



**Herbert Jack Rawson**  
**1887 - 1935**

**FAMILY**

Jack was born in 1887, son of Herbert Pearson Rawson and Agnes Beatrice [nee Symons] He was one of three children:

Alice Wilmot 1881-1971, Elsie Beatrice 1883, and Herbert Jack 1887-1936

**PRE WAR**

Medicine of one sort or another ran deep in Jack's family. His Father and Grandfather were both Doctors, and so true to family tradition in 1914 Jack was a medical student training at St Thomas hospital London.

1914

On 24 January he earned his medical registration - he was now, Dr Herbert Jack Rawson MRCS England LRCP London.

Jacks first position was Junior Doctor at Essex County Hospital. He was almost at the end of a six month tenure and had been accepted for a position at another hospital and War was looming.

His parents were over from New Zealand and suggested he join the Red Cross but Jack had already joined the University of London Training Corps in 1911.

He visited the War Office and emerged :

**Lt Jack Rawson Royal Army Medical Corps 3391**

His first posting was to be in charge of Netley Convalescent Home in Hants.

In London he said his goodbyes and issued with his new uniform of which he was very proud. He caught the train at Waterloo for Southampton.

Netley was an imposing building light and airy and comfortable with 12 wards and no less than 140 patients including secure wards for the mentally ill, described as 'lunatics'.

The patients would come in for a week, be sent on two weeks leave and then back to join their units.

The majority of his time was taken with clerical work and no time for dressing time ' after a time this was not enough and looking for more "action" he signed on as a doctor on the Hospital ships.

**October 1914** preparing to join the hospital ships, said in a letter home *'as much as I will miss the beautiful grounds and surroundings am looking forward to the change'*

**October** his first ship was the Ambulance ship *'Oxfordshire'* a beautifully appointed ship of the Bibby Line.

And so began his journeys Southampton, Boulogne, Havre, St Nazaire, to pick up the sick and wounded from the battlefields of France. 500, 600 at a time and back to Southampton

**October 14** *'Nazare to Southampton had to wait took on some patients then waited 2 days for the trains to come in.*

*Met an ex St Thomas man who spent his whole time working aboard one Hospital train sleeping on a seat in the carriage. Always a danger of being shelled'.*

**4 November** *'so many ships in Southampton there was no room for the Oxfordshire and she had to lay off for 2 days the men on board in spite of injuries were very up beat " our men are making a jolly good fight of it" one was heard to say, even though they had lost most of their men'*

**8 November** *'Oxfordshire on the Boulogne Southampton run with patients on board, when they arrived there were no embarkation staff due to miscommunication so had to stay another day.'*

Jack had nothing but praise for the Southampton team who normally unloaded swiftly and with as little discomfort to the patients as possible. On their return to France the conditions too rough so put in to Havre.

**November** *'Boulogne to Dublin on arrival they were untrained staff to unload red cross firemen and labourers and only one train so eventually the boat was unloaded and patients going on to Dublin, Cork and Belfast'*

## **1915**

By March he was in Cairo attached to the 1/5 Norfolk Regt 54t Div M E F attending to the troops Then transferred to France, No 2 General hospital, British Expeditionary Force, Le Havre receiving hospital trains from Rouen, wounded have to be deloused and labelled according to whether they have bunk or stretcher.

**April** shifted here from the Main NZ General hospital to the Palais-des-Regales British Convalescent situated very close to the beach with light airy wards; it had been the Royal Yacht squadron of France.

## **GALLIPOLI**

On 29 **June** heard they were going to Egypt and sure enough 4 days later they left on the *Asturias* for Cairo stopping for a few hours in Malta not being allowed off the ship, boats came alongside with goods for sale, these were placed in baskets and hauled aboard and after haggling money was sent down the same way.

On board '*Asturias*' on 11 July they left for Helles and Gallipoli steaming for 5 hours took them to Mudros where they anchored in a small bay for 4 days. Then off ANZAC cove to await their men. All around Warships bombing and shelling the concussion rocking the boat for hours and hours he described it as exciting,

The patients soon started to arrive on lighters each winched aboard by crane. For next two days took on wounded they were full to overflowing with over 1500 men mostly bad cases, men on the decks there was hardly room to walk between them. the men had come directly from the battlefield and were filthy dirty so time was spent cleaning and dressing wounds, Jack was working below where it was dark, hot, smelly maggots on wounds, gas gangrene, appalling conditions, they did their best but as he says in his letters there were some they could not get to in time.

On the way back to Alexandria there were many burials at sea.

By mid July they were called back to Southampton and some well deserved leave.

**October 21** on the way to the Med on the '*Asturias*' some light relief, deck tennis, dressed up for concerts. gramophone on deck.

Late 1915 he was transferred to the troopship '*Knights Templar*'

## **1916**

In March while in Egypt he was attached to the 4<sup>th</sup> Cheshire Regt EEF  
Taking care of the troops. Going on 8 mile route march with the battalion In their spare time they explored their surrounds.  
Rode camels from Mena to Memphis and back visiting Sphinx, Saguarah and the Pyramids.

### **1917**

At the start of January he moved to 4<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital Kantara Egypt, then on 25 March to No 2 General Hospital, British Expeditionary Force, Le Havre, France.  
He is now 28 and says how glad of the change from the ships. The *Oxfordshire* came in and he caught up with staff.

### **1919**

Discharged 11 July having served 1914-1919

### **POST WAR**

Worked in St Thomas hospital whilst waiting for his passage back to Wellington. Embarked Plymouth arriving via Australia December 1919.

Jack married Elsie Gladys Dick (nee Symons) 1892 - 1968

Children Betty, Bruce, Evelyn, Herbert Jr.

NELSON CONNECTION Jack's son Dr Richard Dick Rawson has lived in Nelson all his life

Prepared by Syd Daughtrey based on the extensive family records held by Dr Dick Rawson, including many letters quoted from above and available on-line.