

# JAMES CECIL BLAND



**23rd August 1918**

**1892-1918 Aged 25**

**Corporal, 2/5th Battalion London Regiment (London Rifle Brigade), attached 1/28th Battalion (Artists' Rifles) (T.F.).**

On 4th September 1918 James Bland was due to have married Emily Hewitson at Shipley. The ceremony never took place as he had been killed in action twelve days earlier in the Battle of Bapaume. James was the only son of William Wilde Bland and Mary Elizabeth Ingham. William was the Clerk to the Commissioner of Taxes for Wakefield and Dewsbury. He had moved to Bradford during the 1870s from Middlesex where his father ran a parish school. Mary's father was a grocer in Listerhills (near Bradford Media Museum). They married in 1888, and their only other child was a daughter, Julia Gladys.

James started at Bradford Grammar School in September 1904 a few days before his twelfth birthday. He was on the Modern side of the School and until his final year he was a competent pupil whose best subject was Divinity. In 1907-1908 he came bottom in most subjects in 4th Modern Upper, and he left the School aged fifteen to work for the Yorkshire Penny Bank of Bradford. He continued to live with his parents in Horton until he enlisted. They died within a few months of each other in 1917, while his sister had married Fred Haigh, a Bradford wool salesman, in June 1915.

On 11th December 1915, James volunteered in London for the London Rifle Brigade (5th Battalion London Regiment). By this time of the War it was clear the Government was moving towards compulsory service, so it is likely James travelled to London specifically to enlist in an exclusive unit of the Territorial Force which attracted City clerks and City 'men of good position'. He became part of the second line battalion, 2-5th/London Regiment, and was promoted to Corporal. He was in charge of one of four sections making up a platoon, at a time when platoon tactics were being reformed following the lessons learned during 1916. This battalion went to France in January 1917 and saw action at Bullecourt in May, St. Julien in September, and Poelcapelle at the end of October. In January 1918 this battalion



was broken up owing to manpower shortages in the B.E.F. and Bland was part of a draft of 400 officers and men who were transferred to the 1st-28th Battalion London Regiment, the Artists' Rifles. These men retained their L.R.B. cap badges and were not reckoned members of the exclusive Artists' Rifles. Corporal Bland was in 'D' Company.

On 21st March 1918 the Artists' Rifles was in Havrincourt Wood in the Flesquieres Salient, near Cambrai, when it was subjected to a gas and smoke cloud at the commencement of the German Spring Offensive. It conducted a fighting retreat to Pozieres and was then ordered to attack on the outskirts of Albert. 'D' Company was in reserve which perhaps saved Bland's life. Casualties during the retirement were 300 other ranks and seventeen officers. Over the following months spells of rest and line holding alternated until on 21st August the battalion supported an attack on Achiet-le-Petit. In the dense mist and smoke the battalion unconsciously passed through the battalion in front and found itself in the front line. Bland was killed, probably by enemy shell-fire, on the morning of 23rd August shortly before the Artists' Rifles were to be relieved. He was buried a few hundred yards behind the front line, and his body was moved into Achiet-le-Grand Communal Extension Cemetery in 1920. His sister had the words 'I pass, but shall not die' placed on his headstone, and also on the family memorial in Scholemoor Cemetery. Emily Hewitson, who was a clerk-typist in 1911, never married and she died in 1944, still living in the family house on St. Paul's Road, Shipley.





### Acknowledgements:

Although James Bland's sister Julia (later Dame Julia Haigh) lived in Shipley until her death in 1953 no photo of her brother was placed in the School Memorial Book. The family history was researched using Ancestry.com. James' years at Bradford Grammar School are in the Annual Reports for 1905-1908. Fred Haigh had a lucky war: he attested in November 1915 but was not mobilized until March 1918, was posted to an Officer Training Battalion near London, and saw no overseas service. He was later knighted. The Bradford Roll of Honour gives the date for James' enlistment, while *Soldiers who Died in the Great War* records the place as London. Officially he remained a soldier of the London Rifle Brigade and is not listed as a casualty of the Artists' Rifles (the apostrophe was dropped in the 1930s). However, his death with that battalion is recorded in *Register of Solders' Effects*, and *UK, Medal Award Roll* records his service in that battalion from 30th January 1918 until his death (all accessed using Ancestry.com).

For the London Rifle Brigade I used <[https://aim25.com/cgi-bin/vcdf/detail?coll\\_id=15958&inst\\_id=118&nv1=search&nv2=>](https://aim25.com/cgi-bin/vcdf/detail?coll_id=15958&inst_id=118&nv1=search&nv2=>) and <[https://aim25.com/cgi-bin/vcdf/detail?coll\\_id=15958&inst\\_id=118&nv1=search&nv2=>](https://aim25.com/cgi-bin/vcdf/detail?coll_id=15958&inst_id=118&nv1=search&nv2=>)>, accessed 18.8.2018. For the Artists' Rifles, see *The regimental roll of honour and war record of the Artists' Rifles (1/28th, 2/28th and 3/28th battalions, the London Regiment T. F.) Commissions, promotions, appointments and rewards for service in the field obtained by members of the corps since 4th August, 1914*, by Highman, S. Stagoll, (1922), xxvii-xxviii, consulted online. The War Diaries for 2-5/London Jan. 1917 to Jan. 1918 are on Ancestry.com, Piece 3005/2, and 1-28/London 1918 Piece 3119. With the CWGC burial records for Bland, it is possible to plot the position of the front line and Bland's original burial on a trench map. The photo of the L.R.B. badge is from <<https://rememberourdeadregimentallist.weebly.com/5th-battalion-london-regiment.html>>.

The story of the wedding is from the *Shipley Times and Express*, 6.9.1918 (British newspaper collection, accessed using findmypast.co.uk). Edith Hewitson's family was researched using Ancestry.com, and her probate gives the date of death. This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper in August 2018. The photo of the family memorial was taken by the author. For further information, contact Nhooper1956@googlemail.com, or see <<http://www.bradfordgrammar.com/former-pupils/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>>.

