

Forthside Ordnance Depot, Stirling (1915)



Figure 1 Forthside group photo 1915.

We have had an enquiry about the attached photo which was found as the backing of a picture frame in a car boot sale in Yorkshire, without further explanation. The finder wondered if we had more information or knew anything of the men depicted.

The label says 'Stirling, 1915'. It is a wintery scene, the trees are bare and the group are all in contemporary army uniform. Towards the centre of the front row, the man with the moustache is identified as Colonel W.J. Oliver who is known to have been Commanding Officer of the Forthside Depot, Stirling around this time.

The depot was between the railway and the River Forth, adjoining the railway station. In the mid 18th century a Stirling merchant called Wallace bought 15 or 20 acres of land from

Cowane's Hospital, built himself a house there and called his modest estate Forthside. The later private owners (John Burd, Miss Burd and Rev Andrew Milroy) appear to have been his descendants. It was probably John Burd who, about 1820, demolished the original house and built a Georgian mansion, which he called Forthside House; there were stables and a coach-house on the riverside (hidden from the house itself), a gardener's lodge is mentioned and a beech avenue had become a feature by the time the army took over. Through the 1880s the house and grounds were advertised for rent (*Glasgow Herald*, classified ads. April 23, 1880; *ibid* 11 June 1883).



Figure 2 Forthside House in the 1990s.

In 1886 the Army purchased Forthside for an Ordnance Depot with storage for ammunition to be brought in by water. A new quay and storage facilities would be built. The impetus for the move came from the restorations projected at Edinburgh Castle (*Glasgow Herald* August 12, 1886; *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, Aug 13 1886).

Various buildings were erected, some on the river side for handling goods carried by ship; railway lines entered the depot allowing transfer of goods between ship and rail. There was even an engine shed to service the rolling stock used in the depot. Many of the buildings survive today though Forthside House (where Colonel Oliver lived) was demolished in the 1990s as the depot was being run down.



Figure 3. Forthside area in the 1890s with Forthside House and other army buildings.

We have not, so far, been able to identify the building in the background of the photo though the stonework resembles that of surviving depot buildings. However, on 5 October 1915, the Stirling Observer reported on an ‘entertainment’ hosted by Colonel Oliver for the NCOs and men of the 19th (Service) Company of the Army Ordnance Corps who had been based at the depot for nearly a year. Staff sergeant Joslin, Lance sergeant Todd and Lt Medcalfe are named as being present (along with Colonel Oliver’s daughter, Miss H. Hall and Mrs Reginald Graham). Sergeant Joslin, Lieutenant Medcalfe and Colonel W.J. Oliver are all in the photograph.

The occasion of the reception was the imminent departure of the corps for The Front. The bare trees suggest a later date than early October but the coincidence of names suggest that the photo was taken nearer to their departure date.

I recall, years ago, finding that Colonel Oliver died during the War but no longer have the details.

One of our members has records of Sergeant Archibald George Joslin, 3 Queen Street (Royal Army Ordnance Corp) from the Saint Columba's Church Book of Remembrance and various details of his service, his family etc. He had been born in Dulwich and died aged 30 on 25 June 1919 at Taranto leaving a widow by whom he had had three children

<https://astreetnearyou.org/person/2935232/Quartermaster-Serjeant-Archibald-George-Joslin>).

If anyone has information about any of the others or can more clearly identify the location of the photo or add context, we would be pleased to know.