

Gunner John Edward Wilson[©]
Regimental number: 164999
164th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery

born: 19 January 1883–died: 9 May 1918

Gunner John Edward Wilson was born in Lancaster, Lancashire, on 19 January 1883, the son of James Wilson and his wife, the former Sarah Jane Long.¹ John was baptized on 2 May 1883 in Lancaster's parish of St Mary.² Both his parents were also born in Lancaster—James in about 1838 and Sarah in about 1849³—and they married there in 1874.⁴ Sarah was James' second wife—his first wife, Alice Greenall, died in 1871.⁵ James and Alice had married on 20 April 1862 in the parish of Lancaster, on the same day and in the same church as her sister, Sarah Greenall, who married John Pedder.⁶ James and Alice had five children:

- Ann (born in 1863, but died three years later),⁷
- Robert (born on 3 April 1865),⁸
- William (born on 28 March 1867),⁹
- Joseph (born on 31 March 1869)¹⁰ and
- James (born on 17 June 1871 but who probably died shortly after birth).¹¹

In 1871, James and Alice were living at 115 Bridge Lane in Lancaster.¹² A few months later Alice died, leaving James, a calico printer, with four children under the age of 6.

James married Sarah Jane three years later and they had six children:

- Benjamin Alfred (born in 1875),¹³
- Charles (born on 9 August 1877),¹⁴
- Thomas (born on 6 May 1880),¹⁵
- John,
- Albert (born on 23 September 1885)¹⁶ and
- Elizabeth Alice (born on 14 January 1889).¹⁷

In 1881, the family, with three children from James' first marriage and three from his second, were living at 5 Chancery Lane in Lancaster, where James was a labourer in the manufacture of table baize (used on gaming tables).

John was born two years later and, in 1891, was living with his parents and a blended family of eight children at 6 Anchor Lane in Lancaster.¹⁸ In 1901, they were at the same address and John, like his father, was a general labourer.¹⁹

In 1907, John married the former Annie Oglethorpe²⁰ (born in about 1882).²¹ Their first child, John, was born in late 1907.²² Sadly, their son died the following year.²³ After the loss of their only son, John and Annie had four daughters: Annie (born in 1909),²⁴ May (born in 1911),²⁵ Alice (born in 1914)²⁶ and Irene Elizabeth (born in 1917).²⁷ In 1911, John was a floor cloth worker and living with his family at 3 Plumb Court, Lancaster. John's parents were still living at No. 6 Anchor Lane in Lancaster in 1911 and James was still working as a general labourer.²⁸

About the time of the birth of his last child, John enlisted in the Royal Garrison Artillery,²⁹ which was one element of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, "... developed from fortress-based artillery

located on British coasts. From 1914 when the army possessed very little heavy artillery it grew into a very large component of the British forces. It was armed with heavy, large calibre guns and howitzers that were positioned some way behind the front line and had immense destructive power.”³⁰

“Siege Batteries RGA were equipped with heavy howitzers, sending large calibre high explosive shells in high trajectory, plunging fire . . . As British artillery tactics developed, the Siege Batteries were most often employed in destroying or neutralising the enemy artillery, as well as putting destructive fire down on strongpoints, dumps, store, roads and railways behind enemy lines.”³¹

At the beginning of May 1918, John was serving with the 164th Siege Battery on the Western Front. On 9 May he was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station with shrapnel wounds to his face and suffering the effects of gas poisoning. He died the same day and was buried on 10 May in Pernes British Cemetery (Plot II, Row B, Grave 25) with the Canadian chaplain J. K. Tibbits presiding.³²

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.³³ John was one of 331 soldiers admitted on 9 May and one of 115 soldiers to die at the station that month. He was admitted the same day that the chaplain J. K. Tibbits arrived at the station from the 10th Stationary Hospital.³⁴

The chaplain did not know the name of John’s next of kin, so a letter was sent to the adjutant of his unit to notify his comrades of his death. His next of kin was his wife Annie, who was living at 1 Plumb Court, Lancaster. She received the monies owing to him from the army upon his death and had the following inscription placed on his gravestone:

TO MEMORY EVER DEAR
FROM HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN³⁵

John was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).³⁶

At least one of John’s step-siblings was alive in 1939. At the age of 70, Joseph was a widower, living in Nelson, Lancashire and working as an overlooker in a sheeting factory.³⁷ At least three of John’s siblings were living in Lancaster in 1939:

- Charles and his wife Rhoda were living at 3 Park Lane and Charles was a factory warehouseman;³⁸
- Thomas was married and living at 55 Lune Road, but his wife was not with him. He was an oilcloth labourer;³⁹ and
- Albert was a widower living at 37 Edward Street, where he was an oilcloth worker.⁴⁰

It is not known what became of his two other siblings or his father.

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