

## DRIVER ALBERT CLEAL

79368, 66th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery

Died aged 32 on 19 July 1916

Buried with honour in *Amara War Cemetery, Iraq*; XIV J 6  
Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



*Amara Memorial: Rolls of Honour\**



*Albert Cleal [Don Freeman]*



*Royal Field Artillery*

**ALBERT CLEAL** was born in Tewkesbury in 1884, the penultimate of six sons of Richard Cleal, fruiterer and grocer of 1 Barton Street, and Ann (formerly Parker). He was educated at Barton Road School. In 1901 Albert was still living at Barton Street with his parents and his occupation was described as errand boy. His mother died in 1902 and in 1906 his father remarried. There is no trace of Albert's whereabouts on the 1911 Census.

Albert Cleal's military service started long before the Great War. He first enlisted in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in Birmingham in 1902 aged 18. He signed up for the Short Service engagement, giving his occupation as 'green grocer'. Albert served in Ireland in the 4th Battalion and, in 1905, extended his service to eight years but was transferred to the 1st Battalion and sent to India. He returned after two years and was discharged from Netley Hospital, Southampton, in 1908 *'having been found medically unfit'*. Although his condition was not specified, it is known that many patients at the hospital were suffering from tropical diseases.

Albert must have recovered sufficiently by 13 August 1914 as he was one of the early Kitchener volunteers. Still in Southampton, he enlisted in the Royal Field Artillery (RFA), now aged 29. Despite this, he was listed in the Abbey as a Tewkesbury Volunteer, with his brothers Alfred James and Ernest (and three other Cleals).

His army service record shows that, on 26 January 1915, Albert was posted to 66 Artillery Brigade in the 13th (Western) Division. He served as a Driver, probably in 'D' Battery. In June 1915 the Division joined the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and eventually landed at

Cape Helles (Gallipoli) between 26 and 28 July 1915. Albert was thus entitled to the '1914-15 Star' medal. His Division was involved in several actions before it was withdrawn in January 1916 and sent to Egypt to defend the Suez Canal. In February it moved to Mesopotamia (now Iraq) to relieve the besieged British garrison at Kut al Amara. Its attempts failed and Kut fell in April. Afterwards, the British force remained in the area and reorganised in order to renew the offensive in 1917.

**Driver Albert Cleal** did not, however, join them as he *'died of disease'* on 19 July 1916, aged 32. After a temporary burial, his body was subsequently re-interred in the Amara War Cemetery, Iraq. In 1933 all the headstones in the cemetery were removed because of physical deterioration; in 2014 the CWGC is unable to manage its cemeteries and memorials in Iraq\*.

Albert's brothers survived the war. Alfred James, of the 13th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment, was regarded as a *'really splendid man'* by his Commanding Officer, Captain Crockford (who later became the Queen's consultant surgeon), whilst Ernest William served with the Labour Corps until he was demobilised in April 1919. Albert's brother-in-law, **Private Richard J. W. Taylor** [†] of the Army Service Corps, was killed in 1918.

\*In 2014 the CGWC advises that it is not possible to visit the Amara Memorial in Iraq. The photograph caption is:

*'The Rolls of Honour held at the Commission's Head Office commemorating by name all the Commonwealth casualties who died in Iraq during the two World Wars'*