

Cecil William Hardman, died 1 September 1916, aged 28

Cecil Hardman lived at 74 Hertford Road all his life. His father William was a county court clerk, and he and his wife Florry had moved to London from Hertford. They had two children, Ethel born 1887 and Cecil born in 1888. Both children were baptised at Holy Trinity Church, although once All Saints' Church was built that became their church. Cecil Hardman was educated at Christ College where he was in the Combined Cadet Force between 1903 and 1904. On leaving school he followed his father and also became a court clerk. In May 1912 Ethel married a postman called Ernest Smith in All Saints' Church by Father Armitstead, and their first child was born in April 1913.

Cecil joined the 23rd battalion of the Middlesex Regiment – this was nicknamed the second Footballers' Battalion and was formed in London on 29 June 1915 by W Joynson Hicks MP, and Cecil was gazetted as 2nd Lieutenant. After training in Cranleigh and then Aldershot the battalion moved to France in May 1916 and began preparations for the Battle of the Somme. By this time Cecil had volunteered for the Royal Flying Corps, and had been commissioned as Lieutenant in the 70th Squadron in Farnborough. After training to fly the new Sopwith 1½ Strutters, a biplane intended as a fighter as it was the first plane to be fitted with a synchronised machine gun, the Squadron moved to Fienvillers in June 1916.

This was a small village to the east of Abbeville, and the squadron took part in the Battle of the Somme. On 21 September plane A1915 took off from Fienvillers on a training flight, with 2nd Lt Vernon Morgan as pilot in the rear seat and Lt Cecil Hardman as observer and gunner in the front. The plane had reached about 150 feet when it was seen to stall and then nose-dive to the ground, killing both men on impact. The reason for the accident is unknown, although it was suggested at the time that the pilot was not watching his airspeed indicator. However, Strutters developed a reputation for unreliability, and were replaced by Sopwith Camels in 1917.

Cecil Hardman and Vernon Morgan are buried next to each other in Gezaincourt Communal Cemetery, just a mile or so from the crash site. Cecil's parents chose as the inscription for his gravestone:

His life he gave; Could you do more for your country?

Cecil Hardman was recorded as a casualty of the Battle of the Somme in the Finchley Times, and his name is recorded on the Christ College war memorial as well as on the All Saints' war memorial.

