

The Great War - Burgess Hill's First Casualty



Royal Flying Corps: Alan Seymour Archives



Vincent, at Brookland early 1914: Tessa Waterfall

Vincent Waterfall,

2nd Lt. 3rd East Yorkshire Regiment (attached to The Royal Flying Corps.)

The 4th August 2014 marked the 100th anniversary of the day Britain entered one of the costliest conflicts in history – the First World War – with fighting continuing until the 11th of November 1918, Armistice Day.

Although the armistice ended the actual fighting, it took another seven months of negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference to conclude the peace treaty. The Treaty of Versailles ended the state of war between Germany and the Allied Powers. It was signed on 28th June 1919, exactly five years after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

There are now no living veterans from the First World War. But it's important that we remember and commemorate those years because of the sheer scale of sacrifice. The war had a considerable impact on the development of Britain and the world today and gave birth to a number of very significant advances in medicine and technology.

On the Burgess Hill Town's Great War Memorial is the following inscription:-

"This monument is set up by the inhabitants of Burgess Hill to commemorate their gratitude to all those who served their King and Country in the Great War, 1914-1918, and especially to the honoured memory to those whose names are here recorded, who set forth from this place and returned not again."

A total of 145 names are recorded and the first person known to have given his life was Vincent Waterfall.



Avro 504 built under license by Harland & Wolff in Belfast: Alan Seymour Archives



Vincent Waterfall & Charles Bayly: Royal Aero Club RAeC 461 & 441

Vincent Waterfall, 2nd Lt. 3rd East Yorkshire Regiment, along with his Observer Charles George Gordon Bayly, Lt. 56th Field Company, Royal Engineers – both attached to No. 5 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps (RFC) had a short war as on the 22nd August 1914 they were both to die in action. They were on a reconnaissance flight when their aircraft serial No.390, type Avro504, was brought down by enemy ground fire.

Vincent's observer, Charles George Gordon Bayly, was himself a qualified pilot. He came from a military family, with a great uncle being none other than 'Gordon of Khartoum.' Charles joined 5 Squadron at the end of June 1914 and flew his machine to Amiens on 12th August when the RFC landed in France.

No. of Reconnaissance		Hour Started 10.16 am
Date August 22		Hour Ended
Aeroplane No.		Pilot 1 st C.M. Waterfall Observer 1 st G. Bayly
Time	Place	OBSERVATION
10.50	near SOIGNIES road	600 ⁺ baggage wagon on road about 1/2 mile THILLYS des M.C.
11.0	ENHINCHEN Soignies	Can: for 200 ⁺ in file 4 coy. inf: in four Apparently 6 four horse team 2 coy inf 4 four horse team Column turning to left to SILEY, with 4 coy. round

Remains of reconnaissance report from 22 August 1914 written by Waterfall or Bayly: Alan Seymour Archives



***Reputed to be a photograph of the downed Bayly/Waterfall, Avro 504 at
 Marcq, 22 Aug 1914: Alan Seymour Archives***

They can claim the doubtful honour of flying in the first British aeroplane to be shot down by enemy fire. Therefore they also became the first Royal Flying Corps (and so British Army) officers to die in action in the Great War.

The two men's bodies were originally buried in a shallow grave by the Germans but were later exhumed by the Belgium owner of the land. He placed the bodies in zinc-lined coffins and laid them in the family vault where they remained until 1924. After this they were reburied side by side in the Imperial (now) Commonwealth War Grave Commission Cemetery, Hainaut, Belgium.



TOURNAL COMMUNAL Cemetery Allied Extension, Hainaut, Belgium.

***(Grave reference: Plot III. Row G. Grave 3 & 4)
 Alan Seymour Archives***

The following is taken from the report in the local newspaper '*The Mid-Sussex Times*' of **September 22nd 1914**:

Sussex Officers Killed – Biographical Notes

Lieutenant V. Waterfall, of the Royal Flying Corps, who has been killed in Belgium, was the youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. W. F. Waterfall, of Langdene, Burgess Hill, formerly of Derbyshire. He was 23 years of age, and a brother-in-law of Dr. Winkelried Williams, of Hove (Sussex). The King and Queen have forwarded a message of sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Waterfall in their sad bereavement.

The following week a fuller report appeared '*The Mid-Sussex Times*' of **September 29th 1914**:

Sussex Casualties Killed, Wounded and Missing - Biographical Notes

Second Lieutenant Vincent Waterfall, of Langdene, Burgess Hill, whose death was recorded in our last issue, was gazetted to the 3rd Battalion of the East Yorkshire Regiment in January, 1912. He joined the Royal Flying Corps in July, 1914 for a course of instruction at Farnborough (Hampshire) and became a Flying Officer in August. In the current issue of 'The Aeroplane' is the following obituary notice: - "Mr. Waterfall will be remembered by many at Brooklands (Surrey) as a very promising pilot. He took his certificate No. 461, at the Vickers School, on April 23rd 1913, and afterwards flew on various machines, particularly doing some good flying on the Martin-Handasyde monoplane. Personally he was a fine specimen of the best type of English public school boy, and had the making of an officer of the very best class. His high spirits which were absolutely without harm to anybody, and his unfailing good nature, endeared him to all who knew him, and he will be greatly missed and deeply regretted by his many friends, who will join in tendering to the lady to whom he was engaged and to his relatives their deepest sympathy." His body and that of Lieutenant C. G. Bayly were found by a Belgian at a place not stated, and were hidden so that they should not be found by the Germans."



Walter Frank and Mary (nee Figgins) Waterfall

Photograph of Vincent's parents possibly taken in the garden at LANGDENE:
Tessa Waterfall

Vincent's parents, Walter and Mary Waterfall, lived at "LANGDENE" 94 Mill Road, Burgess Hill, having moved here several years before for the sake of Walter's health. Vincent was one of eight sons and two daughters.



***'LANGDENE' (94) Mill Road, Burgess Hill, Sussex.
The home in 1915 of Walter & Mary Waterfall, parents of Vincent.
The house was demolished in 2005 and new houses built. This
large plot of land is now the site of Mill & Millers Close.***

Alan Seymour Archives



***The headstone on the grave of Walter & Mary Waterfall, parents of
Vincent.***

***Location: East Terrace - Churchyard of St. John the Evangelist,
Burgess Hill, Sussex.***

Alan Seymour Archives

Headstone reads: –

*In Loving Memory of **WALTER FRANK WATERFALL** born 20th April 1847,
died 13th March 1915 aged 67 years and his wife **MARY WATERFALL** died
18th January 1927 aged 77 years*

*Also of 2nd Lieut. **VINCENT WATERFALL** their youngest son killed in
action 22nd August 1914 aged 23 years.*

While carrying out my research I found the following article in the Surrey Mirror dated 14th July 1914, just five weeks before Vincent was to lose his life. Vincent pleaded guilty to motoring at 30 miles an hour in the Dorking Road, Betchworth and was fined £2 and costs. The Chairman said "*the defendant was evidently careless, and if he was careless in flying it might cost him his life.*" Little did the Chairman know then that they were only weeks away from the start of the First World War and two weeks after that Vincent would lose his life for 'King & Country'.

SPEEDY MOTORISTS.—George Alexander Cowland, Doods-road, Reigate, pleaded guilty to motoring at 30 miles an hour in the Dorking-road, Betchworth, and was fined £2 and costs.—Vincent Waterfall, an officer in the Royal Flying Corps, living at Byfleet, pleaded guilty to traveling at 30 miles an hour, and also for failing to produce his license.—The defendant told Inspector Bailey when he stopped him he should have been flying that day, but “he did not like the look of it.” Defendant also told the magistrates that he had only twelve hours’ notice in which to rejoin his corps at Netheravon, and in the hurry of packing he forgot to take his motor license with him.—The Chairman said the defendant was evidently careless, and if he was careless in flying it might cost him his life. For exceeding the limit he would be fined £2 and costs, and the other summons would be dismissed.—Other motor-

Surrey Mirror dated 14th July 1914: British Newspaper Archives



Burgess Hill Town War Memorial, Nov 11th 1923
BHLHS photographic archives

Vincent Waterfall & Charles Bayly: Royal Aero Club RAeC 461 & 441

Vincent Waterfall, 2nd Lt. 3rd East Yorkshire Regiment, along with his Observer Charles George Gordon Bayly, Lt. 56th Field Company, Royal Engineers – both attached to No. 5 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps (RFC) had a short war as on the 22nd August 1914 they were both to die in action. They were on a reconnaissance flight when their aircraft serial No.390, type Avro504, was brought down by enemy ground fire.

Vincent's observer, Charles George Gordon Bayly, was himself a qualified pilot. He came from a military family, with a great uncle being none other than 'Gordon of Khartoum.' Charles joined 5 Squadron at the end of June 1914 and flew his machine to Amiens on 12th August when the RFC landed in France.