

Gunner William James Colverd©
Regimental number: 20579
"D" Battery, 72nd Brigade, Royal Field Artillery

born: 7 September 1886 – died: 16 August 1917

Gunner William James Colverd was a Londoner, as were both his parents. His father, Edward James Colverd, was born in London on 26 May 1856 and baptised at Saint Bartholomew Moor Lane on 7 December of that year.¹ He was the son of James and Fanny Colverd. William's mother, Elizabeth Kerley, was born on 2 May 1859 and baptised at St Mary Whitechapel, Stepney, on 19 February 1860, the daughter of William and Elizabeth Kerley.² Edward and Elizabeth married on 18 August 1878 at the parish church of South Hackney.³

William's father was a printer compositor. In 1881, he and Elizabeth were living at 4 John Campbell Road in St John Hackney.⁴ Five years later, their only child, William James, was born. He was born on 7 September 1886 in St Saviour Southwark, London, and baptised on 5 December at All Saints, Newington.⁵ By 1891, the family was living at 6 Cumberland Terrace in Camberwell,⁶ where they remained for at least a decade.⁷ In 1901, William was at school, but by 1911 he was married and working as a tram conductor.⁸ His parents had moved to 17 Carlton Grove in Peckham.⁹

William married Nellie Ada Schofield in 1910 in Camberwell, London.¹⁰ Nellie was born in about 1886 in Heligoland,¹¹ a small archipelago in the North Sea that was under British administration from 1807 to 1890.¹² As Nellie's father was in the coast guard, he had likely been posted to Heligoland in the period 1885 to 1887.¹³ Nellie was baptised in Worth, Kent on 5 June 1892,¹⁴ when the family had presumably returned to England, once the archipelago was no longer under British administration. Before her marriage, Nellie was a machinist.¹⁵

The year after their marriage, William and Nellie were living at 28 Culmore Road, Asylum Road in Peckham.¹⁶ They were lodgers in the home of George William and Emma Ellen Carter. William was a tram conductor with the London County Council.¹⁷

William enlisted in Camberwell as a gunner in the Royal Horse Artillery and Royal Field Artillery. He was serving with "D" Battery of the 72nd Brigade when he was killed in the Third Battle of Ypres, also known as the Battle of Passchendaele.

The First Battle of Ypres, in western Belgium, took place in the first months of the war.¹⁸ In October/November 1914, the German and Franco-British armies fought to advance past the northern flank of their opponents. The Second Battle of Ypres took place the following spring.¹⁹ It was during this battle that the Germans made the first use of poison gas on the Western Front. It resulted in the demolition of the city of Ypres. The Third Battle of Ypres, from July to November 1917, aimed to recapture the Salient and the Passchendaele ridge to the east of Ypres.²⁰

The operation to free the Salient had initially been postponed to allow the forces to support the French offensive near Arras.²¹ In the first phase, up to mid-August, the British and French forces managed to make some gains, but rain prevented reconnaissance by aeroplane and turned the ground into a morass. Advancing was only possible along well-defined tracks, making the troops easy targets for enemy artillery. In addition, enemy ground was relatively undamaged; therefore, it had relative freedom to reorganize its defences. During the operations there were many casualties from the London area.

In 1920, the London County Council prepared a book—*London County Council Record of War Service*—to document the service of its staff in the Great War.²² It noted that, as a result of the operations near Ypres in July/August 1917, “W. J. Colverd (R.F.A., Tram.) died on the 16th of wounds received the day before.”

Indeed, William was admitted unconscious to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 15 August 1917 with a serious head wound.²³ He died the next day and was buried the following day in Adinkerke Military Cemetery (Grave Reference: C. 23).²⁴ Adinkerke Military Cemetery is 20 kilometres east of Dunkirk, in the community of De Panne, just across the border into Belgium. There are 168 Commonwealth soldiers from the Great War buried in the cemetery.²⁵

His parents had lost their only child and his wife, her husband of just a few years. They do not appear to have had any children. His wife, who was probably living at 112 Ivydale Road in Nunhead, London, received the monies owing to William from the army upon his death. The probate of his will to his wife showed that he left £129 1s. 11d.

Although information about the medals awarded to William was not found, he almost certainly received the two medals awarded to all Great War soldiers—the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).

William’s father probably died in 1927 in Bromley, Kent.²⁶

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¹ “England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538–1975,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2016), entry for Edward James Colverd, FHL Film Number: 374425

² “England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538–1975,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2016), entry for Elizabeth Kerley, FHL Film Number: 94698, 94699

³ “London, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754–1921,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2016), entry for Edward James Colverd

⁴ “1881 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2016), entry for Edward J Colverel, Registration district: Hackney, Sub-registration district: West Hackney, ED, institution, or vessel: 13, Piece: 292, Folio: 15, Page Number: 23

⁵ “London, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813–1906,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 5 June 2016), entry for William James Colverd

⁶ “1891 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2016), entry for William James Colverd, Registration district: Camberwell, Sub-registration district: St George, ED, institution, or vessel: 7, Piece: 487, Folio: 40, Page Number: 73

⁷ “1901 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2016), entry for William J Colverd, Registration district: Camberwell, Sub-registration district: Peckham, ED, institution, or vessel: 60, Piece: 514, Folio: 15, Page Number: 18, Household schedule number: 139

⁸ “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2016), entry for William James Colverd, Registration district: Camberwell, Registration District Number: 27, Sub-registration district: Peckham North, ED, institution, or vessel: 23, Piece: 2566

⁹ “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 May 2016), entry for Edward James Colverd, Registration district: Camberwell, Registration District Number: 27, Sub-registration district: Peckham North, ED, institution, or vessel: 19, Piece: 2562

¹⁰ “England & Wales, FreeBMD Marriage Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2016), entry for William J Coverd, Registration district: Camberwell, Inferred County: London, Volume: 1d, Page: 1625

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- ¹¹ "1911 England Census," entry for William James Colverd
- ¹² "Heligoland," *Wikipedia* (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heligoland>; accessed 13 May 2016)
- ¹³ Based on the births of two children in Heliogoland
- ¹⁴ "England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538–1975," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 13 May 2016), entry for Nellie Ada Schofield, FHL Film Number: 1866579, Reference ID: it8
- ¹⁵ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 13 May 2016), entry for Nellie A. Schofield, Registration district: Camberwell, Sub-registration district: Camberwell, ED, institution, or vessel: 18, Piece: 496, Folio: 120, Page Number: 56, Household schedule number: 369
- ¹⁶ "1911 England Census," entry for William James Colverd
- ¹⁷ "UK, Memorial Books WWI and WWII, 1914–1945," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 13 May 2016), entry for W J Colverd, Title: LCC Record of War Service
- ¹⁸ "First Battle of Ypres," *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Battle_of_Ypres; accessed 13 May 2016)
- ¹⁹ "Second Battle of Ypres," *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Battle_of_Ypres; accessed 13 May 2016)
- ²⁰ "The Battle of Passchendaele," *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Passchendaele; accessed 13 May 2016)
- ²¹ "UK, Memorial Books WWI and WWII, 1914–1945," entry for W J Colverd
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," *Library and Archives Canada*, (records accessed 2013 & 2016), Record Group 9, series IIC10, volume 4556, Record number 339. The chaplains' record of deaths notes that he was admitted with "head rendered."
- ²⁴ "Commonwealth War Graves Commission," (www.cwgc.org; accessed 3 December 2016), entry for Colverd, William James, Service No: L/20579
- ²⁵ "Adinkerke Military Cemetery," Commonwealth War Graves Commission (<http://www.cwgc.org/>; accessed 30 April 2016)
- ²⁶ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Death Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 13 May 2016), entry for Edward J Colverd, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred County: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 240