

Bombardier George Bickers
Regimental Number: 418, 681877
276 Brigade, Royal Field Artillery

born: 1888 - died: 20 May 1918

George Bickers was born in the spring of 1888 in Wheatley, Oxfordshire,¹ son of George and Emily Bickers. George's father, George, worked throughout his life with horses. In 1891, he was living in Hayes Mews, St George's, Hanover Square and working as coachman. In 1901 he was living at Jones's Score, Beccles, Suffolk and was working as an osteler - a man employed to look after the horses of people staying at an inn. Then, in 1911, he was still living in Beccles, at The Score, 5 Old Market Score and working again as a coachman.²

George and Emily had nine children, eight of whom survived.³ George was the eldest. He had five brothers: Arthur (born in 1890 in Horstead, Norfolk),⁴ William (probably born in 1893 in Norfolk),⁵ Ernest (born 1894 in St George Hanover Square),⁶ Charles (born in 1897 in St George Hanover Square)⁷ and John (probably born in 1903)⁸ and two sisters: Emily (born 1889 in St George Hanover Square)⁹ and Annie (born in 1898 in Norfolk).¹⁰

In the winter of 1909, George married Minnie Maria Crisp, probably in Beccles, Suffolk.¹¹ In 1911, they were living at 35 Smallgate, Beccles, where George as a wood sawyer. They had a young son, also called George.¹² George Frederick Bickers was born in the summer of 1909.¹³ They then had a daughter, Gladys M., born in the fall of 1913.¹⁴ The children were only two and six when their father enlisted in the army in Lowestoft, Suffolk¹⁵ on 18 November 1915.¹⁶ He enlisted initially as a Driver (Regimental number: 418) in the Territorial Force of the Royal Horse Artillery and Royal Field Artillery. He later became a Bombardier (Regimental number: 681877).

The Royal Field Artillery was one element of three in the Royal Regiment of Artillery. It was the "most numerous arm of the artillery, the horse-drawn RFA was responsible for the medium calibre guns and howitzers deployed close to the front line and was reasonably mobile. It was organised into brigades."¹⁷ The military historian, John Terraine, wrote "The war of 1914-18 was an artillery war: artillery was the battle-winner, artillery was what caused the greatest loss of life, the most dreadful wounds, and the deepest fear."¹⁸

George joined the Great War in France on 18 November 1915.¹⁹ He was admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 20 May 1918 with gun shot wounds to his head and legs. He died that day and was buried on 21 May in the Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 1, Row F, Grave 24). He was identified as a member of the Church of England and the chaplain overseeing his burial was J. K. Tibbits. As George was unconscious when he arrived at the Clearing Station, his next of kin was not known. As a result, a letter to notify his unit of his death was sent to the Adjutant.²⁰ However, his widow, Minnie, received the monies the army owed him after his death.²¹

On 20 May, 370 soldiers were admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station - by far the highest number of admissions in any one day that month.²² This brought the total number of patients to 522. In the whole month of May, there were 115 deaths at this CCCS - more than in any of the other three and a half months that the 1st CCCS was in Pernes. The Pernes British Military Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when the 1st and 4th Canadian Casualty Clearing Stations came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.²³

George was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914-15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).²⁴

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¹ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2014), entry for George Bickers, Registration district: Headington, Inferred County: Oxfordshire, Volume: 3a, Page: 783

² "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2014), entry for George Bickers, County/Island: Suffolk, Registration district: Wangford, Registration District Number: 217, Sub-registration district: Beccles, ED, institution, or vessel: 1, Household schedule number: 11, Piece: 11007

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2014), entry for Arthur Bickers, Registration district: St Faith's, Inferred County: Norfolk, Volume: 4b, Page: 83

⁵ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2014), entry for George William Bickers, Registration district: Loddon, Inferred County: Norfolk, Volume: 4b, Page: 205.

⁶ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2014), entry for Ernest Bickers, Registration district: St George Hanover Square, Inferred County: London, Volume: 1a, Page: 441

⁷ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2014), entry for Charles Bickers, Registration district: St George Hanover Square, Inferred County: London, Volume: 1a, Page: 455

⁸ "1911 England Census," entry for George Bickers

⁹ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2014), entry for Emily Bickers, Registration district: St George Hanover Square, Inferred County: London, Volume: 1a, Page: 40

¹⁰ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2014), entry for Annie Bickers, Registration district: Loddon, Inferred County: Norfolk, Volume: 4b, Page: 220

¹¹ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Marriage Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2014), entry for George Bickers, Registration district: Wangford, Inferred County: Suffolk, Volume: 4a, Page: 1306

¹² "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2014), entry for George Bickers, County/Island: Suffolk, Registration district: Wangford, Registration District Number: 217, Sub-registration district: Beccles, ED, institution, or vessel: 3, Household schedule number: 58, Piece: 11009

¹³ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Marriage Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 7 December 2014), entry for George Bickers, Registration district: Wangford, Inferred County: Suffolk, Volume: 4a, Page: 1096

¹⁴ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Marriage Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 19 January 2015), entry for Gladys M. Bickers, Registration district: Wangford, Inferred County: Suffolk, Volume: 4a, Page: 2079

¹⁵ "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2014), entry for George Bickers

¹⁶ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2014), entry George Bickers

¹⁷ "The Long, Long Trail: The British artillery of 1914-1918," <http://www.1914-1918.net/cra.htm>

¹⁸ "The Long, Long Trail: The British artillery of 1914-1918." <http://www.1914-1918.net/cra.htm>: accessed 7 December 2014)

¹⁹ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," entry for George Bickers

²⁰ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Library and Archives Canada, (records accessed 2013 & 2014), Record Group 9, series IIC10, volume 4556, Record number 508

²¹ "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 19 January 2015), entry for George Bickers

²² "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FIN&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G; accessed 15 December 2014)

²³ "Pernes British Military Cemetery" *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/11600/PERNES%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>; accessed 13 January 2015)

²⁴ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," entry for George Bickers