

**THE TAYLOR FAMILY
WIRKSWORTH CRICKETERS and GREAT WAR SOLDIERS.**

I have been interested in the Taylor family since, over twenty years ago, I first read about their feats on the cricket field in the 1949 History of Wirksworth Cricket Club by Brian Hilditch.

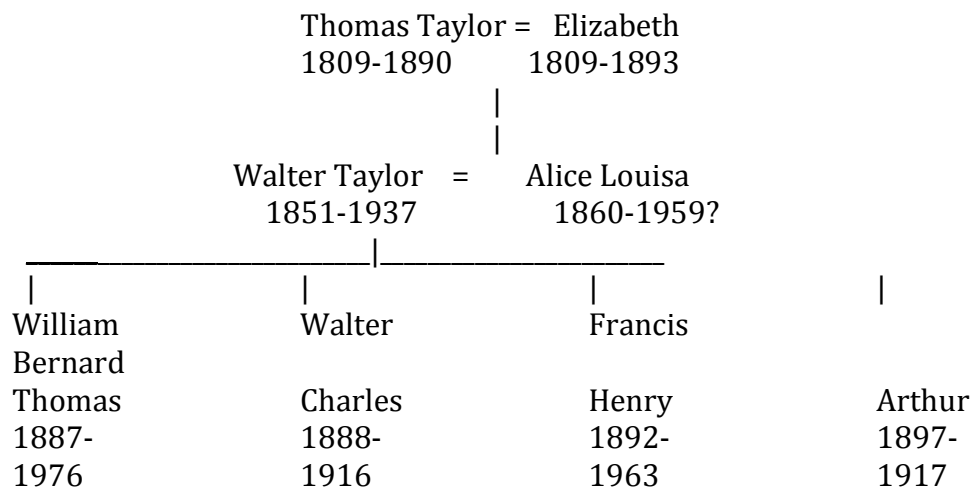
Extract.

'The name Taylor and Wirksworth cricket are synonymous. Mr Walter Taylor was elected a member in 1870 and together with his four sons BA, CW, FH, and WT rendered yeoman service through a period of many years.' There follows a paragraph in affectionate eulogy of 'Old Walter' as a cricketer; a bowler who could 'drop a ball on a sixpence', a batsman with a strong leg hit and a fielder 'first class in the slips'. He had a countryman's eye.

The history then records that *'Bard and Charlie, both grand cricketers, made the supreme sacrifice in the first World War. Their loss was felt not only by the club, but by their many friends and admirers.'*

I realised that of Walter's four sons, two died in service, cut down as young men, while two survived the horrors to play cricket post-war with distinction, but also, surely, bearing many and long-enduring sad thoughts. In the centenary booklet the editor, Brian Hilditch, lists the 26 centuries made by Wirksworth cricketers in the first hundred years; nine of these were made by members of the Taylor family. These notes drafted in 2014 are compiled in tribute. They focus on the family as cricketers. This is a starter and I know there is more to discover – I have not consulted newspaper reports and have had no family contacts. There are some excellent photographs on the Wirksworth Parish Records website.

Let us begin with an abbreviated family tree.



Thomas Taylor (b1809), grandfather to the four boys, lived in Hopton and worked as land agent to the Gell family of Hopton Hall. The Gells were a wealthy and influential local family, the great land owners and lead miners of the Low Peak. Thomas held an important post in the rural community. He lived at Hopton and his youngest son, Walter (b 1851), began his working life by following his father's trade. On the censuses Walter advances from being a land agent's son (1881) to auctioneer /estate agent/ fertiliser manufacturer (1901) and in 1911 he is living at Fern House, a fine Victorian residence on Cromford Road in Wirksworth, registered as a corn merchant.

Clearly Walter not only played cricket very well and taught his sons to excel in the skills of the game, but he inspired all four of them with a remarkable devotion to cricket. Charlie and Bard, who died, were both very good cricketers and the two who survived the Great War, William (Will, b 1885) and Francis (Frank, b 1890) were outstanding club cricketers and good enough batsmen to be chosen for the county team before the war.

Walter was born in Hopton, a country boy with a good eye devoted to hunting and shooting and he became the youthful stalwart of Hopton cricket. The village team played on the tiny, sloping ground, which, though no longer used, is still visible, between the wall of Hopton Hall and the road which leads to Ryder Point. As a young man Walter moved his allegiance to Wirksworth, at the time one of the strongest clubs in the county, and played for many years, famous locally as a formidable competitor.

The family moved from Hopton to Wirksworth, living in Fern House, Cromford Road, where Councillor Chris Whittall now lives.

Walter and his wife Alice had four sons, all of an age to be actively involved in the 1914 war.

William Thomas Taylor (1885-1976), 'Will' secretary of Derbyshire County Cricket Club;

Walter Charles Taylor (1887-1916), always known as Charlie, worked pre-war in Nigeria.

Francis Henry Taylor, (1890-1963), known as Frank, worked pre and postwar as a bank clerk.

Bernard A Taylor, (1897-1917) known as Bard.

Interesting that none was known by his given name and Walter Charles became, even in official records at school and in the army, Charles Walter.

I shall write about each in turn. All four boys were educated at Wirksworth Grammar School, the older ones before the re-organisation in 1908, and I have found information about their activities, both sporting and military, from school magazines. Bard played in the last school cricket match before the war in July 1914 turning out for the Old Boys, in retrospect a sad, end-of-an-era occasion. There are several photos of the Taylors on the Wirksworth Parish website with a notable picture of the three brothers (Charlie was abroad) in a 1914 Wirksworth Amateurs football team with Will as referee.

Will, in 1914, was established happily in his career as cricket administrator at Derbyshire, serving the club he loved until 1960: 51 years, 129 days as Secretary of Derbyshire County Cricket Club, a post we would now call Chief Executive. He was appointed at the age of 23, 'combining the advantages of a good business training with an intimate knowledge of cricket and cricketers'. It is not clear what his 'good business training' was – perhaps he worked for his father; but he was known to the club, having turned out for the county in the years before his appointment. There was a crisis, with the recently appointed secretary moving on unexpectedly, so perhaps Will was only seen as a short term appointment to keep the show on the road. He did so in 1908 and for many years. Will was greatly respected in the world of cricket not only for his efficiency in a demanding job, especially keeping the club alive on a financial shoe string, but as a 'gentleman' with a notable standard of old-fashioned dignity, generosity and courtesy. Derbyshire for most of his time was almost broke and for many years there were volunteers, but virtually no paid staff to support the secretary. He did it all, often travelling to away matches as both scorer and 12th man, and he stayed loyally in post for over fifty years.

Will's life work was interrupted, almost fatally, by the war. Led by WG Grace, the great cricketer, the sporting establishment rallied to the flag, making it clear that cricketers should volunteer and as matter of duty should go rapidly to serve their God and King. County cricket closed down till 1918 and the Wirksworth committee resolved patriotically to suspend their games 'for the duration'. All four Taylors were soon in uniform. Will was speedily involved in the war. In an article recalling memories of his experiences, written in the county year book in 1958, he wrote of his war service with particular reference to cricket.

'I played a lot of Army Cricket and against the great Gilbert Jessop in 1915, when stationed at Whittington Barracks [Lichfield?] we got him out cheaply but he bowled us out with leg spinners.'

'I had two very interesting experiences in France. My battalion was resting after being in the line at Neuve Chapelle for some time when I noticed a cricket match taking place and naturally I had a look at it. A unit of the Royal Engineers had organised the game and I enquired whether they could give us a match, warning them they would have to provide the necessary tackle. They jumped at the offer and I immediately reported to my Commanding Officer who was very interested in the suggestion. I found he played and was very keen to have a game. We won by a few wickets after making a bad start

and he and I knocked off the runs and I became very much a 'blue eyed pet' with him afterwards.'

'We were resting in Bethune prior to going down to the battlefield in July 1916. Again I was able to arrange a match against another unit of the R.E.s. The ground was undulating with water standing in the hollows after heavy rain. Our friends came to the rescue, pumped out the water and the game took place.'

In that article to mark his fiftieth year in office Will wrote of cricket, but said nothing of the daily horrors of four years of war during which he was twice wounded.

I have managed to follow his progress though references in the Wirksworth Grammar School magazine. In the Christmas edition of the magazine in 1916 we read that, *'Captain WT Taylor of the Lancashire Fusiliers has been invalided home with shrapnel wounds'*. We know he returned to active service and the 1918 school magazine reports that *'Capt W and Lt Frank Taylor are both somewhere near Ypres.'* The next magazine reference is that *'Capt W Taylor has been badly wounded.'* I have been told that Will had a wound scar caused by shrapnel which took a piece out of his temporal bone. It was replaced by a stainless steel plate. He had survived a hard war and would lead a long and fulfilled life.

Free at last Will was married to Annie Kathleen Foster on 18th December 1918, wearing his smart captain's uniform; a photograph has survived. He returned to his work at Derbyshire and with his brother played cricket for Wirksworth for many years. He became a much-loved and respected President of the club from 1966 until his death in 1976 at the age of ninety one. Nobody I have talked with has spoken of him with other than affection.

The county year book, in a lengthy obituary, said, *'Few men have done so much for cricket and certainly no other person can ever have achieved as much for Derbyshire as Will Taylor did.'*

Charlie was like his brothers a great games player and no less enthusiastic. In a brief career with the club he scored one of the Taylor centuries, 100 against Cromford, date not recorded. I have no information about Charlie's life before 1909, when he was reported by the grammar school magazine to be in Africa. He was born in 1887, so he would have been at the school from about 1903 to 1903/4. This is before the re-organisation and the publication of a termly school magazine, which is a prime source of these portraits.

In 1909 the magazine reports: *'CW Taylor has gone to Calabar, Southern Nigeria, to take up an important post under the African Association Company, with which H Hindle is also connected.'* Charlie was about 23 and spreading his wings. I assume the 'Company' was a trading organisation like the East India Company.

At Christmas 1910 Charlie is reporting on the rebellion of the King of Benin. 'What a cruel looking old brute he is.' He says nothing about his work in Nigeria, but waxes enthusiastic about his cricket. *'I have had quite a lot of cricket even out here and we have some very fine players, chiefly old College or Varsity men, who are now in government service. I have done fairly well, scoring over 1,100 runs with an average of 65; and I have topped the hundred three times.'*

Whatever the standard of cricket, and public school and Oxbridge cricket was very strong in the golden age pre-war, this is a considerable performance, proudly, but modestly, passed on to his old school. Later we learn that he played tennis, mixed doubles, at Government House. As a gifted and enthusiastic sportsman Charlie from Wirksworth was integrating well with the imperial ruling classes. As far as I can see Charlie is the only Old Boy working abroad; how different from the experience of young people a hundred years later. I am not clear how he came to be employed by the company, but his charm and sporting ability seem to have made him a welcome recruit. Did Hindle recommend him?

He offers to send some 'alligator eggs' for 'curio corner'. This 'corner' was later to be developed by the headmaster as the School Museum and Charlie is thanked for donating 'eggs of a West African crocodile' and in 1912 'a bow and quiver of poisoned arrows from Nigeria'. Charlie showed a great affection for his old school, not just sending letters from abroad, but making these exotic gifts to the museum. Whenever he was visiting, home on leave, he turned out in Old Boys teams, both at football and cricket, including the memorable match when the school had made 111 and Charlie, playing against his brother Bard, saved the OBs by scoring 60 not out to win the match. This energetic twenty six year old, in the prime of his young life, went to war in 1914 and, no doubt, did his best, as he always did.

From the wartime magazines I learn that in 1915 CW Taylor was with the 2nd King Edward's Horse and had been promoted Sergeant. He had been wounded, but there are no details. The regiment, with officers and men recruited as volunteers from the colonies, was raised in 1914 by public subscription, mostly his own money, on the initiative of Sir John Norton Griffiths, known as 'Empire Jack', a wealthy eccentric, who also commanded the regiment. I assume Charlie joined cheerfully to do his duty with his comrades from Nigeria. The regiment was mounted and fought in the early days on horseback as old-fashioned cavalry, a desperately hazardous undertaking against modern firepower.

In July 1916 we read in the magazine: 'The death of Charles W Taylor, who was numbered among the bravest and the best, who have made the supreme sacrifice.'

From the official military website:

Charles Walter Taylor died, killed in action, in France/Flanders on 3rd June 1916. He was a sergeant in the 2nd King Edwards and is buried at Hainant in Belgium.

Of the four brothers Frank Taylor was probably the best cricketer. He made eight centuries for the club and was praised in both the club booklet and in his county obituary for the quality of his play. He had played for Derbyshire in eight matches pre-war without great success, unable to bridge the big gap from being a top club cricketer to becoming a county regular. One odd distinction recorded by the county obituarist was that he was on the field in 1910 when the death of King Edward VII brought the termination of the match against Surrey.

For Wirksworth Cricket Club 'he was one of the mainstays of the batting', both pre and post war.

'He was when thoroughly set, the despair of opposing bowlers, for he treated them all with scant respect. Most of his runs came from beautifully timed cuts and powerful drives.

A player of medium height it was extraordinary the amount of power he could get into his shots. His fielding at cover point can only be described as top grade. He deservedly found a place in the county side.'

The brothers were notable for their loyal support of sport at the grammar school. In most years 1908 to 1914 FH played for the Old Boys team at both cricket and football, often as captain and usually with one of his brothers in the team, on occasion with his father.

I have traced some of his war service.

He is reported in Summer 1915 serving with the Leicestershire Territorials 'at the front', then with promotion in Christmas 1915 to Corporal. He was wounded in an attack on the Hohenzollern Redoubt. Later Frank is on *an officer training course in Oxfordshire* and visited the school as Lt FH Taylor in 1917 (July magazine) *'and showed us various types of British gas masks as used in France and the method of war.'* *In July 1918 Lt Frank Taylor is reported to be somewhere near Ypres.*

And when it was all over Frank returned to his job as a bank clerk in Leicester.

Bard, the youngest of the brothers, was as gifted a games player as his elders. We can trace his record at school through the detailed reports on cricket in the school magazine. His elder brother Charlie teases him in a letter published in *Old Wirksworthians' News* in the magazine, that he had heard of his sporting prowess, but nothing of his scholastic achievement. But on Speech Day in that year Bard won the Junior Latin prize and he appeared from his first year regularly in school plays and in musical performances. I get the impression of a wholehearted, well-liked all-rounder.

Wirksworth Grammar School (WGS) was re-organised, almost re-founded in 1908, when girls were admitted for the first time, and Bard, aged eleven, joined the school in September as one of the first seventy five pupils in the newly built school

building. He appears in the school play at Christmas and makes his precocious debut for the school cricket eleven on June 5th 1909, aged twelve, when he scored 6 and 2.

Full scorecards of matches are recorded. Bard was playing with and against much older boys, though he was a Taylor and brimming with talent, but it is to the credit of WGS that with only forty five boys they turned out a senior cricket eleven in that first year and played eight matches. One remarkable achievement was that in the game against Cavendish School, Matlock, always the weakest of their opponents, Bard, in the absence of the older bowlers, took in the two Cavendish innings 10/32, as Cavendish tumbled out twice for 22 and 27. A mismatch, but Bard had arrived.

In 1910 Bard is opening the batting against the Old Boys, the last match of the season, a grand social and sporting occasion, held on the ancient club ground. The school did well to score 111, but for the OBs Charlie, home from Nigeria on leave, scored 60 not out to win the match. Pause to remember that these were the two sons who 'did not come back'.

In the same edition of the school magazine we read that both WT and FH Taylor had played for Derbyshire.

That winter BA Taylor, still only twelve, is noticed as *'the most promising of the insides and is making a goal getter'*. He scored 14 of the 44 goals scored by the school eleven. In the 1910 Old Boys football match Frank played for the OBs and Bard for the school: Charlie was back in Nigeria. In the summer Bard, now fourteen 'bore the brunt of the bowling', including 5/22 against Ashbourne and 6/23 and 4/17 in the two games versus Derby Grammar School, always their strongest opponents. In the OBs game that summer Will scored 46 and W Taylor made 42; that must be the boys' 58 year old father. Bard was caught and bowled by his brother. How they must have loved it!

That year Bard played Salario in the Merchant of Venice and by Christmas the 1stXI, the best team the school had ever had, could boast eleven victories in 12 games with Bard scoring 19 goals. Both Frank, the captain, and Will played in the OBs match. Finally I discovered that in a Past v Present Hockey match Bard was the star. The magazines give a lively and literate picture of this small school rooted in its community with pupils and their teachers throwing themselves into a wide variety of activities

In the news of Old Boys we find Charlie's jokey contribution. *'I see that brother of mine is well up in the goal scoring but I didn't see where he'd "set the Thames on fire" in the scholastic world.'*

In summer 1911 Bard won Throwing the Cricket Ball at the sports, with a school record of 88 yards 2 feet. He continued to take masses of wickets that summer, including 8/27 against Derby GS, in which match he also scored 36. He was now old

enough to contribute regularly as a batsman and again he opposed both Frank and his father in the OBs match.

Pitches were poor and scores were low in school matches and I rarely discovered a fifty being scored, though one boy JB Fritchley managed to make hundred in 1914, a remarkable performance. The last summer of peace and sadly Bertram Fritchley became another much-mourned casualty of the Great War.

On Speech Day 1911 Bard won the Lower School Latin prize as well as the award for the best cricket averages. By Easter 1912 he is a prefect and though there is no record of his departure he must have left school that term, aged just fifteen. Certainly in the summer magazine his 'absence' from the cricket eleven is 'regretted' and he appears in the Christmas 1912 edition playing for the OBs football team and, of course, that summer in the cricket team against the school.

We should record the last game the school played before the war, the traditional end of term match against the OBs on 17th July 1914: no Bard, but Will and in his father are in the team. Within a month we were at war.

Bard was sixteen when the war began. I have no idea of what work he did after he left the grammar school, but I would not be surprised if he was employed by his father. His name occurs three more times in the WGS magazine.

In Spring 1915 he is based at the Royal Engineers HQ at Woodcote Park, Epsom with four other boys from Wirksworth Grammar School. Bard could only have been just seventeen.

Christmas 1916. *'BA Taylor is serving with a Machine Gun Corps.'* Later he is in officer training at Lichfield.

Christmas 1917. *'As we go to press we learn that Bard Taylor is missing. We most earnestly trust that one of the pluckiest and most popular boys who ever belonged to the school will prove to be safe.'*

It was not to be. Bard is not mentioned again. His name appears alongside Charlie on both the school war memorial plaque and in the church roll of honour of Wirksworth casualties 1914-1918, but I have found no trace of him in military records.

As an old schoolteacher and an enthusiast for both Latin and cricket I have come to like Bard a lot. I bet he fought with unquenched spirit to the end.

Charlie and Bard were not forgotten. Will named his son, born in 1928, Charles Bernard Walter Taylor, honouring the other three great cricketers.

My final thought is to wonder if there was ever a game, perhaps when Charlie was on leave, when the four brothers played together, possibly even with their father. It would have been a competitive occasion. Good men and good cricketers.

Roy Pearce, April 2014.