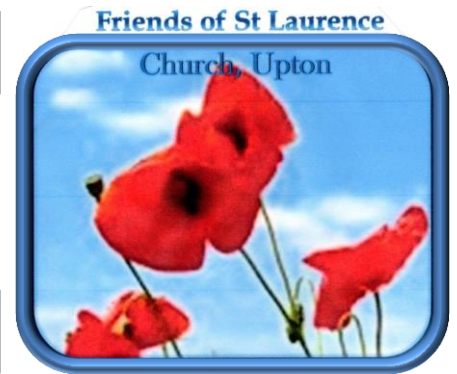


Newsletter

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Welcome to the tenth newsletter of the Friends of St Laurence Church

THE COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION (CWGC) looks after the 1.7 million graves of members of the UK and Commonwealth armed forces all over the world. Some CWGC graveyards are huge: the largest is Tyne Cott Cemetery, in Zonnebeke, Belgium, which contains nearly 12,000 war graves. Some are much smaller. The churchyard at St Laurence contains just one – for a 19-year-old RAF pilot who died while training in Lincolnshire before seeing active service in World War I.

His name was Philip Charles Weaver-Adams. He was born in Church Street, a short walk away from St Laurence, where he was baptised. His father and older brother were well respected doctors in

the parish. We tell their story on p4. Had he lived, Philip might well have become a doctor too. His heartbroken family paid for two beautiful stained glass windows to be made in his memory. They now overlook his grave. Philip's burial plot is maintained by the CWGC with the same loving care that they show to all other fallen comrades.

The second Sunday of November is honoured as Remembrance Sunday, when our thoughts turn to those who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving their country. Those who lost family members in war spare a particular thought for their own loved ones. At St Laurence this year we will remember Philip. And from now on we always will.

A young life remembered, a tragic loss mourned

IT IS DIFFICULT TO APPRECIATE THE tragedy of war from numbers alone. To hear that thousands died in the World War I trenches on a single day of battle is too much for the human mind to grasp. So, in this issue, we have focused on just one victim of war – RAF pilot Second Lieutenant Philip Clive Weaver-Adams.

Philip represents a life snuffed out at an early age – as so many were – before he could fulfil his potential. Recording his life was no easy task. A 19 year old who died over 100 years ago does not leave much of a paper trail for us to follow.

We were fortunate to receive the generous help of Georgina Maszlin, Membership Manager of the Haileybury Society, and colleagues who provided a school photo of



WWI RAF fighter pilot's cap badge.

Philip, from *Haileybury in Two World Wars* by Andrew Hambling, and a cutting from the school newspaper, *The Haileyburian* of November 1918. We are grateful for the time they put

in on our behalf. We also obtained a copy of Philip's service record from RAF archives. At first glance, this document was just a jumble of dates, numbers and letters that meant little to us. But slowly we deciphered the data to trace his progress through training.

We then added some historical background details to bring his story to life. In the process, we reveal an era when young men like Philip, who chose to fight for their country, put their lives on the line from the moment they joined – long before they faced the enemy.

Some information is necessarily technical, for which we apologise. But the picture that emerges is one of pride, dedication, hard work and unwavering courage. Philip was just one member of the armed services who lost his life in war. But he represents them all...

Pilot training: on a wing and a prayer

THE PILOT TIGHTENED HIS SEAT STRAPS, moved the joystick and pedals a few times to check that wing and tail flaps and rudder worked correctly, and then adjusted the fuel settings. He was now ready for take-off.

'Switches off, ready to prime,' he called to the Air Mechanics (AMs) standing in front. They slowly turned the propeller to draw petrol into the cylinders. 'Switches off?' they yelled. 'Switches off,' he replied. They spun the propeller a few more times. More fuel adjustments and then, 'Contact!' they shouted. 'Contact!' he called back. The AMs gave the propeller a hard swing.

The engine coughed into life with a puff of acrid smoke and the pilot's face and goggles became speckled with castor oil. The pilot boosted the throttle, the engine roared and the biplane began to bump along the airfield and pick up speed. It was the 28th of October 1918 and Second Lieutenant Philip Weaver-Adams was about to take his life in his hands – yet again. Take-off was a manoeuvre that he had managed successfully a hundred times or more, but it was never risk free.

DANGEROUS

Aircraft changed beyond recognition during World War I, from giant box kites with car engines to fighters like the Sopwith 'Pup' that Philip was flying now. It had a top speed of 110 mph and could climb to 17,000 feet.

The 'Pup' was no longer a frontline combat aircraft but still a powerful – and dangerous – training tool. Philip had completed over 11 months training; the deadliest phase in the most dangerous branch of the British armed forces. By war's end, 8,000 pilots would be killed in flying accidents – twice as many as in combat. Over 250 air crew had died in training in the last two months alone, two of them in Philip's unit.



Sopwith 'Pup' World War I fighter used as an advanced trainer.

Unlike the mud and carnage of trench warfare, to teenage boys of Philip's era, air combat had glamour. Fighter pilots were 'Knights of the Air' locked in aerobatic dog fights with German air aces.

Philip was based at 46 Training Depot Station (TDS), South Carlton, Lincolnshire, part of 23rd Training Wing, commanded by Major General Louis Strange, whose exploits had made him a legend. Strange was the first pilot to fit a machine gun to his aircraft, fixing it to the top wing to fire over the propeller. He then achieved 'Ace' status by downing six enemy planes, earning him the Military Cross.

To change the ammunition drum in flight he had to stand up in the cockpit. Once, his aircraft flipped over and he was left dangling, hanging on to the drum he'd just fitted. He described the incident: '*I kept on kicking behind me until at last I got one foot and then the other hooked inside the cockpit. Somehow I got the stick between my legs and jammed on full aileron and elevator [wing and tail flaps]...The machine came the right way up, and I fell off the top plane and into my seat with a bump.*' The story appeared in 'Boy's Own' cartoon strips that lads like young Philip devoured.

The 'Pup' was gaining speed and Philip pulled the joystick back just enough to lift the tail. He adjusted the fuel mixture a little more and felt the aircraft coming alive. The 'Pup' started to swing to the left. A touch on right rudder brought it back on course. A little more pressure on the joystick raised the nose, and Philip felt that familiar thrill as the 'Pup' lifted into the air.

EXCELLED

Philip was the fourth of five children born in Church Street, Slough, to Dr Edmund Weaver-Adams and his wife Constance. Philip had an older brother, also called Edmund, serving in France with the Royal Engineers. Like his brother, Philip attended Haileybury School near Hertford, where he entered Melvill House. He excelled in sport and proved popular with staff and pupils alike. He joined Haileybury's Officer Training Corps where he was made sergeant and on leaving school applied for selection in the Royal Flying Corps (RFC), the air branch of the Army.

He was posted to No 1 Officer Cadet Training Wing, in St Leonards, Hastings, for basic training including parade drill, and weapons handling. He also undertook stringent physical tests to show he could cope with the

rigours of flying. If he failed to make the grade he knew he would be sent to fight in the trenches.

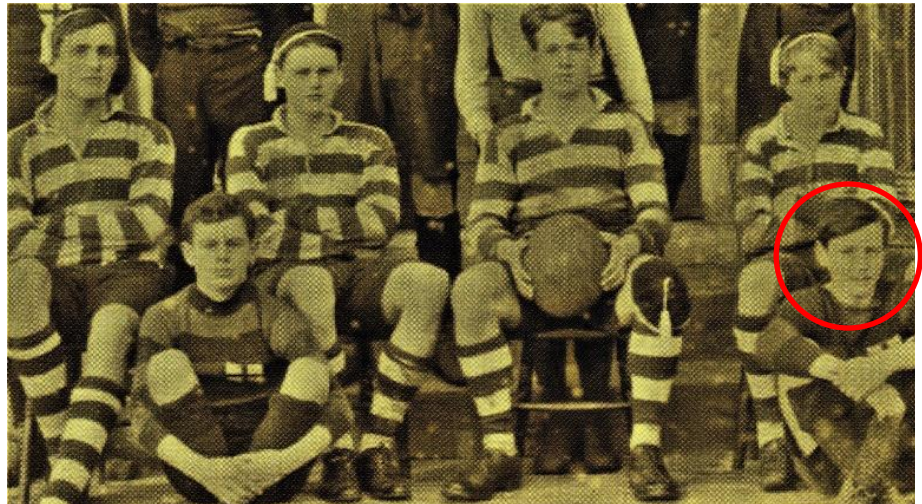
Until 1917, pilots arriving in France could barely fly, let alone fight. During the RFC's worst period, 'Bloody April' 1917, a young pilot's life span was measured in hours: the time it took to take off, reach enemy lines, be spotted by an enemy and get shot down – if they didn't crash *first*. Against better-trained German pilots, recruits stood little chance.

Pilot training was revolutionised by one man, Major Robert Smith-Barry. Sickened by the needless loss of life through poor training, he bombarded the RFC's Commanding Officer Sir Hugh Trenchard with demands for change until given his own training wing at Gosport Flying School, Hampshire. Smith-Barry knew the dangers of flying from personal experience. He was one of the first RFC pilots to learn to fly, and the first to crash. His observer was killed and he was badly injured. He would always walk with a stick.

He brought in dual-control, with the trainee in the main pilot's seat getting instructions via a rubber pipe called the 'Gosport Tube'. Air time was doubled from 40 to 80 hours, including time in fighters such as the notoriously unforgiving Sopwith 'Camel'. Half of all 'Camel' pilots who lost their lives did so in accidents rather than combat.



Flight Cadet Hector Wright



From *Haileybury in Two World Wars*, by Andrew Hambling. Reproduced by kind permission of the Haileybury Society.

Philip (circled) with members of Melvill House Rugby XV in 1914.

Only two of the boys pictured would survive the war.

Smith-Barry encouraged trainees to undertake dangerous manoeuvres such as stalling or going into a spin so they could learn how to recover safely. His 'Gosport System' was soon rolled out across the RFC and Philip was one of those to take part.

THEORY OF FLIGHT

After St Leonards, Philip went on to No 2 School of Aeronautics, at Christchurch College, Oxford, to learn the theory of flight, and aircraft and engine construction.

Flight training began at No 51 Training Depot Station (TDS), at Shotwick, Cheshire, with 25 hours' basic flying, taught over three months. This was followed by 35 hours' advanced training, over two months, to include cross country flying, formation flying, and gunnery – plus at least five hours on advanced frontline aircraft such as the 'Camel'. It was at this point that Philip earned his coveted 'wings'.

Finally came specialist Combat Flying Training with 46 TDS, learning air-to-air combat, ground attack, bombing and air reconnaissance. Despite better pilot training, their wing commander, Louis Strange, was under no illusions about the danger: *'Work in a training wing was no joke. The write-off of one machine for every 140 flying hours meant losses of between 30–40*

aircraft a month, in addition to 70–80 minor crashes. In May 1918 we had 16 fatal crashes in the 23rd Wing.' But the service needed 400 new pilots a month so *'work had to go on at a feverish pace...to cope with operational requirements.'*

In April 1918, the RFC merged with the Royal Naval Air Service to form the fledgling RAF. During this reorganisation, confusion reigned. Plans were drawn up to send new squadrons to France, only to be scrapped. It was a time of great frustration for Philip. He was due to be posted to France with 95 Squadron and then 96 Squadron but both were then disbanded.

In the meantime, Philip was made assistant flying instructor with 46 TDS. With his warm and welcoming personality he soon made friends with the new recruits, but tragically lost some to accidents. One crash occurred just two days before. A 21-year-old Canadian, Second Lieutenant Hiram Claude Fox, was flying a 'Camel' that stalled and spun while he was landing.

Equally tragic was the death of New York-born 18-year-old Flight Cadet Hector Campbell Wright, just a month earlier – again in a 'Camel' – who lost control and spun into the ground. Hector was the only child of US merchant Arthur Fordyce Wright and British-born Alice Fordyce, née

Campbell. After his father's death, Hector and his mother moved to Portman Square, in London.

He attended Lancing College, Sussex, where he served in the Officer Training Corps for two years and later applied for the RFC. Like Philip, he was posted to St Leonards, but on his first leave, unused to alcohol, he reported back to camp intoxicated and was discharged. Only an impassioned plea from his mother got him reinstated.

Hector made it as far as 46 TDS for advanced flight training in a frontline aircraft when he was killed – one month short of his 19th birthday. He is buried in a Commonwealth War Grave at St Andrew's Church, Fencote. Like Hector, the average age of pilots killed in training was just 18 years.

Philip was now clear of the airfield. He was flying to a nearby aerodrome and saw the trip as a chance to practise ground attack on the way. To do this he must keep below 500 feet. If anything went

wrong there was no time to recover. He looked for a 'target' and began his approach. Pushing the joystick forward he began to swoop down as if attacking a gun emplacement.

WRECKAGE

Philip pulled the stick back to level off and begin the climb for another 'attack', but the engine cut out and he crashed back into the ground. Philip was gently lifted from the wreckage still alive, but died later that evening without ever regaining consciousness. Two weeks later the war ended, on 11th November 1918.

His brother Edmund wrote to the school newspaper, *The Haileyburian*: '*...the very large number of letters that my people received shows that [Philip] was popular in very many and different circles.*' The editor added his own moving tribute: '*I was personally very sorry to hear of his death. I had a very touching letter from him in praise of a great friend who was killed in the War. The two will now have met again.*'



One of two stained glass windows dedicated to Philip's memory. *Per Ardua ad Astra* is the RAF motto: 'Through adversity to the stars'.

Father and son GPs: following in Dad's footsteps

DR EDMUND WEAVER-ADAMS AND HIS ELDEST SON WERE both highly respected doctors based in the Upton and Slough area. Dr Weaver-Adams senior was born in Islington in 1869, the son of William Adams, a brick manufacturer, and Clara Simkin. He was educated at the City of London School and King's College Hospital, where he gained the first Warneford Prize (a medical scholarship) in 1890, followed by the prize for medicine a year later.

He qualified as a surgeon and moved to Church Street, Slough, where he was a GP and also, in 1894, medical officer for health for the district. He founded South Bucks St John Ambulance Brigade and often used his eldest son Edmund as 'patient' in first aid lectures. He was one of the founders of Slough Cricket and Bowls Club and an active member of the cricket team. He died of a heart attack in 1931 while on a touring holiday in Wales and is buried at St Laurence Church. A memorial oak bench carved with his name, originally housed

in the Nurses' home in Burlington Avenue, Slough, is now in the south aisle at St Laurence.

His son Edmund Ralph Weaver-Adams was born in Church Street, Slough, in 1895, and educated at Haileybury School, Hertford. In WWI he joined the Royal Engineers as a despatch rider and left as an officer in 1918 to study medicine at St Thomas's Hospital, London. In 1926, he joined his father's practice in Church Street and then Albert Street, where he was known as 'Dr Ralph'. Edmund was closely involved with the St John Ambulance Brigade for 41 years, becoming Commander of the Order in 1954. He, too, was an active Slough Cricket Club player and committee member, becoming club chairman and president.

His first wife Mrs Hebe Margot Weaver-Adams, who he married in 1926, was area superintendent of the St John Ambulance when she died in 1958. He married his second wife Doreen three years before his death in 1965.