

Ambrose Bower (1885 – 1917)

Ambrose Bower, one of six children, was born in Keighley and came from a military family. An apprenticed machine maker he married and lived in Keighley and Steeton, and had two children.

Although not a Farnhill resident, his name was probably included on the list of Farnhill WW1 Volunteers because his relatives lived in the village at that time and he had worked for a local coal merchant.

As a member of the army reserves he was recalled to the Green Howards shortly after the start of the war, and was involved in most of the major battles in Northern France and Flanders.

Awarded the Military Medal for bravery, Ambrose Bower was killed in October 1917. He has no known grave but his name is commemorated on a panel in a cemetery in Belgium and is recorded on the Keighley Roll of Honour.



Photograph courtesy of cpgw.org.uk

Pre-war life

Ambrose Bower appears to have been born into a military family. His mother Louisa, known as Lucy, was born in India and it seems likely that both her father, Michael Crane, and her grandfather were in the army, and stationed there. The 1851 census records a Michael Crane, the son of a serving soldier, as resident in The Royal Military Asylum for Children of Soldiers Serving in the Regular Army.

Note: This was not an asylum in the modern sense of the word. It was a school, originally established in Chelsea, in 1801, for children and orphans of serving or dead soldiers.

Ambrose was born in Keighley, his father's home town, on 5th July 1885. The 1891 census showed him living with his parents and three younger sisters at 11 Sloe Street. His father was recorded as a machine labourer.

Perhaps however, over the next 10 years, the family fell on hard times, as the 1901 census has the family, now with six children, living in a caravan in the grounds of St. Andrew's Rectory, Keighley. Ambrose's father was recorded as being a licensed hawker, and Ambrose himself was an apprentice machine maker.

Civil Parish	Eccelesiastical Parish	County Borough, Municipal Borough, or Urban District	Ward of Municipal Borough or of Urban District	Sanct. District	Parliamentary Borough or Division	Town				
of <i>Keighley</i>	of <i>Keighley St. Andrews</i>	of <i>Keighley</i>	of <i>Keighley West</i>	<i>St.</i>	of <i>Keighley</i>	<i>St.</i>				
ROAD, STREET &c. and No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES			Name and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	Age last Birthday of	PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION	Employer, Worker, or Own account	If Working at Home	WHERE BORN
	Uninhabited	In	Not in	Special		Males	Females			
<i>Caravan (Rectory grounds)</i>					<i>Albert Bower</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>Licensed Hawker</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>do do</i>
					<i>Lena do</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>34</i>			<i>India</i>
					<i>Ambrose do</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>Stratford Machine Maker's Apprentice</i>	<i>Worker</i>	<i>Yorkes Keighley</i>
					<i>Annie do</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>14</i>			<i>do do</i>
					<i>Ethel do</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>12</i>			<i>do do</i>
					<i>Fanny do</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>10</i>			<i>do do</i>
					<i>Albert do</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>6</i>			<i>do do</i>
					<i>Elsie do</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>1</i>			<i>do do</i>

Extract from the 1901 census return for Sladen Street, Keighley – the Bower family living in a caravan
Used under licence from the National Archive

On 25th June 1910 Ambrose married Hannah Louisa Davis at St. Mary's Church in the parish of Eastwood, Keighley. Hannah had been born in London, in January 1891, but at the time of her marriage was living at 172 Parkwood Street, Keighley.

Ambrose and Hannah set up home at 23 Pitt Street, Keighley, and later moved to number 19 – however the electoral roll also records Ambrose living at three different addresses in Steeton and Keighley between 1912 and 1914.

They had two children: Annie, born in 1911; and Albert, born in 1913. (Albert is believed to have died towards the end of 1915, aged 2.)

Some time prior to 1911 the rest of the Bower family must have moved to Farnhill, as the 1911 census records them living at 1 Main Street. It seems likely that Ambrose must have spent some time in the village also, as he is subsequently reported as having been "... for a time employed by Mr. Wm. Sugden, coal merchant, Kildwick" (West Yorkshire Pioneer, 12/1/1917). This might explain how he came to be included on the list of Farnhill volunteers, along with his brother Albert, even though there is no record of him ever actually living in the village.

On his 1911 census return Ambrose records that he was "out of work" but gives his occupation as "Army Pensioner – 8 years".

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.						
Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.						
The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, as in connection with Old Age Pensions, than the preparation of Statistical Tables.						
NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family	AGE (last Birthday) and SEX.	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE.	PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of Persons aged ten years and upwards.	BIRTHPLACE of every person.	
1 <i>Ambrose Bower</i>	<i>head</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>married one</i>	<i>Army Pensioner - 8 yrs</i>	<i>Keighley (Yorkshire)</i>	
2 <i>Hannah Louisa Bower</i>	<i>wife</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>married one</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>London (Middlesex)</i>	

Extract from the 1911 census return for 22 Pitt Street, Keighley
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WW1 service

As a member of the Army reserve, Ambrose was automatically recalled to his regiment, 2nd Alexandra, Princess of Wales's Own Yorkshire Regiment – better known as the Green Howards, at the start of the war; and by 5th October 1914 he was in France.

He seems to have been involved in most of the major battles that took place in Northern France and Flanders between 1914 and 1917, including Mons, Ypres, Armentières, and Neuve Chapelle. In June 1915 he was wounded, although he appears to have considered it only a slight inconvenience:

"I have returned from another very severe engagement, having only received a scratch from a German bullet in the hand. I am not put out of action, the wound not being worth considering a wound."

– From a letter sent home to his parents by Ambrose Bower (West Yorkshire Pioneer, 2/7/1915)

He must have been wounded again sometime between July 1915 and the end of 1916, as a subsequent newspaper report (West Yorkshire Pioneer, 12/1/1917) described him as “having gone through many of the greatest and most severe battles during the war, with only two slight wounds.” The Keighley News (13/1/1917) reported “He has been slightly wounded twice in the arm.”

In June 1916, Ambrose made a simple soldier's will:

WILL

In the event of my death I give the whole of my property and effects to my wife:

*Mrs. H.L. Bower
29 Harcourt St.
Parkwood Bottom
Keighley
Yorkshire*

*Pte. 7584, Bower A.
“C” Company
2nd Yorkshire Regiment
7/6/1916*

Will
 In the event of my
 death I give the whole of
 my property and effects to
 my wife
 Mrs H L Bower
 29 Harcourt St
 Parkwood Bottom
 Keighley
 Yorkshire
 Pte A.R.
 7588 Bower A
 C Company
 2nd Yorkshire Regt
 7/6/16

Ambrose Bower's soldier's will
 Used under licence from the National Archive

29 Harcourt Street, Keighley, appears to have been the home of Hannah's brother, Henry Davis; and presumably was where Hannah and young Annie were living at that time.

Early in 1917, following an action during the battle of the Somme, Ambrose was awarded the Military Medal for gallantry.

His bravery was reported in the Craven Herald (12/1/1917), when Farnhill was keen to claim him as one of their own:

FARNHILL – A brave action

Corporal Ambrose Bower, of Farnhill, has been awarded the Military Medal for gallantry in action in the Battle of the Somme. He was the leader of the grenade section, and, finding that his men were short of bombs, he jumped out of his trench and made his way to the German trenches and captured a good supply, thus enabling them to carry out their work. The Captain congratulated him on his pluck and bravery, and said he never saw anything so daring in his life. He told him he was an honour to his regiment and he was proud to be his Captain. ...

Corporal A. Bower is the first soldier to bring a decoration into Farnhill. His parents are very proud of the honour. He has been made Corporal and allowed a month's leave. Before the war, Corporal Bower was a coal dealer and was called up at the outbreak of the war as a reservist.

Circumstances of death

Ambrose Bower was killed in action, in the Ypres Salient area of the Western Front, on 26th October 1917, the first day of the second Battle of Passchendaele (26th October – 10th November 1917). He was aged 32.

His death was reported succinctly in the West Yorkshire Pioneer (23/11/1917):

FARNHILL – Private A. Bower Reported Killed

Reports have also been received that Pte. Ambrose Bower, Yorkshire Regiment (whose parents resided until recently at Farnhill) has been killed in action. He was in the Regular Army and went to France in the early days of the war.

Ambrose Bower is commemorated on a panel (stone no. 52) that forms part of the Tyne Cot Cemetery, Zonnebeke, Belgium. There is no grave.



Tyne Cot Cemetery, Zonnebeke, Belgium

Photograph by kind permission of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (www.cwgc.org)

Postscript

On 15th November 1918, in its first issue after the Armistice was signed, the Craven Herald reported the toll of the war on various villages in the area. For Farnhill it recorded:

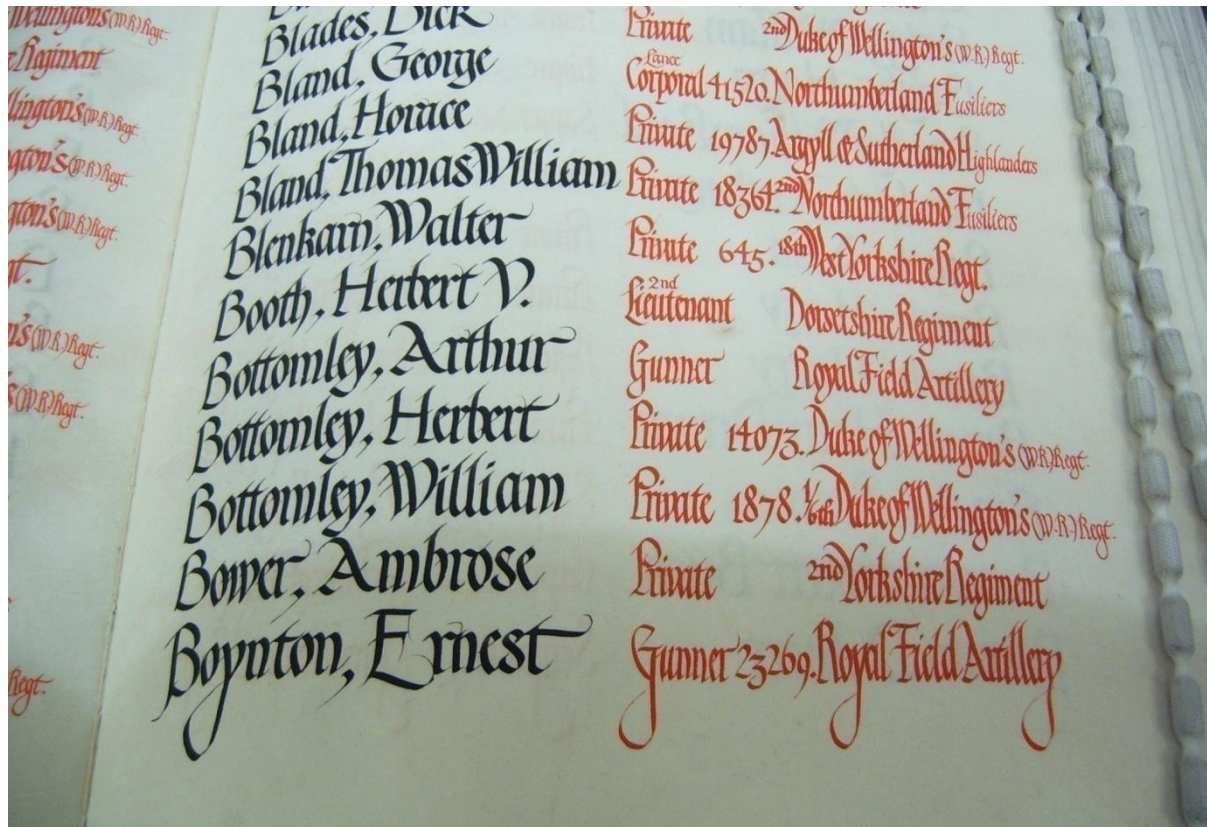
... is six killed: - Private J. Smith, Private Joseph Green, A.B. Walter Dawson, Private Harry Walmsley, Gunner W. Mosley, Private W. Barker ...

and later on in the report it noted:

Private Ambrose Bower and S.B.J.S. Whitham have gained the Military Medal.

The fact that Ambrose Bower was subsequently killed in action did not appear in this report.

Presumably because his parents and the rest of the family had moved from Farnhill to Keighley during the war, Ambrose Bower's name was not included on the Kildwick war memorial – or in the book "Craven's Part in the Great War". However his name is recorded in the Keighley Roll of Honour, held in Keighley library.



Photograph taken with the kind assistance of the staff of Keighley library

On 21st September 1918 Hannah Louisa Bower married again, in St. Mary's Church, Eastwood, Keighley to Arthur Smith.

1918. Marriage solemnized at <u>St Mary's Church</u> in the <u>Parish</u> of <u>Eastwood, Keighley</u> in the County of <u>York</u>								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
486	September 21 1918	Arthur Smith	57	Widower	Blacksmith	29 Harcourt St Keighley	Joe Smith (deceased)	Blacksmith
		Hannah Louisa Bower.	28	Widow	—	11 Pitt Street Keighley	George Davis (deceased)	Labourer
Married in the <u>Parish Church</u> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <u>Established Church</u> by <u>Charles Mills</u> or after <u>Orders</u> by me, This Marriage was solemnized between us, { <u>Arthur Smith</u> } in the Presence of us, { <u>George Davis</u> } { <u>Hannah Louisa Bower</u> } { <u>Agnes Frances Davis</u> } <u>J.P. Greig</u> Vicar.								

Smith – Bower marriage certificate
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He was aged 57 and gave his address as 29 Harcourt Street, Keighley, the address of Hannah's brother; her address was recorded as 11 Pitt Street. They subsequently appear to have lived in Quarry Street until 1924, and then moved back to Pitt Street.

Arthur died in 1934 and Hannah moved to Blossom Street, where daughter Annie appeared for the first time on the electoral roll.

In 1938 there was another move, this time to 41 Rawling Street, where the two women appear together on the roll at the same address as Joseph Hinchcliffe, a married man three years older than Hannah.

1	Smith, Hannah L.	-	F	19 Jan	91	W	Domestic work unpaid.
2	Bower, Annie	-	F	31 Oct	11	S	Smith Hand Room Waxed Man/
3	Hinchcliffe, Joseph J	-	M	22 Oct	87	M	Highways Genl work (Heavy) A.R.P.

1939 Register entry for 41 Rawling Street, Keighley – Louisa, Annie, and Joseph Hinchcliffe
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This is the last known address for Hannah, who died in 1946. She was buried with Arthur Smith, in Utley cemetery.

Annie Bower and Joseph Hinchcliffe continued to live at 41 Rawling Street until at least 1957 (when the online records for the Keighley electoral roll cease). After this date there is no further definitive information about either of them: however, the death of an Annie Bower was recorded in the Worth Valley registration district (which included Keighley) in the first quarter of 1960; she was aged 48.

Several of Ambrose's siblings are known to have married and had children, including the Farnhill WW1 Volunteer Albert Edgar Bower. Descendants of the family are known to be still living in the local area.

Ambrose Bower – a life in summary

Born: 5/7/1885, Keighley
Died: 26/10/1917, Flanders **Aged:** 32

Parents

Father: Albert; b. 1865, Keighley; buried 19/11/1940, Utley
Mother: Louisa (Lucy) (nee Crane); b. 1867, India; buried 21/11/1918, Utley
Married: 1885, Keighley (Registration district)

Siblings

Annie; b. 1886, Keighley; m. Fred Clegg, 1907, Keighley (Registration district)
Ethel; b. 1888, Keighley; m. John William Archer, 5/11/1910, Skipton (Registration district)
Fanny; b. 1890, Keighley; m. Clifford Bottomley, 19/1/1917, Kildwick; d. January 1962
Albert Edgar; b. 12/9/1894, Keighley; m. Elizabeth Ann Frobisher, 20/11/1915, Keighley;
d. 11/1/1970, Silsden
Elsie; b. 10/1/1900, Keighley; m. John Walsh, 1919, Keighley (Registration district);
d. August 1994, Keighley

plus three others who died prior to the 1911 census

WW1 service

Disembarkation date: 5/10/1914
Regt.: Alexandra, Princess of Wales's Own Yorkshire Regiment; Private, no. 7584
Medals: 1914 Star (with clasp), British War Medal, Victory Medal,
MM (Military Medal), for gallantry in action on the Somme.
Home address: Pitt Street, Keighley

Relationship to other volunteers

Albert Edgar Bower – brother

Marriage

Wife: Hannah Louisa Davis; b. 19/1/1891, London (Finsbury Park);
d. March 1946, buried at Utley cemetery – as Hannah L. Smith
Date: 25/6/1910, at St. Mary's Church, Eastwood, Keighley

Children

Annie, b. 31/10/1911, Keighley (Registration district); d. 1960, Worth Valley (Registration district)
Albert, b. 1913, Keighley (Registration district); d. 1915, Keighley (Registration district)

