

THE GREAT WAR

at

WIRKSWORTH GRAMMAR SCHOOL

by Roy Pearce

Who would have supposed, when the last school magazine went to press, that the end of this Term would find us, in common with the rest of world, obsessed by one idea, that of war!

No pupil can recollect the Boer war, so that it is impossible for them to realize the enormous difference between this war and that;—in the first place, in magnitude; secondly, in the scientific discoveries applied to the purposes of destruction and healing; and, above all, in the opinion of other nations as to the righteousness of our cause. Then we stood alone. There was an exceedingly strong prejudice on the Continent against us and in favour of the Boers, and with some show of excuse. The Boers were regarded as a simple, pastoral people, and we were known to be one of the greatest (if not the greatest) of the World Powers in existence. Germany hated us then as venomously as she hates us now; France almost fraternized with her ancient enemy in condemning us for fighting the Boers, who (whatever their recent injustice and provocation towards us) had, at all events, been the early colonists of South Africa. That we were driven to fight by the repeated insults of a people densely and childishly ignorant of our power, and insolently brutal whenever they thought it safe to be so, did not justify our action in the eyes of France, probably because she was ignorant of the immediate facts. Russia alone, in those black days of humiliation (before Lord Roberts and Kitchener went to straighten out the tangle)—Russia alone held out against the cynical proposal of our enemies to attack us in combined force, and crush our power once for all. With this state of things compare the attitude of the world to-day. The opinion of America is well hit off in "Punch," who represents a young American as saying, (as nearly as I recollect)—"I tell you, Sir, we Americans are *absolutely nootral*;—as long as one of you nations downs the Kaiser we don't care a row of buttons which it is!" So that tacitly there, and in Italy, we are included among the champions of a good cause;—and if those neutral powers regard us warmly, what shall be said of the opinion of our neighbours across the Channel? To them, England stands forth as the champion of the oppressed, the chivalrous avenger of innocent blood, the defender of Right against Might. The French, ever ardent lovers or haters, display the most touching affection and gratitude for our brotherly aid; the Russians fell on their knees in the streets and thanked God publicly when they heard that great England would stand in with them in the fight against the monster of German Militarism;—as for poor, ravished, tormented, yet ever gallant Belgium . . . it brings tears to the eyes to recollect with what passionate ardour of love, trust and gratitude she regards the British. The feelings of Serbia (though no doubt friendly) do not particularly concern us. We are not fighting because Serbia was offered impossible terms by Austria, but because Belgium, a small neutral country, was invaded in wicked defiance of the laws of Nations—We, in common with Germany and others, had guaranteed her safety, and it became our obvious duty to make our word good when the war endangered that safety. The fact

that Italy, their ally, refused to fight with Germany and Austria because they were *not attacked but attacking*, is the plainest testimony that can be wanted to the righteousness of our share in this frightful war.

If ours is the side of Right, what can we say that is adequate in praise of Belgium? Offered complete freedom from harm, if only she would allow the German Army to march through her prosperous, pleasant land to attack France, she chose ruin with honour, rather than shameful safety. There is a saying — “A nation has the rulers it deserves.” The noble and heroic King of Belgium is, indeed, deserved by his people!

Shocking as this war is (beyond any other that has gone before), crushing as is the devastation such a little, little way from England, we have very much to be thankful for. In our daily lives we have to give the humblest and most earnest thanks for our continued comfort and security at home, security bought for us by incredible sacrifices on the part of our glorious soldiers across the narrow strip of sea, and by the incessant vigilance of our Navy. Above all, we have to give thanks for the superb loyalty of the Empire, and particularly for that of India, which is bound to us by no ties of blood, and which yet has set an example of noble devotion most beautiful and thrilling to behold.

Alas, that in Africa we have to regret a miserable handful of traitors seduced by German lies! That our ancient enemy, Botha, should have stood firm in this crisis and led South Africa in the cause of honour is fine; still better that he should testify boldly to the Liberty, Justice, and Mercy of British rule.

One other cause for regret we have. There are still strong young men in England who prefer the easy path of dishonour to the awful road to Glory. Well, I suppose we can't expect all men to be brave—yet, in Canada, men crowd the doors of recruiting offices to such an extent that they have to be kept back at the point of the bayonet!

* * *

Only “One other cause for regret?” What of the brave dead? Ah, no! We may—we must—weep for them; but we may never regret that they had the honour of dying the noblest death a man may die. There is only one thing to be said about them, and, however familiar it is, we must say it now:—

“DULCE ET DECORUM EST PRO PATRIA MORI.”

C.H.B.

THE GREAT WAR at WIRKSWORTH GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Boys and girls and their teachers broke up cheerfully at the end of the summer term 1914. The school had played the Old Boys in 'an exciting game' of cricket on 17th July with no thoughts of what awaited the school and the country when they returned in September. The changes in the mood of the nation when war began in August were immediately recognised at the school and alterations were made at once to the established pattern of school life. The sombre mood became darker as terms and years passed with no resolution; at first Old Boys volunteering, then casualty lists and the death toll as so many young men, young lads, who were vividly remembered as pupils at Wirksworth Grammar School were captured, wounded or killed.

The headmaster Rev Hansen Bay and Mrs Bay fought with their customary energy to sustain morale, explaining the issues with Christian fervour, urging duty and patriotism and conveying what they truly believed - that the spirit of England would never be defeated.

In some ways, sadly, the school was defeated, because never would the pre-war carefree, happy life at WGS be restored. There would be too many ghosts for the Bays to throw themselves again into school life with the optimistic vigour they had summoned in their early years in Wirksworth.

From the magazine Christmas 1914.

In a modest way the school is doing what it can to help the country - the boys by rifle practice, in order to be ready should they be needed in later years, the girls by making garments for Belgian refugees.

Daily throughout the term the SOS signal has sounded on the bell at twelve noon, and the whole school has assembled for a very short service of prayer for our Nation and its allies in the Great War. (A list of intercessory prayers is added)

Shooting now forms a regular part of the school curriculum for the senior bays. Later Sgt. Instructor Hardy was hired as drill sergeant to conduct drill with the boys for twelve lessons.

We have had only two Musical Evenings this term; there has been a strong revival of interest (*no doubt encouraged by CHB*) in the good old sea songs of an earlier fighting period; The British Grenadiers, The National Anthems of the Allied Nations, Drake's Drum and Tipperary.

The fireworks on 5th November were cancelled and the money usually used for the celebration was donated to the local company of the Sherwood Foresters.

Speech day was cancelled and there was an informal prize giving. HB made an address, including, 'I feel very confident that the spirit is, as a whole, devout, patriotic and earnest. We discourage "slackers" here.'

A little present was sent to Pte Jas Buckley of Middleton from the boys and girls in the school in token of grateful respect for the valour with which he (like his glorious comrades) endured the awful retreat from Mons. He was badly wounded at the battle of the Aisne. The present consisted of a set of choice handkerchiefs (coloured, of course,) and a flint and steel lighter. He seemed much embarrassed, but very pleased.

Thirty two old boys are reported to be 'serving their country' with another ten in the spring edition 1915.

Letter to the magazine by RP Warren, who had been a boarder at school and now, aged nineteen, was serving in the Huntingdonshire Bicycle Battalion. The - indicates that a place name has been censored.

'I have now been stationed with the - Company, since last Monday. They are mostly farm hands and are a very rough lot indeed. We are billeted on a farm which is two-and-a-half miles from the main road and the same distance from the nearest inhabited building. The lane to the road is awful; in fact I have to walk, as it is impossible to ride until one gets upon the road.

Bridlington is six miles away by road and three on the cliffs, but as we are only allowed to go a mile from the billet, it might as well be six hundred miles off. I am beginning get to know this part of - very well, as I have been stationed at almost every hamlet, village or town from - to -. I spent two weeks on -. It is very rugged and rough and awfully cold there now.

I am enjoying my experience every much. Of course, I have to rough it, but that was expected. For instance there are fifty of us at this one farm. We sleep in the empty stalls, in the stables, in the loft, above the granary and above the cart hovel. Rats run all over the place; it is nothing new to wake up and see one sitting on one's legs. I have not seen a bed since I left home and am so used to sleeping on the floor, that I believe I can sleep on anything. The men's duties consist of patrolling the roads, coast and cliffs all night on the lookout for the enemy attempting to land.

The plan, at first, was to retreat inland out of the range of the guns on their ships, and when they had landed, to smash them up; we were to be reinforced by cavalry, artillery etc., stationed further inland. Now however our orders are to hold our coast at all costs, and during the day the men are busy entrenching, putting up barbed wire entanglements. The whole of the coast is entrenched and every morning (as this is the most likely time for the Germans to arrive) we have to man the trenches, until it is seen there is no one to be killed this time. The life is very healthy. I am out riding with despatches all day and often through the night; but the open air agrees with me, for I have increased my weight by a stone since I have been on this game. We are not sure, but we do not expect to leave England until the Spring, and then we go to the front. We never know when we shall get over there; the sooner the better.'

RP
Warren.

Easter 1915 from the editorial.

Our local battalion of the Sherwood Foresters is now serving somewhere in France, and many of our old boys are with them, helping Britain to keep her word. We most sincerely trust that they may be spared to return to us, when the war is over; but if for some of them it may happen that the paths of glory lead but to the grave, we should temper our natural grief with the thought that each of them will wear 'a truer crown than any wreath man can weave for him'.

School Notes.

All through the term on the sounding of the SOS signal, the whole school, in continuance of the custom begun last term, has assembled for a short service of prayer on behalf of the Empire and the Allies in the Great War; intercession was also made for those old boys who are now serving their King and Country.

Rifle practice is as popular as ever.

The Headmaster gave the school lessons in signalling in the Morse code.

Several of our Old Boys and present pupils have joined the local unit of the Derbyshire Volunteer Regiment of the Home Guard.

Old Boys in service.

JW Talbot OTC Dean Close School

V Bowmer Public School Batt. Royal Fusiliers

P Hallam Notts & Derby Regiment

WR Ward London Electrical Engineers

P Slater Royal Army Medical Corps

HE Bowmer Public School Batt. Royal Fusiliers

CC Malpas Public School Batt. Royal Fusiliers, Royal Naval Division.

RC Pickerill Royal engineers

BA Taylor, WH Bowmer, EH Bowmer, A Drabble and V Bowmer are stationed with the Royal Engineers at Woodcote Park, Epsom, Surrey.

School Magazine, Summer 1915

Editorial.

The word 'Briton' has come to symbolise all that is meant by honour, justice, and faith in the brotherhood of man.

FH Taylor, Leicestershire Territorials and CW Taylor 2nd King's Horse are also at the Front.

Easter 1916 School Notes.

The school continues to send parcels of foodstuffs and useful articles to Pte Ault, now a prisoner of war in the Kriegsfangenen Lager, Mhameln.

Tuesday February 21st is memorable for one of the heaviest snowfalls recorded in the district for many years. The snow fell almost without ceasing for five days and many of our pupils found it impossible to get to school on the 23rd, owing to the huge drifts.

'The Anti Aircraft Band' would scare away the Zeppelins.

Captain JW Talbot. 10th Gloucestershire Regiment, son of Talbot's taxis of Coldwell Street, sends a moving letter from the Front. Extracts:

'No Man's Land is really no place for the imaginative man; every little patch of darkness is a hostile patrol to him, every rifle-bullet which whistles past is aimed at his person, every machine gun in the enemy front is trained on him, whilst every flare sent up is for the express purpose of finding where **HE** is.

The whole distance between the opposing front-line trenches is barely two hundred yards.

School Magazine Summer 1916

The summer 1916 magazine reports the first deaths of Old Boys. There is a particular resonance about Philip Harrison who had left the school only three years before. It may seem surprising that he was the first one reported killed, but the chief casualties early on were the professional soldiers from the regular army.

KILLED IN ACTION July 1st 1916

Philip Harrison, aged 19 years, who was pupil at this school 1910 to 1913. He is well remembered as a quiet and studious boy of a very amiable disposition. So keen was he to serve his country that he volunteered at the age of 17 and joined the Sherwood Foresters. We extend the deepest sympathy to his sorrowing parents, but, with them feel proud of his record.

Also in this edition is the death of an older man Charles Taylor, one of the four brothers who lived on Cromford Road, all great cricketers. All four served; only two returned. The editorial records the death of Charles W Taylor 'who was numbered among the bravest of the best who have made the supreme sacrifice'.

Christmas 1916. Editorial.

It is with the sincerest sorrow that we have to record the recent deaths of four of our former pupils.

TH Stirzaker 54th Kootenay regiment.
George Hall Notts and Derby Regiment
W Brooks Sherwood Foresters
JR Cash Seaforth Highlanders

Their life work was short, but the end was crowned in glory.

We should like to add a word about J.R.Cash who was the most recent Old Boy of the four.

He was just the brave, straight, frank and kindly boy, whom one might trust to take the right side in a quarrel, and do all that he could for it, and yet it is difficult to realize that he was old enough to take his share in the World's quarrel. It seems only yesterday that his pleasant, fresh face was seen in school and on the playing fields, and for all our pride in him we cannot but feel a pang at the heart when we think how young he was to make the great sacrifice.

Two more of the Taylor brothers.

Capt WT Taylor of the Lancashire Fusiliers, has been invalided home for some time with shrapnel wounds.

BA Taylor is serving with a machine Gun Corps.

Flight Lieutenant Gilbert S Hall of the Royal Flying Corps was reported missing on November 20th. It is presumed that he lost his bearings in a fog and landed with his 'plane' within German lines. We sincerely hope soon to hear that he has met with no worse mishap than to become a prisoner of war.

In the following edition we read.

'We regret to record that Flight Lieutenant Gilbert S Hall of the RFC has died of wounds in France.

July 1917 School Notes.

Lt FH Taylor (OW) visited the school and showed us various types of British gas – masks as used in France and explained their use and method of wear.

Half holiday in honour of Lt JW Talbot who had received special mention in one of Sir Douglas Haigh's dispatches for his work as an Intelligence Officer attached to the First Brigade, First Division BEF.

We have suffered a great loss in the death of Rev T.B. Charlesworth M.A. R.D. who for some years was a school governor. [*Charlesworth was vicar of Wirksworth 1913-1917*]

From the Headmaster's Report

As far as I can gather there are now more than 100 Old Boys serving in HM forces.

My wife and I believe that our boys and girls will not be found wanting in the day of trial, but they will take their share of burdens and responsibility as becomes the sons of Britain, doing their bit humbly, keenly and wholeheartedly.

E Beeston has been wounded in France, AA Wain and TH Ruddock have been invalided with dysentery and septic poison respectively. Both are now recovered and have returned to France.

Cyril Beeston was on the Somme.

Christmas 1917. Editorial.

Still the War goes on! Three years ago we should have quailed at the thought of this protracted struggle, and we should then have pictured ourselves at this present date as hungry, thin and worn-out with long continued anxiety. The opposite is the case.

Part of it is due to the cheery philosophy which is becoming recognised abroad as typical of the English.....This is the spirit of our glorious fighting men when they are 'up against' anything really hard; it is only when things are really comfortable that they permit themselves to grumble.

School Notes.

In accordance with the wishes of the government, the whole school gathered chestnuts and a large number were obtained. One can hardly realise how heavy chestnuts are until one has tried to move a sack of them. [Why were they instructed to collect?]

The 'prisoner money' still goes to Pte Ault, in the form of much-needed food parcels.

We welcome with pride the birth of our cadet corps. It is good to hear Barnes, Lees and Hatchet bawling orders quite in correct (bowdlerised) style.

OW NEWS. The news of our old boys is chiefly of a military nature. We have heard with deep regret of the death of H Abel and H Marsden, but each fought and gave his life for England and the principle of Justice for little nations, so our regret is mingled with pride that our boys should have had the nonour to fight and die in such a cause.

It was feared that F Lees and W Read were killed, as they had last been seen in a German trench making an attempt to fight against overwhelming odds, but it transpires (after the weeks of suspense for their families and friends) that they are prisoners in Germany and apparently not being badly treated.

WR Ward has been honoured by the presentation of a special gold medal, at Buckingham Palace, because he had been one of those who brought down the first Zeppelin.

G M Hare, (who is now a full Lieutenant) came to see us just after Passchendaele and gave us a vivid impression of that affair. He is now a very tall and big man.

We are pleased to hear that O Ritman has been awarded the Military Medal, Captain A Gem the Military Cross, (he was however wounded, but we hear only slightly) and WH N Bowmer the Military Cross, He has also obtained his captaincy.

Cyril Beeston is still missing and the time seems very long till news arrives of him.

LETTER from somewhere in France. 'The first two nights we were shelled, the next two nights Hun aeroplanes dropped bombs very near us, the next day a Hun machine came down low and fired his machine gun all over the place, and the sixth day we were gas shelled. No one was hurt and I think on the whole we all enjoyed the show.'

Easter 1918 school Notes.

It is pleasant to see how quickly the girls pick up any new dance. Is it because boys' boots are so heavy that they do not try? Some of the big fellows set a good example. Dancing is excellent exercise in bad weather.

OLD BOYS' NEWS reports on 19 old boys in action. Extracts.

F Lees is apparently made fairly comfortable as a prisoner in Bayreuth.

Cyril Beeston was on the Somme when we last heard of him.

A Goodwin's wounds are not yet healed up, though he is better we are glad to hear.

July 1918 school notes.

A good number of vegetables have been produced in the school gardens, but there are several people who might well be a little more enthusiastic about food production.

O Pitman (OW) died in trying to drag a comrade to safety from No Man's Land. He was always a fine boy, and he had done similar deeds before with success. We regard such an end as a greater honour than any number of medals, and he will always be remembered here with thankful pride.

J Bowler fell in Palestine, dying the kind of splendid death that Richard Coeur-de-Lion would have welcomed, charging up a hill held by Turks.

[A note about the surviving Taylor brothers,]

Capt W and Lieutenant Frank Taylor are both somewhere near Ypres.

From a Letter from S Woodiwiss, 'Somewhere in France.'

'I don't suppose I can say anything original about the trenches. Just the usual knee-high water or mud in most places; dug outs, broken duck boards and all other small inconveniences which everyone – except the soldier – has got quite used to.'

July 2019 or a bit earlier because for financial reasons only one edition of the magazine was published in 1919.

Editorial.

The long agony ceased on November 11th when an armistice was signed and the ringing of joy-bells announced the blessed news throughout the land that the killing was over. We as a school marched straight to the parish church and there gave thanks for our great deliverance.

Nothing will ever efface the recollection of Armistice Day with its tremendous significance.

Easter 2019

[The next extract is a very happy one and celebrates the return of a former and very popular teacher who had served throughout, till his post-war wedding.]

The marriage of our old friend, fine soldier and splendid athlete Major C A Taylor, took place on October 2nd. His bride was well known and very popular here as Gladys Storey, Captain of Games, and holder of the Chandos-Pole-Gell Champion Cup. The school gave the happy pair a rousing cheer as the train, bearing them away to a new life, passed the cricket field. May all joy be theirs.

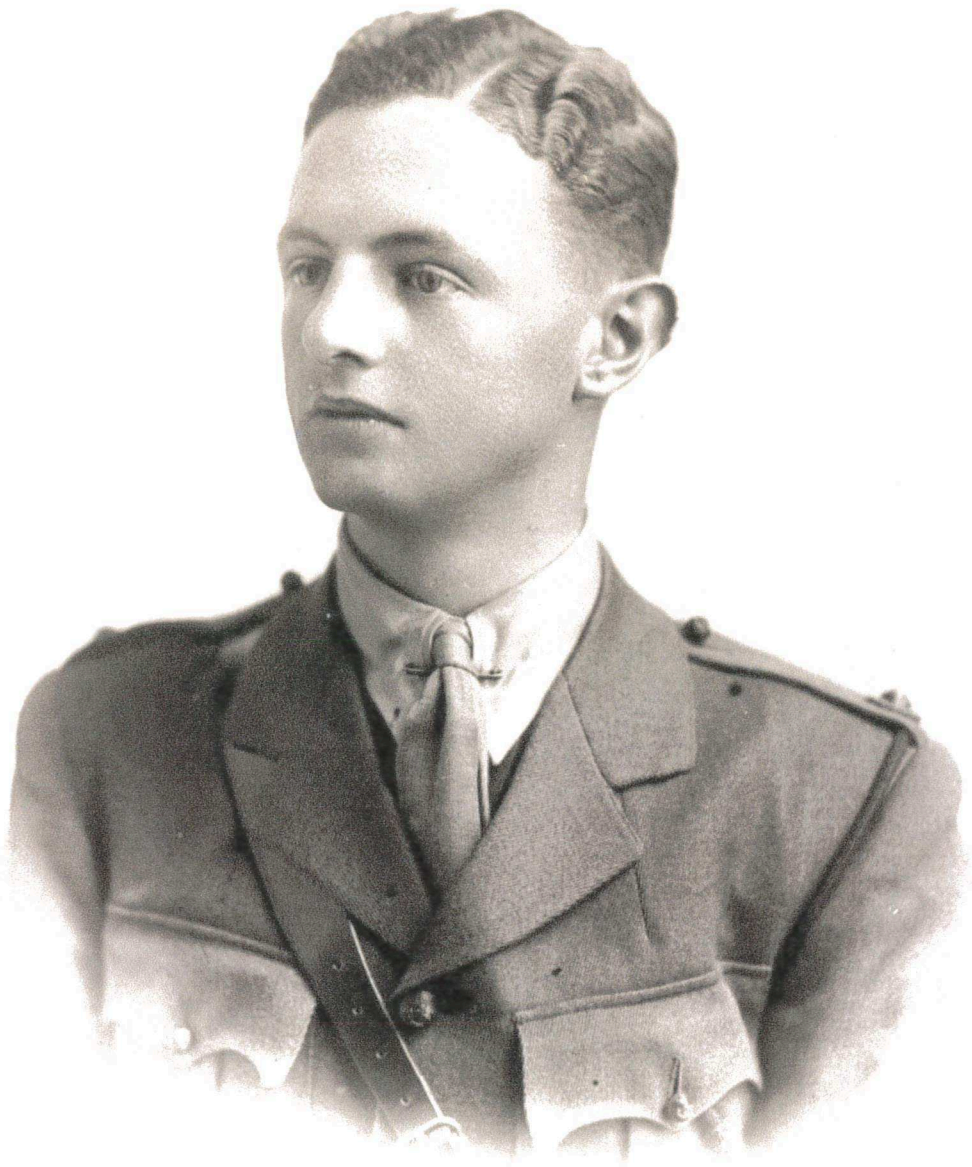
Many of the school gardens have not been kept as we should like to see them. It is hoped there will be an improvement in future.

Spring Bank Holiday 1919. Three moving obituaries here.

The school was deeply grieved to hear of the loss within a few weeks of each other of both the Fritchleys.

Bertram was shot by a sniper about a fortnight after he got out to France, and poor George was injured by a bursting shell, after he had borne his share in almost continuous fighting for months; he was brought to England and died in hospital.

When the news of Bertram's loss came the whole neighbourhood was much distressed; he had proved to be an excellent young officer, and his magnificent cricket will long remain a tradition in the school and in his regiment; (perhaps no more beautiful young figure of an athlete can ever have been seen on the cricket ground than that of Bertram Fritchley, with his lightly set burnished-copper head and slender Greek lines;) but when the news of his brother's loss so soon followed it, it was very hard to feel the glory and honour of sacrifice more than the bitter regret and grief inevitable to the occasion.'



2nd Lieut. Joseph Bertram Fritchley.
6th London Regiment.
Killed in action at Maricourt, Aug 27th 1918.
Aged 20 years.

Further information as to friends is briefly summarized below.

W. Read (slightly wounded). Released prisoner, back in Bank.

A. Goodwin (badly wounded in arm). Teaching at Ludlow.

Frank Lees. Released prisoner, back in Bank at Derby.

J. Dawes. Teaching.

Maurice Kirk.

E. Land. In Wirksworth.

S. Woodiwiss (slightly wounded). Teaching at Sawley.

P. Pearson. Teaching at Tansley.

W. Evans (wounded twice in France). Back at Nottingham.

C. Shaw. Back in Wirksworth.

S. Fowkes (was in Egypt and Mesopotamia). At Post Office at Matlock.

R. Hatchett (now at W.G.S. as Junior Master).

W. Tipper (was very ill in Macedonia). Teaching at Shirebrook.

L. Nicholson. In Sheffield.

W. R. Ward (who has come through without a scratch and with a special medal for helping to bring down the first Zeppelin, before he went to France).

Capt. W. Taylor (very badly wounded). Married.

Lieut. F. Taylor. In a Bank in Leicester.

Lieut. S. Coulson (now refreshing his memory at the W.G.S. before going to Oxford, was wounded in France, and has won the D.F.C.).

Lieut. England (wounded early in war). Has since been on home service.

W. Hallam.

N. Buxton.

R. Twigge (very badly wounded).

E. Bowmer. Back in Wirksworth.

F. Hall (wounded). Back at Bole Hill.

Gratton (was serving in Navy).

R. Storey (who was in Jerusalem). Now back in Wirksworth.

Y Capt. W. Bowmer (Military +). Now married.

Walter Evans. Released prisoner. In Nottingham.

J. Bowmer.

T. Twigge.

A. Hall (serving in Tank Corps). Wounded badly.

Kay (was in India, now in Egypt).

A. Slack. On the Rhine.

R. Pearson (with Army of Occupation in Germany).

O. Land (with the Tanks). In Russia.

A. Evans (with Army of Occupation).

T. Ruddock (with Army of Occupation).

2nd Lieut. Haddon Brown (still in Mesopotamia).

Still serving.

Allan Bryan has joined the Mercantile Marines.

A. W. Barnes is now at Oxford, at Jesus College. He has passed "Smalls."

Have all been demobilized.

NOTES by the author.

The Fritchleys lived on Blind Lane, Wirksworth. Father was a plumber and decorator. There were two sons and a daughter, also at WGS, Gladys. In the last season pre-war, the summer of 1914, JB Fritchley, captain of cricket, scored 113 against Derby School, the only hundred recorded in the magazine (1908-20) and took in the season 26 wickets @ 6 runs average. Both boys had played in the last match pre-war.

You can imagine the feelings of the older boys, who were destined soon to be in service, as they learnt of the death of their young friends. Names are recorded on the memorial tablet in the school library.

During the holidays too we were grieved to learn that poor 'Billy' Killer had been terribly wounded soon after he returned to France as an Officer. He had already been wounded repeatedly, twice very seriously in the face, (but fortunately without disfigurement) and he had a presentiment before he went that he would not come off lightly this time. He is still, after all these months, in hospital.

The news of Cyril Beeston came, not only as a sorrow, but as a great and bitter disappointment. He had been missing for months; he was reported to be killed; he was then found to be a prisoner in Germany, and upon signing of the Armistice he was released (or, more properly speaking, turned loose.) ill and weak. Thanks to the remarkable kindness of a Belgian lady he reached an English hospital only to die, in the end, of pneumonia caused by deliberate neglect by the Germans. They had been begged by this kind Belgian lady to let him travel in a cart, at least, but it was not allowed. It is a comfort to think of the wonderful kindness which surrounded him at the end.

Summer 2019:

A community celebration of Peace in July 2019.

JOY DAY.

On July 19th (Joy Day) there was a very good procession through the town. The Grammar School sent a dray (kindly let by Mr Weston), in the decoration of which many old boys kindly helped. It was drawn by two fine horses, (kindly lent by Mr Degge), and upon it was a large allegorical group. In it Peace (Lesley Hatchet) was supported by Britannia (Edna Parker) with trident, breast-plate, shield and helmet, and France (Gwendoline Williams, dressed as Joan of Arc with tall sword and wearing full armour). Belgium, in scarlet yellow and black (Kathleen Hansen Bay) knelt on one knee before France, crowned with laurels and holding a sheathed sword. The British Lion held the chain which held prostrated Germany between his teeth. At the rear of the car were Italy (Marie Killer), Serbia (Dorothy Lovegrove), Japan (Dorothy Ruddock) and America (Florence Fox). All looked exceedingly well and Britannia's real brass helmet shone resplendently, but the favourite of the crowd was undoubtedly the Lion.

A large banner, which bore the words PAX et VICTORIA LAUS DEO, was carried by Hiddersley and Haworth. The girls walked two by two wearing white dresses and garlands of flowers, and carrying tall staves from which hung ropes of roses.

Altogether it was a festive and highly significant display.

Note by the editor.

As I read the school magazine (published three times a year till 1918 then annually) I noted that football, cricket, hockey and tennis continued, though there were fewer fixtures and shorter reports. Musical evenings survived, but the great Christmas extravaganzas seem to have stopped. 'gone are the days when great iced cakes, sweets and chrystalised fruits graced our table, – but if it is for England and duty, who cares?'

The head continued to lecture: on Trafalgar Day he spoke of the good work of the navy today and Elsie Witham sang The Death of Nelson. Other lantern lectures relating to the war included an update on the western front and the Work of Aircraft in Modern Warfare. CHB continued to publish her worthy reflections (Ung Dieu Ung Roy, On the Reflex of Faith) and her poems appear in most editions. A roll of service was included, reporting on the Old Boys who had signed on.

THE END

Roy Pearce 2014

1914

1918

WIRKSWORTH

SCHOOL

GRAMMAR

THESE GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR GOD & COUNTRY IN THE
CAUSE OF JUSTICE AND HONOUR IN THE GREAT WAR

HARRY ABELL

J. BERTRAM FRITCHLEY

JOHN R. PITMAN M.M.

CYRIL E. BEESTON

GEORGE S. FRITCHLEY

HARRY F. SEVERNE

JOHN C. BENYON

ANGUS HALL

LEONARD B. SHAW

JOSEPH B. BOWLER

GEORGE E. HALL

WILLIAM T. SLATER

VERNON BOWMER MC

GILBERT S. HALL

THOMAS H. STIRZAKER

WILLIAM BROOKS

PHILIP HARRISON

CHARLES W. TAYLOR

JOHN R. CASH

CECIL C. MALPAS

BERNARD A. TAYLOR

FRED NIXON

**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.

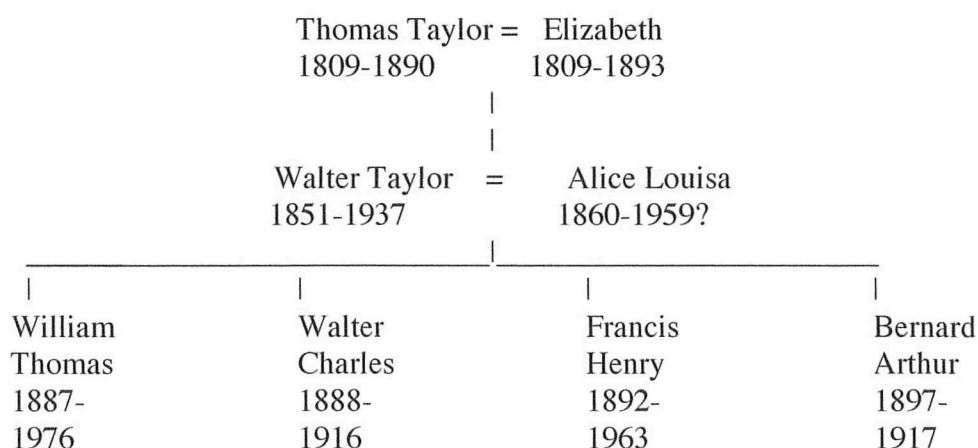
Extract.

'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 through 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 1898 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 role 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.

Wirksworth Amateur Football Club, 1913-14.



W. E. Tompkins, C. E. Porter, S. Porter, C. A. Taylor, F. H. Taylor, C. E. Robinson, T. Ruddock, H. Gandy, W. T. Taylor.
(Hon. Treasurer) (Hon. Sec.) (Referee)

H. E. Bowmer, B. A. Taylor, J. F. Wardle (Capt.), A. E. Goodwin, Rev. W. Dams.

Note FH Taylor, WT Taylor, BA Taylor

CA Taylor was the WAs school teacher

More about the Taylor family.

I discovered obituaries in Wisden for both Charlie and Bard.

'Sgt Charles Walter Taylor (King Edward's Horse), brother of the Derbyshire CCC secretary, was killed in action on January 3rd 1916, aged 29. For some years he was captain of Wirksworth CC and played once for the Derbyshire Colts. Later he went to Southern Nigeria where he played very successfully during his stay of two years and had a batting average of over 80.'

'2nd Lieutenant Bernard Arthur Taylor (Machine Gun Corps) killed on November 30th 1917 was known in Derbyshire cricketing circles as an amateur. Brother of Captain WT Taylor, secretary of Derbyshire CCC.'

The obituary was not published till the 1919 edition.

The extract below is taken from a piece written by WA Bowmer to mark the centenary of the club in 1949. Bowmers and Taylors were the major cricketing families in Wirksworth through Edwardian times.

Roy Pearce September 2014

X
The Taylor boys were fortunate in having a cricketing sire, for Walter Taylor was not only a good performer himself but also 'knew all the words' and was soaked in the lore of the game. His knowledge of the hedgerows and of the birds and beasts of the field was the foundation of his make-up as a countryman and, having also a strong and healthy frame, he was able actively to enjoy his cricket long after the Psalmist's span of mere living.

Of his sons, Will, Charles, Frank and Bernard (Bard), the first named promised to be an exceptional cricketer. As a mere boy in the Hopton eleven his dismissal as a batsman may not have been entirely unknown but he was an optimistic bowler who bowled to him expectantly rather than hopefully. Somehow, however, he did not develop his full force as a batsman, much to everyone's regret, but he played occasionally for the County in their dark days and was always an asset to the Wirksworth Club as a bowler. He is now, of course, the doyen of County secretaries and what Wirksworth lost as a player Derbyshire gained as an administrator.

Charles Taylor was an active member of the Club until the outbreak of the 14-18 War and was Captain for a short time. His batting generally gave the side a good start but if sometimes lacking the gaiety of his adventurous temperament, he was, nevertheless, fulfilling the recognised duty of a No 1 batsman. Alas! Charles, with his youngest brother Bard, failed to return from their last great adventure and the Club was much the worse for their loss. Frank Taylor's career as a batsman was the most successful of all the Taylors. Before the 14-18 War his runs were, at times, prolific and he thoroughly deserved his inclusion in the County side, spasmodic though it was. His defensive play was not quite equal to his attack but the latter was so powerful and fruitful that he could well afford to chance his arm to the exclusion of more conventional methods. Who does not remember his devastating drives between the covers? Frank was also an excellent field with an excellent and sure return.