

NOEL HENRY BOLES (1893 -1916)

Noel Henry Boles was a relative newcomer to the village of Newton St Cyres having been born in the village of St Breward, on the western edge of Bodmin Moor, in Cornwall, in the January quarter of 1893. He was the middle child and only son of Richard and Florence Boles. In 1901 the family were living in the Vicarage at St Winnow (near Lostwithiel and the River Fowey in Cornwall) with a governess domestic (described as a boarder), a cook, a parlour maid, a nurse and a groom/gardener. Richard Boles is described as a clergyman of the Church of England.

The family were still living in the St Winnow Vicarage in April 1911, but with a teacher as a boarder and two schoolroom maids as well as their parlour maid and gardener/groom. It would seem possible that Richard Boles was running a small educational establishment from his home as well as being the local clergyman. By this time Noel was eighteen years old and a resident army student living with four other young army students and a civil service student in the establishment of George Crawford, the tutor, and his family at the Manor House, York Place, Clifton, Bristol.

Canon Richard Henry Boles was inducted as Vicar of Newton St Cyres on the 13th of November 1911 so the Vicarage of Newton St Cyres became the Boles family home. His Patron was Edward G Quicke, the young squire.



With his father Canon Richard Boles

Young Noel Henry Boles had chosen a career in the army perhaps with some encouragement from his uncle, Colonel Dennis F Boles of the 3rd Devonshire Regiment. After his army education, Noel joined the Dorsetshire Regiment as a young lieutenant and was sent to Poona in India, where the regiment was stationed at the outbreak of war. His career is best described by quoting the article in the February 1916 Cadbury Rurideanal Magazine written after his death, most probably by his father.

'On January 15th the Vicar and his family received a telegram from the War Office announcing that his son Noel Henry Boles had been 'Killed in Action' on the 11th Jan. Yet one more name to be added to our parochial Roll of Honour. R. I.P.

N H Boles was a lieutenant in the 2nd Battalion of the Dorset Regiment, and was invalided home from India at the commencement of the War, being unable, owing to the effects of his serious illness (poliomyelitis had left him with his right arm and leg suffering a degree of paralysis) to join his regiment on the Persian Gulf. He had, before his eight months sick leave was up, applied to be passed for active service and to be allowed to join the Royal Flying Corps.

After a period of training at Brooklands, he passed out as a 'Military Observer' and was sent at once to the Dardanelles to join the No 3 Wing of the Royal Naval Aviation Service, which was stationed on the island of Imbros and was under the command of Commander Samson, R.N., D.S.O. M.C., from which place many interesting letters have been received from him. No further details have been received, nor is it known to his family where the action took place in which he fell.'

'A letter has since been received from Commander Samson in which he says 'I was dreadfully sorry to see in the papers of your son's death. I am sorry that I cannot give you any details as I left Imbros on Dec.30th, 1915. I formed a very high opinion indeed of your son, and we all thought very highly of him. He did excellent work and is a great loss.' '

The successful evacuation of Gallipoli was completed on the 8th Jan 1916. In the final days of the campaign a German Ottoman fighter squadron began operations over the Peninsula and inflicted the first British flying losses. Two days after the final evacuation three Fokker Eindeckers shot down two RNAS planes.

Noel Henry Boles was buried at the age of 23 yrs in the Lancashire Landing Cemetery in Turkey. He is remembered on the Memorial window and on the Plaque in Newton St Cyres Church and also by a rather special oak lectern given by his parents to the Church. This lectern is made partly from oak recovered from under the Church floor during renovations underway at this period. It is oak from the carved pews discarded by a previous renovation a century earlier.

Several months after writing up this research I had a surprise email from Richard Powell who lives at Talaton near Ottery St Mary asking me to display posters of a coming WW1 exhibition to be held in their Church. Entirely unbeknown to me, descendants of the the Boles family live in Talaton and Lady Anne Boles had made much information and many photographs available to Richard for display. In addition Richard has written a book on the many Boles cousins who served in WW1. From this I was able to glean much information and confirm other points. The Talaton Boles are descendants of Francis Boles, brother to Dennis and Canon Richard.

From this information I learnt that Noel's two sisters Dorothy and Geraldine were nurses during the war, it is thought in France. That his serious illness was polio and that although his leg improved his arm, particularly the shoulder did not. A letter from the doctor at the military station hospital in India to his parents dated 26.8.14 still exists. Noel expected to remain in India after his battalion were mobilised ready for transport to the Gulf but to his obvious joy he was to be sent back to England. He kept a very full diary of his travel on board the Avon with a convoy of ships bringing forces to the Front. The diary has survived and it has been fully transcribed in Richard's book with some interesting passages especially as the convoy passes through the Suez Canal.



Noel Boles posing outside the vicarage in his flying gear. The WW1 veteran Henry Allingham has left us some evocative words on the garb necessary for flying at that time, 'In those days you had an open cockpit and it was very cold. You had a leather jacket and a leather helmet and you would put Vaseline on your face, and you had gloves to protect you from frostbite. The standard issue was long johns, and you had a thick shirt and a vest. '

During operations in support of the evacuation of Gallipoli Noel was an observer in a Henri Farman biplane. It lacked speed but was able to remain in the air for more than three hours. It was armed with a rudimentary machine gun and had a crew of two, the pilot and the observer. Noel and his pilot Sub Lieutenant Cecil Brinsmead were shot down by two single seater Fokker Eindeckers who attacked simultaneously from behind. These faster planes were the first to have forward firing machine guns that were synchronised to fire through the plane's propeller. The British plane fell into the sea and the two bodies were picked up by a passing trawler. Noel had been shot through the wrist, the bullet having passed through his wristwatch. Both men suffered fractured skulls and would have died instantly. Pictures show the flag draped coffins being borne from a tented camp to a stony cemetery on a hillside above Kephalo harbour on Imbros. They were reburied later.

A fellow officer and West Country friend sent a photo of Noel taken a few days before his death home for his parents and speaks of the photos with which Noel made his cabin look so cheerful 'with that one of the family outside the vicarage in the centre'. He used to visit Noel to see the copies of the Western Weekly News which were sent to him and to listen to his gramophone.

From the Taunton Courier: He had a reputation as a good sportsman. He was a keen shot and greatly enjoyed a good gallop over the countryside with the West Somerset Foxhounds He had a charm of manner and a sensitive consideration for others which everywhere made him an attractive and welcome personality.

I wish to thank Lady Anne Boles and Jonathan Boles for making the photographs and Noel's diary available, as well as other family papers and also Richard Powell for making me aware of all this information and for his help.

Suffering for Righteousness Richard Powell 2015 £10.

This book has been published privately. It is a very interesting read and a very full account of Noel's life in the services. I have only touched on the extra details in this article. If you would like a copy please email Richard Powell at richard.powell7@gmail.com I can fully recommend it.