

Lieutenant Charles Stewart Cautherley – Headstone Rededication 21st March 2024

Herts At War Attendance

When we heard that an unknown Hertfordshire Officer buried at Poelcapelle British Cemetery had been identified, and that there was to be a ceremony for the rededication of the headstone, we felt that we must attend. This is something that I had not seen before, so four of us, Dan Hill, Paul Johnson, Stuart Osborne and I headed out to Belgium for the ceremony.

These are rare events, but despite this we were surprised to learn that over 4 or 5 days four such dedications had been organised - three of which were the results of the efforts of just one researcher. Sadly, although he was due to be there, he was unable to attend, so we have yet to meet him.

While travelling, we were told of the rededication of a headstone to Sergeant J H Bott (DCM), so we diverted to Hooze Crater Cemetery and witnessed that ceremony on our way to Ypres. Not really knowing what to expect, it was not only interesting but useful in helping me decide where to stand to take photographs at 'our Hertfordshire ceremony'. The numbers here were certainly swollen by two coach loads of relatively new recruits from the Army Training Regiment at Winchester, who also just happened to be in the area and whose guides persuaded them to add this to their itinerary.



As brief background to Charles Cautherley's rededication, for those who do not know, the Hertfordshires were a Territorial Force, small in number, fielding only one fighting Battalion during the war and, although not the first such regiment to go, they did go early, entering the war on November 6th, 1914. They were almost destroyed at St Julian on July 31st, 1917, and had other periods of terrible losses. The CWGC record their deaths as 840 men, of which 41 were officers, and of those 14 (now 13) were lost or buried beneath headstones inscribed "Known Unto God".

A military service record form for Charles Stewart Cautherley. The form is handwritten and includes details such as name, rank, and service dates. It is titled "Campaign - 18-14-1914" and "Present situation". The form is divided into sections for "Name", "Rank", "Reg. No.", "Roll", and "Page". It also includes a section for "Action taken" and "Remarks". The form is signed by "W.S. 1/4/22" and dated "18-9-16".

I will only give the briefest of details for Charles, as since our visit, we have added considerably to his biography which can be seen on the HAW website "www.hertsatwar.co.uk/biographies/890432/charles-stewart-cautherley".

He was a Yorkshire man from Headingley, the son of middle class parents and with deep roots in Hertfordshire, although it took a while to find those roots. A newspaper article reported that after his father died in 1911, he was brought some 160 miles back to Royston (Herts) for burial.

Coincidentally, I found that some of the family lived close to where I was brought up there. Charles joined the Honourable Artillery Company Territorial Service in 1909, rising to Company Sergeant Major before being commissioned to the Hertfordshire Regiment in October 1915, and joining them in the field in April 1916. He was probably at St Julian in 1917 (mentioned above), but died much later, probably by bullet, but possibly by shellfire (see biography) in April 1918.

The rededication service, conducted by the Rev. Tom Sander, Chaplain to the Household Cavalry, took place at 9:30am, under a grey sky, threatening rain which for the most part did not come. It was a moving and respectful ceremony organised by the Ministry of Defence's JCCC (Joint Casualty & Compassionate Centre). I would estimate that about 40 to 50 people were present, including a cousin, representatives from the organisers, the CWGC – including their Head of Commemorations, senior military personnel from Belgium, Colour Sergeant Andrew Evans and Sergeant Aron Walker from the 2nd Battalion, Royal Anglian Regiment, Royal British Legion, their standard bearers and a bugler.



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Fortunately, we had a wreath available - stored in case of need, and our project's Lead Historian, Paul Johnson, was permitted to lay it on behalf of Herts At War – a very proud moment for him and us.

Veterans TV have added a video which can be seen at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMmlA2WmWoA – Paul is fourth from the left in the wreath laying line-up facing the grave, and if you wish to see Sergeant J H Bott's ceremony, that is there too at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZsGD1A7qPMw.



It has inspired us, and we are now working to identify another officer's grave, for which Charles Cautherley was one of the possibilities, so that may prove a little easier now - *I'll let you know if we are successful!*

Jonty Wild

