

# EDWIN HARLAND BOWER



21st March 1918

1898-1918 Aged 20

## Lieutenant 2nd Battalion York and Lancaster Regiment.

Edwin Bower was the eldest child of Henry Emerson Bower who came from the Listerhills area of Bradford, and Ada Stockton Harland from Thwing in the Yorkshire Wolds. They married late in 1896 and Edwin was born in Morecambe on 24th January 1898. He was followed by a brother Arthur in 1901, and twin sisters Winifred Ada and Effie Jane in 1903. Henry Bower was a grocer's son and was described as a brewery commercial traveller. He worked for Waller's Brewery of Bradford whose Trafalgar Brewery premises were in sight (and smell) of Bradford Grammar School. By the early 1900s he was more prosperous than his job description implies. He was also a director of the Morecambe West Pier Company and a shareholder in the Scarborough Spa Company, and he would later serve as Chairman of the former as well as being managing director of Waller's. He was initiated into the Freemasons in 1905 and he would be a leading figure in the Bradford Masonic Association. For many years the family occupied a substantial house above Bolton Wood quarries, moving to Listerhills by 1915.

Edwin started at Bradford Grammar School in 1909 in his twelfth year. He progressed through the Classical forms and would probably have gone to university had the war not intervened. When the Officer Training Corps was formed at the end of 1914 he was one of the first to join and he was promoted to the rank of lance corporal. The Bradfordian later described him as 'efficient and liked', and he attended the first summer camp at Levisham in late July 1915. At the start of the month he had applied for a place at the Royal Military College Sandhurst to train as a Regular Army officer but he had been rejected as 'unfit' owing to defective eyesight. However, on appeal in August he was accepted. He was 5 feet 7 inches tall and weighed 126 pounds. Although commissioned in April 1916 Edwin was still below the age for service overseas and it was only in February 1917 that he joined the 2nd Battalion York and Lancaster Regiment in France.



As part of 16th Infantry Brigade (6th Division) the battalion was engaged in severe trench fighting near Lens for five months from March to July 1917, then took part in the Battle of Cambrai in late November and early December. At some point Bower was promoted to Lieutenant. In February 1918, 6th Division moved into the line at Lagnicourt, near Arras. A German offensive was expected. The 2/York and Lancaster was at half strength, as were the other battalions in the division, and all were worn out from working on strengthening the defences. Bower lost his life in the massive German assault which commenced on 21st March. A crushing bombardment of the British positions began at 5 a.m. 'D' Company in the front line was wiped out bar fifteen survivors who reached the main position; 'B' Company was also reduced to a few men, while 'A' and 'C' companies suffered heavy losses from shelling. The survivors were forced back when the Germans worked round both flanks, and by the next morning the battalion was reduced to 150 men. Of 99 men killed that day, only seven had known burials. No details of Bower's death emerged. Newspapers reported in May that he was wounded, in July that he was dead, and then in October that he was missing. His name was recorded on memorials in his birth-place Morecambe, his school and Bradford Cathedral.



### Acknowledgements:

Bower's photo is from *The Sphere* 20th July 1918; the same photo appeared in *The Illustrated London News* for 19th October. The family was researched using Ancestry.com, except for the 1911 Census for which I used findmypast.co.uk. I found Bower's photo and several references to Henry Bower's career and activities up to his death in using the British Newspapers collection on the same website. His obituary was published in the *Shipley Times and Express* 4th August 1943. He was a member of the Prince of Wales Lodge. For the history of Waller's Brewery, I used an article by brewery historian Malcolm Toft published in *Tyke Taverner*, the Bradford CAMRA magazine, in 2016. The brewery name has been revived recently.

Edwin's years at B.G.S. are recorded in the Annual Reports for 1909-10 to 1916 inclusive, starting in Third Classical Lower through to Remove Classical. *The Bradfordian* July 1918 notes his death, and the 'OTC Notes' in the same issue his O.T.C. record. His Officer Personal Record is TNA WO339-59385. For his entry in the Bradford Roll of Honour, <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/bradfordww1/9342806974/in/album-72157634776696882/>>. For Morecambe War Memorial, <<http://www.lancasterwarmemorials.org.uk/memorials/morecambe-wwi.htm>> (accessed 18-1-2018).

The War Diary for 2nd York and Lancaster is on Ancestry.com. It does not appear to name Bower, but it gives a very detailed account of the events of 21st-22nd March 1918, which I supplemented by consulting *A Short History of the 6th Division*, ed. Major-General T.O. Marden (Hugh Rees Ltd., London, 1920) <<https://ia902702.us.archive.org/11/items/hist6thdivision00marduoft/hist6thdivision00marduoft.pdf>> chapters 7-9. The figures for the dead of 21st March were arrived at by a casualty search using the CWGC website.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper in January 2018. For further information, contact Nhooper1956@googlemail.com, or see <<http://www.bradfordgrammar.com/former-pupils/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>>.