

**Aim of the Report:- To give an account of Military artifacts, and from them to**

- **research the military career of the recipient within the limitations of the project**
- **advise what further research might be yield information.**

## **The Soldier**

**James Edward BOWLER** 19 February 1882 – 30 October 1914. His relationship to the writer is that of great uncle (paternal grandmother's brother), shown in the pedigree at page 12.

## **Documentation and Artifacts**

Other than documentation arising from family research there is no documentation in the possession of the family relating to James.



There are three artifacts, all military medals.

1. **A star shaped medal without ribbon.** The banner motif reads 'Aug-1914-Nov'. This is identifiable as the 1914 Star (pictured left, with ribbon), a campaign medal awarded to those who served between the outbreak of the First World War and 22/23 November 1914 with either the British or Indian Expeditionary Force in France or Belgium.<sup>1</sup> Medical personnel were included and marine units stationed ashore. The Medal was introduced in 1917.<sup>2</sup>

## **What does the medal tell about the recipient?**

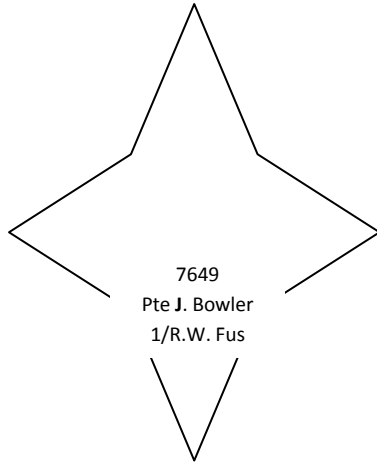
That he served with either the British or Indian Army or onshore in France/Flanders with the British Navy between the dates noted above, not necessarily as a soldier or sailor. Were he a soldier he would have been one of the 'Old Contemptibles'. Receipt of this medal would have precluded him from receiving very similarly designed 1914-1915 Star, awarded to those who entered the War at a later date.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (Fowler, 2003, p. 49)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.1914-1918.net/grandad/themedals.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Ditto



**What other information can be obtained from the medal?**

On the reverse (depicted left) are the recipient's number, rank, name and unit as shown left. The 'J' of the initial in the name is more heavily indented than the other lettering.

It is therefore known that the man who served in France/Flinders between August and November 1914 was Private 7649 J. BOWLER of the first battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers. He was a soldier, serving with an identifiable British Regiment in WW1 in an ascertainable time frame.

**What, if any, other conclusions can be drawn from the information gathered?**

To be involved in the First World War at such an early stage Private 7649 J. BOWLER had not simply joined up at the outbreak of War but was either a regular soldier at the time of outbreak of War or had seen previous service and was a reserve soldier.<sup>4</sup> Certainly he was not a raw, untrained recruit or a conscript.<sup>5</sup>

**Items 2. and 3.**



<sup>4</sup> For a detailed description of the reorganisation of the British Army in 1908 and the composition and size of the British Expeditionary Force see (Corrigan, 2003, pp. 43-48)

<sup>5</sup> Conscription was not introduced until May 1916 following a failure to recruit sufficient volunteers (Corrigan, 2003, p. 74)

2. Is a silver medal, 36 mm diameter, without ribbon as that above left (shown with ribbon<sup>6</sup>). On the rim is engraved '7649 PTE. J. BOWLER. R.W.FUS'  
 This is identifiable as the British War Medal,<sup>7</sup> a campaign medal awarded to those of the British and Imperial Forces who saw service overseas in the First World War.<sup>8</sup> It was awarded to both officers and men who either entered a theatre of war or entered service overseas between 5 August 1914 and 11 November 1918 or who saw service in some other areas, including Russia and Siberia in 1919/20<sup>6</sup> (Fowler, 2003)<sup>9</sup> comments it was awarded to some civilians including nurses.

3. Is a bronze medal 36 mm diameter, with ribbon, as that shown above right. On the rim is engraved '7649 PTE. J. BOWLER. R.W.FUS'

It is identifiable as the (Allied) Victory Medal, a campaign medal awarded in the case of the British, to those fulfilling the same conditions for the award of the British War Medal.<sup>10</sup> The medal was adopted by all the allied forces but that owned and shown above is the design adopted in the British Empire

**What do these medals, 2. and 3. tell about the recipient and his career?**

Alone they would each have indicated that the man to whom they were awarded served abroad in the First World War. Each indicates this and as they were issued together and designed to be worn together neither provides information which the other does not.

From the engraving on the rims the recipient of these medals is identifiable as the same man, by name, number and regiment as the recipient of item 1., the 1914 Star described at page 1.

Were only item 1. available that would tell far more of this man's service career than either of the other two items, individually or combined. Because, by convention, the three medals were worn together in order 1, 2,3, left to right when viewed from the front,<sup>11</sup> they form an historical collection.<sup>12</sup> However it is item 1. which gives the most assistance to taking the research forward. It does this by providing the profile set out in the table below, some of which would be missing were items 2. and 3. all that were available.

Detail	Information	Item 1.	Items 2./3.
<b>Name</b>	J. Bowler	Y	Y
<b>Number</b>	7649	Y	Y

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.greatwar.co.uk/medals/ww1-campaign-medals>

<sup>7</sup> Ditto

<sup>8</sup> (Fowler, 2003, p. 49)

<sup>9</sup> Page 49

<sup>10</sup> (Fowler, 2003, p. 49)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.greatwar.co.uk/medals/ww1-campaign-medals.htm#mercantilemedal>

<sup>12</sup> Though this particular set are not quite complete even for WW1 see page 6.

<b>Rank</b>	Private	Y	Y
<b>Regiment</b>	Royal Welsh Fusiliers	Y	Y
<b>Battalion</b>	1	Y	N
<b>Service</b>	Army	Y	Y
<b>Date of entry</b>	Entered	Y	N
<b>Where served</b>	France and Flanders	Y	N (only indicates abroad)
<b>Other</b>	Served in France and Flanders sometime between August and 22/23 November 2014. Had seen previous service in some capacity.	Y	N only that had served in some capacity in WW1

## How these could assist in uncovering further details of the service career?

### WW1 Military sources indicated by the profile of this soldier obtained from artifacts

#### 1. First World War Army Medal Cards (National Archive Reference WO 372).

A search in the online catalogue of National Archives disclosed in that series the Medal card of BOWLER, James, Corps: 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Welsh Fusiliers, Regiment No: 7649. Rank: Private. Reference: WO 372/3/10908

An online search on [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) revealed the digitised card in the site's British Army WW1 Medal Rolls Index Cards 1914-1920 series

That record confirms the subject's name as James Bowler and his rank as private 7649 in the First Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers. The regimental number and name of regiment on the medals would have been even more significant had the subject of the research had a particularly common name.

The Medal card further confirms the awards of British War and Victory Medals and the reference in the Campaign Medal Rolls as J/2/102B2 page 416, and the award of '14 Star' and the reference J/2/4 page 29 on the Campaign Medal Roll. There are other notes with no obvious meaning which may relate to the dispatch of the medals to the recipient.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> (Fowler, 2003, p. 49)

The theatre of War first served in is not given but the date of entry therein is stated to be 12 September 1914. From the award of the 1914 Star the theatre of War was France and Flanders.

The most striking information from the card is the note:- 'Death assumed 30.10.14'

On the second page of the card under 'Correspondence' is a note, *Shrewsbury returns 1914 Star for amendment.*

### Comments on the record

The medal record card can be identified as relating to the subject from the name, number, rank, battalion and regiment. It further confirms that the three campaign medals in the possession of the writer were the only awards made in respect of service in WW1.

The statements that James entered a theatre of war on 12 September 1914 and *Death assumed 30.10.14*, indicate a very short service in WW1 and also that there will be no entry in any record relating to an award of disability pension, that is National Archives reference PIN 82. As he was known to be unmarried at the date of death there would have been no widow's pension form in National Archives Reference PIN 82 (though his widowed mother would have received a small gratuity).

It would be possible to use the references to the medal rolls to track the three campaign medals in the medal rolls National Archives reference series WO 329 though as no further information other than that on the medal card would be given<sup>14</sup> such a search would be wasteful of research time.<sup>15</sup>

### Other observations

Having been directed to the medal record card by the three campaign medals the card, from the note *Death assumed 30.10.14*, identifies two missing documents and two missing artifacts from the WW1 collection those being:-

- The Memorial Scroll issued to the family of all men who died in WW1.<sup>16</sup>
- A bronze memorial plaque bearing the name of the deceased.
- A letter on Buckingham Palace notepaper bearing a facsimile of the King's signature, enclosed with the two above items.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ditto

<sup>15</sup> Had the soldier been wounded and discharged he would normally have been awarded The Silver War Badge. If not with his medal collection the badge would have been shown on the medal record card or a separate card, the Silver War Badge Card enabling reference to the Silver War Badge Roll which provides the date of enlistment and discharge and reason for discharge (by reference to King's Regulations) and whether served overseas.

<sup>16</sup> These items were not always accepted by the families of the men who died.

<sup>17</sup> Images may be viewed at <http://www.greatwar.co.uk/memorials/memorial-plaque.htm>

- In 1919 a clasp to be attached to the ribbon of the 1914 Star was instituted to be awarded to those who had operated within range of enemy mobile artillery between 5 August and 22 November 1914. In view of his assumed death, by inference in action, James had clearly come under enemy fire.<sup>18</sup>

The note that the 1914 Star was returned for amendment co-incides with the heavily indented 'J' on the reverse of the 1914 Star. The reference to 'Shrewsbury' indicates that the medals were issued to either James' mother or sister who were living by the end of WW1 on the Staffordshire Shropshire border.

Though these observations are not directly connected with the soldier's career they nonetheless indicate the feeling within the country towards all those who served, the carelessness of the medal engraver and the possible lack of respect subsequently shown to the artifacts.<sup>19</sup>

### **What further details of the military career might be uncovered?**

#### **Service prior to WW1**

Use of the three original items, and in particular the 1914 Star, has revealed a significant amount of information about the military career of Pte. 7649 Bowler.

As noted<sup>20</sup> WW1 would not have been his first experience of the Military and to have served at an early stage in WW1 he would have enlisted and served prior to the outbreak of War. From his date of birth in 1882 he would be unlikely to have enlisted before 1900. He could have served in the Territorial Force though they were intended as a home defence so unless a man had enlisted in the regular Army a territorial soldier was unlikely to have formed part of the British Expeditionary Force.

As the Royal Welsh Fusiliers might not have been the regiment in which he commenced his career, an electronic search of British Army Service Records 1760-1915 on FindMyPast.co.uk using name and birth year immediately revealed an enlistment record, National Archive reference WO96 Militia showing that James Bowler born Ashton under Lyne aged 19 years 2 months, a hatter of 108 Hesketh Street Heaton Norris<sup>21</sup> enlisted in Manchester Regiment (formerly 63<sup>rd</sup> and 96<sup>th</sup> Foot) as Private 7875 on 4 June 1901.

Apart from giving a detailed description of his appearance<sup>22</sup> the record is informative as to James' service, stating that he embarked at Southampton for South Africa 13

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<sup>18</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1914\\_Star](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1914_Star)

<sup>19</sup> Possibly by the writer or her father as children.

<sup>20</sup> Page 3 ante

<sup>21</sup> Details confirmed by 1901 census of England and Wales Class: RG13; Piece: 3286; Folio: 92; Page: 20.Civil Parish Stockport

<sup>22</sup> No family photograph survives



February 1902 and disembarked at Cape Town in March 1902. He was therefore involved in the Boer War, 1899-1902.

It is unclear from this record which Battalion James served with but by the time of his arrival the War was all but over. Peace was declared on 31 May 1902.<sup>23</sup>

## Service in WW1

Between the ending of the Boer War and the outbreak of WW1 in August 1914 James' service underwent changes. At the time of his death he was still a Private, but in a different Regiment and with a different number from those of his original enlistment.

If it survived the most informative record about James' service, would be his WW1 Service Record in Series WO363 National Archives. Because James he was killed there was less likely to be a record for him than if he had survived. If the records survived they were likely to be in the 'burnt series.' Of WO 363.<sup>24</sup>

An online search of this series on Ancestry.co.uk revealed twelve filmed pages of what is clearly a very badly damaged record. No regimental number appears on the Attestation page due to damage but it is for a man named James Bowler born in Ashton under Lyne St John's Parish, a labourer, aged 20 years 11 months<sup>25</sup> who on enlistment with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers on 18 February 1903 declared previous service with the Manchester Regiment.<sup>26</sup> His next of kin is confirmed as his mother, Mrs. Annie BOWLER of 108 Hesketh Street, Heaton Norris, Stockport.

The Service Record gives other indications of his previous service with the Manchester Regiment, and awards (not in the possession of the family) connected with it.

- Service with Manchester Reg. 317 days conduct good.



- Award of the **Queen's South Africa Medal** (pictured left with two clasps) awarded to all personnel who served in South Africa between 11 October 1899 and the end of hostilities in 1902.
- Award of the **Orange Free State Clasp** – awarded to all troops

<sup>23</sup> (Tameside Citizen (1))

<sup>24</sup> (Fowler, 2003, p. 37). [http://www.northeastmedals.co.uk/britishguide/queens\\_south\\_africa\\_medal\\_reverse.JPG](http://www.northeastmedals.co.uk/britishguide/queens_south_africa_medal_reverse.JPG)

<sup>25</sup> He was born on 19 February 1882 from his baptism record Registers of Hurst, St John Ashton Under Lyne 1885 page 64 Repository Lancashire Archives Ref L57/1/1/2

<sup>26</sup> National Archives Reference WO 95/1665/3 Record Ancestry.com. *British Army WWI Service Records, 1914-1920* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2008.

Original data: The National Archives of the UK (TNA): Public Record Office (PRO). War Office: Soldiers' Documents, First World War 'Burnt Documents' (Microfilm Copies);

in Orange River Colony at any time between 28th February, 1900 and 31st May, 1902, inclusive who had not received a clasp for a specific action in the Orange River Colony.<sup>27</sup>

- Award of the **Cape Colony Clasp** – awarded to all troops in Cape Colony at any time between 11th October, 1899, and 31st May, 1902, inclusive, who had not received a clasp for a specific action in the Cape Colony, or the “Natal ” clasp.<sup>28</sup>

The service record indicates that in 1903 James enlisted for a period of twelve years with the Royal Welsh fusiliers but that on 9 May 1908 he was transferred to the Army Reserve.

His removal to the Army Reserve would have been in consequence of the Haldane Reforms of the Army. Briefly the aim was to cut defence costs whilst keeping on hand trained reservists, an Expeditionary Force, who could be called upon at short notice as a back up to the Regular Army.<sup>29</sup>

In 1911 James was stated to be unemployed, head of the household living with his widowed mother at 18 Hamilton Street Stockport.<sup>30</sup> On 5 August 1914 his Army Service record states he was mobilized at Wrexham, the headquarters of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and on 20 September was posted with the First Battalion, recently returned from Malta. On 7 October 1914 his battalion landed at Zeebrugge under orders of 22<sup>nd</sup> brigade in 7<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>31</sup>

It is known from the Medal Index Card that James was missing presumed killed on 30 October 1914.

To find the movement of his Battalion and details of the action in which he was killed reference was made to the relevant War Diary of James’ battalion indicated by the medals and service record, deposited at the National Archives.<sup>32</sup>

The diaries describe in detail the embarkation and the progress of the Battalion, names of officers killed, wounded and missing and numbers of men killed wounded and missing,<sup>33</sup> a description of the terrain and enemy movements till on 20 October 1914 the Battalion reached Gheluvelt, a village on the Menin Road near and to the East of Ypres.

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.northeastmedals.co.uk/britishguide/>

<sup>28</sup> Ditto

<sup>29</sup> For a detailed analysis of the reforms see (Higgins, 2010)

<sup>30</sup> 1911 England census Stockport Third Class: RG14; Piece: 21408.

<sup>31</sup> (C., 1995-2013)

<sup>32</sup> National Archives Reference WO 95/1665 Description **7 DIVISION, 22 INFANTRY BRIGADE: 1 Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers 1914 Oct. - 1917 Nov.**/ Brigade Machine Gun Company 1916 Feb. - 1917 Nov./ Brigade Trench Mortar Battery 1915 Mar. - Dec. Available by download from TNA website.

<sup>33</sup> File 1 of 5, pages 1-14



For the period leading up to James' death on 30 October 1914 the diaries indicate that initially the Royal Welsh Fusiliers (RWF) were not engaged but on 23<sup>rd</sup> October parties were sent out and came under fire. Other Regiments including the Wiltshires were involved in the action. Heavy fighting and heavy German losses were described but the town of Menin was reported strongly held and RWF casualties were relatively few as at 25 October.

On 29 October seven named officers reported for duty and joined the battalion in the trenches and on 30 October the Germans mounted an attack on the trenches, which were to the east of Kleine Zillebeke at daybreak. It is unclear from the diary the precise position as pages are damaged and writing poor, created in a desperate situation.<sup>34</sup>

Of 30 October 1914 the regimental diarist wrote:-

*The exact nature of the casualties that day are unknown but the following officers (naming them) and about 320 NCOs and men were found to be missing on that day.*<sup>35</sup>

The officers named were from not only RWF but other regiments, Essex, RAMC, who fought alongside RWF. However the heaviest loss of officers numerically (6) was those of RWF.

The diarist added

*No accurate information is obtainable regarding this action, but it is hoped that this record will be verified and completed with further details on the return to duty of those officers who were actually engaged and are now prisoners of war. No officer remained after the 30<sup>th</sup> October and the party which survived the action on that date (approximately 86 other ranks) were attached to the 2/Queens.*<sup>36</sup>

History has named the Battle in which James was killed as the Battle of Gheluvelt, part of the First Battle of Ypres when the Allies denied the German Army the opportunity to capture Ypres and gain from there a route across Belgium to the ports of Dunkirk and Calais. The strategic importance of the Battle is illustrated by the map at page 11.

The CWGC site confirms James is commemorated on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing, Ypres.<sup>37</sup> On the site he is incorrectly described as having been a native of Stockport, rather than Ashton under Lyne.

**Conclusion:** - Starting with the information given by the three items described at pages 2 and 3, but in particular the 1914 Star, it has proved possible, by progressing through

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<sup>34</sup> The diarist refers to some records being lost.

<sup>35</sup> File 1 page 18

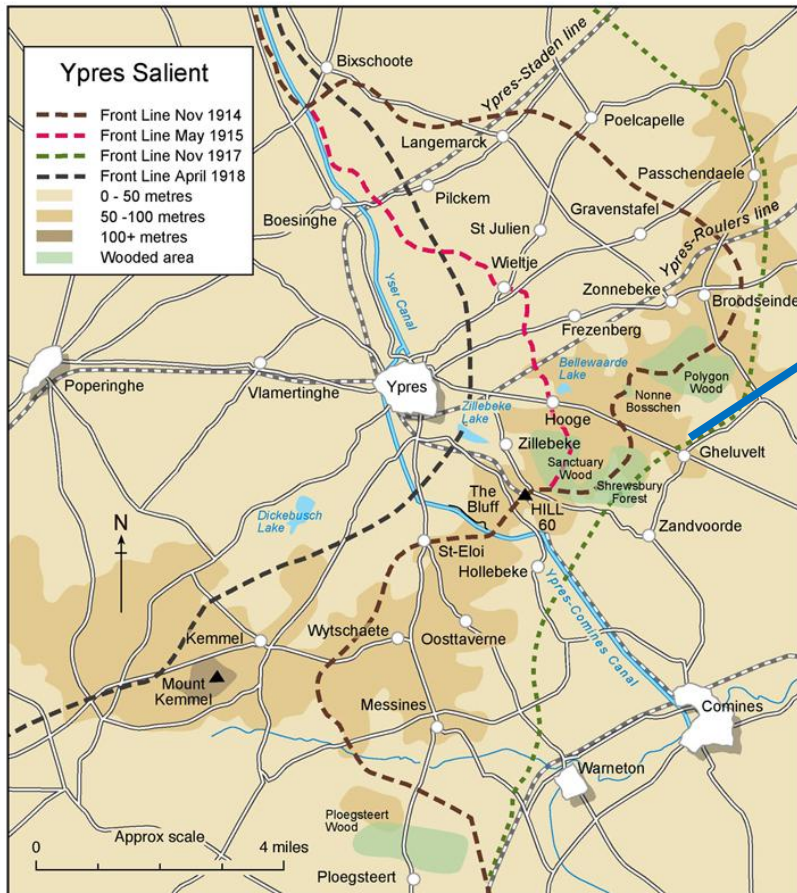
<sup>36</sup> Ditto

<sup>37</sup> Panel 22

the records to uncover what is likely to be the whole of the military history of the family member.

More information about the part played by his Regiment, the Manchesters, in the Boer War are likely to be obtained from documentary information held at Tameside Local Studies and Archives Centre.<sup>38</sup>

## Gheluvelt and the First Battle of Ypres



The map left shows the strategic importance of the action at Gheluvelt and the relative positions of the combatants as at November 1914 and later dates. (GWGC site)

<sup>38</sup> Listed at <http://www.tameside.gov.uk/archives/manchesterregiment>

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