

Driver Ernest Filby[©]
Regimental number: L/15775
"A" Battery, 161st Brigade, Royal Field Artillery¹

born: January 1890–died: 13 July 1917



Figure 2: Ernest Filby, about 1905

Ernest Filby, born either late in 1889 or early in 1890,² was the second of eight children of William Filby and Priscilla Pickering. They were married in July 1887 in Sculcoates, East Riding, Yorkshire,³ likely at St. Paul's (Anglican)⁴ Church, where Priscilla was baptised on 13 July 1870.⁵ When Ernest was a toddler William was a drayman,⁶ probably at the Port of Hull, because later he was a mate on a tug boat⁷ and, later still, William captained a tug.⁸



Figure 1: Driver Ernest Filby
 Source: "(WWI) Filby, Ernest Driver Tree," Ancestry (www.ancestry.com)

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all photos are from the same source.



Figure 3: Ernest Filby's first job, (centre, aged 16) with G. Elvin Printers and Stationers, Hull.

Ernest's siblings were Francis (b. 1888),⁹ George William (b. 1892),¹⁰ James Harold (b. 1894),¹¹ Wilfred (b. 1896),¹² Frederick Rupert (b. 1901),¹³ Annie May (b. 1907)¹⁴ and Stanley (b. 1909).¹⁵

About the time the family photo (right) was taken,

the family were living on Rosemead Street, Sculcoates. Francis was a self-employed boot maker; Ernest worked as a fitter at a shipyard; George was a general labourer at a flour mill; and Wilfred was an apprentice fitter, also at a shipyard.¹⁶ Unfortunately James had passed away before his first birthday.¹⁷



Figure 4: Filby family circa 1910
 Back row (left to right): Francis, Ernest, George William; middle row (left to right): Wilfred, Annie May, Priscilla with baby Stanley, William; front: Frederick Rupert

It is likely that Ernest enlisted early in the summer of 1915.¹⁸ His regiment, the Royal Field Artillery (RFA), was the largest of the three army artillery regiments, the others being the Royal Horse Artillery and the Royal Garrison Artillery. The horse-drawn RFA was responsible for the medium calibre guns and howitzers deployed closed to the front line and was reasonably mobile.¹⁹ Ernest's brigade, the 161st, marched from



Figure 5: Ernest Filby, believed to have been taken on his 21st birthday.

camp at Fovant in southwest Wiltshire to entrain at Salisbury for the trip to Southampton on 30 December 1915.²⁰ They arrived at Le Havre, France, on New Year's Eve and immediately moved forward to Albert in the department of Somme in northeast France. Each battery (there were four: A-D) saw its first action on 6 January 1916.

Excerpts from *The Long, Long Trail*²¹ indicate that before the Battle of the Somme, which began in July 1916 and lasted until November, the largest bombardment fired by the British Army had been in the Battle of Loos the previous September 1915. It had been successful in destroying the enemy's wire, strongpoints and trenches in some places, allowing the attacking infantry to break into the German defences. At the Somme, with almost twice as many guns and five days of unceasing barrage (individual artillery units firing in 2-hour shifts), it was thought that nothing would be left at the conclusion of the bombardment, leaving the way open for the infantry.

The effects of the bombardment varied considerably. In some places the wire was flattened and the enemy artillery silenced. In others, the attacking infantry faced deep, virtually untouched belts of wire, with alerted enemy gunners behind it.

Numerous factors were responsible for the poor artillery results. Many of the rounds fired were duds and many, rather than containing high explosives, contained shrapnel, which failed to clear away wire or damage deep enemy dugouts. Very little of the British artillery could be ranged against the German artillery because the ability to spot enemy emplacements was still in its infancy and gunnery techniques were not accurate enough to hit them if they were identified. Lastly, the officers and gunners of the artillery were inexperienced at this relatively early stage of the war.

"When the battle was later analysed, it was realised that despite the apparently colossal build up of artillery and weight of firepower, it was still insufficient to suppress the defences and destroy the enemy's ability to defend. The peak of artillery strength came just under a year later, at the Battle of Messines. In this highly successful battle, the British artillery had more than *twice as many* field guns per yard than at the Somme, and *three times as much* heavy artillery. In the first eight days of the Somme, 1.73m rounds were fired, of which a significant proportion were duds; at Messines, the comparable figure at Messines was 3.25m with far fewer failing to explode. At Messines, a much higher proportion of the effort was devoted to the destruction of the German artillery. It was at Verdun that the saying "artillery conquers, infantry occupies" was coined. And it was right: a hard lesson learned by all sides."²²

Ernest's brigade remained "in the field" after the Somme, moving frequently from place to place as ordered. Between the Battle of Messines (7-14 June 1917) and the Battle of Ypres (31 July-10 November 1917), the 161st brigade, RFA, was in the area of De Panne,²³ a town on the North Sea coast in Belgium near the border with France, when Ernest was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 11 July 1917.²⁴ The 161st Brigade war diary for that day notes only "Very much quieter all day except for desultory shelling of back areas. The 161 Brigade R.F.A. twice opened fire on 'S.O.S' Lines at request of Infantry. Left Battalion endeavoured to get back its old

front line system, being supported by A/161, B/161 and C/161 R.F.A. No report received yet." However it happened, when Ernest was admitted he was wounded in the neck and had trouble breathing. He died two days later and was buried in Grave 51 of the Adinkerke Churchyard Extension.²⁵

Ernest was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914–15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).²⁶

Ernest's father, **William**, died on 24 July 1957,²⁷ having survived his son by 40 years and his wife, **Priscilla**, by just over a decade.²⁸ Ernest's parents are buried side by side in St. John Churchyard, Kingston upon Hull, Yorkshire East Riding.²⁹

Their eldest son, known as **Frank**, married Ethel Richardson in 1912.³⁰ They had two children: a daughter, Beatrice, born in 1913³¹ and a son, his father's namesake, born in 1917.³² Frank passed away on 15 June 1959,³³ Ethel on 21 March 1976.³⁴ They are buried together in the Eastern Cemetery, Kingston upon Hull, Yorkshire East Riding.³⁵

Ernest's younger brother, **George William**, also served in the First World War, as a private in the Labour Corps.³⁶ After the war, in the summer of 1921,³⁷ George married Annie Ockleton; they had no children. In 1939, George was working in the Port of Hull drydocks.³⁸ He died in 1964;³⁹ his wife died in February 1993.⁴⁰

While Ernest and George enlisted in the army, their brother **Wilfred** joined the Royal Navy in 1916.⁴¹ Wilfred and his wife, Ellen (née Conley), who married in 1920,⁴² had three sons: Wilfred (b. 1923)⁴³, Dennis (b. 1924)⁴⁴ and Roy (b. 1927).⁴⁵ Unfortunately, their first son lived only a few months.⁴⁶ Ellen passed away in January 1970;⁴⁷ Wilfred died in the fall of 1971.⁴⁸

Frederick Rupert, known as Fred, was the fourth brother to serve, joining the merchant navy.⁴⁹ Fred married Emma Davey in the summer of 1921.⁵⁰ They had one son and two daughters: Ronald (b. 1932),⁵¹ Jean (b. 1937)⁵² and Audrey (b. 1938).⁵³ Fred died on 8 September 1971;⁵⁴ Emma passed away in 1986.⁵⁵

Ernest's only sister, **Annie May**, married Walter Gale, who also worked in Hull's shipyards,⁵⁶ in October 1932.⁵⁷ They had two sons: Walter (b. 1933)⁵⁸ and Kenneth (b. 1945).⁵⁹ Walter Sr. died on 19 September 1964.⁶⁰ Annie May survived her husband by almost 23 years, passing away at the end of May 1987.⁶¹ She was buried with her husband in Eastern Cemetery, Kingston upon Hull. In addition to inscribing her name and particulars on Walter's headstone, the family added the single word, "Reunited."⁶²

The youngest of the Filby children, **Stanley**, never married. Unlike some of his family, Stanley seems to have kept his feet firmly planted on dry land, working as an agricultural stockman.⁶³ In 1939 he was living with his parents at 203 Greenwood Avenue, Kingston upon Hull.⁶⁴ He passed away in the nearby town of Beverley in the summer of 1987.⁶⁵



Figure 6: Grave marker for Driver Ernest Filby

¹ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 17 March 2023), entry for Filby, E., Service No: L/15775

² "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 17 March 2023), entry for Ernest Filby, Registration place: Hull, Yorkshire East Riding, England, Volume: 9d, Page: 279

³ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 17 March 2023), entry for William Filby, Registration district: Sculcoates, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 9d, Page: 281

⁴ "St. Paul's Church, Sculcoates, Hull," *Church of England* (www.achurchnearyou.com: accessed 17 March 2023)

⁵ "England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538–1975," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 17 March 2023), entry for Priscilla Pickering, FHL film number: 1657109, Reference ID: p 109

⁶ "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 17 March 2023), entry for William Filby, Registration district: Hull, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 18, Piece: 3938, Folio: 27, Page: 7

⁷ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 17 March 2023), entry for William Filby, Registration district: Sculcoates, Sub-registration district: Drypool, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 33, Piece: 4487, Folio: 37, Page: 22, Household schedule number: 150

⁸ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 17 March 2023), entry for William Filby, Registration district number: 521, Sub-registration district: Drypool, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 09, Piece: 28666

⁹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 17 March 2023), entry for Francis Filby, Registration place: Hull, Yorkshire East Riding, England, Volume: 9d, Page: 243

¹⁰ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 17 March 2023), entry for George William Filby, Registration place: Hull, Yorkshire East Riding, England, Volume: 9d, Page: 296

¹¹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 17 March 2023), entry for James Harold Filby, Registration place: Sculcoates, Yorkshire East Riding, England, Volume: 9d, Page: 249

¹² "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 17 March 2023), entry for Wilfred Filby, Registration place: Sculcoates, Yorkshire East Riding, England, Volume: 9d, Page: 204

¹³ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 17 March 2023), entry for Fred (*sic*) Rupert Filby, Registration place: Sculcoates, Yorkshire East Riding, England, Volume: 9d, Page: 218

¹⁴ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 17 March 2023), entry for Annie May Filby, Registration place: Sculcoates, Yorkshire East Riding, England, Volume: 9d, Page: 181

¹⁵ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 17 March 2023), entry for Stanley Filby, Registration place: Sculcoates, Yorkshire East Riding, England, Volume: 9d, Page: 198

¹⁶ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 18 March 2023), entry for William Filby, Registration district number: 521, Sub-registration district: Drypool, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 09, Piece: 28666

¹⁷ "(WWI) Filby Ernest Driver Tree," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 18 March 2023), entry for Ernest Filby

¹⁸ Based on "War Gratuity Calculator" (<https://wargratiuity.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/gratuity-calculator/>: accessed 18 March 2023)

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- ¹⁹ "The Royal Artillery in the First World War," *The Long, Long Trail* (www.longlongtrail.co.uk: accessed 20 March 2023)
- ²⁰ "War Diary, 161 Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, January 1916–October 1919," *The National Archives* (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk: accessed 18 March 2023). Unless otherwise specified, all information about the experience of the 161 Brigade, RFA, comes from this source.
- ²¹ "British artillery bombardment before the infantry attack on the Somme," *The Long, Long Trail* (www.longlongtrail.co.uk: accessed 20 March 2023)
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ "De Panne," *Wikipedia* (www.wikipedia.org: accessed 20 March 2023)
- ²⁴ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 15 March 2023), entry for Filby, E. Note that there are two entries by the Chaplain as regards Driver E. Filby: the first, #260, describes his admittance and his injuries; the second, #262, notes when he died and where he was buried.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ "UK, WWI Service Medal and Award Rolls, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 20 March 2023), entry for Ernest Filby
- ²⁷ "England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 21 March 2023), entry for William Filby
- ²⁸ "UK and Ireland, Find A Grave™ Index, 1300s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 21 March 2023), entry for Priscilla Filby
- ²⁹ "UK and Ireland, Find A Grave™ Index, 1300s–Current," *Ancestry*, entry for William Filby
- ³⁰ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 21 March 2023), entry for Francis Filby, Registration district: Sculcoates, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 9d, Page: 302
- ³¹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 21 March 2023), entry for Beatrice Filby, Registration place: Sculcoates, Yorkshire East Riding, England, Volume: 9d, Page: 213
- ³² "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 21 March 2023), entry for Frank Filby, Registration district: Sculcoates, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 9d, Page: 182
- ³³ "UK and Ireland, Find A Grave™ Index, 1300s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 21 March 2023), entry for Francis Filby
- ³⁴ "UK and Ireland, Find A Grave™ Index, 1300s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 21 March 2023), entry for Ethel Filby
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ "UK, WWI Service Medal and Award Rolls, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 21 March 2023), entry for George William Filby
- ³⁷ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 21 March 2023), entry for Annie Ockleton, Registration district: Sculcoates, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 9d, Page: 254
- ³⁸ "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 21 March 2023), entry for George W. Filby, Enumeration district: Jatc, Borough: Kingston upon Hull; Registration district: 522-4
- ³⁹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 21 March 2023), entry for George W. Filby, Registration district: Hull, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 2a, Page: 323
- ⁴⁰ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 21 March 2023), entry for Annie Filby, Registration district: Hull, Inferred county: Humberside, Register number: D40A, District and subdistrict: 5502D, Entry number: 125

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- 41 "UK, Royal Navy Registers of Seamen's Services, 1848–1939," (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 March 2023), entry for Wilfred Filby, Service Number: M22495
- 42 "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 March 2023), entry for Wilfred Filby, Registration district: Sculcoates, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 9d, Page: 480
- 43 "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 March 2023), entry for Wilfred Filby, Registration district: Sculcoates, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 9d, Page: 338
- 44 "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 March 2023), entry for Dennis Filby, Registration district: Sculcoates, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 9d, Page: 342
- 45 "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 March 2023), entry for Roy Filby, Registration district: Sculcoates, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 9d, Page: 335
- 46 "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 March 2023), entry for Wilfred Filby, Registration district: Sculcoates, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 9d, Page: 158
- 47 "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 March 2023), entry for Ellen Filby, Registration district: Hull, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 2a, Page: 666
- 48 "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 March 2023), entry for Wilfred Filby, Registration district: Holderness, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 2a, Page: 200
- 49 "UK, Campaign Medals Awarded to World War I Merchant Seamen, 1914–1925," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 March 2023), entry for Fredrick Filby
- 50 "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 March 2023), entry for Fred Filby, Registration district: Sculcoates, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 9d, Page: 521
- 51 "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 March 2023), entry for Ronald Filby, Registration district: Sculcoates, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 9d, Page: 255
- 52 "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 March 2023), entry for Jean Filby, Registration district: Sculcoates, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 9d, Page: 310
- 53 "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 March 2023), entry for Audrey Filby, Registration district: Hull, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 9d, Page: 308
- 54 "England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 March 2023), entry for Frederick Rupert Filby
- 55 "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 March 2023), entry for Emma Filby, Registration district: Beverley, Inferred county: Humberside, Volume: 7, Page: 129
- 56 "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 21 March 2023), entry for Walter Gale, Enumeration district: Jata, Borough: Kingston upon Hull; Registration district: 522/4
- 57 "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 March 2023), entry for Annie M Filby, Registration district: Sculcoates, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 9d, Page: 422
- 58 "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 29 March 2023), entry for Walter W Gale, Registration district: Sculcoates, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 9d, Page: 159

⁵⁹ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2007,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 29 March 2023), entry for Kenneth Gale, Registration district: Hull, Inferred county: Yorkshire East Riding, Volume: 9d, Page: 392

⁶⁰ “England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 29 March 2023), entry for Walter Gale

⁶¹ “England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 29 March 2023), entry for Annie May Gale

⁶² “UK and Ireland, Find A Grave™ Index, 1300s–Current,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 29 March 2023), entry for Annie May Gale

⁶³ “1939 England and Wales Register,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 29 March 2023), entry for Stanley Filby, Enumeration district: Jalc, Borough: Kingston upon Hull; Registration district: 522-3

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 29 March 2023), entry for Stanley Filby, Registration district: Beverley, Inferred county: Humberside, Volume: 7, Page: 69