

Arthur Thomas Crawford Cree

**Private 964, C Company, Inns of Court Officer Training Corps
Lieutenant, 7th Battalion, Durham Light Infantry**



Lt Arthur Thomas Crawford Cree
With kind permission of the President and
Fellows of Magdalen College Oxford

The *Pall Mall Gazette* of 31 March 1881 announced the birth of a son three days earlier to Mrs Arthur W Cree of Beckenham. This first child of the marriage of Arthur Walker Cree to Elizabeth Newby of Stockton, would be named **Arthur Thomas Crawford Cree**. Three more sons and two daughters followed.

The family led a settled existence in Beckenham, Kent, and, although their address is given in 1881 as 3 Oakhill Villas, Bromley Road, for all subsequent Censuses they were at Brodsworth, 124 Bromley Road.¹ The house was named after the Yorkshire birthplace of Arthur Walker Cree's father, Thomas. The family clearly had strong legal traditions, as not only was Arthur Walker Cree a solicitor like his father, but his grandfather, also named Thomas Cree, had been called to the Bar at Gray's Inn.² Other members of the family were ordained or served in the armed forces.

In due course, the two older boys, Crawford Cree and his brother John Francis George, following in the footsteps of an uncle, became boarders at Shrewsbury School. ATC Cree was there from 1895 to 1900 and left to go to Magdalen College Oxford, where he graduated in *litterae humaniores*, having already been called to the bar at the Inner Temple in 1902.³

JFG Cree was not far behind, entering Shrewsbury in 1896 and Magdalen in 1900, graduating with a law degree in 1904 and becoming part of his father's firm of solicitors, Cree & Son, of 13 Gray's Inn Square.⁴

¹ 1881 Rg11/850/6/6; 1891 RG12/625/141/34; 1901 Rg13/688/8/7.

² Three generations, all named Thomas Cree, were under the same roof, 26 Mornington Place, St Pancras, in 1851 [HO 107/1493/278/27]. ATC Cree's father, Arthur Walker Cree, was born in 1853.

³ *Shrewsbury School Register*, 1909, p 325; *The Magdalen College Record*, 1909, p 31

⁴ *The Law List*, p 466

The two younger sons seem to have chosen, or perhaps been viewed as suitable for, a possible career in the Army, for they both went to Wellington College. David was in Combermere House from 1898 to 1901; he moved on to the Royal Military Academy and a career with the Royal Engineers, won an MC and retired as a colonel. Charles Edward Victor arrived in the same house in 1900 and left there in 1905.⁵ Although he must have been well regarded in this military college, being made a prefect in his last year, he too opted to become an undergraduate of Magdalen from 1905 to 1909 and by 1911 was employed as an articled clerk and was apparently poised to follow a number of his ancestors into a career in the law.

Meanwhile, Crawford Cree had begun making headway as a barrister, working on the North-Eastern circuit to gain experience and then starting to specialise in Chancery cases. On 31 July 1907 at the Church of St Peter and St Paul, the parish church of Tring, Hertfordshire, aged 26, he married Ivy Elizabeth Marion Williams, two years his junior and the daughter of George Stanley Williams, deceased, late captain in the 8th



The Cree siblings – standing George, Victor and Arthur.

Hussars. The ceremony was performed by the Reverend Edward David Cree, the 80-year-old great-uncle of the bridegroom and the Reverend George Thomas Cree, Crawford's uncle. Ivy Williams had a close family connection to nearby Pendley Manor, which had been rebuilt for her uncle, Joseph Grout Williams, in 1872. The two witnesses to the marriage were JG Williams and Arthur W Cree.⁶

By 1911 the couple were living at 13 Albert Bridge Road, Battersea, and had two daughters: Elizabeth Mary born on 16 October 1908 at the Cree family's house, Brodsworth, in Beckenham and Janet Katherine, registered as Janet, born on 18 March 1910 at 23 Overstrand Mansions, East Battersea. *The Times* of Saturday 13 April 1912 announced the birth of another daughter to Crawford and Ivy Cree on 10 April at 13 Albert Bridge Road and she was registered as Eleanor.⁷

Although his work as a barrister and his young family must have kept him busy, Crawford Cree found the time and energy to serve his local community as a member of Battersea Borough Council. As a member of the Municipal Reform Party he is likely to have been in favour of greater accountability for those in charge of spending public money and of bringing in an integrated transport policy. He also served as manager for three local schools.

John Francis George had also married, on 24 August 1909, in Guernsey, Agatha Blanche Carey. Their daughter, Kathleen Blanche, was born in 1910 and they were living in 1911 at 64 Park Road, Dulwich. His uncle, Thomas George Cree, officiated also at this ceremony.

⁵ *Wellington College Register*

⁶ *Tring Parish Church Marriage Register* p 24, entry 48. See also the announcement in *The Times* of 2 Aug 1907 and a fuller account in the *Buckinghamshire Herald* of 3 Aug 1907, p 6. My thanks to David Roberts who discovered the last mentioned article.

⁷ RG14/2148. WO 374/16496. GRO Index of Births 1912 Q2 Wandsworth 1D 906.

Apart from David, who had chosen a military career, the other three boys must have envisaged a future solidly based on their legal training. For all three, the outbreak of war in August 1914 brought an abrupt change and two would pay the ultimate price.

At that time, 153 public and grammar schools provided basic military training through the Officers' Training Corps (OTC) brought into being in 1907 by RB Haldane, Secretary of State for War; and in most public schools membership was compulsory. This basic training could be extended through university OTCs and a man who had gained his Certificate A at school, followed by Certificate B at university, was viewed as fit to lead a platoon in the Territorial Force.⁸ Thus a *cadre* of potential junior leaders with strong tribal loyalties had been created in time for the unprecedented expansion of the standing army required during the First World War.

War was declared on 4 August 1914 and the very next day C Company of the Inns of Court OTC ('The Devil's Own') received Private ATC Cree, no 964, into its ranks.⁹ This was one of only two Senior OTCs outside the university OTCs; the other was the Artists' Rifles¹⁰ and both now bent all their efforts to giving future officers the necessary military skills.

On 14 September it was agreed that the Inns of Court OTC, under the command of Lt Col FHL Errington, who later wrote its history, should set up its training camp in Berkhamsted on a sloping field near the station and the infantry and cavalry (travelling with their one and only horse, Rowena) duly embarked on all the hustle and bustle of creating their new base. Cree was soon joined by his two brothers, JFG Cree being allocated to the same company on 23 September and CEV Cree going to the newly formed D Company on 29 September.¹¹

They must have gone through their training together, adapting to life under canvas, route marches and night operations away from the indoor setting of court and office. Great emphasis was placed on officers being fitter than the men they would lead and in all military skill areas it was assumed that they were not merely being instructed but were being prepared to instruct others. They had two battalion Field Days a week and were exercised in drill, musketry, entrenchment, map reading, marching, night operations, bombing, PT and bayonet training, plus (from spring 1915) anti-gas measures and the Lewis gun, while lectures covered the many subject areas an officer needed to master. Needless to say, these soldiers were very different from an average army intake. They were older, educated, and independent thinkers, used to running their own lives; and they included experts in many fields. As lawyers and logicians they were only too happy to pick apart regulations and show how they could be interpreted in ways never intended! Instructors had to continue doggedly explaining the trajectory of a bullet, ignoring the lifted eyebrows of eminent mathematicians or physicists, but the corps was immensely proud of having a regimental quartermaster sergeant who could turn King's Regulations into iambs and drill sergeants who would galvanise clumsy recruits by using suitably scathing Latin quotations.¹²

Crawford Cree had little time to benefit from the camp which he must have helped to set up, but was rapidly put forward for a commission. As from 27 November he, with two others from the Inns of Court OTC, were promoted lieutenants and transferred to the 7th Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry,¹³ then stationed in Sunderland. It must have been at this time that he had a studio portrait taken wearing the uniform of the DLI by the photographer Stocks. A copy is held by Magdalen College.¹⁴

⁸ John-Lewis Stempel, *Six Weeks; the Short and Gallant Life of the British Officer in the First World War*, 2010, p 12. See also Richard Holmes, *Tommy, The British Soldier on the Western Front 1914-1918*, 2004, p 134.

⁹ Lt Col FHL Errington, *The Inns of Court Officers' Training Corps During the Great War*, p 134.

¹⁰ J-L Stempel, *op cit*, p 53-4. For further details of the Artists' Rifles see entry for Horne, James Anthony, pp 200-205.

¹¹ Errington, *op cit*, pp 13 & 134.

¹² Errington, *op cit*, pp 14, 56 & 60.

¹³ *The London Gazette*, 26 Nov 1914, p 9982, col B.

¹⁴ The permission of the President and Fellows of Magdalen College Oxford to reproduce this photograph is most gratefully acknowledged.

The battalion moved from Sunderland to Ravensworth Park, Gateshead, for training and it was not until April 1915 that they were sent to France, disembarking at Boulogne on either 17 or 19 April. They became part of the 151st Infantry Brigade, 50th (Northumbrian) Division (TF). The *Battalion War Diary*¹⁵ recounts how they moved up to the line, being billeted at Vlamertinghe on 23 April before moving to Potijze via Ypres, getting their first taste of enemy shellfire on the way. From 28 April to 1 May they were employed in digging and on other fatigues in support of the front-line troops north-east of Frezenberg. Two days later they marched 12 miles to Watou near Poperinghe. This no doubt gave them a chance to absorb what they had seen. On 5 May Sir John French¹⁶ addressed the battalion, telling them they had done fine work.

Three days later they moved up towards the line, bivouacking at Brandhoek. On 11 May, Crawford Cree's last full day on earth, they left Brandhoek Woods at 7.30am and marched by a circuitous route (presumably to remain under cover and avoid shelling) to Zillebeke. Tools were issued and the battalion CO conferred with an officer of the Royal Engineers who was in charge of constructing trenches. The soldiers were shown a line of trenches which had been started and then, under cover of darkness, laboured for five-and-a-half hours until they were relieved at around 2.30am. They then withdrew into the GHQ Line, described in the *War Diary* as a 'second line of trenches E of Ypres'. For 12 May the diary continues: 'The battalion remained in the GHQ line. We were heavily shelled all day and lost 12 men and an Officer.' This officer must have been Crawford Cree.

Colonel H Vause wrote to his widow:¹⁷ 'We had been digging all night. Your husband had been left behind with a party of men to bring up some tools. I went back and stopped him coming any farther about 1.30am, then sent them all to some dugouts where I slept myself. [...?] morning I had some talk with him, he being the only Officer present, and left him to visit the lines. I came back about ½ an hour later and found him wounded. I had some talk with him never thinking he was badly hit and went myself with him to the Hospital about 1 mile back. I saw the Doctor was rather [.....?] about him, but as I examined him I could not find any wound but his hand that was badly hit. I chaffed him he would soon be home again. He complained about a pain in his stomach. I thought he might have had a blow. I went back later in the day and found he had passed away soon after I left. I went back with a party at night as company officers have to go out digging. I also got a nice cross made and carved his name on.' It seems probable that this was the cross later kept at the family's church, St Barnabas, in Beckenham, since it would eventually have been replaced by a standard Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone.¹⁸ Army Form B 2090a, which had to be completed on the death of an officer, stated that he was buried 'on the right of the school on the Menin Road, east of Ypres.'

A brief obituary appeared in *The Times* of 22 May 1915¹⁹ and in *The Salopian*, Vol 34, no. 13, 29 May 1915, no 294, p 220. He is commemorated also on the war memorials at Beckenham, at Shrewsbury School, Magdalen College Oxford and in Temple Church, London, as well as at Chesham Bois and on the Rolls of Honour in St Leonard's Church, Chesham Bois and St Mary's, Amersham. A memorial to the Inns of Court OTC stands on Berkhamsted Common.

The attestation papers filled in when Cree applied for his commission in November 1914 give Avalon, Bois Avenue, Chesham Bois, as his wife's address. This road runs between Copperkins Lane and the A416 Amersham-Chesham road. In Kelly's *1915 Street Directory* and in subsequent

¹⁵ WO 95/2840

¹⁶ Field Marshal Sir John French, Chief of Staff of the British Army, was in command of the British Expeditionary Force until he was replaced in December 1915 by Field marshal Sir Douglas Haig.

¹⁷ I am greatly indebted to Sean Rippington, Archives Assistant, Magdalen College, Oxford, for a transcript of this letter and for other information and to Richard Sheppard, Emeritus Fellow of Magdalen College, for help, information and encouragement.

¹⁸ See entry for Crawford-Cree (sic) on the *Buckinghamshire Remembers* website.

¹⁹ See page 6. This says that he left for France on 4 May, so perhaps he had been granted leave.



Anthony's, Bois Avenue, Chesham Bois
View from rear garden.

correspondence her address is Anthony's, Bois Avenue, Chesham Bois. It was from there that his widow applied for his medals in 1919.²⁰ It is now called Chalk House.²¹ On his death his widow received a gratuity of £140 and a pension of £80 a year, while the three children each had a gratuity of 46 pounds 13 shillings and 4 pence and £15 per year. There was considerable correspondence about a field allowance of 8 pounds 10 shillings paid to Cree and a brother officer which subsequently was disallowed by the Paymaster General and had to be recovered by the Adjutant to the Command Paymaster who had been 'unable to obtain the endorsement of 2nd Lt. ATC Cree or 2nd Lt. Meek, they having become non-effective.'

The file also contains a copy of Crawford Cree's Will,²² dated 5 May 1915, the day that Sir John French addressed the battalion and just before they moved up into the front line. 2/Lt Meek was one of the witnesses. It was very simple and left everything to his widow.

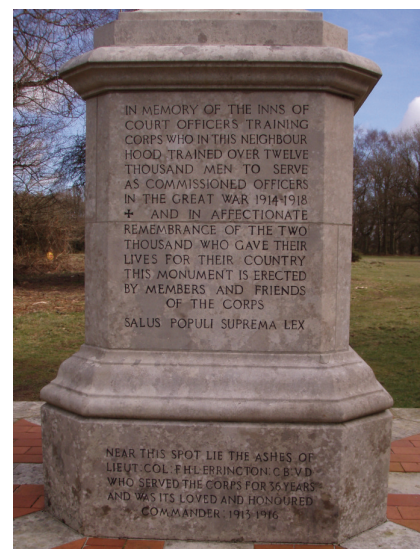
Crawford Cree was a man of considerable abilities and a strong sense of public duty. The President of his college, TH Warren, described him as 'a shrewd, sensible, kindly fellow, the best type of an English professional gentleman.'²³

He was awarded The Allied Victory Medal and The British War Medal, 1914-18.

Arthur Thomas Crawford Cree lies buried in the
Bedford House Cemetery, Ieper [Ypres], Belgium,
enclosure no 2, VI.A.47

INNS OF COURT OFFICERS TRAINING CORPS MEMORIAL

The memorial stands on Berkhamsted Common at the junction of Brownlow Road and New Road above the castle. The vestiges of some of the 13 miles of trenches dug by the OTC in training can still be seen nearby.



²⁰ Kelly's 1915 *Directory of Buckinghamshire*, p 76, but they do not appear in the 1911 publication. WO 372/5/83307, the Medal Rolls index Cards 1914-1920. Cree's enthusiasm for country life encompassed the building of a two-storey henhouse at Anthony's, as one family member recalls.

²¹ It was identified from a photograph provided by a descendant and some very smart detective work by Peter Bright and Peter Powell, to whom warm thanks are due. For the letters and army forms see WO 374/16496 at The National Archives.

²² It would have been very surprising had Cree, a barrister, not left a will, but there was no trace of one in the National Probate Calendar, nor has it so far appeared in the Probate Service's online index to WW1 Soldiers' Wills.

²³ TH Warren, 'Oxford's Sacrifice', *The Oxford Magazine*, 33, no 24 (28 May 1915), p 220. I am again indebted to Sean Rippington for this quotation.

ADDENDUM ²⁴



The plain wooden cross that originally marked the grave of Lieutenant A T C Cree is now in St Barnabas Church, Beckenham, Kent.



Members of Lieutenant Cree's family visited his grave at Bedford House Cemetery, Ypres, Belgium on 12 May 2015, the 100th anniversary of his death.

²⁴ We are grateful to Kate Greenhalgh, a granddaughter of Lieutenant A T C Cree, for the additional information and for kindly making the photographs used on this page available to us.

The Wedding of Arthur Thomas Crawford Cree and Ivy Elizabeth Marion Williams



The Church Lads' Brigade form a guard of honour as the bride and groom leave Tring church after their wedding on 31 July 1907.²⁵

The wedding reception at Pendley Manor. It is now a hotel and a popular venue for these occasions more than a hundred years later.²⁶



Some time later:

This delightful photograph shows three generations of Williams at Pendley. J G Williams stands behind Ivy Cree (née Williams) with her first two children: Elizabeth (standing) born 1908 and Janet who was born in 1910.²⁷

²⁵ Picture by kind permission of The Tring and District Local History and Museum Society.

²⁶ & ²⁷ We are indebted to Bob Little for allowing us to reproduce these photographs from his book, '*A Perspective on Pendley*'.