

Three Butler-Bowdon Boys in the Great War and a Memorial Brass

Christiane Müller-Hazenbos, M.A.

Upon auction sale of Southgate House, a Georgian country house of modest size built in the mid-1700s, and its surrounding estate near Clowne, Derbyshire, in 1938, potential purchasers were informed of the following in the Sale Particulars regarding the future use of its chapel, an annex of the house: “The Chapel is a temporary Brick Structure and can remain or not, as the purchaser desires, but if pulled down or converted to other uses, the Vendor reserves the stained-glass window and the memorial brass.”¹ The house and estate’s vendor was Colonel William Erdeswick Ignatius Butler-Bowdon (1880-1956), and the purchaser was Sir Osbert Sitwell of near-by Renishaw Hall, Eckington (1892-1969). In 1955, the building and the land were bought off from Sir Osbert Sitwell by the van Dyk brothers, who first built greenhouses there (1957), and then successively renovated the house and turned it into a hotel (1966) and restaurant. The chapel became one of the hotel’s dining rooms. In 1969, Southgate House was sold again and resold over the decades, still serving as a hotel today.

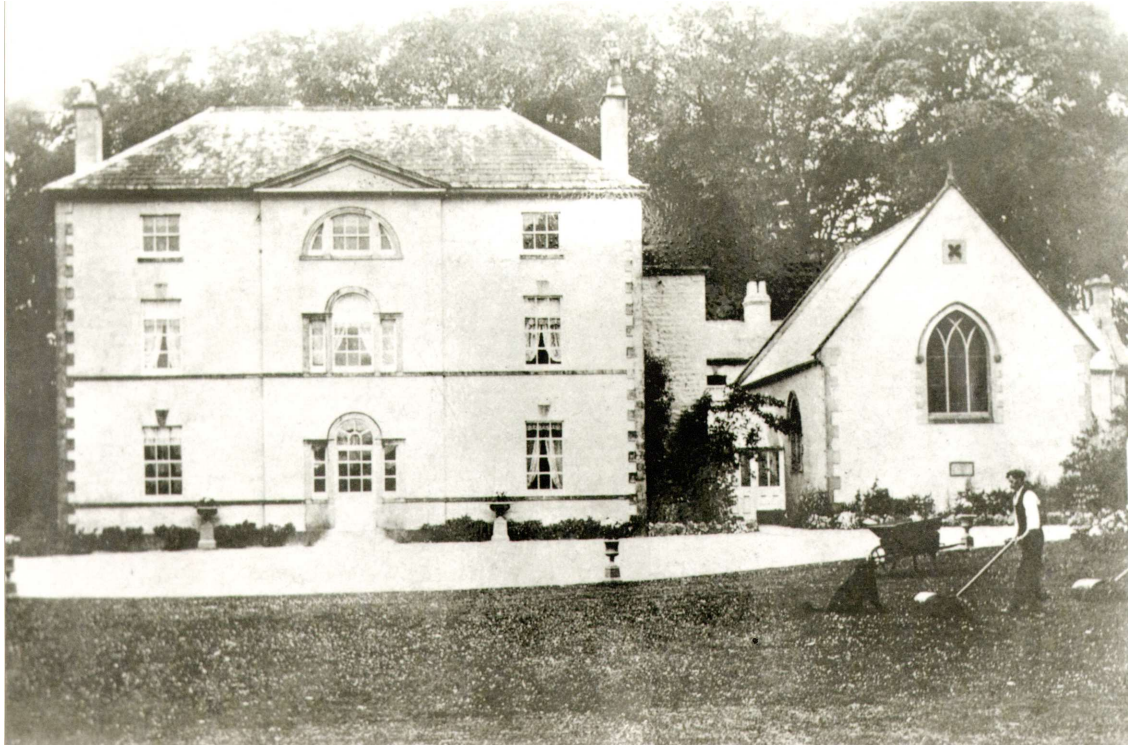


Figure 1: Southgate House/c.1900s, Derbyshire Record Office Matlock/Picture the Past (DCBR000405)

¹ Sale Particulars of 1938, p. 5 (Derbyshire Record Office, *Ref. No. D1300/11/1*).

Through a very lucky stroke of fate, the above-mentioned memorial brass came into the possession of the Barlborough Heritage Centre, a small local museum, in October 2013, when the then manager detected it in an online auction (Holloway's Auctioneers/Lot 316) and was able to purchase the object for the centre.²

The commemorative text of the plaque, written in bold Gothic *textualis*, is flanked on the top left by the Butler-Bowdon family coat of arms and on the top right by the badge of the Lancashire Fusiliers, depicting an Egyptian sphinx and the word "Egypt" because the company was engaged in the Egyptian Campaign (1793- 1802), and reads: "Of your Charity / Pray for / the repose of the Soul of / Basil Butler-Bowdon / Lieutenant 2nd Batt. the Lancashire Fusiliers / who was killed in action on March 28th 1918 at / Fampoux near Arras, where, by the gallantry of / the Third British Army the German onrush / was stemmed and broken. / *Requiescat in Pace.*"



Figure 2: Memorial Plaque of Basil Butler-Bowdon, © Tony Bak/Worksop and Barlborough Heritage Centre/Barlborough

Memorial brasses played a great role for the landed gentry and wealthy middle classes between the early 14th century and the mid-17th century, often put up

² Purchasers: Tony Bak/Worksop, former manager of the Heritage Centre for and on behalf of the centre, Graham Duckmanton/Worksop and Christiane Müller-Hazenbos/Berlin.

in isolated churches across the country, and with a preponderance in the Home Counties and East Anglia. Roughly 8,000 brasses have survived until today, but an unknown number fell victim to iconoclasm, greed and negligence.³ Gothic Revival (a short-lived art form during Victorian times replicating mediaeval style in 19th-century art during a widespread resurgence of the church and the expansion of Roman Catholicism, predominantly used in ecclesiastical buildings as well as in civic and residential settings and led by exponents such as the influential architect and architectural theorist Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812-1852)) picked up on this medium and produced a number of metal brasses once again.⁴

Since John Hardman & Co. of Birmingham was responsible for manufacturing a magnificent stained-glass window for the Butler-Bowdon family around the years 1907 to c.1910 (today at Pleasington Priory near Blackburn, Lancashire)⁵, it immediately suggested itself that the memorial brass also came from their production, which could later be brought to proof by numerous pieces of evidence.⁶

Hardmans entered trade as button- and medal makers in the mid-1800s and quickly extended their product range to metalwork and ecclesiastical fittings, then branching out to stone- and woodcarving, leather-making, textiles, and stained glass production. They were staunch Roman-Catholics, which is possibly why they made the plaque by order of the likewise Catholic Butler-Bowdon family, who considered themselves recusant; it is even possible that the families were personally acquainted.

On 21.09.1901, Southgate Chapel, was opened as the place of worship for the Butler-Bowdon family and place of assembly for the local Catholic community. In the year 1920, the family commissioned Basil Butler-Bowdon's memorial brass and affixed it inside Southgate Chapel around the same time. After the sale of Southgate House in 1939, its purchaser, Sir Osbert Sitwell, allowed services to continue in the chapel until the opening of a new Catholic church in Clowne on Christmas 1952. Meanwhile, Southgate House's chapel interior remained intact, including the stained-glass window and the memorial brass. In 1953, the desecration of Southgate Chapel took place and all its fittings were removed. The stained-glass window went to Pleasington Priory and the memorial brass got returned to Hardman & Co., Birmingham, whilst the chapel's furniture was given to the new church in Clowne (now defunct).

³ Lack, *Monumental Brasses*.

⁴ Meara, *Victorian Memorial Brasses*.

⁵ Müller-Hazenbos, *Southgate House*; Müller-Hazenbos, *A Portrayal of Personal Piety*.

⁶ Müller-Hazenbos, *Southgate House*, Chapters 8 and 20, Fig. 9.

The 2013 auction of the memorial plaque took place in Banbury, Oxfordshire, and because the town is not very far from Birmingham, it is not entirely unlikely that the plaque somehow got there from the former inventory of John Hardman & Co. by a circuitous route. Birmingham City Archives at the Birmingham City Library hold a file (Ref. No. MS 175/A/4/5/3/41, File 41 (B)) referring to "Butler-Bowden (*sic*) Brass", assumedly containing a correspondence or memo of John Hardman & Co. Upon a personal inspection on 22.04.2014, the folder that was to contain the file surprisingly turned out to be empty.

The plaque arrived in Barlborough, however, with an accompanying memorandum ("note to be added to parcel in the safe") of John Hardman Studios dated 27.05.1953. It reads: "A Butler-Bowdon brass, originally carried out for Southgate House, Clowne in 1920. Removed when the house passed out of the hands of the family in 1952. It was intended to re-fix the brass at Pleasington Priory, but the Bishop's permission could not be obtained. Lieut. Col. Butler-Bowdon advised us 24th. May, 1953, we were to scrap the brass, but we informed him that it will be stored pending any future possible use."

<u>MEMORANDUM</u>	
Telephone : CENTral 5434	
FROM	TO
JOHN HARDMAN STUDIOS	
43 NEWHALL HILL	
BIRMINGHAM, 1	
London Address : Rookley, Shenley Hill Radlett, Hertfordshire	NOTE TO BE ADDED TO PARCEL IN THE SAFE. 27th. May, 1953.

A Butler-Bowdon brass, originally carried out for Southgate House, Clowne, in 1920. Removed when the house passed out of the hands of the family in 1952.

It was intended to re-fix the brass at Pleasington Priory, but the Bishop's permission to do this could not be obtained.

Lieut. Col. Butler-Bowdon advised us 24th. May, 1953, we were to scrap the brass, but we informed him that it will be stored pending any future possible use.

Figure 3: Memorandum accompanying Memorial Plaque, © Tony Bak/Worksop and Barlborough Heritage Centre/Barlborough

A letter from Henry Vincent Marshall, 6th Bishop of Salford (1939-1955), to Father Bonney of Pleasington Priory, dated 18.05.1953 (letter (copy?) today in possession of Humphrey Butler-Bowdon/London; personally inspected on 22.04.2017) reads: „(...) the law of the Church does not permit the erection in churches of any Memorial Tablets of people who may not be buried in the church itself. I regret, therefore, that I am unable to grant permission for the erection of the brass plate in memory of Basil Butler Bowdon in your church. (...)“.

A letter from Colonel William Erdeswick Ignatius Butler-Bowdon, possibly to Mr Feeny of Hardman dated 24.05.1953 (letter (copy?) today in possession of Humphrey Butler-Bowdon/London; personally inspected on 22.04.2017) also suggests that: „(...) the only thing to do with the brass is to scrap it. (...)“. Luckily, this did not happen, and according to a 2014 post on the Facebook site of the Barlborough Heritage Centre, the plaque had lain “in a solicitor’s safe” for more than 60 years.

Basil Joseph Bernard Butler-Bowdon was born on 05.11.1898 in Bournemouth. He was the youngest son of John Erdeswick Butler-Bowdon and his second wife Monica Mary⁷, Second Lieutenant of the 2nd Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers, and was killed in action on 28.03.1918, aged 19, on one of the battlefields in northern France. He was commissioned on 16.01.1918, and was posted to his battalion in the first week of March 1918. Three weeks later, he lost his life in “Operation Michael”, the big German spring offensive which started on 21.03.1918, also known as “Kaiserschlacht”. A short notice in the Catholic weekly newspaper “The Tablet” dated 16.10.1918, informs the readers about the following: “Second-Lieut. Basil Joseph Bernard Butler-Bowdon, Lancashire Fusiliers, reported missing near Fampoux since March 28, is now officially presumed to have been killed in action on that date. He was nineteen years of age, and the youngest son of Colonel and the late Hon. Mrs. Butler-Bowdon, of Pleasington Hall, Lancashire, and Southgate House, Derbyshire. He was educated at Downside.”⁸

Fampoux is a little village on the river Scarpe, to the east of Arras, northern France (Somme area). It was taken from the Germans during the Battle of Arras in 1917. It remained behind the Allied front line until the Germans' final spring offensive a year later. The Germans were desperate to secure a victory, and on 28.03.1918, made a heavy attack on the British and French lines. Fampoux was at the

⁷ For the genealogy of the Butler-Bowdon family, see Müller-Hazenbos, *Southgate House*, Chapter 10; Müller-Hazenbos, *Southgate House*, <https://www.southgate-house.co.uk/>.

⁸ Downside is a Catholic co-educational boarding and day school in Stratton-on-the-Fosse near Bath, Somerset.

centre point of the assault, and its control was vital to both sides. After heavy shelling and fierce fighting, German infantry captured part of the village - but the British, though tremendously hard-pressed, maintained their hold on the remainder. The battle lasted until 04.07.1918, and the dreadful toll on human life is borne witness to the fact that there are no less than five war cemeteries around the village of Fampoux. They contain the graves of many hundreds of soldiers - some of whom will never be identified. Some are, however, remembered by the Fampoux Gardens in Winton, a suburb of Bournemouth. Irony of fate: Bournemouth is the birthplace of Basil Butler-Bowdon. Basil's mortal remains, however, could not be recovered and remained in France.

The Clowne War Memorial on "The Green" on North Road, Clowne, honours Basil's memory together with the names of 97 male Clowne inhabitants who gave their lives during the Great War and WWII. The names of the fallen of the Great War are engraved in black letters on the front panel of the plinth under the caption "In grateful remembrance of the men of Clowne who fell for their country in the war 1914-1919". Basil Butler-Bowdon's name is also listed on the Arras Memorial, Pas de Calais, France, and on one of the marble panels in the Chapel of St George and the English Martyrs in Westminster Cathedral, commemorating those Catholic servicemen who gave their lives in battle and for whom prayers are said in the chapel.⁹



Figure 4: Marble panels in the Chapel of St George and the English Martyrs in Westminster Cathedral, © Humphrey Butler-Bowdon/London

⁹ Kind information by Humphrey Butler-Bowdon/London in personal email correspondences on 16.06.2015 and 10.08.2025, and by Dylan Parry, the then editor of "Oremus", the Westminster Cathedral Magazine (16.06.2015); Westminster Cathedral, *The Chapel of St George* (accessed 16.06.2015).

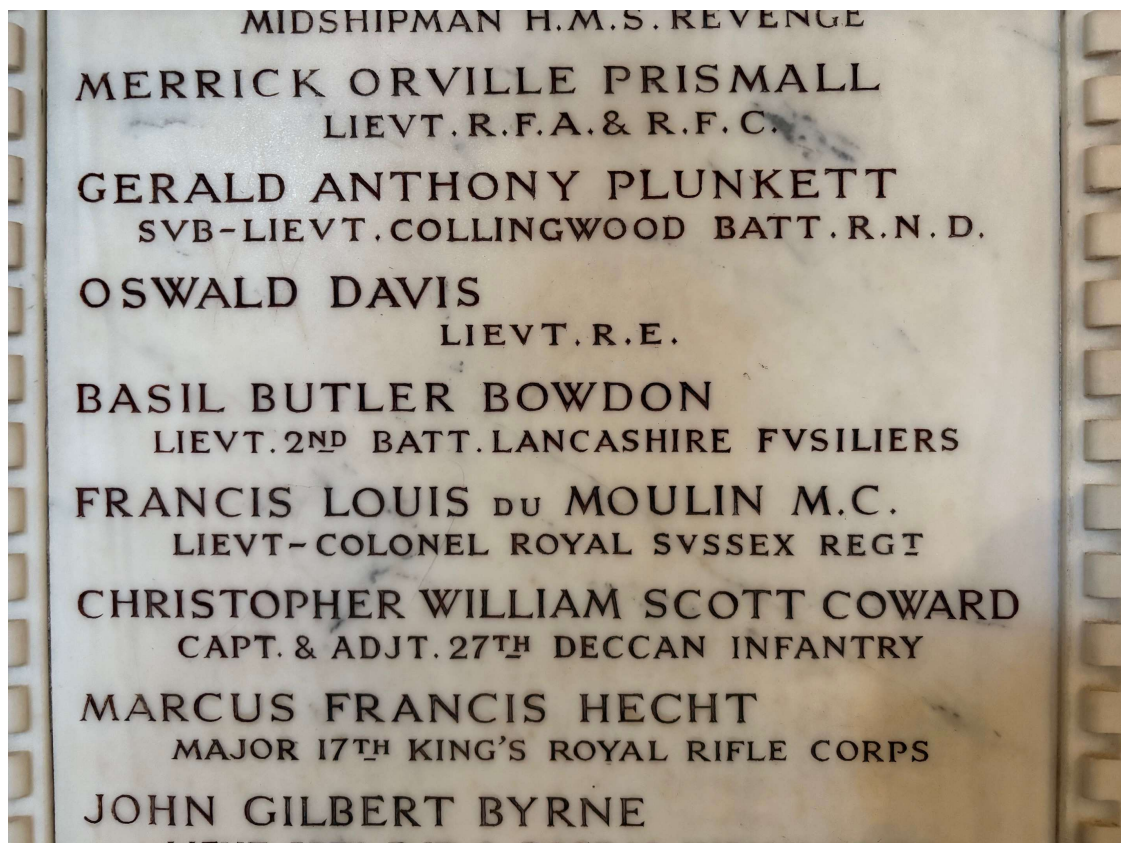


Figure 5: Detail of Marble panels in the Chapel of St George and the English Martyrs in Westminster Cathedral, © Humphrey Butler-Bowdon/London

Basil is also commemorated at Pleasington Priory where his name is mentioned on one of two brass plaques to the right and left of the Butler family vault, naming those men of Pleasington parish who met their deaths in WWI.¹⁰ He, too, is depicted in the circle of his family in the aforementioned stained-glass window from Hardman production at Pleasington Priory.¹¹

A probate calendar dated 1919 gives slightly deviant information about the date and place of Basil's death (29.03.1918, and Gavrelle, a place very near to Fampoux). It states that he died in active service (administration). His effects were priced at £79, 16s, and 2d, and according to his will dated 05.06.1917, they were left to his father John Erdeswick Butler-Bowdon, Esq. An old black-and-white photo shows a sitting Basil, posing in his lieutenant's uniform and looking sceptically into the camera lens. He holds a walking stick in both his hands, perhaps a hint to an illness, injury or physical handicap.¹²

¹⁰ Child, *Pleasington Priory*, p. 53. Basil presumably never was a resident of Pleasington, though.

¹¹ Müller-Hazenbos, *A Portrayal of Personal Piety*.

¹² Image made available to the author by George Liakos/Chandler's Ford in an email on 06.07.2017.

Unfortunately, Basil Butler-Bowdon was not the only young man of the Butler-Bowdon family who gave his life in the Great War. Ronald/Romolo Del Monaco, born in Rome on 26.10.1893 and cousin of Basil Butler-Bowdon, son of Alice Bowdon and Ireneo Del Monaco, was killed in action at the Battle of Regina Trench at the Ancre Heights (near Corbie, Département Somme, Arrondissement Amiens) on 18.10.1916. This battle took place between 01.10. and 11.11.1816, when the Canadian Armed Forces assaults on Regina Trench witnessed brutal fighting and heavy loss of lives.

A Canadian Memorial Cross was for sale online in May 2014. This cross was awarded in remembrance of Private Romolo Del Monaco, alias Ronald Bowdon. The reverse is incised with "151547 Pte. R. Bowdon". Apparently, he emigrated to Canada together with his younger brother Bernard/Bernardo, in 1915 under the name of Ronald Bowdon, indicating his place and date of birth as Sheffield and 25.10.1893, and his trade as "laborer" (according to an attestation paper of Library and Archives Canada). Following the specifications, he "Served as Ronald Bowden (*sic*). Son of the late Ireneo Paolo Del Monaco and Alice Elizabeth Del Monaco (nee (*sic*) Bowden (*sic*)), of Beightonfields Priory, Renishaw, Derbyshire." Stated as his next of kin is his brother Henry Bowden (*sic*) of Beightonfields, Renishaw, Derbyshire, England. Ronald is described as 5 feet 11.5 inches tall, of fair complexion, with brown eyes and black hair, Roman Catholic, and unmarried. Ronald enlisted in the 79th Battalion Canadian Infantry, Manitoba Regiment, on 10.11.1915, and transferred to the 43rd Canadian Cameron Highlanders (Infantry, 9th Brigade, 3rd Canadian Division) on 28.06.1916. He was initially reported missing in action on 08.10.1916, but only on 14.07.1917, was he "previously reported missing now for official purposes presumed to have died". His mortal remains are interred in London Cemetery and Extension, Longueval (Département Somme, Picardie), Northern France (grave reference: 4 E 21). The inscription on the Spinkhill First World War Memorial reads, "Pray for the souls of the following who laid down their lives for their king & country in the Great War 1914-1919" and lists a number of young men of the area who were killed during that war, one of them being the son of Alice and Ireneo Del Monaco, R(onald/Romolo) Del Monaco (born 26.10.1893), Private of the 43rd Canadian Camer(o)n Highlan(de)rs (151547).

Ronald/Romolo did not go to war on his own. He was joined by his younger brother Bernard/Bernardo Del Monaco (born c.1898 in Rome). The story of the two brothers gives rise to questions. Why did they choose to go to Canada with the intention to become labourers in the first place and then join the Canadian armed forces? And why would a young man like Ronald/Romolo Del Monaco obfuscate his

origins when entering military service? On his attestation documents, he identifies himself as Ronald Bowden (*sic*), born 25.10.1893 in Sheffield, England (see above), his next of kin his older brother Henry/Enrico Del Monaco. Born to such distinguished persons as the Del Monacos, his family connections could have assisted Ronald/Romolo to obtain a commission or other considerations, and Italy was an ally in the Great War. The use of an alias, however, when enlisting in the military was apparently not an unusual event, and the Canadian Expeditionary Force certainly had a number of enlistees who, for various reasons, provided recruiters with a false name and purposely inaccurate personal details. Ronald/Romolo's intentions, however, will have to remain unexplained.

For estate purposes, Alice Del Monaco provided a declaration signed at Horseferry Road Schools, City of Westminster, on 16.04.1917, which reads as follows: "In the matter of the estate of the late No. 15147. Private T. (*sic*) Bowdon, 43rd Battalion, C.E.P. I Alice Bowdon Countess del (*sic*) Monaco of Beightonfields, Renishaw, Chesterfield. Hereby solemnly and sincerely declare: - (1) That I am the mother of No. 151547. Private Romolo Bowdon, 43rd Battalion, C.E.F. and that his correct name was Romolo del Monaco. (2) That he was born in Rome on the 26th October 1893. And I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true and knowing that it is of the same force and effect as if made under oath, and by virtue (*sic*) of the Statutory Declarations Act, 1895. Alice del (*sic*) Monaco." Romolo Del Monaco's war medals and awards (British War Medal, Allied Victory Medal, Memorial Cross, Plaque and Scroll) were sent to his mother Alice, who at that time resided at Coombe Lodges, Buckinghamshire.

Bernard/Bernardo Del Monaco survived the horrors of the Great War. He enlisted as 1529190 Private Bernard Bowdon into the Canadian army in the same battalion (79th Battalion Canadian Infantry, Manitoba Regiment) as his older brother, but unlike Ronald/Romolo with slightly more veridical information. Named as his next of kin is his mother, Alice Del Monaco, and seemingly he did not falsify any other information about his origin. When Bernard/Bernardo emigrated to Canada in 1915, his name could be found on a passenger list of the steamer "SS Transylvania", which left Liverpool on 27.03.1915 heading to New York; the country of intended future residence is stated as Canada (ticket number 38838; Bernard/Bernardo's profession is declared as "Mil" (= Military), his nationality as Italian). Ronald/Romolo's name does not appear on the passenger list, he may have travelled under an assumed name or on another ship. Bernard/Bernardo arrived in New York on 06.04.1915 with a further destination of Dunrea/Manitoba, where he intended to work as a farmer. At this point we lose track of him for a while, until he appears

again having travelled together with his mother Alice on the steamship “SS Montcalm” from Liverpool to Québec between 17.07. and 26.07.1927. According to the document of the Canadian Immigration Service, Canadian Government Return, Bernard/Bernardo’s profession then was a “Poultry Farmer” with a land settlement in Winnipeg/Manitoba.

(This article is an augmented and updated text based on excerpts from my book *Southgate House, A Derbyshire Country Mansion and its Inhabitants through the Centuries*, London 2014)

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