

# EDWARD ALBERT GELLERT

1888– 1915 Aged 27

**Private 2353 1/6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (Territorial Force).** Edward Albert Gellert was born in the summer of 1888 into a German family attracted to Bradford by its wool industry. His father Ernest Bruno Gellert came from Saxe-Altenburg in central Germany. In 1881 he was a commercial clerk in the wool industry, boarding in Little Horton. Only a decade later he was a yarn merchant occupying a large house on Selbourne Grove, across Lister Park from the present Grammar School. Gellert was a partner in the firm of Nathan Heydemann and Son, whose palatial warehouse stands still in Little Germany at 4 Curren Street. In 1885 he married Rosa, from the same area of Germany. They had three daughters and two sons. In 1899 Bruno became a naturalized British subject. On the eve of the First World War the family occupied a substantial house on the Heaton Estates, with many of Bradford's leading citizens for neighbours. Bruno bought out his business partner, and his eldest daughter Marta had recently married the son of a Berlin wool merchant, at St Luke's parish church.

Edward attended the Bradford Grammar School from 1898 until 1907, and his younger brother Harry was a year below him. The brothers combined academic and sporting prowess. In his final year Edward was described in *The Bradfordian* as *'The most energetic forward we have; rather light yet, but has all the makings of a good forward; follows up well; plays the game in the true vigorous spirit. Shows his keenness by constant attendance at practices.'* He was 5 feet 10 inches and weighed 10 stone. He defended the Suffragettes in the Debating Society, and he obtained Higher Certificates in Latin, Greek, English and History. He was in Form VI Classical and must have been intended for university, but what he did next is unknown—the only person of his name who can be found travelled to Quebec in 1912 with the occupation of waiter.

The outbreak of war with Germany must have come as a profound shock to this family. Nevertheless, Edward soon volunteered for the Bradford Territorial battalion, the 6th, and joined his former school-friends in 'C' Company. They crossed to France in April 1915 as part of 49th West Riding Division. From July the Division was stationed in the north-

19th December 1915



Photo courtesy of Bradford Grammar OBA

eastern part of the Ypres Salient. For much of the autumn heavy rains flooded the trenches. Only regular rotation between the front, support and reserve made the conditions endurable. The Division was promised it would leave the Salient before Christmas. The 6th Battalion entered the trenches for the final time on 15th December. On the 17th there was heavy shelling, in which Laurence Denison suffered a mortal wound, then all was quiet. At 5.15 a.m. on the 19th sentries heard a hissing sound which presaged a German gas assault. Another O.B. related what happened in a letter: *'The gas came over in the early morning in great green clouds. All telephone communications had been cut and so one of my platoon doubled off with the warning. Within three minutes, if that, the artillery had drawn an impassable curtain of fire across their line. Isolated [German] parties managed to struggle out and across but were mown down to a man by machine gun and rifle fire. At no point did they enter our trenches. ... Of those killed I think you will remember Gellert and Cohen. The boys are full of plans for Christmas.'* The Battalion had one hundred casualties, a quarter of those in the line, of whom eighteen were killed. Effective gas masks (the 'Tube' or P.H. Helmet) had recently been issued and the men were alert, so the deaths were caused by shell-fire. Gellert was taken to the dressing station at Essex Farm, but had died and was buried there.



### Acknowledgements:

Gellert's family history was reconstructed from documents available on Ancestry.com (census, birth, death and marriage registers, electoral registers, telephone directories, probate records, Canadian passenger lists, WW1 Medal Roll Index Cards, Register of Soldier's Effects). Many German bearers of the name Gellert were Jewish, but Ernest Bruno's daughter married in St. Luke's parish church, Heaton. For the circumstances of Gellert's death, see the War Diary of the 1/6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment ([http://interactive.ancestry.co.uk/60779/43849\\_2794\\_2-00271?pid=696564&backurl=http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db%3DUKWWarDiariesWWI%26gss%3Dangs-d%26new%3D1%26rank%3D1%26msT%3D1%26msydd%3D18%26msydm%3D12%26msydy%3D1915%26\\_F0007CF4%3D1%252f6th%2BWest%2BYorkshire%26MSAV%3D0%26uidh%3D6n6%26ql%3D%26gst%3D%26hc%3D50%26fh%3D50%26fsk%3DBEHhYrglgAdtawABEVs-61-&usePUB=true#?imageId=43849\\_2794\\_2-00271](http://interactive.ancestry.co.uk/60779/43849_2794_2-00271?pid=696564&backurl=http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db%3DUKWWarDiariesWWI%26gss%3Dangs-d%26new%3D1%26rank%3D1%26msT%3D1%26msydd%3D18%26msydm%3D12%26msydy%3D1915%26_F0007CF4%3D1%252f6th%2BWest%2BYorkshire%26MSAV%3D0%26uidh%3D6n6%26ql%3D%26gst%3D%26hc%3D50%26fh%3D50%26fsk%3DBEHhYrglgAdtawABEVs-61-&usePUB=true#?imageId=43849_2794_2-00271)); EV Tempest, *History of the 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment*, 56-7 (provision of gas masks), 63-7 (the events of 15th-19th December); the letters of Arthur Kenneth Bloomer were kindly made available by the family (this excerpt taken from letter 30, page 32 of the transcript). I am grateful to Tricia Platts for allowing me to compare my findings with hers.

The photo of Cohen's grave was taken by the author. The CWGC register contains the additional information:

GELLERT, Pte. E. A., 2353. "C" Coy. 1st/6th Bn. West Yorkshire Regt. Killed in action at Ypres 19th Dec., 1915. Age 27. Son of Bruno and Rosa Gellert, of 72, Duchy Rd., Harrogate. Native of Bradford, Yorks. Enlisted Sept., 1914. I. R. II.

(<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/159347/GELLERT,%20E%20A>)

Essex Farm Cemetery is at Boesinge, on the road to Dixmude north of Ypres (Ieper). The cemetery also contains the memorial to the 49th West Riding Division and the concrete Advanced Dressing Station, built in 1916 on the site of the original timber and elephant iron shelters dug into the Canal Bank. It was here that Lt. Col. John McRae composed his poem 'In Flanders Fields' in 1915.

Researched and composed by Nick Hooper, October 2015.

