

James ELSDEN

Born	July 1899
Killed in Action or Died	12th October 1918 age 19
Commemorated	Panel 3, Vis-en-Artois Memorial, Pas de Calais, France
Unit	8 th Battalion The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment)
Rank	Private, Service Number G/30167
Awards	British War Medal and Victory Medal

James Elsdén is commemorated on both the Ely and Soham War Memorials and in St Mary's Church in Ely, although he was from a Soham family. This double commemoration was probably because James' father had moved the family to Barton Road in Ely during the War and then spent his declining years in the Ely Poor Law Institution on Cambridge Road (formerly known as the workhouse, later Tower House) and would have asked for his son to be remembered locally.

James' parents Cooper Elsdén (1865) and his wife Louisa Matilda aka "Tilly" (nee Fabb, 1867) were both from Soham and the family lived chiefly in the village, apart from a period of approximately four years when they were at Sidbury in Devon, which was where James and his older brother George were born. The Elsdén children were: Eva (1892); Frank aka Frederick (1894); Ada (1896); George (1897); **James** (1899); Cecil (1902); and Elsie (1905). Cooper Elsdén was a bricklayer.

In 1901 the Elsdéns were in St John's Square, Soham, then at the time of the 1911 Census the family were living in Speed Lane, Soham, and eldest son Frank was working as a clerk to a manure merchants while George was an errand boy for a grocer and James himself was still at school. James' two eldest sisters were no longer at home as Eva was working as a live in servant in Beckenham, Kent, while Ada was a servant closer to home in the household of Soham butcher Ellis Staples.

Late in 1911 James' mother Tilly died.



James moved to London to work, living in Clapham and enlisting in Wandsworth. He fought in the closing stages of the War as the Germans began to retreat back to the Hindenberg Line. James' Regiment fought in the Battle of Cambrai and then pursued the retreating Germans towards the River Selle; this was the first open warfare (rather than trench warfare) which had taken place since 1914. James and his companions were engaged in house to house fighting as the Germans attempted to defend local villages enroute, and after covering seven miles, due to a broken bridge, had to swim the River Selle or cross it by other means. They were then driven back across the river by the Germans at the end of the day. Somewhere in all this fierce fighting James was killed in action, although his body was not afterwards identified. It was less than a month to the end of the War and he had seen twelve months service in France. He is commemorated with the 100 other missing men who died in this day on the Vis-en-Artois Memorial.

Cooper Elsdén was sent £6 as his son's final effects.

Edward William EVERETT

Born	1894
Killed in Action or Died	19th January 1917 age 22
Buried	Grave A 210, Ely Cemetery
Unit	1/4th Yorkshire Regiment
Rank	Private, Service Number 7605
Awards	British War Medal and Victory Medal

Edward's surname is spelt as Everitt on the Ely Market Place Memorial and on the Memorials in St Mary's Church and Countess Free Church. **Edward William Everett** was the eldest son of Arthur William Everett (1870 Ely) and Rose May (nee Carter, 1870 Soham); he was born in the summer of 1894 in Ely. Edward's surviving siblings were also all born in Ely: Blanche (1893); Florence (1898); Ben (1901); Rose (1907); and George (1911). Another four Everett babies had died. (These were Ada who died May 1899 aged three months, Ernest who died March 1907 aged 18 months, Edith who died October 1897 aged seven months, Frank who died December 1909 aged three years.)

In the 1901 Census the Everetts can be found living in Newnham Street, Ely, in the house next to the High Flyer Tavern, also in the household is a sick nurse, Martha Smith (1867 Ely) and her one year old son Henry. Arthur was away from home on census night, staying with his widowed mother and his brother in Chapel Street, Ely. Arthur was then working as an ostler.

In 1911 the family was still in Newnham Street, although they would later move to Barton Road. Edward had begun work as an errand boy and it is possible that this may have been with his later employers, the Downies, who were local fruit growers. His father Arthur worked for the Commissioners draining the Fens (probably with the Middle Level or South Level Corporations).

With the outbreak of the War Edward tried four or five times to enlist, but each time was turned away because of his chronic eyesight. He therefore joined the Ely Voluntary Training Corps and from here he was finally accepted into the Army, after undergoing a month of treatment to correct his eyesight. He enlisted with the Yorkshire Regiment in 1916. By the end of the year Edward was in the Eastern General Hospital at Stourbridge, recovering from a shell wound where two pieces of shrapnel had embedded themselves into his right thigh. He had been hit when the Germans shelled the British support trenches.

The local newspaper of 26th January 1917 carried the news of Edward's military funeral and more details of his life:

"The funeral took place of Private E. W. Everett, Yorkshire Regiment, son of Mr and Mrs A.W. Everett, Barton Road, Ely. Pte. Everett, who was only 22 years of age, joined the Cambs. Regiment on March 19th (1916), went out to France on August 30th last, and was then transferred to the Yorkshire Regiment, being one of the platoon bombers. He was wounded on October 17th and in a letter home he said; "We had been in the front line of trenches the day before , and it was about 25 minutes to two when old Fritz started shelling the support trenches in which we were. Three shells fell about ten yards off from where I was, and only two of us were wounded out of about twelve. I think it was a bit of luck none of us were killed." Pte. Everett, who was hit by shrapnel, was brought to England, and he was one of the patients at the Kidderminster Red Cross Hospital. He underwent an operation, which was quite successful, but he caught cold and pneumonia set in. His mother, in response to a telegraphic communication, hastened to Kidderminster and spent some hours with her son, who died about nine o'clock on Friday morning. The dead private was formerly in the employ of Messers. H. Downie and Son and was a member of Mr W. Teevson's Bible Class at the Countess of Huntingdon's Church, Ely, for some years. The deceased was accorded military honours. His body was conveyed to Ely on Tuesday. A detachment of A (Ely) Co. of the



James ELSEGOOD

Born	18th July 1889
Killed in Action or Died	17th February 1917, age 27
Buried	Grave XXI. F. 4., Etaples Military Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France
Unit	6 th Battalion The Buffs (East Kent Regiment)
Rank	Private, Service Number G/18916
Awards	1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal

The record of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission states that James Elsegood was the son of the late George and Ellen Elsegood of Ely, but although this may have been the story he told others, the records tell a different story. **James Elsegood** was baptised at his home church of Littleport on 1st December 1889 and his mother's name is shown on the baptismal record as Emily Elsegood, here, and on his birth registration, there is no record of a father.

In 1891 James was living in Burnt Chimney Drove, Littleport. The others in the household were eighteen year old farmer Harry Elsegood (1873 Leicester) who is shown as the head of the household, his widowed grandmother Martha Elsegood (1815 Hockwold Norfolk) and his aunt Emily Elsegood (1858 Hockwold), James is described as Harry's cousin. The household is thus made up of James' grandmother, mother and cousin. Emily's family had been farming on Deepney Drove, Littleport, for most of Emily's life.

James' grandmother Martha died in 1897. Emily's brothers Francis (1846 Hockwold) and Henry (1848 Hockwold) were also farming in the Littleport area, but it seems they were unable to help their sister and her son, as in the 1901 Census James and his mother were living in Ely as pauper inmates of the Ely Union Workhouse on Cambridge Road. The mother and son had probably been there for some time as when James was registered at Market Street Infants School in 1896 his address was given as Cambridge Road. On the census record Emily (shown as Emma) described herself as a farm labourer. Emily died in 1903.

In the 1911 Census James can be found with other family members at a farm on Burnt Fen, Lakenheath, where his uncle Robert Elsegood (1842 Hockwold) was farming. James was the farm's horsekeeper. James was the only one present who was under sixty years of age. It is possible that Robert took on responsibility for James when his sister died.

Late in 1913 James married Ellen Seager; two years later they had a daughter, Elizabeth. The family lived at Chettisham and James continued to work in the farms.

James enlisted in the Buffs at Newmarket and was placed in the 6th Battalion which reached France in June of 1915. His battalion fought in the Battle of Loos and some of the 1916 battles on the Somme. James died early in 1917; his service record simply records that he died, rather than died in action, as he died of broncho-pneumonia in one of the military hospitals at Etaples.

In the autumn of 1918 James' widow Ellen married Arthur Smith and they lived at Station Farm, Shippea Hill, Mildenhall, Suffolk.

Chettisham does not have a roll of honour in the village, but James is recorded on the County Memorial in St George's Chapel, Ely Cathedral, as the only casualty under Chettisham, and on the Ely Market Place Memorial.

Cambs. and Isle of Ely Volunteers under Sergt. Major H.A. Clarke assembled at the Barracks and marched to the residence in Barton RoadAs the coffin, draped with the Union Jack, was borne out to the hand bier the members of the firing party presented arms, and afterwards headed the procession, with arms reversed.....other volunteers and wounded soldiers from the Ely Military Hospital brought up the rear....at the close of the service three volleys were fired over the grave."

Amongst the family mourners appears the name of "*Miss Barber the deceased's young lady*" which is one of the few occasions we know that one of the soldiers on the Ely War Memorial had a sweetheart waiting at home, but one can imagine that many of the others did too. Also present at the funeral was Edward's wounded friend "*Pte. Creak (Ely) who lost a leg in the present war*".

Rose was sent £4 2s as Edward's effects and a further £7 10s in 1919.

James EVERITT

Born	March 1887
Killed in Action or Died	27th July 1916 age 29
Buried	Grave XXI. S. 15 Baghdad (North Gate) War Cemetery. Iraq
Unit	86th Heavy Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery
Rank	Corporal, Service Number 25235
Awards	1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal

It took a whole year for the Everitts of Ely to hear that their son was dead; the Cambridge Independent Press of 23rd August 1918 had the following short notice:

“In response to inquiries, Mr and Mrs J. Everitt, Fore-hill Ely, have received a letter from the Army authorities stating that their son, Corporal J. Everitt R.G.A., had been reported in the casualty list which reached them, having died on the railway, probably at Bosante. The Corporal belonged to General Townshend’s force and was first missing twelve months ago. Corpl. Everitt was in the Army 11 years before the outbreak of war.”

James Everitt was born in Queen Adelaide in 1887. He was the son of James Everitt (1858 Norfolk—his birthplace is shown variously as Brandon, Lakenheath and Thetford) and Mary (nee Taylor, 1859 Ely). His siblings were all born in Queen Adelaide or Ely itself: Ada (1883); Thomas (1885); Charles (1891); William (1893); Beatrice (1897); and Florence (1897).

In the 1891 Census the family can be found living in Broad Street, Ely, and in 1901 on the north side of Forehill. James senior was working as a platelayer for Great Eastern Railways. Thomas and James had both started work as errand boys in 1901. James went on to work as a warehouseman for Mr W. Scott of Forehill. In 1911 James senior, still working for GER, described his role as “blacksmith” while most of the sons of the family were labourers of different kinds.

James Everitt was many thousands of miles away from the rest of his family in 1911, as he appears on the census as an acting bombardier in the Royal Garrison Artillery at Peshawar on the North West Frontier of India. James had in fact attested in the Suffolk Regiment (12th Foot) at Ely when he was nineteen, on 13th March 1906, for an initial period of six years. His army records show that he was 5 feet 8 3/4 inches tall with a fresh complexion, brown hair and blue eyes. He had a number of tattoos on his arms including Buffalo Bill, an anchor, a heart, clasped hands, a cross and a star.

James transferred from the Suffolks into the Royal Garrison Artillery and saw further duty in India, which was where his battery was still based at the outbreak of the War. The 86th Battery was mobilised for service in Mesopotamia in March 1915 and captured at Kut Al Amara in April 1916.

The 86th Battery joined the 6th (Poona) Indian Division, led by Sir Charles Townshend. The force attacked the Turks at Kut on 28th September 1915. The Turks lost approximately 5,300 men in the attack, together with all their guns, but the bulk of the remaining Turkish force escaped to prepared positions at Ctesiphon. Townshend’s force was running short of supplies, but were ordered to advance on Ctesiphon. Townshend was soon forced to fall back on Kut, where the forces under his command were besieged from 7th December 1915 until they surrendered on 29th April 1916. 13,000 Allied soldiers were made prisoners of war at this point, and James was amongst this number. About 70% of British soldiers who surrendered at Kut died in captivity afterwards, some in prisons in Baghdad, Mosul, and elsewhere, and others in the desert between those cities, casualties of gruelling marches, while yet others were put to work building the Baghdad Railway.. It would seem that James survived until he succumbed to illness or starvation in the desert conditions, on approximately 27th July 1916—his exact date of death cannot be confirmed with certainty in these conditions. James would have been buried near where he died, in the Yarshabi cemetery, and his body was later moved to Baghdad (North Gate) War Cemetery, along with his companions who had suffered similarly.

Back in Ely James and Mary Everitt had actually heard nothing from their son since the siege of Kut began—a whole year before he was even considered to be “missing”. In August 1917 the military authorities passed them a message from army chaplain Rev’d H Spooner, who was himself a prisoner of the Turks, that he had heard James had “died on the railway, probably at Bosante” (Bostanci?). The authorities had no way of confirming the truth of this news, and told James’ parents that this was not accepted at present for official purposes. A year later the authorities confirmed that James was now on the official casualty list and finally confirmed his death in May 1920—his parents were then sent a total of £2 17s 9d.

Herbert Scott EVERSON

Born	1895
Killed in Action or Died	6th November 1917 age 22
Buried	Grave D 162, Ely Cemetery
Unit	Railway Operating Division, Royal Engineers
Rank	Sapper, Service Number 229135
Awards	British War Medal and Victory Medal

Herbert Scott Everson was the son of Herbert Everson (1864 Felsham Castle, Suffolk) and (Susannah) Elizabeth (nee Basham, 1868 Withersfield, Suffolk) of Aylsham House, 28 Barton Road, Ely. Herbert Everson senior was appointed station master at Ely by Great Eastern Railways in March of 1915. He had worked for GER since 1867 at Stowmarket, Framlingham, Long Melford, Harwich, and Haverhill, and was then made station master at Aylsham, followed by Wymondham and finally Ely. It is not surprising that his son Herbert was placed in the Railway Operating Division of the Royal Engineers, having been around railways all his life.

Herbert was the third son of the Everson family and, like his two elder brothers, was born in North Elmham in Norfolk (1895). His brothers were Reginald (1892) and Ernest (1894) he also had a younger sister Olive (1908 Fakenham, Norfolk). In the 1901 Census the family was living in Norwich Road, Aylsham, where Herbert senior was station master, then ten years later in the station master's house at Wymondham. Herbert joined GER in July 1909. By 1911 both Herbert and his brother Reginald were working with their father as GER railway clerks at Wymondham. He also held clerical positions at Fakenham, Kimberley, Cromer, Buckenham and Ditchingham. GER then moved Herbert to the station at Wisbech, and when he was attested in January 1917 he was living at 23 Albert Street, Wisbech. It is clear from his enlistment form, however, that it was his parents' home at Ely that he regarded as "home". His form describes Herbert as 5 feet 10 1/2 inches tall.

Herbert was placed in a section of the Royal Engineers which was manned almost exclusively by railway employees and would have been responsible for helping to keep supplies of all kinds moving from the Channel Ports to the Front and transporting the wounded back home. It was a major work of logistics without which the War would have been quickly lost.

Herbert went abroad on 17th February 1917 but was sent back home on 19th September and died about a month and a half later at the Lord Derby Hospital in Warrington. The cause of Herbert's death is shown as "delusional insanity" on his army record and his medical report does not make easy reading: *"he is utterly insane and useless. Habits faulty."*; *"Has little idea of time and thinks he is still in France. He says that people keep saying he was a spy."*; *"he was gassed in his tent. He has a septic sore on his left leg and says something was injected in to him."*; *"patient is eating poorly and has lost considerable weight"*; *"restless, wandering, collapsed, put on danger list."* The official hospital record lists the cause of Herbert's death as exhaustion caused by confusional insanity and heart failure (effectively of shellshock and of being gassed).

Herbert was brought back to Ely for burial. His funeral was attended by a significant number of GER workers including railway inspectors, past and present Ely stationmasters and representatives from every department at Ely Railway Station.

Herbert was commemorated on the Holy Trinity Memorial as well as the Ely Market Place Memorial. He is also named on the Great Eastern Railway's Memorial which is at Liverpool Street Station in London (originally at Harwich House). On his grave stone in Ely Cemetery his parents recorded "He died for his country—Greater love has no man than this. That a man lay down his life for his friends." At the time Herbert was being buried the newspaper records his brother Reginald (Machine Gun Corps) was in hospital in Lewisham.

Herbert's mother was sent his effects of £15 9s, and a final £3 in 1919.