

GUNNER WILLIAM CHARLES L. GREEN

158423, 'B' Anti-Aircraft Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery

Died aged 20 on 21 March 1918

Buried with honour at *Anzac Cemetery, Sailly Sur-la-Lys*; III E 1

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



Anzac Cemetery, Sailly Sur-la-Lys



Royal Garrison Artillery

WILLIAM CHARLES L. GREEN was born in Tewkesbury in 1898 the son of William Green and Mary Maria (formerly Price) from Hereford, who married in 1893. William senior was a 'Corn Labourer' in the Midland Railway Provender Store at Ashchurch; by 1911 the marriage had produced two sons and three daughters. In 1901 the family was living in Natton, near Ashchurch, but by 1911 had moved to Fish Alley, Barton Street. In that year, William was still a pupil at the Abbey School. Later he worked for eight years with Messrs. Allen, Grocer, at the Cross, 2 Church Street (in 2014 Pronto's Fast Food shop).

William Green was conscripted in March 1917 into the Royal Garrison Artillery and assigned to an Anti-Aircraft Battery, an arm of the artillery which had not existed at the outbreak of the war and which evolved progressively to address a new menace of warfare – aircraft. In the absence of any surviving army service records, it is impossible to identify exactly where William was serving and in what he might have been involved at the time of his death. However, the unit in which he was serving ('B' Anti-Aircraft Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery) was known to be part of the First Army in northern France at the end of December 1917, only a matter of weeks before William was killed. The battery had been a permanent fixture in the First Army for the whole of 1917 so it is reasonable to assume that was still the case on 21 March 1918. At that time the First Army was holding the line from Givenchy north towards Armentières.

Although the date of William's death coincided with the first day of the *Battle of St. Quentin* (21-23 March 1918, the opening phase of the German Spring Offensive), his death cannot be attributed to that attack as it occurred some distance to the south of where William's unit was probably serving. The First Army was not targeted until 9 April, nearly three weeks later. It is likely, therefore, that he was a casualty of the routine shelling which was commonplace at that time. The fact that an officer had time to write a letter home describing a '*thoroughly loyal and good hearted lad*' suggests 'normal' trench warfare.

Gunner William Charles L. Green's body was recovered and he is buried in the *Anzac Cemetery* in Sailly Sur-la-Lys, Bethune, France, which illustrates the international nature of the war reached by 1918. Sailly Church was burnt during the open fighting of 1914 but until the spring of 1918 the village was comparatively untouched. Allied troops on this front were at rest and the onslaught of *Operation Georgette* caught them unawares in a chalk terrain which was difficult to entrench. The village was captured by the Germans on 9 April 1918, and it remained in their hands until early September.

William's death was reported in some detail by the *Tewkesbury Weekly Record* on 30 March: '*Gunner Green was killed instantaneously – the first Tewkesbury casualty in the German onslaught on an anti-aircraft battery which was shelled*'. When news of their son's death arrived, the family was living in Merrett's Yard, Oldbury Road.