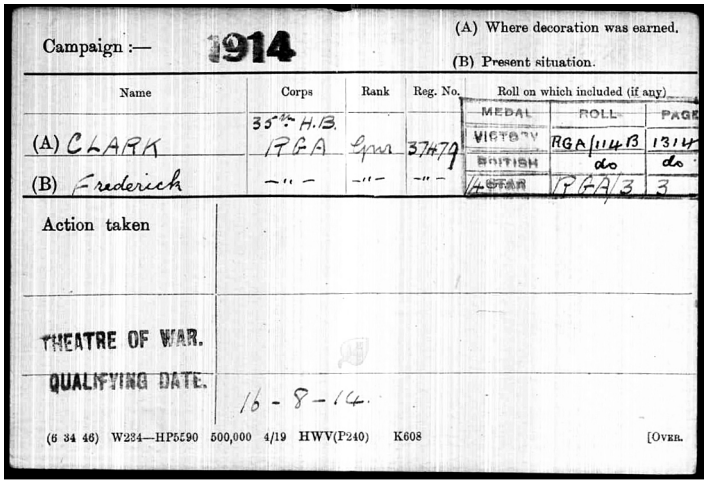
Frederick Clark

Gunner 37479, Royal Garrison Artillery, 35th Heavy Battery

One of eight siblings, two of whom died young, **Frederick Clark** was the eldest of the six remaining children of Fred and his wife Rose Hannah Clark (née Shirley). Frederick was born at Hyde Heath, Little Missenden, Buckinghamshire circa 1894 and, at the time of the 1901 Census, lived with his family – dad and mum, (28) & (27) respectively, Frank (3), Ethel May (1) and dad's sister-in-law Ellen Shirley (12) and one year old niece Susan Newberry - at 4 Alexander Street, Chesham, Bucks. Ten years later in 1911 the family had moved to The Vale, Chesham, a four-roomed residence, but now also with three additional children namely: Robert (9), Thomas (6) and Sarah (1 month). Dad Fred, born Tring, Hertfordshire, was a foreman in a boot factory and Frederick an apprentice boot riveter.



Campaign :— 1914

(A) Where decoration was earned.
(B) Present situation.

Name	Corps	Rank	Reg. No.	Roll on which included (if any)		
				MEDAL	ROLL	PAGE
(A) CLARK	35th H.B. RGA	Gnr	37479	VICTORY	RGA/11413	1314
(B) Frederick	-"-	-"-	-"-	BRITISH	do	do
				STAR	RGA/3	3

Action taken

THEATRE OF WAR.

QUALIFYING DATE. 16-8-14.

(6 34 46) W234—HP5590 500,000 4/19 HWV(P240) K608 [OVER.

Medal Card, Army Medal Office. *WWI Medal Index Cards*

Frederick is remembered on the Ashley Green, Bucks, War Memorial plaque within the church as well as in Amersham, though his connection with the parish of Amersham is unknown. The battlefield will[1] he left reveals marital status, but, unfortunately, his wife's identity remains a mystery and her whereabouts, as written on the will are illegible. Wills in these circumstances were, invariably, simple documents in the handwriting of the soldier involved, and inevitably bequeathed all "property and effects" to their next of kin in the event of their death, in the subject's case, his wife.

Frederick, who had originally enlisted in London, survived until the final weeks of the war. He was killed in action in the Western European Theatre of engagement on 5 October 1918, aged about 24. The records of the mobile heavy batteries do not allow us to follow the unit closely but the diary of the battery's commanding officer, Major A C Williamson[2] gives a good flavour of the day-to-day lives of the men who moved, serviced and fired the four 60 pounder guns and who cared for the horses that pulled them:

"13 Sept 1914, left Wassigny. In 23 days covered 334 miles.

February 1915 The first Battle of Ypres on the Aisne.

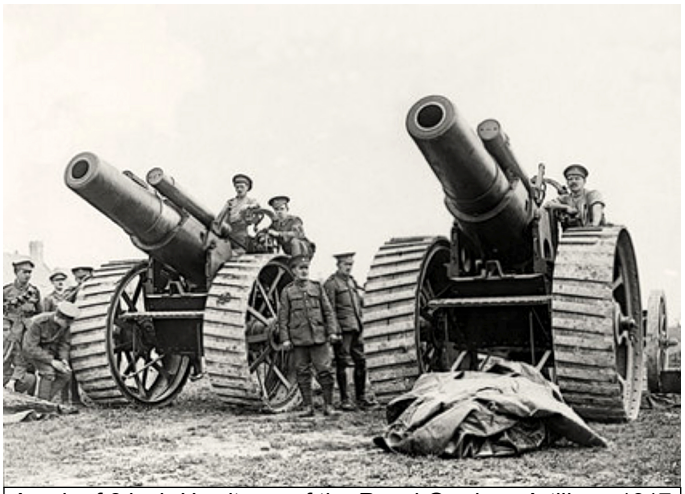
10th February 1915 Fired [guns] with aeroplane fitted with radio for the first time. [The heavy guns fired from such a distance that it was not possible for the gunners to see how closely their shells fell to the intended target. They relied on aeroplanes to spot the shells falling and to signal between plane and ground to direct the fire onto the target.]

1 June 1915 60 pounder gun. Difficult to effect concealment.

25 September to 14 October 1915, Battle of Loos. The British used gas for the first time. The British infantry ran into the gas clouds and suffered heavy casualties. By the end of the day, had captured Loos. [It was not only the Germans who used gas. The advantage of the gas (chlorine or phosgene) is that as it was heavier than air, it would roll along the ground and down into and fill the enemy's trenches. The disadvantage is the wind could change direction.] I am struck by the amazing skills of the Germans and the lack of training experience of our own troops. The German attack of 8th October was repulsed.

[1] Battlefield Will can be obtained from https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk/
[2] *War Diaries* 35 Heavy Battery Royal Garrison Artillery, TNA Ref WO 95/481

1916 SIEGE WARFARE



A pair of 8 inch Howitzers of the Royal Garrison Artillery, 1917
© National Army Museum

The artillery and most especially the heavy artillery in the early stages of the war were never out of the line, for the simple reason they could not be spared. Their casualties were undoubtedly less than the infantry, but as the agony was so much more prolonged, it is doubtful whether there was much to choose between the two branches. No one can realise, unless you have been through it, what a strain such a long period must bring upon individuals. There were no rest days or "weekends". As a rule, more firing was done on Sundays than any other day.

Every battery has "wagon lines" where horses were picketed and wagons parked. Horses churned up the soil until it became a thick slimy mud. Hence thousands of bricks and rubble from devastated areas and villages were carted to build standings.

[On one occasion, Major Williamson recalls, they were collecting rubble when the owner of what had once been a farmhouse rushed up demanding payment for the material.]

Horse-drawn British 60-pdr guns passing along Clermont-Compiegne Road, 29 March 1918
© IWM (Q 66141)

A Howitzer under camouflage netting.
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Increasing numbers of hostile aeroplanes and balloons meant that a battery had to disguise itself as something else [Major Williamson hated the French word camouflage]. Aerial photography was getting more certain. Woe betide any battery whose position came out clearly on an aeroplane photograph for the enemy artillery would give it no rest.

Frederick was awarded The Allied Victory Medal, The British War Medal, 1914-18 and The 1914 Star.

Frederick Clark is remembered with Honour
Bellicourt British Cemetery, Aisne, France, I.B. 12