

Driver Alexander William Owen[©]
Regimental number: 76768
23rd Battery, 40th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery

born: 13 September 1894 - died: 29 May 1918

Driver Alexander William Owen was born on 13 September 1894, the son of Joseph James and Jennie (nee Henderson), and baptized on 22 March 1896 at St John's Church in Walworth in southeast London.¹ This is the same church where his parents, both aged 19, were married on 22 June 1890.² His father and mother were both born in about 1871 in southeast London—his father in Bermondsey and his mother in Southwark.³

A year after their marriage, Joseph and Jennie were living at 12 Silvester Buildings in Newington, London, where Joseph was a general packer. Alexander, their first child, was born in 1894. Then they had five more children: Eleanor Louise (known as Nellie) (born in 1896),⁴ Mabel (born in 1898),⁵ William George (born in about 1900),⁶ Albert (born in 1902)⁷ and William James (born in 1911).⁸

In 1901, the family was living at 6 Tatam Street in Newington and Joseph was a glass packer.⁹ The family may have had some troubles, because it appears that Nellie, Mabel and Albert (ages 9, 7 and 3) were admitted for two days to the Saint George's Workhouse in Southwark.¹⁰

In 1911, the family was living at 24 Toulmin Street in Southwark. Joseph was now working as a packer for an ironmonger and all the children were at home. Alexander was a brass worker, doing brass engravings.

Alexander enlisted in the Royal Field Artillery in London¹¹ and went to France on 2 June 1915.¹² He survived for nearly three years. On 29 May 1918, he was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station with shrapnel wounds to his back that penetrated his lung.¹³ He died the same day and was buried the following day in Pernes Military Cemetery (Plot 2, Row D, Grave 33) with the Canadian chaplain J. K. Tibbits presiding.

His mother, who was next of kin and living at 160 Southwark Bridge Road in London, was notified of his death.¹⁴ She had the following inscription engraved on his headstone:

WHO PLUCKED THIS FLOWER?
THE MASTER
AND THE GARDENER
HELD HIS PEACE¹⁵

In May 1918, nearly 4,000 soldiers were admitted to No. 1 CCCS.¹⁶ There were 115 deaths that month—more than in any of the other three and a half months that No. 1 CCCS was in Pernes. The Pernes British Military Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when No. 1 and No. 4 CCCSs came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.¹⁷

Alexander was awarded the Military Medal,¹⁸ which was given to Other Ranks (non-officers) for gallantry and devotion to duty when under fire in battle on land.¹⁹ He was also awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory

Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914–15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).²⁰

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¹ “England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538–1975,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 September 2017), entry for Alexander William Owen, FHL film number: 291741

² “London, England, Marriages and Banns, 1754–1921,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 September 2017), entry for Joseph James Owen, Parish: St John the Evangelist, Walworth, Borough: Southwark, Register type: Parish register

³ “1901 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 September 2017), entry for Alexander W Owen, Registration district: Southwark, Sub-registration district: St Peter, Walworth, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 28, Piece: 380, Folio: 99, Page: 85, Household schedule number: 493

⁴ “London, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813–1906,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 September 2017), entry for Eleanor Louise Owen, Record type: Baptism, Borough: Southwark

⁵ “London, England, School Admissions and Discharges, 1840–1911,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 September 2017), entry for Mabel Owen

⁶ “London, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813–1906,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 September 2017), entry for William George Owen, Record type: Baptism, Borough: Southwark

⁷ “London, England, Workhouse Admission and Discharge Records, 1659–1930,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 September 2017), entry for Albert Owen, Title: Saint George’s Workhouse, Mint Street, Index to Register, 1904–1907

⁸ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 10 November 2017) entry for Owen, William James, Registration district: Southwark, Volume 01D, Page 39

⁹ “1901 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 September 2017), entry for Alexander W Owen

¹⁰ “London, England, Workhouse Admission and Discharge Records, 1659–1930,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 September 2017), entry for Albert Owen

¹¹ “UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 September 2017), entry for Alexander William Owen

¹² “British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 September 2017), entry for Alexander Owen

¹³ “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 12 September 2017), entry for Owen, A. W.

¹⁴ “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 12 September 2017), entry for Owen, A. W.

¹⁵ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 3 December 2017), entry for Owen, Alexander William, Service No: 76768

¹⁶ “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=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G: accessed 15 December 2014)

¹⁷ “Pernes British Military Cemetery,” *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/11600/PERNES%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>: accessed 13 January 2015)

¹⁸ “Royal Artillery Military Medal awards,” *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 1 October 2017), entry for A W Owen, Dataset: Royal Artillery Military Medal awards 1916–1995

¹⁹ “A Guide to British Awards for Gallantry or Meritorious Service in WW1,” *the Great War* (<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/medals/ww1-gallantry-awards.htm#MM>: accessed 5 February 2017)

²⁰ "UK, WWI Service Medal and Award Rolls, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 13 September 2017), entry for Alexander William Owen