

Charles Train

Private

287699

Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry



This biography will tell the story of two men, a father and his son. Both worked in service and both reached the pinnacle of success within the higher echelons of nineteenth and early twentieth century society. Charles Train was born in 1886 in a small village called Pluckley on the outskirts of Ashford in Kent. Charles was the second child born to Nelson and Mary Train, the first being Edith who was born the previous year. Nelson had been born in 1846 and was from Hornsea in Yorkshire. By the age of fourteen he was working as a Groom Boy for farmer Henry Strickland of Wassand Hall,

Seaton, Yorkshire. Nelson was however destined for great things and in the 1871 census we find him working as a footman for the widowed Viscountess Clifden, who lived at the unbelievably grand Whitehall address of Dover House, St. Margaret's, in Westminster. Dover House was named so by Baron Dover who had bought this amazing structure in 1830. Upon his death in 1833 his title passed to his



Contemporary engraving of Dover House c.1831

son who later became 3rd Viscount Clifden upon the death of his grandfather in 1836. In 1861 the 3rd Viscount married one Eliza Horatia Frederica Seymour, the great-granddaughter of the 1st Marquess of Hertford, she became Viscountess Clifden. The 3rd Viscount died in 1866 and accordingly in the 1871 census Eliza is recorded as being a widow. Between 1867 1872 the Viscountess



*Viscountess Clifden
c.1871*

was honoured to be Queen Victoria's, Lady of the Bedchamber. This was the exalted position she held in 1871 when Nelson Train was one of her footmen. Incidentally Dover House is now a Grade 1 listed mansion in the heart of London, currently owned by the state, and used as the headquarters of the Scotland Office.

In 1874 Nelson Train married Hannah Sheen, on the marriage record he declares himself a Butler, sadly Hannah died shortly after. By 1881 Nelson had moved on and was employed as butler to Mr. Henry Townsend of Coton House, Churchover, Warwickshire.



The beautiful Coton House, Churchover

On 1st June 1881 he was again married, this time to Mary Hooker, at St. Martins in the Field, Westminster. This mobile and resourceful man is next found in Pluckley, Kent, where daughter Edith was born in 1885 and Charles in 1886. However, in the 1891 census the family were again on the move and were located in the village of Stockton where Nelson was the Butler at Stockton House. In 1901 they had again moved and it is in this census return that we see Nelson's influence upon his children. They were living in the grounds of Godinton House, a stately home in the parish of Great Chart on the outskirts of Ashford in Kent. Here Nelson was Butler to Margarite Dodd, with Edith a Scullery Maid while Charles, then fifteen, was a Hall Boy. Nelson had managed to get his children into service in truly prestigious circumstances. Ten years later Nelson had retired from service and was the landlord of The Red Lion public house in Britwell Salome, Oxfordshire. Mary was with him but the children had gone their separate ways. It was here, at the age of seventy, that Nelson died and was buried at St. Nicholas, the parish church of Britwell Salome, on 15th November 1917.

So, what of Charles Train, the focus of this biography. Very few of his service records survive, but from those which do we can discover something of his experiences within the military and after. Charles enlisted into the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry as Private 21783 Train on 2nd December 1915. At some point he was transferred into the Labour Corps where his service number changed to 287699, private Train. The few surviving records indicate he served overseas and a report made on 29th September 1916 indicates he had been wounded while on active service. This led to him being discharged from military service on 7th July 1918. He was issued with the Silver War Badge (425775). Service personnel no longer fit for war service, who had



been honourably discharged due to wounds received or sickness contracted as a result of military service, were issued with the Silver War Badge. The badge was intended as a sign of recognition and respect toward those who had served and suffered due to the war and to deflect any criticism of the individual for not playing an active role in the war effort. The sterling silver lapel badge was intended to be worn on civilian clothes and Charles was forbidden from wearing it with any form of military uniform. Charles had done his bit for King and Country and resumed his employ in the service sector.

In early 1917 Charles married Elsie Louisa Pettitt, in Chesterton, Cambridgeshire. Two years later their first child David was born on 27th February 1919, in Epsom, Surrey. At the time they lived at Ordsal Lodge, one assumes working as servants. The fledgling family did not stay long in the Epsom area and in 1922 Charles had moved them to Kington where he acquired the position of butler to the Romilly's of Huntington Park, a large estate on the outskirts of Kington. Here, on 7th March 1923, their second son Peter was born. For over one hundred-and-fifty-years Huntington Park had been the ancestral home of the Romilly family. Nestled in the countryside three miles to the west of Kington, the park was once the deer park of the nearby thirteenth century Huntington Castle. At the time of his death in 1927 Charles had served as butler to Samuel Henry Romilly, the then incumbent of the Romilly stately pile, for five years. As with many grand houses, after World War Two the house fell into disrepair and was subsequently demolished in 1966. Today nothing remains of the original Georgian edifice, but the beautiful landscaped parklands still exist and hint at the grandeur of the stately home in which Charles Train served, sadly for all too short a time. Charles succumbed to the injuries he received while on active service on **9th April 1927** and was buried at the parish church of St. Thomas a Becket, Huntington. A large number of British Legion members attended and the Last Post was played by a Mr Cook. An impressive memorial was erected in his memory with the following inscription carved upon it;

In Loving Memory of Charles Train.

Wounded in the Great War.

Died from the Effects 9th April 1927.

Age 41 Years.

I Have Fought a Good Fight

I Have Finished my Course

I Have Kept the Faith



Understandably Elsie grieved the loss of her husband but none-the-less continued working for the Romilly family at Huntington Park. In early 1939 she remarried, in Huntington, this time to a Kington postman called Cecil A Lewis. Shortly after the outbreak of World War Two, on 29th September 1939, a survey of the population of England and Wales was undertaken. The information was used to produce identity cards and to administer conscription. It also informed the issue of ration books once food rationing was introduced in 1940. The register shows Elsie and her son Peter were located at Huntington Park, Elsie as the Cook/Housekeeper and Peter as a Chemist's Apprentice. Cecil and David were living at a house called Ridge Holme on the Brilley Road. It appears the family home was Ridge Holme and Elsie travelled to the big house for work. From her

probate record we discover Elsie died on 2nd July 1974, aged 77, at Ridgeholme, 3 Grayland Close, Bromley, a very nice house on the outskirts of London. Clearly the name Ridgeholme was of sentimental significance to Cecil and Elsie. It is interesting to note that a memorial stone, dedicated to Elsie Train, was placed on Charles's grave. Perhaps we may be forgiven for speculating that Charles was her one true love and upon her death wanted to be remembered beside him in the beautiful surroundings of Huntington Churchyard.

Charles Train's belated sacrifice was recorded on the Kington and Huntington War Memorial. The pain and suffering he endured during and after the war earned him the Victory and British War Medals. It is clear that the end of war on 11th November 1918 was not the end of suffering for Charles and his family. Charles followed in his father's footsteps and succeeded in emulating him as butler to some of the higher echelons of British society. We congratulate him and may he long rest in peace.



Biography researched and produced by

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