

CHELTENHAM CEMETERY GREAT WAR CROSSES



The Project

Freddie Gick, on behalf of Cheltenham Civic Society, applied for and was awarded a grant of £9,800 from the Heritage Lottery Heritage Fund for the restoration of the crosses, and visits and research carried out by the pupils, to be shown as part of an exhibition at the school and at Cheltenham Civic Society as part of Heritage Open Days 2019. In addition, the grant paid for pupils' research to be published in a booklet, freely available, which was edited by Neela Mann and designed by Art Works Design, Cheltenham.

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INTRODUCTION

Richard Gilpin, Head Teacher, Pittville School

It is a great honour to have been asked to write this introduction to the research booklet for the WW1 Wooden Crosses Project as part of school's *Pittville Remembers Project*. As a historian myself, the First World War has always been of particular interest. I have had the pleasure of visiting the battlefields of the Somme and Ypres with students and I know how these visits make a lasting impression on young people.

It has been tremendous to watch the students develop as historians of the future through this project. I know it has ignited an interest in the Great War and Cheltenham's contribution and an understanding and enjoyment of historical research that will stay with them throughout their lives.

I would like to thank and pay tribute to the work of our history teacher, Hannah Taylor, who has worked tirelessly to bring this project together. The fourteen students who voluntarily took on this research project should be commended for their hard work and dedication revealing unique stories behind each cross.

I would also like to thank local historian, Neela Mann, an expert on WW1 and author of the book *Cheltenham in the Great War* and Freddie Gick, for making this project happen. Freddie Gick initiated the project and was awarded a National Lottery Heritage Fund Grant on behalf of the Cheltenham Civic Society to fund the project. Andrew Booton and Chris Healy of Cheltenham Civic Society have also been a great support during the process. Thanks also go to Sarah Harvey of Art Works Design for pulling it all together in designing the booklet and the exhibition posters.

We hope you find the booklet as fascinating as the students did researching the recipients of the wooden crosses, now renovated and restored - these men from Cheltenham who gave their lives over 100 years ago. The current generation of students have learnt so much from their work on this project and I am very proud that they have made their findings widely available to inform and inspire others of their generation.

March 2019

FOREWORD

Chairman of Cheltenham Civic Society, Lt Col Andrew Booton

*“In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row”*

From *In Flanders Fields* by John McCrae

John McCrae's poem *In Flanders Fields* memorialises the battle in Ypres salient in April 1915 and led to the adoption of the poppy as the flower of remembrance for the British and Commonwealth dead. Indeed, one of our soldiers, Major John Griffith lost his life at Ypres.

The estimated loss of life of 1,100,000 men and women in the service of the British Empire during World War 1 and the grief of the bereaved is unimaginable, not least because of the unprecedented scale and impact. This was compounded by the fact that in mid-1915 the government decided not to repatriate bodies from the battlefields, which caused great controversy.

Of that number who lost their lives, 1,297 men and women were from Cheltenham. It is seventeen of those men (and one from Worcester who appears not to have any connection with Cheltenham) whose original wooden crosses, sent from the battlefields where they had fallen, had been rotting away in Cheltenham cemetery. Four more of the crosses have no names attached. Now, thanks to a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, those crosses have been renovated and preserved. We must ensure that these crosses last as long as possible in memory of these courageous and selfless men of Cheltenham.

Cheltenham Civic Society is very proud of this project. Initiated and managed by Freddie Gick, it is an excellent example of partnership working, from the NLHF's financial support to the research carried out voluntarily by 14 pupils from Pittville School to Cheltenham Borough Council's commitment to provide a permanent, safe home for the crosses.

We can only imagine what these crosses meant to those whose loved ones they commemorate but their survival as part of a significant group is rare and deserving of recognition and preservation. They pay tribute to sons of the town.

On behalf of Cheltenham Civic Society, I thank everyone involved in this project. Their names appear in the Acknowledgements but their real recognition will be in the preserved timber, steel, stone and stories of these crosses. We can assure John McCrae we will keep faith with these men for the final words of McCrae's poem reads:

*“If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.”*

March 2019



THE STORY OF THE WAR GRAVES

What happened to the fallen soldiers of WW1?

It starts with the story of a remarkable man, Fabian Ware – teacher, publicist on educational reform, former Editor of the Morning Post – who ensured that a scheme for recording the location of, marking and registration of battlefield graves was established.

Aged 45 years of age, Ware was too old to fight but offered his services to the Red Cross at the start of the war. He arrived in France on the afternoon of 19th September 1914 and was put in command of a collection of private cars and drivers that made up a Red Cross ‘flying unit’ which followed the army, picking up wounded and stragglers and in some cases, prisoners of war. Ware became increasingly concerned that there didn’t seem to be any way of recording the British soldiers who fell in battle when the army moved on.

During the winter of 1914 and spring of 1915, Ware and his unit searched out graves in France

in fields and gardens, wherever men had fallen. Some were marked with wooden crosses roughly made by the dead men’s comrades out of army ‘soap boxes’ because of the haste in which they had been erected. Eventually Ware’s unit replaced these with well-made crosses and a painted (later a metal) inscription – all paid for by the army.

After official approval of the unit’s work in March 1915, it was named the Graves Registration Commission, attached to the Adjutant-General’s Department and Ware was given the rank of Major. The commission’s work became even more necessary when the government announced repatriation of bodies would be banned from mid-1915 on logistical, health and morale grounds. After this time the only body repatriated was that of ‘The Unknown Warrior’. The bodies, it had been decided, would be buried in cemeteries close to the battlefield. This was highly controversial and bitterly contested by many of the bereaved families who wanted to give their loved ones ‘proper’ burials at home.

Within 18 months of being set up, the commission had registered over 50,000 graves and later became the Directorate of Graves Registration

and Enquiries – the organisation having expanded its responsibilities to cover enquiries from relatives.

Ware established a system of dividing allied-held territory into sectors with units finding and marking British graves and reporting back to headquarters in a chateau at Lillers, which eventually had a staff of 44 people. Other notifications came in from army chaplains, officers’ reports and the information was then recorded onto a register.

On 21st May 1917, a Royal Charter established the Imperial War Graves Commission (now the Commonwealth War Graves Commission) which was also to create cemeteries and memorials to the missing, such as Thiepval and Tyne Cot, and maintain them in perpetuity. Land for the cemeteries was leased from the French and Belgium governments. Ware intended that the soldiers should be reburied in permanent cemeteries with proper headstones and the commission agreed that crosses already on the graves should be preserved and that the original grave markers be offered to the soldiers’ families. The remarkable story of wooden trench crosses returned by Cheltenham families can be read on pages 40-41.

Ware’s story didn’t end in 1918. This was his life time’s work. After the war Ware brought together well-known people to design the headstones, the inscriptions (many of which have been researched by the pupils), the memorials, the gardens, the ‘sword of sacrifice’ memorial (there is one in Cheltenham cemetery) – people such as Rudyard Kipling (poet and author), Herbert Baker and Edwin Lutyens (architects), Sir Frederick Kenyon (Director of the British Museum), Arthur Hill (Assistant Director of Kew Gardens) and Gertrude Jekyll who advised on planting. One of the two guiding principals agreed was that in the treatment of the dead and the design of the cemeteries, all should be treated equally, no matter what their rank in life or in the forces, or their colour or creed.

By 1918, 587,000 graves had been identified and 559,000 casualties registered as having no known grave. Over ten years 2,400 cemeteries were constructed in France and Belgium.

Major General Sir Fabian Ware died in 1949. He is buried, with a Commonwealth War Graves headstone, in Amberley churchyard, Gloucestershire. There are memorials to him in Gloucester Cathedral and St. George’s Chapel (the Warrior’s Chapel), Westminster Abbey.

THE PUPILS AND THE PROJECT

Hannah Taylor, History KS3 Lead at Pittville School

Lead Teacher for the *Pittville Remembers Project*.

For over a year during 2018-19 a dedicated group of KS3 pupils and I have been involved in the Pittville Remembers Project to follow the restoration of the WW1 wooden trench crosses in Cheltenham cemetery and to research the soldiers for whom the crosses were erected. Initially the school was approached by Freddie Gick of Cheltenham Civic Society in the latter part of 2016 suggesting the research project be taken up by Pittville School pupils. We were immediately enraptured by the potential it offered to our historians and pupils who wished to be involved. Those interested were asked to write a letter of application. Initially we were looking for 12 researchers but the 14 applications were so good that I was obliged to accept them all – and so our team was created.

This project has offered the pupils something,

as a teacher, one can often only dream of; the chance to delve into what is contained in real, original, historical documents, to explore the lives of (once) living, breathing Cheltonians. I think perhaps at first the pupils felt a little overwhelmed by the task ahead of them, but with some guidance they were soon readily reading trench diaries, trawling through the newspaper archives and avidly examining the 1901 and 1911 censuses to discover details of the soldiers' lives and where in Cheltenham the families lived. Some were even lucky enough to view some of the documents in person at the National Archives in Kew. During group research sessions here at school, there was many an excited moment when we realised that a soldier lived near to school, or near to somewhere they were in some way familiar with. It was exciting to watch their fascination at the realisation that sometimes one document could open a whole new line of interesting research.

Indeed, several other wonderful secrets were uncovered by our dedicated students; we were lucky enough to discover a relative of **Private Regan**, whom could pass on a treasure trove of detailed research she had already completed. The lucky recipient was already excited to be

researching Private Regan as they share a family name, and was understandably delighted to receive the package of documents. The pupil researching **Lieutenant Clarke**, our only soldier not to hail from Cheltenham, was extremely excited to discover not just the name of the German Flying Ace responsible for his demise, but also the German's picture. There was many a moment of genuine wonder, when the images and stories of these men were brought back to life by students who grew to genuinely care for the men they were researching.

Beyond the research, the pupils were also lucky enough to receive two expert talks. The first, by Stephen Umpleby who completed the restoration of the crosses. This gave them an insight into how and why restoration work is carried out. It also gave the students their first chance to handle a selection of the original crosses. It proved to be a spine tingling and emotional moment for all of us.

The second talk was by local historian Neela Mann, who came to talk to the students about the extensive research she has undertaken on Cheltenham during the First World War whilst writing her book *Cheltenham in the Great War*

and the history of Cheltenham boys rushing to enlist and eventually how the crosses for some of them came to find their way back to Cheltenham. They were enraptured; their soldiers were put sharply into the context of a wider picture and then the researchers saw how much their work was adding to the rich fabric of the history of the town.

I could not be more proud of what the pupils have achieved and the stories they have created. They have worked incredibly hard – some of them whilst also studying towards their GCSEs. Although we all see this as a work in progress, what they have discovered is going a long way towards giving back these men their stories and their recognition in their home town. In an educational climate that can be somewhat focused on exams and acquiring knowledge, we have been able to give these students valuable skills that they can call upon in the future. More importantly, we have boosted their interest in local history and allowed them to tangibly become part of that history themselves which will now be shared with a wider audience outside of the school through the website <http://cheltenhamremembers.org.uk>.

CONSERVATION OF WOODEN CROSSES

Report by Stephen Umpleby ACR

Objects Conservator, Artefacts
Conservation Services

The first stage of the project to conserve the WW1 field crosses in Cheltenham cemetery was to assess the condition and stability of the individual crosses and to establish the causes of deterioration to be able to develop a proposal or methodology for their conservation treatment.

Condition assessments of the 22 individual crosses and one other cross were carried out at Cheltenham cemetery on 3rd May 2017. The majority of the crosses were seen to be suffering from similar forms of deterioration (environmental, biological and physical damage), having been exposed to the elements outside in the cemetery for a prolonged period of time, with damage including wood rot, insect damage to the wood, mould, biological growth and corrosion of metal elements.



After approval of the treatment proposals the crosses were removed from the cemetery for conservation treatment off-site.

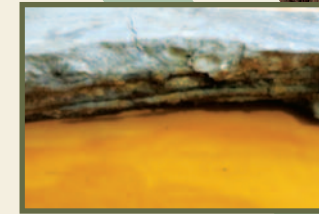
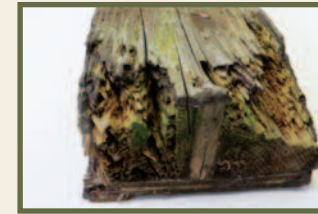
The Treatment

Although many of the crosses displayed similar damage and deterioration, each cross was treated on a case-by-case basis, each having individual issues and problems that needed to be addressed through treatment.

Conservation treatment was carried out through the following stages:

Drying out

The crosses were allowed to slowly air dry to reduce the moisture content in wood to arrest wet rot, to avoid dimensional changes in the wood from rapid drying and minimise further potential damage of the wood prior to further treatment (consolidation, repair and fills).



Cleaning

Surfaces of the crosses were cleaned to remove surface dirt, biological growth and mould. Surfaces were dry cleaned to remove/reduce loose dirt, bird dirt, biological growth/staining, particulate matter and loose rotten wood. Surfaces were further wet cleaned to remove ingrained surface dirt and algae. Excess paint (brown wood preservative paint) was removed from the surfaces of stamped metal plates, where the paint had reduced the legibility of the inscriptions, with solvents and cleaned surfaces rinsed.

The Results

Following conservation treatment, the crosses were packed and wrapped and returned to Cheltenham cemetery in time for the Centenary of Armistice Day in 2018 and a Dedication Service and for their future re-display.



Private
HENRY RUDOLPH ARUNDELL

1/4th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment

DIED: 15th April 1917

AGED: 34 years old

Died of wounds in No 2 Base Hospital,
 Le Havre, France



Henry Arundell was born in 1883 in Cheltenham to William and Jane Arundell. He grew up in Clare Place, off Bath Road where he lived with his widowed father, who was a Mineral Water Salesman. His mother died when he was seven years old. His sister Ellen was a Housemaid and his two brothers, Albert and Sidney, worked for a Greengrocer and Butcher respectively.

In 1901 Henry had been working as a Tailor's Porter but by 1911 he had married Mary Jane from Monmouthshire and moved to Newport where he was then working as a Hotel Porter. He enlisted at Bristol and was drafted to France with the 1/4th Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment.



Henry was wounded during the battle in the Somme Sector near Lempire. He had been evacuated to the No 2 Base Hospital at Le Havre but died on 15th April 1917, leaving a widow and two daughters, Vera May and Kathleen who lived at 1 Victoria Road, Bristol. He is buried in the St. Marie Cemetery at Le Havre and the inscription on his gravestone reads "*They Will Be Found*".

He is commemorated on the Cheltenham war memorial as well as the St. Luke's Church Roll of Honour, where his name is the first engraved name on the left hand column. In 1945, Henry's father's address is given as 27 Upper Norwood Street. It is not known why he didn't claim the cross which is now in the cemetery.

2nd Lieutenant

CHARLES WALLACE BOYCE

1/4th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment
Attached to 61st Coy. Machine Gun Corps

DIED: 24th October 1918

AGED: 31 years old

Killed In Action during
the Battle of the Selle, France



Charles Boyce was born in Shepherd's Bush, Middlesex in 1887. His mother died when he was 11 years old and his father, William, was a manufacturer of saddles. The family, including Charles's two sisters Hilda and Isa, lived in Ebenezer Villa, 11 Whitecross Square, Cheltenham.

Jessamine May Chandler, a Milliner of Ashley Villas, Shurdington Road and Charles married at St. Philip and St. James Church on 22nd November 1915. At the time of his marriage, Charles was an Assistant Land Valuer for the Government and enlisted in 1916.

For nine years Charles was the Secretary of the Cheltenham YMCA, following his brother-in-law.

After serving in the ranks in France for 12 months, Charles was given a commission on 27th November 1917 as 2nd Lieutenant in the 61st Machine Gun Corps. He was Mentioned In Despatches.

Having been killed in action at the Battle of the Selle, Pas-de-Calais, northern France, Charles is buried in the Crucifix Cemetery, Vendegies-sur-Ecaillon. He is commemorated on the Cheltenham war memorial, St. Paul's Church war memorial and also St. Philip's Church war memorial.



Lieutenant
**FRANCIS CHARLES
ERLIN CLARKE**

Royal Flying Corps

DIED: 11th October 1917

AGED: 21 years old

Died of wounds Arras, France



Francis Clarke is the only person, who, after extensive research, cannot be found to have a connection with Cheltenham but whose cross is in the cemetery.

Known as 'Tommy', he was born on 30th December 1895 in Worcester to Charles, a Solicitor and Violet who was born in Hobart, Tasmania. The family lived at 6 Lark Hill, Worcester. Francis was a day boy at The King's School, Worcester, where his father was Clerk to the Governors. Having left school intending to join the Navy, Francis decided instead to attend Marlborough College and from there went to Sandhurst.

Francis received a commission in the Worcestershire Regiment on 16th December 1914 and served in Arras, France from 15th June 1915 until July 1916 when he was invalided home. He was attached to the 5th Squadron, Royal Flying Corps from October 1916.

On a cloudy day in the early morning of 11th October 1917, Francis was piloting an RE8 on a patrol of the front line, when he was attacked by four or five enemy scout machines. A letter to his parents states:

"I don't think that, but for your son's bravery and grit in sticking it to the last, his observer would have been killed outright. As it was, a bad landing was made, and the machine crashed to the ground. It must have been humanly guided or there would have been practically nothing left."

Sadly, Francis died soon after landing at 9.45am and his observer died the next day.

It is known that Francis received wounds in aerial combat as the 16th victim of 36 aerial victories from Julius Buckler, a German ace. On the same day Julius's 17th victim was a Sopwith Camel at 5.50pm at Armentières. Julius survived both world wars despite numerous serious injuries.

Francis is buried at Duisans British cemetery, Etrun, Pas-de-Calais and the inscription on his headstone reads *"Those who die so gloriously live everlastingly"*. He is commemorated on five memorials in Worcester. Francis's war medals sold for £920, auctioned by Dix Noonan Webb in 2002.

2nd Lieutenant

HUBERT WILLIAM CORKE

10th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment
Trench Mortar Section

DIED: 19th April 1916

AGED: 22 years old

Killed In Action at Hulloch



Born on 1st November 1893 in Bradenstoke, Wiltshire, Hubert was the eldest son of the three children of Rev. Hubert Alfred and Louisa Alice Corke. His father became Vicar of Holy Apostles Church, and the family lived in the vicarage at Hales Road, Cheltenham and latterly at Swindon Rectory. There is a plaque to Hubert in St. Lawrence Church, Swindon village.

Hubert was educated at Christ's Hospital School, London and at Cheltenham Grammar School and studied at Faraday House, an Electrical Engineering College in London. He had signed on for a four year course and spent his second year working for Fielding and Platt, Atlas Works, Gloucester. However, before starting his third year, war was declared and he suspended his course.

Hubert initially enlisted in the Public Schools Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment in September 1914 and received a commission in December 1914 in the Gloucestershire Regiment. Following training in Cheltenham whilst temporarily attached to the 11th (Service) Battalion of the Regiment, Hubert rejoined his unit and crossed to France on

16th October 1915. The 10th Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment had suffered heavy losses at the Battle of Loos which saw the deaths of many Cheltenham men.

From February 1916 Hubert was attached to the Trench Mortar Section of 'C' Company and was killed in action at Hulloch, France whilst directing the line of mortar fire in the trenches, south of Loos. A fellow officer, who himself was later killed, wrote to Hubert's parents "*Never was an officer more willing or ready to do his duty thus you have lost the noblest and most upright of your sons, I have lost the very best of pals and the regiment the best of officers.*"

In Cheltenham, Hubert is commemorated on the Cheltenham war memorial, at Pates Grammar School and in Holy Apostles Church.

Private
SIDNEY LEONARD DEAN

1st Battalion Dorsetshire Regiment

DIED: 27th August 1918

AGED: 21 years old

Killed In Action after the Battle of Albert



Sidney Dean was born in Cheltenham in 1897 to William, a Fish Hawker, and his wife Alice. He was one of 14 children, seven of whom were boys and all of whom served during the war. By the age of 14 years, after leaving St. John's School, Sidney was an Errand Boy but later worked at The Hippodrome Theatre and Music Hall. The family lived at 32 Fairview Road.

Aged 19 years, Sidney got himself into some bother with the police, having been charged with the theft of two bicycles. The newspaper report states "*He seems to have no prejudices of politic or sex, his thefts being from both the Liberal and Conservative Clubs and the bicycles gentleman's and lady's.*"



A few months later Sidney enlisted at Bristol, probably in the Gloucestershire Regiment and was transferred to the Dorsetshire Regiment. He was killed just after the Battle of Albert in the last weeks of the war in what became known as the Hundred Days Offensive, which ultimately led to the end of the war.

He is buried at Assevillers New British Cemetery, the Somme. The words on his headstone, chosen by his mother, read "*Thy Will Be Done*". In Cheltenham he is commemorated on the Cheltenham war memorial and in Holy Trinity Church.

Major
LIONEL GOODEVE

6th (Service) Battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers

DIED: 23rd August 1915

AGED: 33 years old

Killed In Action in France



Lionel Goodeve was born at Hampnett Rectory, the home of his mother's parents on 5th September 1881. He was the youngest son of five children of George and Emmeline Goodeve. On his war records Lionel's address is given as 'Hawksworth', 26 Albert Road, Pittville.

Lionel was educated at Cheltenham College and Sandhurst after which he excelled as a career soldier serving in Allahabad, South Africa, Burma, the Andaman Islands and India. In 1902 he was awarded the Queen's Medal with three clasps. In February 1913 he became a Captain with the 1st Battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers.

At the outbreak of war Lionel was detailed to assist with the raising of new battalions for the regiment and consequently was prevented from going to war straight away. On being promoted to Major in April 1915 Lionel was posted to the 6th (Service) Battalion which had been raised at Ayr in 1914, landing in France in May 1915.

Lionel was killed in action in August 1915 – the date being between 23rd-26th August. His death was caused by being shot through the heart whilst superintending a working party in No Man's Land. His commanding officer described him as "...a good sportsman and a first-class soldier."

He is buried at Vermelles British Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais. The beautiful inscription on his headstone reads "Until the day break and the shadows flee away." Here in Cheltenham he is commemorated on the Cheltenham war memorial, in All Saints Church and on the Cheltenham College Roll of Honour.



Major
JOHN GWYNNE GRIFFITH

32nd Lancers (Indian Army)

DIED: 24th May 1915

AGED: 41 years old

Killed In Action

Battle of Bellewaarde, Belgium



John Gwynne Griffith was born in Taraghur, India on 23rd June 1874 to Lt-Col John Gilbert Griffith of the Indian Staff Corps and his wife Fanny Augusta. When the family moved to Cheltenham they were living at Fairfield House, Leckhampton

John was educated at Stubbington House School and Dulwich College. He married Florence Ethel Baker at St. Philip and St. James' Church, on 15th June 1889. The couple lived at 29 Park Place, Cheltenham. In his will he left all his property to his wife including the estate of 'Hodges Pen' in Jamaica, West Indies.

John was a professional soldier who had an illustrious career. His military career began in 1893 when he joined the 3rd (Militia) Battalion of the South Wales Borderers. During his military work he was on plague duty in India; officiating Inspector Officer with the Imperial Service Cavalry and Military Attaché in Bombay. Selected as one of eight senior subalterns, John took part in operations in South Africa, in the Transvaal and Orange River County.

In 1911 he was sent to Australia for two years as Director of Military Training. Whilst home on leave war was declared and John joined the 7th Cavalry, becoming Brigade Major of the 9th Cavalry. He embarked for France on 20th October 1914.

On 24th May 1915, at the Battle of Bellewaarde, south east of Ypres, he was killed instantly whilst giving orders to his brigade. Lord French mentioned him in despatches a few days later for gallant and distinguished service in the field. General Greenly wrote of him "*He was the sort of English gentleman who has made the Empire what it is.*"

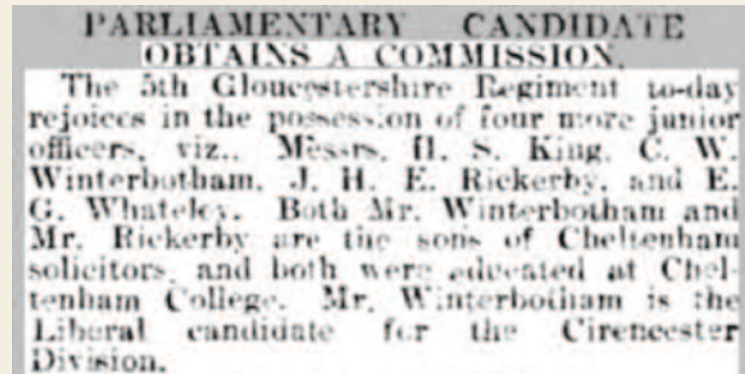
He is buried at Ypres Town Cemetery, Menin Road and commemorated in Cheltenham on the Cheltenham war memorial and on his parent's grave in St. Peters, Leckhampton.

THREE CHELTENHAM SOLICITORS' SONS

Cyril Winterbotham and Kenneth Gurney lived next door to each other in Wellington Square Cheltenham and were boyhood friends. Both of them were born in 1887 and both read law at Oxford colleges and practised law in London after graduation.

John Rickerby was some eight years younger than Cyril Winterbotham but attended Cheltenham College as did Cyril. However, the families must have known each other as Cyril Winterbotham was one of the witnesses who signed the marriage certificate in 1912 of Adelaide Helen Rickerby – John Rickerby's aunt. Adelaide, who lived with John's family at 'Hafod', Shurdington Road, married Frederick Welch who lived at Chargrove Lawn, the next house to 'Hafod'. Frederick and Cyril were the same age but Adelaide was 17 years older.

Cyril Winterbotham and John Rickerby received their commissions into the 5th Gloucestershire Regiment at the same time, which were reported together in the *Gloucestershire Echo* 26th September 1914.



CYRIL WINTERBOTHAM'S LAST LETTER TO HIS MOTHER

(Extract courtesy of The Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum)

24th August 1916 France

"Percy (Cyril's older brother) and myself are still alive and kicking. Life is a bit strenuous but to everything there is an end some time... I picture you back in Cheltenham which must be very hot... all day and night guns and the drone and thud of shells... I hope this is our final appearance in this very unpleasant form of scrapping."

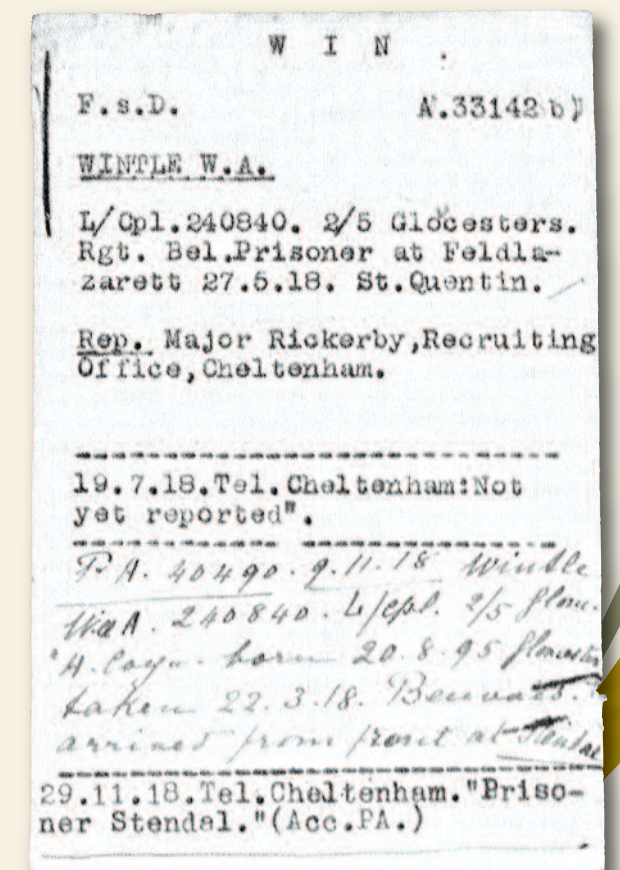
RICKERBY FAMILY STORY

As John Rickerby had been reported wounded and missing and his body had not been found, Major Rickerby wrote to *The Times* on 12th July 1918, asking friends of Prisoners of War if they might have any information regarding his son.

John Rickerby's Orderly, Lance Corporal William Wintle, was with John on the battlefield when he was wounded. The story is that John inscribed a bible with a message to his father and handed that to Wintle. William Arthur Wintle was a Solicitor's Clerk from Gloucester.

Wintle tried to recover John's body from the battlefield but in doing so was taken as a Prisoner of War by the Germans and sent to Stendal POW Camp in Germany. Hence, Major Rickerby didn't hear of the circumstances of his son's death, or receive the bible, until after the war when Wintle was released.

John's death was officially reported by his father in *The Times*, published on 12th May 1919, for, when Wintle returned to Cheltenham, he presented the bible to Major Rickerby. However, the Major felt that it was appropriate for that bible to be held by the Wintle family and it is still in their possession.



2nd Lieutenant

KENNETH GURNEY

2/5th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment

DIED: 17th December 1917

AGED: 30 years old

Died of wounds as a Prisoner of War
in a German hospital



Kenneth Gurney was born in 1887 to Walter Gurney, a Solicitor and Emily Constance Gurney. His parents lived at 11 Wellington Square in a house next door to the parents of Cyril Winterbotham whose cross is also in Cheltenham cemetery. Kenneth and Cyril's fathers were partners in the firm of Winterbotham Gurney and Co in Rodney Road, Cheltenham.

Kenneth was educated at Northaw Place School (where Clement Attlee had been a pupil), Potters Bar, Rugby School and Oriel College, Oxford where he graduated in law. He worked for Druce and Attlee, Solicitors in London. Blanche Lillian Brown (also from Cheltenham) became his wife on 24th August 1915 at the parish church of St. Pancras, London. Sadly, Blanche died on 28th October 1917.

**YOUR KING AND COUNTRY
NEED YOU.**

A CALL TO ARMS.

An addition of 100,000 men to His Majesty's Regular Army is immediately necessary in the present grave National Emergency.

Lord Kitchener is confident that this appeal will be at once responded to by all those who have the safety of our Empire at heart.

TERMS OF SERVICE.

General Service for a period of three years or until the war is concluded.

Age of Enlistment between 19 and 30.

Having joined the Artists Rifles (28th London Regiment) Officer Training Corps, Kenneth was granted a commission in the 2/5th (Territorial) Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment in December 1916. He saw fighting at Arras, Ypres and Poperinghe.

On 2nd December 1917 he was fighting on the Arras front, defending trenches at La Vacquerie, when he was shot through the lung and shoulder and left for dead on the battleground. His family received a postcard from him detailing his injuries and explaining that both feet were now frost bitten and that he had been found by German soldiers on 4th December and taken to a German hospital. Sadly, he died as a Prisoner of War on 17th December 1917. It is so sad that his family joyfully received his postcard well after he had died.

Kenneth is buried at Honnechy British Cemetery Nord, Pas-de-Calais. In Cheltenham he is commemorated on the Cheltenham war memorial and on St. Paul's Church war memorial.

Private
CHARLES WILLIAM HARWOOD

1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment

DIED: 4th October 1917

AGED: 23 years old

Killed In Action in
West Vlaanderen, Belgium



Charles Harwood was born in Cheltenham in 1894 to Thomas, a Carpenter, and his wife Sarah. They seemed to be a practical family as in 1911, Thomas was an apprentice to a tailor's outfitter working for Bryant and Sons, Drapers on The Promenade. His older sister was a Dress Maker and his younger sister an apprentice in a millinery show room. The family lived at 29 Lypiatt Street, Tivoli, Cheltenham.

On 25th December 1914, William married Rosalind Beatrice Bellows in St. Mary's Church. He was 20 years old and she was 24 years old.

Charles served in the 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment and was Killed In Action on 4th October 1917 in West Vlaanderen, Belgium during the Battle of Broodseinde when the British second and fifth armies fought against the German fourth army near Ypres. He left his widow Rosalind who never remarried and a two year old son Charles, named after his father.

He is buried in the Hooge Crater Cemetery, West Vlaanderen. The inscription on his headstone simply reads "*Peace, perfect peace*". Charles is commemorated on the Cheltenham war memorial and St. Stephen's Church Roll of Honour.



Private

ARTHUR THOMAS HIRON

1/6th Battalion North Staffordshire
Regiment

DIED: 15th October 1918

AGED: 38 years old

Died of wounds at Le Tréport base hospital



Arthur Hiron was born in Cheltenham in January 1880, one of three sons of Thomas, a Postman and Lucy Hiron. He was baptised on 11th July 1880 at St. Mary's Church, Cheltenham and at this time the family lived at 35 Portland Square. Arthur was a pupil at Holy Trinity School. On 5th October 1901 Arthur married Emily Winter at the parish church in Cirencester.

When he enlisted in Cheltenham on 18th May 1915, Arthur was working at the brewery as a Drayman and he and Emily were living at 4 Melrose Cottages, Rosehill Street, Cheltenham. He joined the Army Service Corps as a driver but was transferred to the 1/6th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment.

On 10th November 1915 Arthur sailed on the S.S. Winifredian arriving in Salonica on 5th December. He was wounded and sent to Malta from where he was invalided home arriving on 5th December 1916. He was hospitalised again in France in August 1918 as the result of the effects of shell gas.

Arthur was severely wounded on 3rd October 1918 within weeks of the end of the war. He died on 15th October 1918 as a result of a haemorrhage, in the No. 2 Canadian Hospital at Le Tréport and is buried in Mont Huon Cemetery at Le Tréport.

In the package of his possessions returned to his wife were the following: a photo, pipe, religious book, match box, metal ring, purse, cap badge, memorial band, wound stripe, tin of ointment and three farthings.

The inscription on his gravestone reads "*I am with you always even to the end*". In Cheltenham cemetery his wife erected a gravestone to him and his parents are buried in the same grave. Arthur is also commemorated on the Cheltenham war memorial, St. Paul's Church war memorial and Holy Apostles Roll of Honour.

Lieutenant
**'REX' REGINALD
ANTHONY LYON**

1/7th Battalion Duke of Wellington's
Regiment

DIED: 13th August 1917

AGED: 27 years old

Killed In Action at Nieuport, Belgium



Reginald (known as 'Rex') Lyon was born in 1890 to Thomas and Margaret Lyon. Rex was the youngest of their 10 children; he had four older brothers. The family lived at 17 Pittville Villas, Cheltenham. Thomas was a Tutor at St. Paul's Teacher's Training College.

Rex was educated at Cheltenham Grammar School before becoming a pupil architect for four years at the local firm of Chatters and Smithson, 17 Regent Street. He married Emily Ann Clark on 6th November 1916 at St. Luke's Church and they then lived with her parents at 73 Naunton Crescent.

Emily and Rex moved to Wakefield, where he took up a post with the local council. He was initially granted a commission in the West Riding Division of the Army Cyclists Corps in Wakefield in November 1915, later transferring to the 1/7th Battalion of the Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment.

Tragically he was killed in action at Nieuport, Belgium on 13th August 1917 during the Third Battle of Ypres. He is buried at Coxyde Military Cemetery, West Vlaanderen, Belgium. The inscription on his stone reads "*Dulce et Decorum Est Pro Patria Mori*" – It is sweet and proper to die for one's country. Here in Cheltenham he is commemorated on the Cheltenham war memorial and the Cheltenham Grammar School Roll of Honour.



Private
ARTHUR GEORGE MASLIN

1/5th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment

DIED: 21st July 1916

AGED: 20 years old

Killed In Action during the battle
at Ovillers-la-Boiselle



Arthur Maslin was the eldest of George and Jessie Maslin's eight children. He was born in 1896 and his father was a Builder's Labourer with the family living at 11 Great Western Terrace.

Prior to the war, Arthur worked for Messrs Pritchards, Hairdressers of 193 High Street, Cheltenham where he had been apprenticed since leaving school. Arthur was a cross country runner, representing his battalion and in peace time a member of Cheltenham and District Harriers.

He joined the 1/5th Battalion (Territorials) of the Gloucestershire Regiment in July 1915 going to the front in the spring of 1916, where his regiment were heavily involved from the outset in the battles of the Somme.



The day he died on 21st July 1916 the Gloucesters were at Ovillers-la-Boiselle. 'C' Company crawled out into the open ready to attack as soon as the artillery barrage lifted, but the Germans dropped a barrage between the trenches a quarter of an hour before the attack was to commence.

Arthur is buried at Pozières British Cemetery, Ovillers-la-Boiselle, France where he is remembered as one of 1,387 casualties. The inscription on his stone reads "*He died the noblest death a man may die fighting for God and liberty*".

In Cheltenham, Arthur is commemorated on the Cheltenham war memorial and on St. Mark's Methodist Chapel Roll of Honour.

THE STORY OF CHELTENHAM'S WOODEN CROSSES

It was a suggestion by an unknown man – 'J.T.J.' – in a letter to the Editor of the *Gloucestershire Echo* of Monday 29th March 1920, that could be said has led to this project 99 years later.

The suggestion by 'J.T.J.' was taken up by Tom Packer, Honorary Secretary of the Cheltenham Remembrance Day Committee, based at 3 Royal Well Terrace. His reply in the newspaper on behalf of the committee three days later considered it a "most commendable idea". Ironically, Mr Packer had been one of the two Cheltenham Army Recruitment Agents who organised the recruiting campaign for Kitchener's Army from the start of WW1 until conscription in 1916.

OUR WOODEN CROSSES.
TO THE EDITOR OF THE "ECHO."
Sir,—The simple wooden crosses, fashioned and erected on the field of battle by their comrades, which marked the first resting-place of our departed heroes in the Great War, are, we know, to find no place in the ordered cemeteries, but the Government has promised to send them to any next-of-kin who shall apply before Sept. 1st. Those—and they must be many—who would love to have one may, like my wife and self, be perplexed as to what they could do with it; and we are wondering if our Cemetery authorities would, on payment of a small fee, sanction their erection along the inside and close up against one of their boundary walls, where they would take up no room, and form a rare and touching reminder of the gallant souls that went over the top. J. T. J.

The idea was put before Cheltenham Borough Council Burial Board Committee who agreed to give space for the wooden crosses in the cemetery and a site was chosen by Tom Packer – the 22 crosses have been here ever since.

By July 1920 circulars had started to be issued to bereaved relatives inviting them to make application for their soldier's cross to the Imperial War Graves Commission. At the Remembrance Day Parade in August 1920 a collection was made for 'Soldier's Corner', as it came to be known, for the laying out of the area for the crosses.

Money collected from the crowd was the equivalent today of around £500.



In April 1924 the Imperial War Graves Commission 'Cross of Sacrifice' was unveiled at the cemetery by Major H.F. Chettle, Director of Records at the commission. At the same time a ceremony of dedication was held for the 90 wooden trench crosses that had been returned so far. Major Chettle stated: "so far as I am aware, this has been done nowhere else in the kingdom..."

the idea is a touching and beautiful thought." The crosses were mounted on ornamental oak rails provided by the Cheltenham Master Builders Association. The cemetery still has 88 Imperial (now called Commonwealth) war graves of servicemen who died in Cheltenham's eight Red Cross V.A.D. hospitals. Of these graves, two are Canadian soldiers and ten are Australian men. The latter are still looked after by the Australian War Graves Commission.

By 1927 there were 200 wooden crosses in place and a year later the number had risen to 230 crosses. The crosses were not reported on after 1928. Sadly, Tom Packer didn't live to see the completion of his work, having died in 1925.

"How can we, how dare we not remember them. They have passed on, but being dead, they live; being silent they speak; and leaving behind them an imperishable memory, they need no other memorial."

Rev. Edgar Neale at Cheltenham cemetery – Remembrance Day 1928

Private
HAROLD EDGAR RALPH

17th Coy. Labour Corps

DIED: 15th April 1918

AGED: 26 years old

Killed In Action in the Amiens area



Harold Ralph was born in Cheltenham on 29th November 1892, the sixth son of ten children of Charles Ralph, a Market Gardener and Ellen Ralph. In 1911 Harold was working with his father in the Market Gardening business at Donegal Villa, Shurdington Road next to The Greenway Lodge.

On 2nd September 1916 Harold married Ethel Dorothy Grist at Christ Church, Cheltenham. His wedding certificate gives us the information that at the time of his wedding his father had died. Harold gave his occupation as a Munitions Worker and his address as 2 Victoria Parade, which is now 130 Gloucester Road in Cheltenham.

Harold enlisted in Cheltenham in the Royal Field Artillery in December 1916 at the age of 23 years. Whilst serving overseas he was wounded three times and transferred to the 6th Labour Company of the Devonshire Regiment and latterly transferred to the 17th Coy. Labour Corps. It is thought that the transfers may be due to his injuries when he was probably medically down graded.

On the 15th April 1918, aged 26 years old, Harold was killed during the German Spring offensive of 1918. He is buried at St. Pierre Cemetery, Amiens, France.

It is very sad that his widow Ethel had not seen her husband since he enlisted, neither had Harold seen his child who was born after he left England.



Private
WILLIAM REGAN

1/3rd Battalion Monmouthshire Regiment

DIED: 22nd May 1915

AGED: 22 years old

Died of wounds at Festagne-Lazarett
Military Hospital for Prisoners of War,
Luttich (Liège), Belgium



William Regan, one of 12 children, was born on 14th June 1893 at Queen Street, St. Paul's Cheltenham to Daniel Regan and Margaret (née Sullivan) and was baptised at St. Gregory's Roman Catholic Church on 16th July 1893. His father worked at the Gas Works on Tewkesbury/Gloucester Road.

After leaving St. Paul's Practising School, Swindon Road, William was working as a Fish Porter in 1911 but left to work in the coalfields of South Wales. It was in Abertillery, Wales that William joined the Territorial Army of 1/3rd Battalion of the Monmouthshire Regiment.

The regiment left for France on 14th February 1915 and was sent straight to the Ypres sector. The main attack started on 22nd April and on the critical day, the 8th May, a tremendous bombardment wiped out the front line of the trenches. The survivors were ordered to withdraw but were swept with machine gun fire.

William was severely wounded on 9th May, being shot through the back and mouth, breaking most of his teeth. He lay in the trench for two days before being captured by the Germans. He wrote to his parents that he had been moved around several hospitals: *"I used to long to be in bed when in the trenches, and now I want to get out... I have only slept one night out of seven. I am in such pain and am very weak."*

On 22nd May 1915 William died of his injuries at Festagne-Lazarett Military Hospital for Prisoners of War, Luttich and his final resting place was at Robermount Cemetery in Liège. The Red Cross in Geneva informed his parents of his death, having been informed by the Chief Doctor at the German Prisoner of War Hospital. He is commemorated on the Cheltenham war memorial, Cheltenham Parish Church Boys School war memorial and St. Paul's Church war memorial.

Captain
**JOHN HAROLD
ELLERSON RICKERBY MC**

2/5th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment

DIED: 22nd March 1918

AGED: 22 years old

Killed In Action at Beauvois, France



John was born in Cheltenham on 15th October 1895. His father was Major Thomas Ellerson Rickerby, Cheltenham's Army Recruiting Officer and a Territorial Officer and his mother was Alice Emily. The family lived at 'Hafod', Shurdington Road.

Major Rickerby, John's father, was a partner in the legal practice of Rickerby & Co at 2 Ormond Place, later moving to 16 Royal Crescent, which had been established in 1796. Today the company continues as Harrison, Clark, Rickerbys – the Cheltenham branch being at Ellenborough House in Wellington Street.

John attended Cheltenham College and had intended to go up to Pembroke College, Cambridge but enlisted and was appointed to a Territorial Force Commission as a 2nd Lieutenant on 26th September 1914 at 18 years of age. He joined the 2/5th Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment when it was formed and was promoted in April 1915 to Lieutenant and 23rd May 1916 as a Temporary Captain at the age of 21 years, being appointed Captain on 17th March 1917.

Thus when John went to France with his unit on 25th May 1916 he was a Captain and

Commander of 'A' Company of the battalion. In July 1916 he was awarded the Military Cross for his part in the action at Aubers Ridge when, during heavy German bombardment of the Duck's Bill Crater, he moved his men from the front line into the crater to protect them from bombardment. The award citation in the *London Gazette* states: "For conspicuous gallantry...when his signallers had all become casualties he went himself under fire to the signal dugout to ask for reinforcements. On his return he beat off another attack by machine-gun fire and then counter-attacked with the bayonet."

John was awarded a second medal – the Italian government's Silver Medal for Valour – on 26th May 1917. Ernest Hemingway was also awarded this medal whilst an ambulance driver in 1918.

The day he died, 22nd March 1918, John's battalion was stationed in the Battle Zone at Holnon Wood, to the west of St Quentin. During that day they were pushed back to incomplete, shallow and meagrely wired trenches at Beauvois. At about 6pm large numbers of Germans were seen advancing from Holnon Wood and moving in attack formation towards Beauvois and, after a short sharp bombardment, assaulted the battalion's positions. It was during this bombardment that John Rickerby was hit by a shell and died of his wounds. As his body was not found he was reported wounded and missing. His body

was subsequently found and he is buried in Savy British Cemetery.

The book *The Story of The 2/5th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment 1914-1918*, by A F Barnes, MC, calls John's death a disaster to the battalion. Barnes write, "He was a type to whom clean life and hard living are part of a deep religion. To these attributes he added a capacity for detail and an instinct for soldiering that made him a leader among others. Possessing a stern sense of duty and full of joy of living, yet completely regardless of death, he was the ideal Company Commander." He was 22 years old.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in *The British Campaign in France and Flanders January to July 1918* writes of the tenacity and determination of the 2/5th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment and John is mentioned by name.

He is commemorated on the Cheltenham war memorial, the St. James' Church, Cheltenham Roll of Honour, the Cheltenham College Roll of Honour and the St. Paul's Church, Shurdington, Roll of Honour.

See page 29 for more information of the death of John Rickerby.

Lance Corporal
LESLIE JAMES SILVESTER

1/5th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment

DIED: 20th May 1915

AGED: 22 years old

Died of wounds in Bailleul Base Hospital



Leslie Silvester was born in Cheltenham, the eldest son of seven children of James Andrew Silvester, who was a Music Seller's Salesman and Mary Anne Silvester. Leslie was an enthusiastic member of the 6th Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment (Territorials) from the age of 14 as a bugler when the family were living in Bristol. When the family moved back to Cheltenham in 1910, Leslie went to work for H.H. Martyn at Sunningend Works. The family lived at 2 St. Clair Villas, Naunton Lane.

In Cheltenham Leslie was a 2nd Lieutenant of the St. Philip's branch of the Church Lads Brigade where he directed the bugle band and for two seasons was Captain of Emmanuel Church Football Club. He was also a keen swimmer, winning prizes and medals for life-saving and long-distance swimming.

Territorial soldiers were intended to be used to defend England but at the beginning of the war the Territorial soldiers were given the opportunity of volunteering for overseas duty. Leslie was one of the first of his battalion in the 1/5th Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment

from Cheltenham to volunteer for service overseas and for this he was given the Imperial Clasp. The battalion was in the front line at Ploegsteert in May 1915 and it was here on 19th May that Leslie was seriously wounded and evacuated to a base hospital at Bailleul but died the next day and is buried at Bailleul Community Cemetery.

Leslie was described in a newspaper report as being a "...fine and promising young man who was extremely popular." A letter he sent to his parents was published in the *Gloucestershire Echo* on 19th May 1915. In it he says "Behind the trenches are several mounds of earth, marked with crosses to commemorate the deaths of some brave English soldiers....The main cemetery is down in the wood. The wood will no doubt be visited by English people when the war is over." Little did Leslie realise that the next day after publication of his letter he too would be joining those brave soldiers and that many would visit the cemetery down in the wood.

Private
ERNEST SMITH

2/5th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment

DIED: 7th April 1917

AGED: 29 years old

Killed In Action at Bihecourt



Ernest Smith was born in Cheltenham in 1887, the only son of William and Fortune Smith, his father was a Butcher. Both his parents were from Radnorshire in Wales. The family lived at Millbrook Terrace, 19 Millbrook Street.

Before the war Ernest worked at Arthur Jack and Co., Watchmakers on The Promenade. He married Esther 'Daisy' Jones on 22nd August 1914, the daughter of a Mason, at Christ Church, Cheltenham. Daisy and Ernest lived at 43 St. George's Street. Daisy was left a widow with a young son at the age of 21 years old.

Ernest enlisted in May 1916 at Bristol and served in the 2/5th Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment. According to the battalion war diaries his battalion was ordered to prepare for an attack and was in the front line on 6th April 1917, moving into position at 11pm for an assault the next day. During the deployment one man was killed and another wounded. Ernest was the man who was killed in action in a wire cutting operation against enemy trenches on 7th April 1917 at Bihecourt, France.

He is buried at Vadencourt British Cemetery, Maissemy, Aisne, France and is mentioned on his parent's grave in Cheltenham cemetery. He is also commemorated on the Cheltenham war memorial, the Charlton Kings war memorial and St. Mary's Church war memorial in Charlton Kings.

GREAT MEETING.
Clarence Lamp.
WEDNESDAY NIGHT.

At which a Resolution expressing—

"The inflexible determination of the people to continue to a victorious end the struggle in the maintenance of those Ideals of Liberty and Justice which are the common and Sacred Cause of the Allies."

ATTEND IN YOUR THOUSANDS

AND SHOW THAT AFTER ONE YEAR OF THE WAR YOU ARE
AS DETERMINED AS EVER TO WAGE IT

UNTIL VICTORY IS OURS!

SPECIAL SPEAKERS.
HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR IN THE CHAIR.

The Splendid **BAND** of the
1st GLOUCESTERSHIRE REGIMENT
will play national music at 7. Meeting at 8.

TO-DAY (Monday) — Promenade Concert
and MARATHON RACE in Athletic
Ground.

TUESDAY: BIRDLIP at 8.
THURSDAY: GOTHERINGTON at 7. BISHOP'S CLEEVE at 8.
FRIDAY: GAS LAMP at 8. NEAR ST. PAUL'S CHURCH at 7.
SATURDAY: NAUNTON at 6.30. LOWER GUITING at 8.
The Band of the Old Braggs and the Detachment of the 11th Glo'sters
will attend all the above Meetings.

Lieutenant
**CYRIL WILLIAM
WINTERBOTHAM**

1/5th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment

DIED: 27th August 1916

AGED: 29 years old

Died Ovillers-la-Boiselle



Cyril Winterbotham was born on 27th February 1887 at the family home Cranley Lodge, Wellington Square, Cheltenham, the youngest son and fifth child of Alderman James Batten Winterbotham and his Australian wife, Eliza Hunter MacLaren Winterbotham. His father was a Solicitor and partner of the Cheltenham law practice – Winterbotham, Gurney and Company – and was prominent in local town and county politics.

After an education at Cheltenham College and Lincoln College Oxford, where he read law, Cyril became a Barrister in London. It was predicted that Cyril would have a brilliant political career and this was started when he was adopted in September 1913 as the Liberal Party's parliamentary candidate for the Cirencester Division.

Cyril was appointed to a Territorial Force Commission as a 2nd Lieutenant on 26th September 1914, having initially enrolled in the Officers' Training Corps at the Inns of Court London. He was posted for active service with the 1/5th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment in March 1915. The men of this

battalion were the first uniformed soldiers to leave Cheltenham the day after war had been declared on 5th August 1914.

The battalion first took over trenches in the front line in the Ploegsteert Wood Sector in April 1915. Cyril was promoted to Lieutenant on 10th June 1915.

On 26th August 1916 the battalion was based in the front line trenches to the north of Ovillers-la-Boiselle and to the south east of Thiepval in the Somme sector. The next day the battalion attacked and captured a Prussian trench near Mouquet Farm, taking a machine gun and over 90 prisoners of the Prussian Guard Regiment. However, the cost was high for on this day not only did Cyril Winterbotham lose his life but in the same trench 2nd Lieutenant Charles Brien, Privates Edward Keen and Ernest King – all four from Cheltenham – were killed. The battalion adjutant, whose job it was to write the report of the battle, was Cyril's brother Percy. He had to report the death of his own brother.

In total in this battle all the officers were either killed or wounded and three quarters of the men didn't survive. It was left to a Cheltenham man, Company Sergeant Major William Tibbles, to take over and lead the remaining men. For this brave action Tibbles received the Military Cross. During the month of August 1916 the battalion lost 54 men, 428 wounded and more than 95 missing in action.

The battalion erected a wooden cross over the trench where Winterbotham, two other Gloucestershire officers and six men died. A pen and ink sketch of the cross was made and sent to Cyril's mother who published it in the *Gloucestershire Echo* on 3rd August 1918. The cross was sent back to Cheltenham in 1925 and was placed in the cemetery until 1945 when Cyril's sister Clara, in her third term as Mayor of Cheltenham, had the cross replaced and asked for a record to be made of all the remaining wooden trench crosses in the cemetery. This cross has been the centre cross of the 22 original crosses for the last 74 years.

Cyril is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial along with others with no known grave; Cheltenham war memorial, Gloucester Cathedral, Cheltenham College, St. Paul's Church and Holy Trinity Church.

Cyril was a minor war poet and it is ironic that his poignant poem *The Cross of Wood*, detailing how a trench cross was as important as any brass medal, was published in the *Cheltenham Chronicle* the day before he died.

A war memorial painting was commissioned by the Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum Committee in 1919, the chairman of which was Councillor Clara Winterbotham, sister of Cyril. It is no surprise that Cyril is at the forefront of the painting as is their brother Percy.

RESEARCH BY PUPILS AT PITTVILLE SCHOOL



Jessica Jeffries researched
Lieutenant CYRIL WILLIAM WINTERBOTHAM

Jonas Whitfield researched
Private SIDNEY LEONARD DEAN

Jabir Rashid researched
Private ARTHUR GEORGE MASLIN

Oscar Reeves researched
2nd Lieutenant KENNETH GURNEY

Kitty Regan researched
Private WILLIAM REGAN

Chase Allen researched
Major JOHN GWYNNE GRIFFITH

Nathan Theyer researched
Lieutenant FRANCIS CHARLES ERLIN CLARKE
and Lieutenant 'REX' REGINALD ANTHONY LYON

Ellie-Mae Sawle researched
Private HENRY RUDOLPH ARUNDELL

Penny Cleevely researched
Private ARTHUR THOMAS HIRON
and Lance Corporal LESLIE JAMES SILVESTER

Lilah Culliford researched Private ERNEST SMITH
and Private CHARLES WILLIAM HARWOOD

Austin Rose researched
Captain JOHN HAROLD ELLERSON RICKERBY MC

Jake Leworthy researched
Private HAROLD EDGAR RALPH

Sam Burge researched
Major LIONEL GOODEVE

Bonnie Hosey researched
2nd Lieutenant HUBERT WILLIAM CORKE

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Members of The Wintle Family

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* C&G refers to *Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucestershire Graphic*

THE CROSS OF WOOD

God be with you and us who go our way
And leave you dead upon the ground you won.
For you at last the long fatigue is done,
The hard march ended. You have rest today.

You were our friends. With you we watched the dawn
Gleam through the rain of the long winter night,
With you we laboured till the morning light
Broke on the village, shell-destroyed and torn.

Not now for you the glorious return
To steep Stroud valleys, to the Severn leas,
By Tewkesbury and Gloucester, or the trees
Of Cheltenham under high Cotswold stern.

Cyril Winterbotham's poem *The Cross of Wood*, which first appeared in *The Fifth Gloucesters Gazette* July 1916 secured his reputation as a minor war poet, having been published posthumously in several anthologies of First World War poetry. This moving poem also appeared in the *Cheltenham Chronicle* the day before Cyril Winterbotham died.

Right: The 'cross of wood' of Cyril Winterbotham and those who fell with him in Cheltenham cemetery.

For you no medals such as others wear
A cross of bronze for those approved brave.
To you is given, above a shallow grave,
The wooden cross that marks you resting there.

Rest you content. More honourable by far
Than all the Orders is the Cross of Wood,
The symbol of self-sacrifice that stood
Bearing the God whose brethren you are.

Cyril Winterbotham
1887-1916

