

ALBERT GEORGE TAYLOR

by Barry Burnham

Also remembered at St Michael at the North Gate, the name of Albert George Taylor appears on the City Police Memorial which was formerly displayed at the former police station in Blue Boar Street, prior to its relocation to St Aldates. One of four names to appear on the city police memorial, Albert enlisted along with two of the other men on this memorial on the very same day. Born in the village of Shabbington in Buckinghamshire on March 16, 1890, Albert was the second of three sons born to farm labourer Joseph Taylor, and his wife Maria Taylor, nee Neale. Albert was one of eight children listed as Agnes Maria, born 1881, Elizabeth Ann, born 1883, Henry Joseph, born 1886, Janet Prudence, born 1888, Albert George, 1890, Susan Nellie, born 1892, Hilda Louise born 1897, and Ernest Thomas, born 1899.

Shown living at Witney's Farm, Warpsgrove in 1901, the Taylor family then consisted of Joseph, a farm stockman aged 52, his wife Maria aged 42. Of their children, the eldest son Henry was employed as a farm labourer aged 15, and he was followed by Janet, who was 13 years of age. With the two elder children already missing from the family home, Albert was the third child to appear on the 1901 census at the age of 11, and he was followed by Nellie aged 9, Hilda aged 3, and finally the youngest son Ernest at the age of two.

Although Albert had originated from a farming family, it would appear that he initially trained as a mason/bricklayer and it was with this occupation that he appears on the census of 1911. Now living in his father's home village of Ickford (Buckinghamshire), Albert was already twenty-one years of age, and was again living with his parents; Joseph, a farm labourer /cow-man aged 67, and Maria aged 50. The only sibling still living at home was the youngest brother Thomas, who was 12 years of age, and he was still a schoolboy.

Albert Taylor joined the Oxford City Police on August 25, 1911, and at the time of his enrolment as PC 39, he was 5ft 10¼ inches tall, and was described as a former labourer from Shabbington, who had seen no previous public or military service. Given a warrant number 290, Albert soon settled into his new life as a police officer, and was in fact commended by the City Watch Committee on October 8, 1914, for his "prompt and courageous conduct in stopping a runaway horse attached to a four wheeled van near the Railway Stations at 3.40 p.m. on Thursday, October 1st". As a result, Albert was awarded a reward of one guinea (£1-05p) by the Watch Committee.

Soon after this commendation Albert married his wife, Hilda Jane Clifton, at the Headington Registry Office on December 23, 1914. Hilda Jane was born in the small rural hamlet of Sutton, (south-east of Witney) in c. 1889, with her baptism held at the church of St. Michael's in Stanton Harcourt on July 7. Hilda was one of seven children, and was the second daughter of Letitia and Henry William Clifton, a local farmer who had apparently originated from Stanton Harcourt. Still living at home with her parents at the time of the 1911 census, Hilda was employed as a dressmaker during this period. At the time of her marriage Hilda appears to have been living at 50 Kingston Road in Oxford, although some months earlier she may have been living at 47 Sunningwell Road, New Hinksey. Albert and Hilda appear to have had two children, the first of whom,

Dorothy Hilda Clifton, was born on March 19, 1914. As she was born some months before their marriage, there must be some doubt as to the parentage of Dorothy. A son, Ronald George Taylor, was born in 1915.

Certainly not a man lacking in personnel courage, Albert is known to have enlisted alongside a group of fellow police officers on May 27, 1915; and like his colleagues, (PCs Page, Martin, Edmund, Webb, Judd, Brookland, Hudson and May) he joined the newly formed 132nd (Oxfordshire) Heavy Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery. Eventually deployed to France in March 1916, Albert would have seen action during the Somme campaign of 1916, and possibly the following year during the Arras offensive of April/May 1917. (Following his death, it was reported that Albert had been suffering from shell shock early in 1917, and may have missed the Arras campaign). Later moving to Belgium, the 132nd Heavy Battery was part of a massive artillery offensive during the Passchendaele campaign, and on September 29, 1917, joined the 11th Heavy Artillery Group (also known as the 11th Artillery Brigade). Although Albert was officially recorded as 'killed in action' on October 1, 1917 by both the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and *Soldiers Died in the Great War*, the *Oxford Chronicle* (dated October 19, 1917) published a brief, yet interesting death notice which indicated the circumstances surrounding his death, and also gave a completely different date of death. Entered in the 'late casualties' section, the death of Albert Taylor was reported as -

Killed in Action, Sergt. Albert George Taylor R.G.A. a member of the Oxford City Police was killed at the front on September 20th. It is believed that while he was sleeping in a bomb-proof shelter a shell from an enemy aeroplane burst near, and he was struck by the splinters. Sergt. Taylor had been a member of the City Police Force since 1911. He enlisted on May 17th 1915, as a gunner in the R.G.A. and was quickly promoted to the rank of Sergeant. Sometime this year he was in hospital in France suffering from shell-shock. A short while ago he was home on leave, and had returned only a few weeks when he was killed. The deceased leaves a widow and two children.

The Oxford Times also reported his death on October 13, 1917:

Taylor - September 30, killed in action in France, Sergt. A. G. Taylor, R.G.A. late of the City Police, Oxford, and second son of the late Joseph Taylor, of Ickford, aged 28 years.

A third local newspaper, the *Oxford Journal Illustrated*, also recorded the death of Albert Taylor, with an entry in the 'Heroes of the War' section on December 19, 1917. Printing a small photograph, the newspaper used a brief description which reads: "Sergt. A.G. Taylor, R.G.A, Newton-road, late of the City Police, - Killed." - In-fact this was not the first time that this photograph was published in the *Journal* as just five months earlier the same photograph had been used on July 18, 1917, to announce that Albert had been suffering from shell-shock.

After his death, one of the regular Watch Committee meetings was held at the Police Station on October 11, 1917, and at this meeting the following letter was read out: "Gentleman, I regret to have to report to you that news has been received that P.C. 39. Albert Taylor of this force has been killed in France by a splinter from a bomb dropped

from an aeroplane on Sunday, 30th September. P.C. Taylor joined the force on the 25th April, 1911, and enlisted in the army (132nd Battery, R.G.A) on the 17th May, 1915, proceeding to France in April 1916. Taylor leaves a widow and two children, and I respectfully suggest that the weekly allowance of sixteen shillings be continued to her until it is known what the War Office will do in the matter of a pension. I am, Gentleman, your obedient servant, Oswald Cole, Chief Constable". "It was resolved that a letter of sympathy be sent to Mrs Taylor in the great loss she has sustained in the death of her husband".

His official date of death was confirmed twelve months later on October 5, 1918 when *The Oxford Times* published a memorial from his wife: *"Taylor - In loving memory of Sergt. A. G Taylor, R.G.A, (late of the Oxford City Police Force) killed in France, October 1, 1917, aged 28 years - from his loving wife and children."*

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has the following details for Albert Taylor:
- Rank: Sergeant, Service No: 291926, Date of Death: 01/10/1917, Age: 28, Regiment: Royal Garrison Artillery, Unit: 132nd Heavy Battery, Cemetery: The Huts Cemetery, Grave Ref: VII.B.4. Additional Information: Son of Joseph and Martha Maria Taylor; husband of Hilda Jane Taylor, of South View, Standlake, Witney, Oxon. In addition to the C.W.G.C, a second Great War database; Soldiers Died in the Great War, shows the following information: - Birthplace: Shabbington, Bucks, Enlisted: Oxford, How Died: Killed in Action, Theatre of War: France & Flanders, Supplementary Notes: Formerly 562, 132nd Oxford Heavy Battery, R.G.A. For his service with the R.G.A. Albert was posthumously awarded the ubiquitous pairing of the British War and Victory Medals.

Albert's father died in Ickford on 5 October 1917. His mother possibly died in 1947, with her death recorded in the Ploughley Registration District during the March quarter aged 85.

It's not clear what became of Albert's wife after his death, although she was living at Standlake during the early 1920s.