for a year until July 1903 when he was brought home and discharged as medically unfit for reasons not specified. He used the medical knowledge he had gained to great effect in his later escapades.

Edward had formed a relationship with Phoebe Blewitt in Leeds

163-23	Edward Waugh Atkinson , aliases Edward William Atkinson, Frank Lockwood Atkinson, Edward Atkinson, John Taylor, Albert Lawson and Clarence Calvert v F 118 Parkhurst	1885 Blackburn	6	0	fr	dk bn	hl	scar each side of neck and rt. forearm; fleshy growth rt. of neck
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Scotland Yard's listing showing some of Edward's many aliases and physical description (FindMyPast)

Atkinson an Atkinson to the Court by Edward Waugh Atkinson of 15, Back West View, Beckon Hill in the City of Leeds Clerk against a certain Order in Bawdery dated the twelfth day of May one thousand nine hundred and four under the hand and seal of Charles Milner Atkinson Esquire the Stipendiary Magistrate of the said City whereby the said Edward Waugh Atkinson was adjudged to be the putative father of a bastard child of one Phoebe Elizabeth Blewitt and was thereupon ordered to pay to the said Phoebe Elizabeth Blewitt the sum of three shillings per week until the said child should attain the age of fourteen years or should die And by the said Order the said Edward Waugh Atkinson was further ordered to pay to the said Phoebe Elizabeth Blewitt the sum of one pound five shillings for the expenses incidental to the birth of the said child and the further sum of seven pounds ten shillings and six pence for the costs of obtaining the said Order And in which said Appeal the said Phoebe Elizabeth Blewitt is Respondent

It is ordered and adjudged by the Court here on the trial of the said Appeal after hearing the proofs and allegations of both parties that the said Order of the said Stipendiary Magistrate be reversed.

By the Court

The judgement from Edward's successful paternity appeal against Phoebe Blewitt. It seems to be a coincidence that the magistrate was also called Atkinson. (Ancestry)