

Sapper Henry Thomas Kensett
Regimental Number: 681009
11th Battalion, Canadian Railway Troops

born: 18 May 1895 - died: 14 November 1918

Sapper Henry (also known as Harry) Thomas Kensett was born on 18 May 1895 in Kensington, London¹ and baptised on 10 June 1895 at St Matthias in Earls Court.² He was the son of James George Kensett and Mary Clarke. James was born in about 1865 in Lewisham,³ and Mary was born in the early 1860s in Herefordshire.⁴ In 1885, James, a labourer, enlisted in the 10th Royal Hussars⁵ and, in 1891, he was a patient in a military hospital in Yorkshire.⁶ After his recovery, he and Mary were married in St Mathias, Earls Court on 12 December 1892.⁷

Their first son, George James, was born in Kensington on 14 November 1893.⁸ Henry was their second son. A third son, Sydney Herbert was born on 17 November 1896⁹ and finally a daughter, Ellen was born in 1899.¹⁰ Sydney and Ellen were born in Fulham. In 1901, the family was living at 2 Bramber Road, Fulham, where James as a labourer.¹¹ In 1911, the family had moved to a three-room flat, a few blocks away at 136 Kingwood Road in Fulham. James was a labourer and his son, Henry, was a milkman.¹²

The following year, the family made a much bigger move. In about 1912, they immigrated to Canada¹³ and were living at 240 Wilton Avenue, Toronto when, over a period of one year, all three sons enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. George James enlisted in July 1915 in the 74th Battalion.¹⁴ Harry enlisted on 11 January 1916 in the 169th Battalion¹⁵ and Sydney enlisted in the 201st Battalion on 8 July of the same year.¹⁶

Harry later transferred to the 11th Battalion, Canadian Railway Troops. The Canadian Railway Troops were support units for the Canadian Expeditionary Force. In the period before the war, Canada had built more railways than any other country in the British Empire and, as a result, Canada was asked to provide railway construction men to form, initially the Canadian Overseas Railway Construction Corps.¹⁷ After the first Battle of the Somme in 1916, when the armies had become bogged down in the mud, the Allies decided to make greater use of railways for transportation and Canada was asked to provide five battalions of railway construction men to form the Canadian Railway Troops. Harry was serving with the Canadian Railway Troops when he died, within a few months of his two brothers in 1918.

Sydney was a Private in the 19th Canadian Infantry Battalion when he died of wounds on 23 June 1918.¹⁸ He is buried in Bagneux British Cemetery, near Gezaincourt, in the Somme.

George was killed in action when a bomb dropped from an aeroplane on the morning of 13 August 1918 during an attack at Demery.¹⁹ He was a Sergeant in the 52nd Battalion (Manitoba Regiment). He is buried in Roye New British Cemetery, also in the Somme. George left a wife of just a few months. On 24 March 1918, when he was in England, George married Daisy Elizabeth Everard in St Alban the Martyr in Fulham, London.²⁰



H T Kensett in Auberchicourt Cemetery
(Source: Author)

Then just three months later, Harry died at the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station near Auberchicourt. He was admitted to the 1st CCCS on 11 November 1918 – Armistice Day – with influenza. He died three days later and was buried in the Military Cemetery at Auberchicourt the following day (Grave 14, Plot 1, Row A) with the chaplain W. O'Neill Fisher presiding. His mother was notified of his death. She had lost all three sons in a period of five months – with the last dying four days after the formal end of the war.

Influenza accounted for most deaths at the 1st CCCS after the Armistice. In spite of the horrific number of soldiers killed in World War I, the influenza pandemic, which affected the whole world and scourged Europe in 1918-1919, killed more people than the war itself.²¹ The war diaries for the 1st CCCS note for 11 November that “Receiving steadily and overflowing into neighbouring buildings. Very busy. Many Flu cases and Broncho Pneumonia. The war was not over so far as we were concerned. On patient claimed to be wounded at 11.10 A.M.”²² Sixty-seven people (soldiers and civilians) died at the 1st CCCS in November 1918.

During that period the work of the Centre had shifted from being primarily surgical to medical, as it has to deal with the influenza pandemic.²³

Auberchicourt, a village about 12 kilometres to the east of Douai, was occupied by Commonwealth troops in October 1918.²⁴ The Auberchicourt British Cemetery, which is just west of the village, was set up at the end of October and was used until February 1919 while the 6th, 23rd and 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Stations were located nearby.

This was a heavy loss for one family. Mary Kensett died just ten years later, on 31 January 1928, at the age of 67, of myocarditis, from which she has suffered for three years.²⁵ Her husband, James, died on 25 October 1930 from angina.²⁶ Their only surviving child, Ellen, married Sidney Sluce,²⁷ himself a recent immigrant to Canada²⁸ and a veteran of World War I,²⁹ on 5 September 1921 in Toronto.

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¹ “Canada, Soldiers of the First World War, 1914-1918,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 March 2015), entry for Harry Thomas Kensett

² “London, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813-1906,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 March 2015), entry for Henry Thomas Kensett

³ “London, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813-1906,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 March 2015), entry for James George Kensett

⁴ Her calculated date of birth varies across various records. “1901 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 15 March 2015), entry for Henry Thomas Kensett, Registration district: Fulham, Sub-registration district: North East Fulham, ED, institution, or vessel: 33, Piece: 54, Folio: 77, Page Number: 3, Household schedule number: 21; “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 15 March 2015), entry for Henry Kensett, Registration district: Fulham, Registration District Number: 3, Sub-registration district: North West Fulham, ED, institution, or vessel: 9, Piece: 275; “Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869-1938 and Deaths Overseas, 1939-1947,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 March 2015), entry for Mary Kensett

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- ⁵ "British Army Service Records 1914-1920," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 15 March 2015), entry for George James Kensett, Attestation service number: 2275
- ⁶ "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 15 March 2015), entry for James Kensett, Registration district: York, ED, institution, or vessel: 29, Piece: 3895, Folio: 7, Page Number: 8
- ⁷ "London, England, Marriages and Banns, 1754-1921," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 15 March 2015), entry for James George Kennett, Parish: St Matthias, Earls Court, Borough: Kensington and Chelsea, Register Type: Parish Register
- ⁸ "Canada, Soldiers of the First World War, 1914-1918," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 15 March 2015), entry for George James Kensett
- ⁹ "Canada, Soldiers of the First World War, 1914-1918," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 15 March 2015), entry for Sydney Herbert Kinsett
- ¹⁰ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 16 March 2015), entry for Ellen Kensett, Registration district: Fulham, Inferred County: London, Volume: 1a, Page: 292
- ¹¹ "1901 England Census," entry for Henry Thomas Kensett
- ¹² "1911 England Census," entry for Henry Kensett
- ¹³ "Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869-1938 and Deaths Overseas, 1939-1947, entry for Mary Kensett. The death certificate for her husband, James George, suggests that he arrived in Canada in 1910, but since he was shown in the 1911 UK census, this is probably an error.
- ¹⁴ "Canada, Soldiers of the First World War, 1914-1918," entry for George James Kensett
- ¹⁵ "Canada, Soldiers of the First World War, 1914-1918," entry for Harry Thomas Kensett
- ¹⁶ "Canada, Soldiers of the First World War, 1914-1918," entry for Sydney Herbert Kinsett
- ¹⁷ "Canadian Railway Troops in World War I: "Lest We Forget": Canadian Rail: No. 437 November - December 1993," Fred F. Angus, Canadian Railroad Historical Association, (http://www.exporail.org/can_rail/Canadian%20Rail_no437_1993.pdf; accessed 16 March 2015)
- ¹⁸ "Canada, Soldiers of the First World War, 1914-1918," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 15 March 2015), entry for Sydney Herbert Kinsett
- ¹⁹ "Canada, War Graves Registers (Circumstances of Casualty), 1914-1948," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 15 March 2015), entry for George James Kensett
- ²⁰ "London, England, Marriages and Banns, 1754-1921," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 15 March 2015), entry for George James Kensett, Parish: St Alban, Fulham, Borough: Hammersmith and Fulham, Register Type: Parish Register
- ²¹ "The Influenza Pandemic of 1918," (<https://virus.stanford.edu/uda/>: accessed 3 February 2015)
- ²² "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINN&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G)
- ²³ *Ibid*
- ²⁴ "Auberchicourt British Cemetery," Commonwealth War Graves Commission (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/59509/AUBERCHICOURT%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>: accessed 3 February 2015)
- ²⁵ "Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869-1938 and Deaths Overseas, 1939-1947, entry for Mary Kensett
- ²⁶ "Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869-1938 and Deaths Overseas, 1939-1947," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 March 2015), entry for James George Kensett
- ²⁷ "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1801-1928," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 15 March 2015), entry for Ellen Kensett
- ²⁸ "Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865-1935," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 16 March 2015), entry for Sydney Sluce
- ²⁹ "Canada, Soldiers of the First World War, 1914-1918," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 16 March 2015), entry for Sydney Sluce