



Name: Corporal Thomas BOWEN  
 Sex: Male  
 Father: Edward BOWEN (1858 - 31 Mar 1894)  
 Mother: Esther ERRINGTON (4 May 1856 - 9 Jan 1910)

#### Individual Facts

Birth	16 Nov 1884	
Census	1891 (age 7)	13 Lancaster Street, Murton Colliery, Easington
Census	1901 (age 17)	48 Church Street, Seaham Harbour.
Occupation	1901 (age 17)	horse driver at a coal mine, working above ground; Seaham Harbour
Occupation	1907 (age 23)	coal miner; Bedlington
Burial	1917 (age 33)	New Irish Farm cemetery, Belgium
Death	16 Aug 1917 (age 32)	
Military		WW1, 6th (Pioneer) btn, East Yorkshire Regiment

#### Marriages/Children

##### 1. Sarah Ann PROCTOR (aka Gelear)

Marriage	4 May 1907 (age 22)	Morpeth Registry Office
Children	Edward (Ned) BOWEN (24 Mar 1908 - 1 Oct 1959)	
	William (Billy) BOWEN (9 Feb 1911 - 26 Apr 1986)	
	Eliza BOWEN (1 Oct 1914 - )	

#### Notes (Individual)

**Birth (16 Nov 1884):** Thomas' birth was registered by his father, Edward Bowen, on the 1st December 1884. His father's occupation was given as coal miner, and his mother as Esther Bowen, formerly Errington.

**Burial (1917):** Buried in the plot next to Thomas at New Irish farm, near Ypres, is Private Samuel Norton, also of the 6th East Yorkshires. He is recorded as having been born and enlisted in Hull, service number 26677. He was killed on the 21st August 1917, five days after Thomas.

Thomas was not originally buried at New Irish Farm, as his grave is not amongst those in Plot 1. He would either have been buried where he fell by his colleagues, or his body recovered and taken to one of the many small cemeteries on the Salient. After hostilities ceased and the War Graves Commission took responsibility for the registering of the deaths and upkeep of the plots, battlefield burials and those in smaller cemeteries were often concentrated into larger ones.

The list of Thomas' possessions sent home from 'the front' after his death read : notebook, testament, pipe, metal watch (broken), match box covers, photos, cards, disc, 2 metal chains.

**Death (16 Aug 1917):** Thomas Bowen died on 16th August 1917. The battle of Langemarck commenced at 4:45am on that day, and although the village of Langemarck was captured, this signified the furthest advance by the British across the whole of the line and was well short of their objectives. German artillery positions continued throughout the day unmolested and caused severe casualties. Thomas was engaged at an area known to the British troops as 'Gloucester Avenue' working on the road from Hurst Park to Regina Cross. The war diary for the East Yorks states that " a track was successfully got through which was passable for pack animals, but owing to the large number of shell holes full of water which all had to be drained, it was not possible to get a road through all the sectors worked on fit for wheeled traffic. Work was greatly interfered with on account of the enemy continually shelling the road, most of the shellings appearing to come from the St Julien direction." It was during this period of the day that Thomas Bowen and two of his colleagues were



killed.

**Military:** Thomas' enlistment papers describe him as having blue eyes, brown hair and a fresh complexion. He enlisted at Bedlington, originally in the West Yorks but was switched same day to the East Yorks, service number 16288. His first entry into the 'theatre of war' was in the Balkans campaign of July 1915.

Whilst in training at Belton Park, Grantham and Whitby Camp, Godalming, the then Private Thomas Bowen was twice marked as absent, on the 25 October 1914 until the 2 November 1914 and then again on the 21st June 1915 until the 27 June 1915. The first period of absence coincides with the birth of his daughter, Eliza, in October 1914 and the second was just eight weeks before the death of his wife, Sarah Ann from tuberculosis. For both of these offences he had his pay deducted.

The battalion sailed with the 11th Division to the Dardenelles on the 1st July 1915 arriving at Sulva Bay on the 7th August; the battalion was immediately pushed into it's first offensive action of the Great War. The East Yorks acquitted themselves well, and although by this time the battalion were the Divisional Pioneers, it adopted it's fighting roll and suffered over 250 fatal casualties. On the 15th September 1915 Private Thomas Bowen was appointed Lance Corporal quickly followed on the 24th January 1916 to Acting Corporal. By the time of his third promotion, to acting Lance Sergeant, the 11th Division were in Egypt, defending British interests in the Suez Canal. Then in July 1916 the 11th Division left the Far East for the Western Front and the Somme. It was men of the 6th East Yorks who were involved in the capture of Mouquet Farm, being told to 'put down their shovels and take up their rifles', an instruction that they followed with great bravery, and ultimate success.

The 11th Division were involved in the battle of Flers-Courcelette (15th-22nd September) and the battle for Thiepval Ridge (26th-28th September.) The 6th East Yorks casualties were light in comparison to it's heavy losses in Gallipoli. Toward the end of 1916 acting Lance Sergeant Bowen began a period of time in hospital. According to his service records he was admitted to Number 25 Base Hospital on 21 December 1916 suffering from scabies. This period of illness lasted until March 1917, when he rejoined his battalion.

After a period in reserve the 11th Division was transferred to XV111 Corps in Gough's Fifth Army and moved to Ypres in preparation for the forthcoming offensive which is best known as Passchendaele.

Killed on the first day of the battle of Langemarck, 'Third Ypres' 16th August 1917, Thomas is buried at New Irish Farm cemetery in Belgium, 'Flanders Fields.'

Flanders Fields by John Mcrae :

In Flanders Fields where poppies grow,  
Between the crosses, row on row  
That mark our place; while in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarcely heard amid the guns below.  
We are the Dead, short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow  
Loved and were loved; and now we lie  
in Flanders Fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe!

To you from failing hands we throw

The torch - Be yours to hold it high!

If ye break faith with us who die

We shall not sleep, though poppies grow

In Flanders Fields.

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## Notes (Family #1)

**Marriage (4 May 1907):** At her wedding to Thomas, Sarah Ann gave her name as Sarah Ann Gelear, father Charles Gelear, coalminer. She also gave her age as 21, when in fact she was only 18. Parental consent would therefore have been required for her marriage to Thomas had she admitted her true age. Non family members Robert Burns and Mary Ann Harmison were witnesses to the ceremony.

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## Sources