

**St. Martin's Churchyard,  
Talke, Staffordshire  
War Grave**



*Lest We Forget*

**World War 1**



**27341 GUNNER**

**W. FERN**

**ROYAL FIELD ARTILLERY**

**20TH DECEMBER, 1918 Age 34**

*An Angel Waits*

*At Heaven's Bright Gate*

*Hope Whispers*

*Meet Him There*

## William FERN

William Fern was born in 1884 at Talke o' th' Hill, Staffordshire, England to parents Thomas & Martha Fern (nee Rigby).

The 1891 England Census recorded William Fern as a 6 year old, living with his family at Talke, Audley, Staffordshire, England. His parents were listed as Thomas Fern (Colliery Labourer, aged 32, born Cotton near Stoke, Staffs) & Martha Fern (aged 28, born Talk Pits, Talke, Staffs). William was one of five children listed on this Census – Amary Fern (female), (Scholar, aged 10, born Talk Pits, Talke, Staffs), John Thomas Fern (Scholar, aged 8, born Mill End, Audley, Staffs) then William, Martha Fern (Scholar, aged 4, born Talk Pits, Talke, Staffs) & Robert Fern (aged 1, born Talke oth Hill, Staffs).

The 1901 England Census recorded William Fern as a 16 year old Waggoner (Coal below ground), living with his family at Talk-oth-Hill, Audley, Staffordshire in a 4 roomed dwelling. His parents were listed as Thomas Fern (Coke Burner, aged 41, born Cotton, Staffs) & Martha Fern (aged 37). William was the eldest of six children listed on this Census (all born Talk, Staffordshire) – William then Robert Fern (aged 11), George H. Fern (aged 9), Nellie (aged 5), Eliza E. (aged 4) & Betsy J. Fern (aged 1).

William Fern enlisted on 23rd September, 1902 with Royal Field Artillery & had a service number of 27341.

William Fern married Mary Jane Boulton in 1906. Their marriage was registered in the March quarter, 1906 in the district of Wolstanton, Staffordshire, England.

The 1911 England Census recorded William Fern as a 27 year old, married, Coal Miner (below ground), living with his wife – Mary Jane Fern (aged 30, born Tunstall, Staffs) & their children in a 4 roomed dwelling at Hollywall Lane, Tunstall, Staffordshire, England. William & Mary Jane Fern stated on the Census form that they had been married for 11 years & they had 6 children, 1 having since died. Their 5 children were listed on this Census – Charles William Fern (aged 4, born Talke oth Hill, Staffs), William James Boulton Fern (aged 9, born Chatterley, Staffs), Thomas Henry Boulton Fern (aged 7, born Chatterley, Staffs), Mabel Fern (aged 5 months, born Hollywall Lane, Staffs) & Amy Fern (aged 5 months, born Hollywall Lane, Staffs). Also listed on the Census was Nellie Fern, sister of William Fern (General Servant, aged 15, Talke oth Hill, Staffs).

Gunner William Fern entered a Theatre of War on 11th September, 1914. His Medal Index Card records that he was originally posted to 6 D.A.C. (Divisional Ammunition Column), R.F.A. (Royal Field Artillery).

The Medical Records Book for H.M. Hospital Ship *Assaye* record Gunner W. Fern, 27341, 20th Battery, R.F.A., aged 33, was admitted to the Hospital Ship with Asthma on 6th June, 1916. The records show that he had completed 14 years of service & had completed 22 months in the Field. Gunner Fern was to be transferred to Hospital at Suez.

Gunner William Fern was discharged from the Royal Field Artillery - No. 5 "C" Reserve Brigade on 11th August, 1916 as permanently unfit. He was entitled to Silver War Badge – No. 158,943 due to sickness & had served overseas.

### Silver War Badge

The Silver War Badge was issued in the United Kingdom and the British Empire to service personnel who had been honourably discharged due to wounds or sickness from military service in World War I. The badge, sometimes known as the "Discharge Badge", the "Wound Badge" or "Services Rendered Badge", was first issued in September 1916, along with an official certificate of entitlement.

The large sterling silver lapel badge was intended to be worn on civilian clothes. The decoration was introduced as an award of "King's silver" for having received wounds or injury during loyal war service to the Crown's authority. A secondary causation for its introduction was that a practice had developed in the early years of the war in the United Kingdom where some women took it upon themselves to confront and publicly embarrass men of fighting age they saw in public places who were not in military uniform, by ostentatiously presenting them with white feathers, as a

suggestion of cowardice. As the war had developed substantial numbers of servicemen who had been discharged from His Majesty's Forces with wounds that rendered them unfit for war service, but which were not obvious from their outward appearance, found themselves being harassed in such a manner and the badge, to be worn on the right breast while in civilian dress, was a means of discouraging such incidents being directed at ex-forces' personnel. It was forbidden to wear the badge on a military uniform.

*(Information from Wikipedia)*



**Silver War Badge**

Gunner William Fern died on 20th December, 1918.

A death for William Fern, aged 34, was registered in the December quarter, 1918 in the district of Wolstanton, Staffordshire, England.

Gunner William Fern was buried in St. Martin's Churchyard, Talke, Staffordshire, England – Plot number 45. 10. and has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone.

Gunner William Fern was entitled to 1914/15 Star, British War Medal & the Victory Medal.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Gunner William Fern – service number 27341, aged 34, of No. 5 "C" Reserve Bde., Royal Field Artillery. He was the husband of Mrs Gerrard (formerly Fern) of 110 Group, Kent River, Denmark, Western Australia.

Mary Jane Fern, widow of the late Gunner William Fern, had remarried in the September quarter, 1919 in the district of Wolstanton, Staffordshire, England to William Gerrard.

Mary Jane Gerrard, aged 43, along with her new husband – William Gerrard – Farmer, aged 34 & her children – Mabel & Amy (aged 13) & Willis (aged 8) were passengers on *Moreton Bay* which had departed from London, England & arrived at Fremantle, Western Australia on 15th February, 1924.

Gunner William Fern is remembered on the Commemorative Roll Book, located in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. The Commemorative Roll records the names of those Australians who died during or as a result of wars in which Australians served, but who were not serving in the Australian Armed Forces and therefore not eligible for inclusion on the Roll of Honour. *(Note: It appears that Gunner Fern's name on the Commemorative Roll was based on the information that his next-of-kin's address was listed as Australia & therefore it was assumed the soldier concerned would be Australian.)*



**Commemorative Area of the Australian War Memorial** (*Capital Photographer*)

W. Fern is remembered on the St. Martin's Church Roll of Honour, Talke, Staffordshire, England.



**St. Martin's Church Roll of Honour, Talke** (*Photos courtesy of Berenice Baynham*)





**St. Martin's Church Roll of Honour, Talke**



**St. Martin's Churchyard, Talke, Staffordshire, England**

St. Martin's Churchyard, Talke contains 11 Commonwealth War Graves – 9 from World War 1 & 2 from World War 2.



Photo of Gunner W. Fern's Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in St. Martin's Churchyard, Talke, Staffordshire, England.



*(Photo by Len Scott)*