

## CAPTAIN GEORGE HUTTON BOWES-WILSON, MA.



The eldest son of Thomas, linen and sailcloth merchant, and his wife Maria Bowes-Wilson of Enterpen Hall, Hutton Rudby. The family ran their business from Hutton Mill employing one hundred hands in the late 1880s, eventually dropping to fifty in the early 1900s. However, they are recorded as being the largest employer in the village for more than fifty years

George was born on 26 October 1873 and educated at Clifton and New College, Oxford, where he graduated *BA* with honours in 1898.

He qualified as a Solicitor in April 1902, working from office premises at 28 Albert Road, Middlesbrough, now nondescript modern office block premises.



In 1906 he was elected a Councillor for the Exchange Ward and having been re-elected a number of times, was still in post at the time of his death. During the intervening years he had served on many committees such as Sanitary, Sanatorium Finance, Streets, General Purposes, Fire Brigade and Cemeteries.

On 29 September 1908 he married at St Peter's Church, Harrogate Nora Dulcie Linney, aged twenty-three, only child of the late Herbert Linney and they settled in the Middlesbrough area.

He is recorded in Ferrum Lodge documents as living at 6 Lothian Road when proposed for membership by the WM; his proposer was W Bro Henry Winterschladen, seconded by W Bro S.F. Thompson with his initiation in Ferrum Lodge being on 8 March 1911.

That same year saw the opening of the Transporter Bridge and perhaps as a testament to George's position in town society he and his wife were allotted places in No. 8 carriage.

A member of the Law Society he was later employed in the Treasurer's Department, Town Hall, whilst a representative for Middlesbrough on the North Riding Territorial Association and a Cleveland Unionist Agent.

Among his many hobbies and interests were golf and cricket and it is known that he played the latter game for Hutton Rudby, being their triumphant captain in the 1905 and 1906 Cleveland and Teesside Cup competitions. (see photo below).



In July 1914 a new bowling green in Albert Park was opened by Mrs H.W.F. Bolckow and Chairman of the Parks Committee was G.H. Bowes-Wilson, now residing at 80 Lothian Road.

He was also a member of the New Oxford, Cambridge and Cleveland Clubs.

Involved with the Territorial Forces since 1907 and promoted Captain on 1 March 1913 George volunteered to do his duty in 1914 with his Regiment as previously detailed.

Whilst in the Flanders fields the Captain had exchanged letters with a friend, colleague and fellow Freemason, Preston Kitchen, Middlesbrough's Town Clerk (1917 WM Erimus Lodge) and the following from him was printed in a *Daily Gazette* article dated 10 May 1915.

### **"Our Men Are Splendid"**

"You will now know our battalion has been in the forefront of the Ypres battle and how badly we suffered – one hundred odd men and five officers killed.

The battalion has been specially complimented by the General on the splendid way it fought in its first engagement. (This is a possible reference to the Yorkshire Regiment because of their bravery and fighting stance, later being dubbed the Yorkshire Ghurkhas.)

Middlesbrough can be proud of her sons. Not a man in my company hesitated.

Tell the people at home this war is by no means over. England will require every man she has before German Militarism can be crushed – and crushed it must be – otherwise all the lives we have lost will be in vain.

So far thank God, I am well. We are now in the thick of it and our losses are growing. Trench life is unpleasant but what a pleasure it is to receive letters from friends. I have not washed or had my boots off for ten days now so you can imagine what I feel like."

"You ask me if you can do anything to help."

"Yes, send me an occasional Gazette, some chocolate and a nice plum cake if you find time."

(MRE note – Personally I think this letter was written towards the end of April after the previously described battle of St. Julien. To me it encompasses so much in a brave brother's thoughts when facing difficulty and personal jeopardy. How he finds time to communicate to others a Masonic belief in the truth through the description of his own and his compatriots situation, his belief in the fight and a sense of humour when facing terrible times).

In a further letter to Councillor Trevelyan Thompson, also in the *Gazette*, his mood appears altogether more sombre and serious.

"England will need all her sons, there must be no slackness in recruiting. The German is not beaten yet. English people must be made to understand the seriousness of this war. Where I am, neither in Ypres nor the district is there a single house standing.

Devastation all over.

Prussian ruthlessness must be smashed otherwise all the efforts of those noble sons who have given up their lives will be in vain.”

In a note referring prior to but dated 6 May 1915, George says “I am fit and well and was never wounded. No praise could be too great for our fellows. I knew they would do it. Remember me to everyone.”

Perhaps also still being displayed was the Captain’s Masonic thoughts of brotherly love and relief as his field address on the front line was printed in the *Gazette* for anyone desirous of sending packages to members of the 4<sup>th</sup> Yorkshires.

During that month Captain Bowes-Wilson and the 4<sup>th</sup> remained in the hot spots of the Ypres sector where there was a daily loss of life through regular enemy action.

On 23 May 1915 they moved to trench warfare and apparent hand-to-hand fighting in which he and his battalion were heavily involved along the Menin Road at Hooge.

It was here that the Germans again used ‘gas’ causing serious injury to many officers and men, one of whom was our brave brother, who although exhausted and in a terrible state from the gas, refused to attend hospital.

In June the Battalion was moved up to Sanctuary Wood, an area about two miles east of Ypres and as ill-fitting a name for a battle area that anyone could ever conjure. Sanctuary Wood is said to have obtained the identity in October 1914 when it was used as a sanctuary by stragglers making their way back to their regiments. Throughout the war it was a very active area exchanging hands a number of times, many soldiers losing their lives fighting in trenches that in places were short distances apart and where shelling and sniping was commonplace. At the time Captain Bowes-Wilson and the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion were in the British (1<sup>st</sup>) front lines, the Germans had started tunnelling and blowing the British trenches up and the Royal Engineers assisted by The Ghurkhas were urgently ordered to the area to return the compliment.

However on 17 June 1915 George was stood outside his billet and lost his life to a sniper who had secreted himself within the German lines established in what was known as Shrewsbury Forest.

On numerous occasions I have visited Sanctuary Wood which has been well preserved in its original form. Should anyone doubt the bravery of any of our soldiers then I ask them to view those same trenches overlooking the fields to the German lines, to see and actually feel the remaining shrapnel hammered tree stumps which would have in some poor Tommy’s opinion provided some form of cover, and then realizes the futility of such a thought on observing the surrounding multitude of shell and mortar craters.

There was no sanctuary in that wood for the Captain and the many brave men who followed him.



**Preserved trenches in Sanctuary Wood 2006.  
The British front line is the hedging on the right**



**Shell holes. In the background is hedging which was the British front line with the German front line twenty to thirty yards beyond it.**





**A reminder of the past as we view the shattered tree stumps in Sanctuary Wood  
(Bottom right are German gravestones)**

The Gazette of 28 June 1915 carried an article from a member of the 4<sup>th</sup> Yorkshires describing Captain Bowes-Wilson's burial service within the sound of the gunfire.

"Shortly before midday on the anniversary of Waterloo the remains of the Captain were laid in their last resting place, in a peaceful spot under the shadow of the ruins of Vlamertinghe Church which had been burnt out in consequence of the shelling of the Germans a few days ago." (The church's location for security reasons not initially noted, was later identified in the Captain's memorial service *Gazette* article of 29 June 1915.)

"It was a solemn party which took the body from the camp of the 4<sup>th</sup> York Regiment (where it had been brought from the trenches the night before) and amid silent manifestations of sympathy the little party stood round the open grave and heard the beautiful burial service of the Church of England read by the Chaplain of the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade (The Rev Mr Birch of Darlington)."

"Very few eyes looked on that were not dim with tears whilst the body was tenderly and affectionately committed to its last resting place.

The grave is marked with a rough wooden cross and two beautiful wreaths made from simple wild flowers were placed on it as a token of esteem from those who had served with the deceased officer."

"Whilst the burial service was being conducted the roar of the guns could be heard in the distance. It was truly the funeral of a soldier, simple, yet impressive.

The following poem was encompassed in the same Gazette article of 28 June 1915:

### **To George Bowes-Wilson**

He was not as the lesser men, who wait  
To weigh the issue; self their only creed,  
He would not leave his country to her fate,  
He saw how great her need.

He did not pause to ask if it were best,  
If in the future he would sufferer be;

He quietly made the sacrifice, the rest  
He left to God's decree.

A man of action, just to friends and foes,  
He deemed man's honour than his life more dear;  
His words were few, but when the need arose,  
Forceful and terse and clear.

He had the gift of tolerance, rooted deep  
In kindly humour, ever swift to see  
That oft men laugh so that they may not weep,  
He dared himself to be.

We mourn him deeply, we who hoped to see  
Come to fruition gifts of promises rare,  
Loyal, honourable, brave, a man that we  
And England cannot spare.

'Tis through such men that England's name will live:  
They clear the path to freedom, blind to fears,  
Choosing to die when life is sweet, nor give  
To self the future years.

No man has greater love or self-control,  
Than he who gives his life for that of friend,  
This he has done, and, captain of his soul,  
Played gamely to the end.

W.T.T.

W.T.T. is believed to be Walter Trevelyan-Thomson, the then Councillor for the Vulcan Ward and later Liberal MP for Middlesbrough and with whom George was regularly in written contact (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trevelyan\\_Thomson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trevelyan_Thomson))



WTT

On 29 June 1915 the *Daily Gazette* carried an article and the following includes excerpts from that entry:

### **A POPULAR OFFICER**

#### **Memorial Service for Captain Bowes-Wilson**

The respect with which the Captain was generally regarded was shown yesterday by the large and representative congregation at a memorial service in St. John's Church. His loss deeply mourned by a wide circle of friends many of whom were present today to pay a last tribute.

The Mayor and Mayoress (Alderman and Mrs Bruce) attended accompanied by the Captain's old colleagues on the Town Council.

Also evident were a large military element including several officers from the reserve battalion of his regiment, a detachment of the Royal Garrison Artillery, a number of volunteers in uniform and the Scouts were also represented. The service was conducted by the vicar, the Revd R.W. Beresford-Peirse assisted by the Rural Dean, Canon William Thomas Lawson (former Ferrum Lodge member). The vicar spoke of difficult times where hearts were broken and homes desolated yet through all the sorrow and sadness there came a note of triumph, even of joy. If the war had taught anything it was life's true value recalling the words of our Lord "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends".

Captain Bowes-Wilson heard the call and answered it, and many a home in Middlesbrough, where soldier sons were mourned would grieve at his loss, for he possessed the gift of sympathy and understanding.

Many a mother cherished his sympathetic letters telling of her son's end.

Further sadness was revealed that a short time prior to going to the Front, the Captain and his wife Dulcie had lost their only son Maurice Desmond, aged two.

His Commanding Officer, Colonel Maurice H.L. Bell (later Sir Maurice Bell, 3<sup>rd</sup> Bt) informed his sister Gertrude Bell of the Captain's death and she in a letter to their father, Sir

Hugh Bell, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bt, echoed Maurice's comments, describing Bowes-Wilson as "A most gallant and competent officer".



#### **Grave of Captain Bowes-Wilson with Ferrum Lodge memorial cross 2006**

He is buried at Vlamertinghe Military Cemetery, Grave Ref. No. II. A.9 (5 km west of Ypres, Belgium).

On his grave there is an inscription taken from a poem entitled "Clifton Chapel" by the poet and military historian Sir Henry Newbolt (1862-1938) and reads:

'Qui procul hinc,'

'Qui ante diem perit:

'Sed miles, sed pro patria'

It loosely translates as:

'Who at a distance from here'

'Who died before his time'

'But a soldier on behalf his king and country'





On 12 July 1921 in the presence of his family and many friends, a portrait by George Kewley of Captain Bowes-Wilson (reproduced here), was unveiled by the Mayor in the Middlesbrough Town Hall council chamber and is still on display today.

Sadly whilst researching George I found that his brother, Lt-Col John Hutton Bowes-Wilson serving with the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, attached 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion York and Lancaster Regiment, was also killed in action on the Western Front 7<sup>th</sup> June 1917. He is buried in grave V11, M10 in the Railway Dugouts burial ground, West Vlaanderen, Ypres. John Bowes-Wilson was a fine all round sportsman excelling at cricket and polo and whilst serving in India had won the prestigious Darjeeling Cup and the Regimental Polo Cup. During the Boer War as a Second Lieutenant he was severely wounded and was one of two men rescued by Sergeant James Firth. Firth under heavy enemy gunfire and although shot twice in the head had carried them from the field for which he won the Victoria Cross

Both Bowes-Wilson brothers are commemorated on the Hutton Rudby war memorial along with twenty-seven other men named thereon.

George is also commemorated on the Middlesbrough Cenotaph but his name has been spelled wrongly and is detailed as George Hutton Bowes-Willson