

“I look for the life of the world to come”

So reads the epitaph on the grave of **Francis George Wake Marchant**, Hayes cricketer and killed in action whilst flying on the Somme on 22nd October 1916.

A few weeks ago, Len Watkins, Keith May, Nick Beavis, Andrew Jackson and Harri Kallas, along with 2



friends, spent 3 days in France visiting the Somme. No-one needs reminding of the destruction that occurred there during the Great War – over 1 million young men gave their lives.

Pat Thompson, former President of Hayes Cricket, wrote a history of the club which was published in 1978 and in talking of the Hayes players he wrote:

“Of the team that played that 8th day of August 1914 Frank Marchant and C.H. Wood, son of the Captain, would die in the war just

starting, as would Fred Plant, H. Williams and H.W. Williams, and also of course, as already mentioned, the most talented cricketer to play for Hayes in the Edwardian era, A.A. Torrens.”

The “Roll of Honour” close to the changing rooms at the club lists these brave men and prior to our trip, we asked our guide to see if he could locate their final resting place. We were pleased to learn that 2 were actually buried on the Somme. Frank Marchant and Attwood Alfred Torrens were buried in the Cemeteries at Heilly Station Cemetery and Pozieries. We visited both the graves and learnt a little about their sacrifice.



Attwood Alfred Torrens.

Attwood Alfred Torrens a Major in the Royal Field Artillery was killed in action on the 8th of December 1916. He was the son of Captain Alfred and Mrs Torrens and lived at The Grove in Hayes. He was educated at Harrow and was on the Stock Exchange prior to the outbreak of War. He obtained a commission on 12th February 1915 and was promoted to a Major the following year. In writing of the death of Major Torrens, Brigadier-General R C Coates wrote: “The whole of the artillery of the division much feel his loss. He was an exceptionally popular officer both with his brother officers and the men”. Lieutenant Kobel wrote “His battery was being shelled and being uneasy about the safety of his men he went out to move them and was struck and killed

instantaneously by a piece of shell. He was an excellent officer and very popular in the brigade. We all deplore his loss” One of his subalterns wrote “He was such a favourite with us all. I feel his loss very deeply. I have only been in his battery three months but they have been quite the happiest three months of my army life” A A Torrens had a brother who captained Hayes in 1922 and prior to his years of cricket at Hayes, Torrens played for the MCC and was part of the touring party that visited New Zealand in 1905/06. His name also appears on the Roll of Honour at Lords Cricket Ground. At the side of his grave we read this obituary and following Len saying the exhortation, we laid a miniature cricket bat on behalf of the club as a token of our respect.

Like all the 120 cemeteries on the Somme, the one outside Pozieries was in immaculate condition. Tended by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission they remain a lasting tribute to the fallen.



The following day we paid our respects at the Cemetery at Heilly Station, the final resting place of Frank Marchant. Little more is known of Frank, other than he served in the Queens Own Royal West Kent Regiment and was killed whilst flying for the 3rd Squadron of the

precursor to the RAF, the Royal Flying Corps. His grave was next to that of another airman killed the same day, so we assume they were flying together and were buried together. Flyers in the First World War had a life expectancy measured in days. We also held a moments silence at the grave and following Len's reading of the exhortation, we laid a miniature cricket bat on behalf of the club. The Cemetery in which we found Frank Marchant was outside the station in Heilly – this station was to where casualties on the Somme were evacuated, to await transport to hospitals in Boulogne or Le Touquet. On a small field outside the station over 30,000 brave soldiers lay after the battle of the Somme commenced on July 1st 1916 and waited for their turn to board one of the, wholly inadequate, 4 or 5 trains sent to help them. 300 a day would perish before they were evacuated. As an aside the station was only a few hundred yards away from where Captain Manfred Von Richthofen, otherwise known as the Red Baron, perished.

The other Hayes Cricketers to perish in the war were:

Herbert William Williams Seaman age 29, Killed 9 July 1917 when his ship HMS Vanguard was destroyed with the loss of nearly 900 men in an accidental explosion off Scapa Flow The worst loss to the RN by accident. Husband of Lillian *Mayes Cottage* Hayes Common

Fred George Plant Second Lieutenant age 22 Royal West Surreys KIA on the first day of the most terrible battle at Loos 25/9/1915. Remembered at the Loos memorial. Son of William Plant, Courtland , Hayes

H D Williams Lieutenant Royal Engineers, died 20/12/ 1920 buried at St Mary's Hayes. We are currently locating the grave and plan to lay a further bat in his memory at the year's Remembrance Day ceremony. All past/current Hayes players are welcome to join us.

C H Wood We are still researching for any information.

**They shall grow not old,
as we that are left grow old:**

**Age shall not weary them,
nor the years condemn.**

**At the going down of the sun and
in the morning**

We will remember them

