

# St. Cuthbert's Alumni Association

The alumni association of St. Cuthbert's Society, Durham University

## REGINALD VALPY JAMES

*Royal Army Medical Corps; Royal Engineers;  
Second Lieutenant, Indian Army Reserve of Officers*



Reginald Valpy James was born in Bristol in 1878, where his father was the Rector of St. Philip's church. (His maternal grandfather had also served as a Rector elsewhere). He was educated at Clifton College between 1888 and 1892 and played on at least one occasion for Clifton RFC, in 1893, as a fifteen year old.

He apparently went on to Dean Close School, Cheltenham then obtained a degree from the University of London in 1895. He later attended St Cuthbert's Society as a mature student, in 1907, where he was an active member of the common room.

He married Katherine Norma Wadsworth at Bristol Register Office on 15 April 1905. She was the child of the Vicar of another Bristol parish.

By 1911, James was living with his mother in Stourbridge while working as an assistant master at King Edward School in Stourbridge. He enlisted on the 9 September 1914, only six days after Britain declared war on Germany, by which time he was aged 36. He was with the Royal Army Medical Corps between 1914 and 1915 and was sent to Aldershot in September 1914 for training as a Private. He was promoted to Corporal in November 1914 and worked as a despatch rider.

In June 1915, he was transferred to the Royal Engineers, where he served as Acting Quarter Master Sergeant. Unfortunately, between July 1915 and November 1916 he was found drunk on active service on three separate occasions and punished accordingly. He was transferred to the Royal Engineers Dunstable Signal Depot in November 1916 and while twice promoted to Corporal he was then demoted to Pioneer. It was at this time he was invalided. Throughout most of these years, James's permanent address is recorded as Portishead in Somerset, a town with both shipping and railway connections.

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James embarked for Mesopotamia in February 1917. He moved to the Signal Service Park No.44 in October 1917 and was posted to the Railway Department in February 1918. On demobilisation, he was transferred to Class "Z" Army Reserve. His admission to the Indian Army Reserve of Officers was approved in October 1918. Attached to the Railway Directorate based in Bagdad, he nonetheless served on the Indian North West Frontier. As a speaker of Hindi (probably learned from his mother who had been born in India and came from an Anglo-Indian family of long standing) he would most likely have been sent to India to organise supplies (of arms and food) when unrest was increasing immediately after the War. Listed as 'Lieutenant, No. 9 Works Corp' he was probably working as a Quarter Master on the railway line connecting Islamabad with Kabul, a violent and dangerous area then and now.

He died on 15 July 1919 at Mureee, a hill-station in Rawalpindi in the north of the Punjab, bordering Kashmir. His cause of death is recorded as cardiac failure due to an accidental overdose of chloral. (This was formerly used as a sedative, or to treat the symptoms of alcohol withdrawal). He was buried at Murree and is commemorated on the memorial in the Karachi War Cemetery, alongside others who served in distant garrisons and lie buried in civil and cantonment cemeteries. Having died on service, he is recorded as a casualty of the Great War both by Durham University's Roll of Service and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.