

# Star pupil was cut down in the prime of his life

International footballer, actor and officer had a glittering career ahead of him

THE First World War saw millions of lives cut short.

Among the casualties were many who had recently finished school and who would have begun their own path in the world.

One was a young aspiring officer by the name of Evers, whose life is remembered in St Bartholomew's School, Newbury.

Bertram Saxelbye Evers, born in 1891, was the youngest of 12 children of the Rev Edwin and Fanny Evers (nee Saxelbye) of Leamington Spa, Warwickshire.

He attended Newbury Grammar School – now St Bartholomew's School – from 1904, his sister Lucy having married the headmaster, Edward Sharwood-Smith.

Bertram was an excellent all-rounder, capable with both academics and physical activities.

He won junior school prizes for Latin and French in 1905 and 1906, and passed the Cambridge Junior Local Examination in 1907. He went on to pass the Senior Local and obtain a Third Class Honours with Distinction in Latin.

He also appeared in various Shakespeare productions and was appointed a school prefect and secretary of the Dramatic Society in 1907.

**BERTRAM EVERS** was on the brink of a successful career when war broke out. The former Newbury Grammar School pupil was an amateur international footballer and Cambridge graduate. But, after surviving the disastrous campaign in Gallipoli, he was killed at The Somme in 1916.

■ If your family history touches on the First World War, or you have stories or photographs that you think would be of interest to us as we cover the centenary, email [john.herring@newburynews.co.uk](mailto:john.herring@newburynews.co.uk). We would be pleased to hear from you.

Bertram's time in Newbury also saw him appointed captain of the school's football and cricket team – and this was the start of his short sporting life.

Extracts from the school's magazine *The Newburian* said that the football team, under his able and energetic leadership, had once more fully maintained the football traditions of the school.

The team had won 12 of its last 19 matches, scoring 95 goals and conceding 68 – a distinct improvement on the previous season.

The report said: "Evers, who scored on 12 occasions, was easily the best of the halves, and both in attack and defence set an admirable example to the rest of the team by his vigorous, effectual and untiring work in the centre."

"Evers has set his team an excellent example on and off the field.

"A brilliant exponent of the game; his tackling is even better than last year, and as a spoiling half he would be difficult to beat. He feeds his forwards well and generally manages to be there."

Evers was equally adept at cricket – an attractive, stroke-playing batsman, a good bowler and 'an absolutely first-rate field'.

*The Newburian* reported: "His efforts have been untiring, his only fault being that he has done too much, not insisting on more work from his subordinates."

Bertram left the Grammar School in 1910 and entered Jesus College, Cambridge, where he became known as 'Babe'.

The college's newsletter *The Chanticleer* described him as: "A nice little laddie. The reason for his nickname is obvious, but the look of extreme innocence which he wore as a fresher has been discarded – we know him too well now."

He gained distinction as a half-back and was awarded his football Blue for the 1910-11 season.

His ability was recognised as he was selected for the amateur footballer internationals against Wales and France in 1913 and also saw action against Belgium.

Evers teamed up with Cyril Edward Hughes-Davies to write *The Complete Association Football* (complete with 29 illustrations and seven diagrams), published in 1912.

He also joined the Officers Training Corps – something that would play a great role in his young life.

After graduating, Bertram became a master at the Priory School, Malvern, and was planning to leave to answer an appeal for men to take up work in the college at Agra, India, when the clouds of war formed in 1914.

At the outbreak of war in August 1914 Bertram enlisted as a private in the West Yorkshire Regiment.

His early service is unclear, but

on July 10, 1915 the regiment was sent to assist Commonwealth troops against the Ottoman Empire at Gallipoli, where Evers was involved in the disastrous landing at Suvla Bay in August.

The landing was supposed to draw away and defeat Ottoman troops to allow a break-out of Australian and New Zealand forces five miles to the south.

The 6th Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment, drove the Ottomans from a hillock overlooking the beach at the cost of all but two of the officers and one third of the men.

Things deteriorated further when destroyers conveying the troops anchored too far south, meaning that the men had to wade with their kit in pitch darkness to the shore, where they became pinned down by enemy fire.

In the first 24 hours Eleventh Division had suffered 1,700 casualties and gained two positions, Evers being one of the many wounded.

The aftermath of the Gallipoli landings saw the elderly General Frederick Stopford replaced and reinforcements bought in.

The fighting reached its peak at the largest battle of the Gallipoli campaign, the Battle of Scimitar Hill, on August 21. The action produced another defeat for the Allies, who were evacuated in December.

Bertram's local paper, the *Herald and Courier* in Heckmondwike reported: "Evers joined his regiment at York as an ordinary private and was a member of the famous Eleventh Division that made history at Suvla Bay, being the first to land and the last to leave."

"This same battalion was transferred, after the withdrawal from Gallipoli to Egypt, and after two or three months' stay, was brought to France."

"Whilst in Gallipoli Capt Evers received his promotion. But as a private he had the opportunity of studying the conditions in which soldiers live."

Following the disaster at Suvla, Evers was now a captain in the 9th Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of Wales' Own), one of many that took part in the four-month 'Great Push' of 1916 – the Battle of the Somme.

Evers was killed on September 14, 1916 while leading his men in an attack on the fortified village of



Captain Bertram Evers

Thiepval and the Wundtwerk (Wonder Work), a series of German fortifications and concentrated machine guns.

(The *Herald and Courier* (Heckmondwike) reported his death on October 5, 1916 under the heading *A Brilliant Career Cut Short*.

It read: "Capt. Evers is the youngest son of the Rev. E Evers, formerly vicar of Aldborough, near Harrogate, and now of Morton Lodge, Leamington."

"The manner in which Capt Evers met his death is a thrilling story."

"An officer writes: 'Bertram had gone about 100 yards or a little more than half the distance to the German trench and was signalling the direction to his men when he was hit.'

"Two or three men ran to him, but he waved them away and urged his men on for a few seconds as he lay and then collapsed."

"This occurred at about 6.30am on September 14."

"Many are the letters that have been received testifying to the dead officer's worth."

"He was loved, respected, and, one might say, almost worshipped by all his men."

"In a dispute Tommy would consult 'Mr' Evers, for they forgot 'Capt' in their love for him, and his judgments were always fair and just."

"In his work, he was conscientious, and his one consideration was the welfare of the soldiers in his charge, for had he not himself suffered their privations."

"He will be greatly missed by a huge circle of friends."

His obituary was also published in *The Times* on October 6, 1916. His commanding officer wrote: "He died leading his men splendidly."

Bertram Evers is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial and the War Memorial in the Cloisters of Jesus College, Cambridge.

## Teacher ensures legacy endures

BERTRAM EVERS' memory lives on through the thousands of pupils who have passed through Evers house at St Bartholomew's School.

Former St Bart's teacher, Alan Metcalfe, was the housemaster of Evers House for around 30 years.

Very little was known of Evers until Mr Metcalfe began looking into his remarkable life, with just a school photograph of the 1910 football team to go on.

Mr Metcalfe, who lives in Newbury, wanted to know more about the eternally young man who had been a part of his life for so long.

He travelled to the massive Thiepval Memorial, which has the names of more than 72,000 war dead with no known grave.

Mr Metcalfe has stood on the spot where Evers walked his final path "leading his men gloriously."

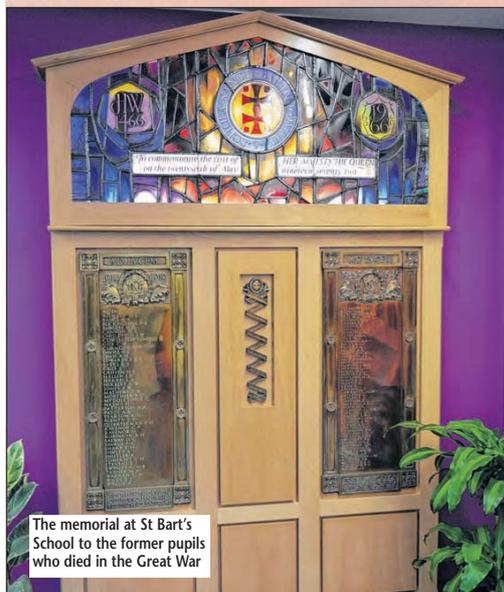
After more research, Mr Metcalfe discovered that Capt B S Evers' remains had been reinterred in Poziere's British Military Cemetery.

Mr Metcalfe took the former headmaster's grandson, Geoff Sharwood Smith, along with him to visit the resting place of his great uncle.

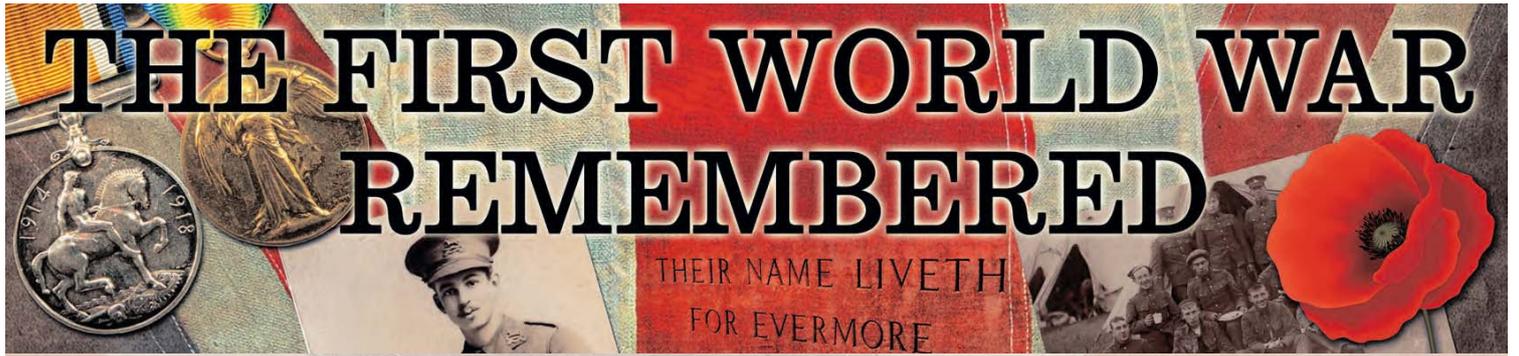


Alan Metcalfe, right, and Geoff Sharwood Smith at the grave of a 'Captain of the Great War' at Poziere Military Cemetery

Words by John Herring and Jackie Markham



The memorial at St Bart's School to the former pupils who died in the Great War



# 'School gave some its best and noblest to the war'

## St Bart's headmaster's heartache as his former pupils are killed in action

THE deaths of so many young men on the battlefields of Europe caused heartache for those left behind.

This massive sense of loss was particularly keenly felt in the schools, where just a few years previously these young men had seemed to be on the cusp of brilliant and successful futures.

When war was declared in 1914, the headmaster of Newbury Grammar School was Edward Sharwood Smith.

He had come to the school in 1902, having been the Sixth Form master at Whitchurch Grammar School, and was an educational visionary.

He inspired his pupils, as well as taught them. His trust and belief in the boys was absolute—he gave them wide responsibilities and ran the school as a self-governing community.

A spirit of mutual co-operation was encouraged, and under his enlightened leadership the school flourished.

Mr Sharwood Smith founded

a dramatic society, a library and a school magazine, as well as building science labs and encouraging a host of sporting and extra-curricular activities.

He retired from the school at Christmas, 1924, and in 1935 published a book based on his long career in education, *The Faith of a Schoolmaster*, and his wife Lucy was connected with many good causes throughout the town.

Mr Sharwood Smith died in 1954, aged 89.

As the war progressed, the deaths of local men were recorded in the columns of the *NWN* with depressing regularity.

In September 1916, several of those were ex-Newbury Grammar School boys, among them George Herbert, aged 33, who had worked for the GPO telegraphs department, and Herbert Ravenor.

Herbert, one of seven sons of a local alderman and ex-mayor of Newbury, had travelled widely and answered his nation's call to arms from his



Newbury Grammar School headmaster Edward Sharwood Smith fruit plantation in Australia. At the end of that month, Mr Sharwood Smith penned a moving article in the *NWN* on the many losses the school had suffered.

He wrote: "I sometimes think that to no person do the long casualty lists strike home with a more poignant thrill than to a schoolmaster who has followed his profession for many years.

"No schoolmaster worthy of the name feels other than a deep personal affection for nearly all his pupils – he has watched them grow from childhood to adolescence under his care and when they leave him, his hopes and thoughts must follow them wherever they may go.

"The Grammar School at Newbury has given some of its best and noblest to the war."

Mr Sharwood Smith mentioned Alec Davis, 'the leader of the best soccer team the school has possessed in recent years'.

Among others mentioned are Geoffrey Myddleton, on the threshold of a brilliant career at Cambridge, and DJ Salway, quiet and unassuming by nature, but "a potent influence for good".

And just a couple of weeks earlier, a member of Mr



The Newbury Grammar School building that opened in 1885

Sharwood Smith's own family, his wife's brother Bertram Evers, was killed.

"The brilliant athlete" captained the cricket and football teams, and survived the horrors of Gallipoli almost unscathed before falling in battle on The Somme.

Describing walking the corridors of Newbury Grammar School with its photographs of dramatic productions and sporting trophies, Mr Sharwood Smith said: "Everywhere the air is thick with ghostly voices. We shall think of them all with proud remembrance.

"The best memorial will be in the hearts of their school-fellows and school-masters.

"And surely in the highest and truest sense, each one is with us still – a pulse in the eternal mind, no less' [a reference to Rupert Brooke's 1914 poem *The Soldier*]."

In 1917 the headmaster's wife suggested that the names of the four houses of the school's new pastoral care system should be named after four of the war dead.

The Newbury boys and girls grammar schools amalgamated in 1975 and formed the present St Bartholomew's School.

According to the St Bartholomew's School librarian Judith Thomas, those four were selected from the 44 boys who died in the war, on the basis of their school records.

The four were Alec Davis, Bertram Evers, George Curnock and Robert Patterson, and St Bartholomew's continues to use these house names.

All of the war dead are commemorated on the school's Roll of Honour. Their names will be read out at a special service of remembrance to be held at the school on November 11.



A memorial to the 44 former St Bart's pupils who were killed during the First World War

# War heroes' legend lives on in house names

ALEXANDER Herbert Davis was born in Newbury in 1889 and attended the grammar school from 1898 to 1906.

His father Henry Davis was a chemist in Northbrook Street, but his mother Laura died when Alexander was just 12.

Alexander was a "team player" and headmaster Edward Sharwood Smith described him as "the fair-haired leader of the best football team the school has possessed in recent years, whose devotion and keenness were most marked."

He performed well in the dramatic society, but it was for his sporting prowess in both football and cricket that he was mainly remembered.

He served as Private 2350 in the Artists' Rifles, a regiment formed in London in 1859 by art students, painters, musicians and actors. It was popular for volunteers, and recruits from public schools and universities.

Alexander died of a brain tumour in hospital in London on January 21, 1915, aged 25, having seen no active service on the battlefield (the Regiment did not go to France until 1917/18, when they suffered heavier casualties than any other regiment).

Alec is buried in the family plot at Newtown Road cemetery.

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GEORGE Ashwin Curnock was

A TOTAL of 44 former pupils of Newbury Grammar School were killed in the First World War.

Four were chosen to have the school houses named after them – Bertram Evers, Alexander Davis, George Curnock and Robert Patterson. St Bartholomew's School librarian Judith Thomas has researched their life stories.

born in 1893 in Worcestershire, and attended the grammar school from 1905 to 1912.

His father Clement Curnock was a farm bailiff at Harwood Farm, Woolton Hill, and George was the most academic of the four, with little interest in sport.

He received many prizes on speech days, and was considered a good actor in the Dramatic Society.

He became a senior prefect and was editor of the *Newburian* magazine.

In 1911 he "achieved the greatest distinction yet fallen to our lot" by being elected to an Open Scholarship for Classics at Pembroke College, Cambridge.

The headmaster described him as a "stalwart pillar of the school".

After two years at Cambridge, George joined the University Officers' Training Corps (OTC) at the outbreak of war, and in December 1914 was a 2nd Lieutenant in the Rifles brigade.

He served with distinction in various theatres of war until he was killed in action in France on August 14, 1917.

He was 24 years old and had been in France for three months.

Headteacher Edward Sharwood Smith wrote a tribute in the *NWN* of August 30, 1917.

It read: "It is difficult not to feel resentful with a fate that has cut short a life of such splendid promise.

"Truly the school has suffered beyond measure.

"Let anyone who was there in the seven years from 1905-12 think what these three names – Evers, Curnock, Patterson – meant for the whole character and spirit of the place.

"And all three are now gone, cut off in the prime of their early manhood.

"But what they were survives, and will survive in the memory of their school-masters and schoolfellows, and remains an abiding possession that nothing can wholly take away."

George is commemorated on the Menin Gate memorial at Ypres, as well as the Newbury Town War Memorial and the school's Roll of Honour.

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ROBERT Arthur Patterson was born in Islington in 1896.

His father was a doctor in Lambourn, and lived at Eastbury, and Robert attended the grammar school from 1907 to 1912.

He was a master of language and excelled at debating.

He was a football captain, librarian and editor of the *Newburian*, and was able to argue "with a charming flow of wit" on many and varied subjects, including playing devil's advocate, at the debating society.

Mr Sharwood Smith recalled "his spirit was of the finest temper", and said: "If I had to choose boys of first-class ability and unwavering rectitude of character who have been at Newbury in my time, and of whom I could unhesitatingly prophecy that they would achieve great things, I should select three, and RA Patterson is one of the three."

He was a student at Cambridge when war broke out, and became a captain in the Rifle Brigade.

He was killed in France on April 12, 1917, and is remembered on the Roll of Honour and War Memorial at St James the Great Church, Eastbury, pictured left, and the Point du Jour Military Cemetery, Athies, in Northern France.



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