

## WW I Enlisted Men & Women of Whitewater Region Project

### Private William Anderson Ferrier

Sapper William Anderson FERRIER, son of David FERRIER and Jane Amelia CHEAPE, was born on 19 Jan 1893 in Leith, Edinburgh, Scotland. The circumstances have not been discovered but William embarked on his journey to Canada on Apr 29, 1905 with 102 children under the care of the Quarrier's Home for orphaned children. He was 12 at the time. He was later sent from the Quarrier's Home in Brockville to live with and work on the Howison farm near Pembroke, Ontario. He was still living in the household of William Kennedy Howison and his wife Emma Fraser Davis at the time of the 1911 census.<sup>1</sup>

William Ferrier enlisted into the 21st Battalion, Canadian Infantry on Dec 29, 1914 at Kingston, Ontario. He was 21 years, 11 months and listed his occupation as farmer. He was described as 5' 6 1/2" tall and having a fair complexion, grey eyes, and reddish-brown hair. He arrived in England on May 15, 1915 and embarked for France on Sep 14, 1915. The following February, he was transferred to 3rd Tunnelling Company, Canadian Engineers on Feb 7, 1916. Over the three years in the field, he attended health services a number of times for illnesses including influenza, bronchitis, and trench feet.<sup>2</sup>

Sapper William Anderson Ferrier died at age 25 years while performing his duties. The Circumstances of Death Register States:

*"Died (Accidental Injuries)*

*He was working on dugout at Kemmelhof and while engaged at the face at 7 am, Jun 21, 1918 was buried by the breakaway set collapsing. He died before he could be dug out."*<sup>3</sup>

His next of kin was listed as his Uncle William Ferrier in Leith, Scotland, so one would expect that he had some communication with family in his homeland.<sup>3</sup>

He was buried in the nearby Royal West Surrey Cemetery that same day. In early January 1922 his remains were exhumed when that cemetery was emptied and reburied in the Bertencroix Military Cemetery, Fletre, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France.<sup>2,4,5,6</sup>

His sacrifice is also commemorated on the Greenwood Methodist Church Memorial Tablet.<sup>7</sup>

Private Wm. Ferrier, who was one of the Pembroke company of the 21st Battalion, has been killed in action. He had been nine years in this country, having come from Leith, Scotland, and during that time lived at the home of W. K. Howison in Pembroke township. His age was 24 years.

The Perth Courier published a heart wrenching letter addressed to W.K. Howison from Spr. William Ferrier's Captain.<sup>8</sup>

#### SPR. W. A. FERRIER MET DEATH FROM A CAVE-IN

Graphic Story Told By His Captain.

In the Pembroke Observer appears the following tragic story from France tells of the terrible death which came to a young man from this district who went from here with the 21st battalion in the fall of 1914, in the person of Sergt. W. A. Ferrier. The letter was sent to Mr. W. K. Howison, who lives on the Westmeath road a few miles from Pembroke and with whom the young man resided before going overseas.

France, 26/6/18.

W. K. Howison,  
R. R. No. 1, Pembroke.

Dear Sir:

I regret to have to inform you of the death of your nephew, Spr. W. A. Ferrier, belonging to our company. His death occurred yesterday morning between 6 and 7 under peculiar and rather harrowing circumstances. Digging in underground workings, a "cave" occurred and Sapper Ferrier was pinned to the floor by a beam and buried by a large amount of debris. To aggravate matters there was also a large flood of water—the cause of the cave-in.

His comrades worked like desperate men to rescue their chum, for he was greatly loved by all. They worked also in constant danger of another cave that would bury them.

Spr. Ferrier was conscious to the last, and inch by inch the water kept rising. It was a scene of peculiar sorrow, and the strong men worked while weeping bitter tears that they could not reach their pal. At last his voice came low and unquivering, "Well, good-bye, boys, I'm going to leave you, and all was still. After a while the body was recovered and we buried Spr. Ferrier on the hillside nearby, in a lovely country still undesolated by the war. He, too was counted worthy to give his life for the world's liberties. Our unit is erecting a cross over your nephew's grave and his comrades have approached me to get a wreath at their expense.

I am sure that they all, with me, wish to express their deepest sympathy with those who mourn Spr. Ferrier's loss.

Yours sincerely,  
Merton Smith, Capt.

Image 1: Death Notice<sup>9</sup>

Image 2: Letter from Captain<sup>8</sup>

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### Sources:

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3. "Circumstances of Death Registers, First World War." Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. Digital images. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/mass-digitized-archives/circumstances-death-registers/Pages/item.aspx?PageID=54123> go to 857 of 938.
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6. Commonwealth War Graves Commission. "Commonwealth War Graves Commission." Database. <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/273624/w-ferrier/>
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"SPR W. A. Ferrier meets death from a cave-in" The Perth Courier
8. August 9, 1918 (originally published in The Pembroke Observer).
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<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/books/page?page=407&book=1&sort=pageAsc>
11. Find A Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/24366037/w-ferrier>



Image 3: Greenwood  
Memorial Tablet Unveiling<sup>7</sup>