

Bombardier James Bowen[©]
Regimental number: 42645
"A" Battery, 307th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery

born: 1890 - died: 15 May 1918

Bombardier James Bowen was born in 1890 in Camberwell, London,¹ the son of James and Mercy Bowen.² He was baptized at Camberwell St. Michael and All Angels in Southwark, London, on 16 March 1898. His parents were both born in Walworth, London—James in about 1853 and Mercy in about 1851.³ While no evidence of their marriage was found, the birth records for their children indicate that their mother's name was Baker. They had eight children, four whom survived childhood.

Their first children were twin girls—Eliza and Louisa—who were born in 1877, but both probably died shortly after birth.⁴ The following year, they had another set of twin girls: Ellen, who was also known as Nellie, and Mercy.⁵ Their first son, James John, was born in 1881, but died at the age of 1.⁶ Another daughter, Jane Elizabeth, may have been born in 1883 but also died at the age of 1.⁷ They then had two more sons, John (born in 1885)⁸ and James, born five years later.

In 1881, the family was living at 44 Sultan Street in Camberwell, where James Sr. was a general labourer and Mercy was a charwoman.⁹ Later James Sr. became a flower hawker and, in 1891, he was an employee and the family was living at 2 Sultan Street.¹⁰ Ten years later, James Sr. was working on his own account and the family had moved to 5 Sultan Street. James Jr. was now a printer's boy.¹¹ James Sr. died in 1903¹² and, by 1911, Mercy and her two sons had moved to a fourth house on Sultan Street—to number 23. John was a stereotyper, working for a letter press printer, and James Jr., an engineer's assistant, working at a printing machinery company.¹³

James enlisted in the British Expeditionary Force in about December 1914¹⁴ in Camberwell¹⁵ and joined the Western Front in France on 4 September 1915.¹⁶ He enlisted early in the Great War and survived for nearly three years.

At the beginning of May 1918, the 307th Brigade was in the field near Liettes, northwest of Bethune, France. In the early morning hours of 10 May, the enemy carried out attacks on the battery position. "One gun was damaged & severe casualties to personnel, 3 officer casualties and 20 O.R.s [Other Ranks]. We carried out usual day and night harassing fire . . ." ¹⁷ James may have been one of these casualties. There were 33 Other Ranks in the brigade killed or wounded that month.

James was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 10 May 1918 with gunshot wounds to his right thigh and left shoulder. He survived until 15 May when he succumbed to his wounds. He was buried that day in Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 2, Row, E, Grave 14) with the Canadian chaplain J. K. Tibbits presiding.¹⁸

In May 1918, nearly 4,000 soldiers were admitted to No. 1 CCCS.¹⁹ There were 115 deaths that month—more than in any of the other three and a half months that No. 1 CCCS was in Pernes. The Pernes British Military Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when No. 1 and No. 4 CCCSs came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.²⁰

James was awarded posthumously 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).²¹

The monies owing to him from the army upon his death were sent to his mother and three siblings—Mercy, Ellen and John.²²

Mercy and Ellen had both married in the early the 1900s—Ellen married Charles Lloyd in 1903²³ and Mercy married Christopher Lands in 1905.²⁴ The two sisters were living close to each other in 1911. Mercy, Christopher and their four children were living at 46 Bowyer Street in Camberwell.²⁵ Ellen, Charles and their three children were living just two minutes away in the previous family home at 2 Sultan Street.²⁶

By 1911, James' brother John may have already enlisted in the army and was possibly serving with the 9th Ammunition Column of the Royal Field Artillery in India.²⁷ He subsequently volunteered to serve in the Great War, again with the Royal Field Artillery—enlisting on 10 May 1915 in Camberwell and joining the 167th Brigade. He served in the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force for the duration of the war. He contracted malaria in late July 1917 when he was in Salonica, Macedonia, and was sent to Malta for treatment, but he rejoined his unit in early October 1917. The malaria reappeared a couple of times during his service in the Middle East. He was in the army of occupation in Palestine after the war, until he returned to England and was demobilized in May 1919. He transferred to the Army Reserve in June 1919.²⁸

James' mother continued to live at 23 Sultan Street²⁹ until her death in 1934.³⁰ In 1939, Ellen and Charles Lloyd were living at 17 Sultan Street. Members of the Bowen family had lived in five different houses on Sultan Street, Camberwell since at least 1881.

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¹ "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 April 2018) entry for Bowen, James, Registration district: Camberwell, Volume 01D, Page 903

² "London, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813–1906," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 April 2018), entry for James Bowen, Register type: Parish Registers

³ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 April 2018), entry for James Bowen, Registration district: Camberwell, Sub-registration district: St George, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 03, Piece: 515, Folio: 74, Page: 29, Household schedule number: 170

⁴ "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 April 2018) entry for Bowen, Eliza, Registration district: Camberwell, Volume 01D, Page 805; "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 April 2018) entry for Bowen, Louisa, Registration district: Camberwell, Volume 01D, Page 805; "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 9 April 2018), entry for Eliza Bowen, Registration district: Camberwell, Inferred county: London, Volume: 1d, Page: 424; "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 9 April 2018), entry for Louisa Bowen, Registration district: Camberwell, Inferred county: London, Volume: 1d, Page: 424

⁵ "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 April 2018) entry for Bowen, Ellen, Registration district: Camberwell, Volume 01D, Page 871; "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 April 2018) entry for Bowen, Mercy, Registration district: Camberwell, Volume 01D, Page 871

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- ⁶ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 April 2018) entry for Bowen, John James, Registration district: Camberwell, Volume 01D, Page 926; “England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 9 April 2018), entry for James John Bowen, Registration district: Camberwell, Inferred county: London, Volume: 1d, Page: 632
- ⁷ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 April 2018) entry for Bowen, Jane Elizabeth, Registration district: Camberwell, Volume 01D, Page 942; “England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 9 April 2018), entry for Jane Elizabeth Bowen, Registration district: Camberwell, Inferred county: London, Volume: 1d, Page: 632
- ⁸ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 April 2018) entry for Bowen, John, Registration district: Camberwell, Volume 01D, Page 579
- ⁹ “1881 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 9 April 2018), entry for Mercy Bowen, Registration district: Camberwell, Sub-registration district: St George, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 9, Piece: 695, Folio: 27, Page: 48
- ¹⁰ “1891 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 April 2018), entry for James Bowen, Registration district: Camberwell, Sub-registration district: St George, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 10, Piece: 487, Folio: 136
- ¹¹ “1901 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 April 2018), entry for James Bowen
- ¹² “England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 April 2018), entry for James Bowen, Registration district: Camberwell, Inferred county: London, Volume: 1d, Page: 397
- ¹³ “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 5 January 2018), entry for James Bowen, Registration district: Camberwell, Registration district number: 27, Sub-registration district: Camberwell North, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 17, Piece: 2501
- ¹⁴ Based on “War Gratuity Calculator” (<https://wargratiuity.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/gratuity-calculator/>: accessed 18 May 2017); “UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 April 2018), entry for James Bowen
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- ¹⁹ “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=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&=G: accessed 15 December 2014)
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²³ "London, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1932," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 9 April 2018), entry for Ellen Bowen

²⁴ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 9 April 2018), entry for Mercy Bowen, Registration district: Lambeth, Inferred county: London, Volume: 1d, Page: 601

²⁵ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 9 April 2018), entry for Mercy Lands, Registration district: Camberwell, Registration district number: 27, Sub-registration district: Camberwell North, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 17, Piece: 2501

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