

## MAJOR CHARLES HEReward BECKER (1912-14)

<b>Date of Birth</b>	7 July 1897
<b>School Information</b>	Sub-Prefect. Cricket XI 1914. Football XI 1913-14. Hockey XI 1914. Sergt OTC
<b>Career Information</b>	None
<b>Date Of Death</b>	8 August 1918
<b>Cause of Death</b>	<p>The following is taken from the Scioto Gazette on Friday 9 August 1918 :-</p> <p><i>CAPTAIN BECKER OF THE BRITISH MISSION KILLED WHEN MACHINE GUN GOES OVER HIGH BANK</i></p> <p><i>Capt Charles E. Becker, of the British army, lies dead at Ware's mortuary, and Lieut. William H. Nell, of the American army, is in the Base Hospital, with a broken shoulder, as a result of an early morning drive to the Artillery Range in the Stoney Creek section, for the big car which was driven by Jack McCoy, went over the steep embankment near the Morgan Wood house, and crushed the occupants under it. Capt. Becker had his neck broken and died almost instantly, and Lieut. Neil was caught on the shoulder. There were in the car, besides, these two, Chub Wadley and the driver, and two other lieutenants from Camp Sherman.</i></p> <p><i>The trip was essayed about two o'clock Friday morning, and was the result of the driver not knowing the roadway, and but few of the occupants, if any, were thoroughly familiar with it. One lieutenant said that he would direct the driver and when the sharp turn came, after crossing the little iron bridge at Pride, he yelled "turn to the right," but the car's momentum was too great for it to respond quick enough, and it went over the bank with the disastrous results noted.</i></p> <p><i>The aid of the neighbors men from the Artillery Range were secured and the injured man was rushed to the Base Hospital after a first aid dressing.</i></p> <p><i>The body of Capt. Becker was taken to Ware's mortuary, where it awaits instructions from the British embassy at Washington, as to it's disposition.</i></p>
<b>Location</b>	Stoney Creek Road, Chillicothe, Ross County, Ohio, USA
<b>Cemetery</b>	<a href="#">Chillicothe (Grandview) Cemetery</a> <b>Plot:</b> Section 10, lot 138, grave #8195
<b>Rank</b>	Major on Chapel memorial but CWGC states Captain
<b>Branch of Service</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> Battalion, East Surrey Regiment, attached to Royal Fusiliers

In August 2015 we were contacted by Jonathan Spurrell, who on behalf of his old school, Colchester Royal Grammar School (CRGS), visited the grave of Charles Hereward Becker in Chillicothe, Ohio, USA. CRGS is commemorating the lives of all the Old Colchestrians who died during the First World War by having somebody visit each grave.

He sent the following photographs and additional information. As you will see the grave clearly states that he was a Captain at the time of his death and therefore why the Chapel Memorial states Major is unclear. Jonathan says "Piecing together all in the information, it appears that Becker was a Lt. in the East Surrey Regiment; when he was transferred to the British training mission in America he was made a Temporary Captain, attached to the Royal Fusiliers. A book about Camp Sherman had photographs of some of the French and British officers, but I couldn't find one of Becker."



Jonathan also sent a photograph of the probable site of the accident. His vehicle came over the bridge on the left (the original bridge was a small iron one) and made a sharp right turn. It was night and the driver didn't know the road. The car skidded and ended up in a ditch. He thinks this must be the ditch along where the stop sign is. Presumably the road has been widened in the past 100 years and the ditch may have been wider and deeper in 1918.



The next 2 pages are the full article that Jonathan Spurrell has written for his old school magazine. We are very grateful for him allowing us to include this.

# Visiting CRGS's First World War graves...in the USA

Jonathan Spurrell OC

*The centenary of the First World War is being marked in many ways, and CRGS, like other schools, has been remembering the former pupils and masters who died in the service of their country.*

Laurie Holmes, the school archivist, has been reading accounts of their lives during assembly and placing brass poppies in the new Garden of Remembrance on the anniversary of their deaths. By the autumn of 2018, 76 poppies will have been 'planted'.

The wider school community has also been invited to participate in these commemorations. Current pupils, staff, OCs and relatives of the fallen have begun visiting graves and memorials and placing commemorative crosses on behalf of the school.

Most of the graves and memorials are in France, Belgium and the UK, with a handful scattered throughout Turkey and the Middle East. But two are on the other side of the Atlantic – one in Canada and one in the United States – a long way from the bloody battlefields of Europe.

On a hot, humid morning at the end of August, Chris Wright and I – both OCs currently living in Maryland – set off on a long road trip to visit the grave of Capt. Charles Hereward Becker OC in Chillicothe, Ohio. As well as paying our respects on behalf of CRGS, we were keen to find out more about his life and why he was buried there.

We met in Frederick, Maryland, bought some coffee and sandwiches for the road, and set off on the interstate that carves its way westwards through the Appalachian mountains. Although we had never met before (Chris sat his A levels in the summer of 1993 and I joined the school that September), we found we had plenty to talk about: languages and travel had played an important role in both our careers, and of course we had our memories of CRGS to share. Before we knew it, the mountains of West Virginia had given way to the cornfields and aging industrial towns of Ohio. We pulled into Chillicothe (the second half of the name rhymes with 'coffee') and checked into our bed and breakfast, an elegant Victorian house owned by a retired chef who had been the butler at Camp David during Nixon's presidency. The grand buildings along Chillicothe's main streets were an indication of its former glory: the city was the very first capital of Ohio over 200 years ago.

Our first stop was the Ross County Historical Society. We had contacted them a week earlier and could not have been more grateful for the help they gave us. Copies of newspaper articles and a map of the cemetery were waiting for us at the front desk. After a brief tour of their museum, we found a café for a much needed cup of coffee and a glance at the papers we had been given. The facts were becoming clearer and we began to put together a picture of Charles Becker's short life, his family's interesting connections with Colchester, and the tragic

events that led to his death in Chillicothe at the age of 21.

Becker joined CRGS as a day scholar in 1907, having previously attended Ascham College in Clacton. He was the third generation of his family to reside in Colchester. His grandfather, Charles Otto Gustavus Becker, had a rather adventurous start to his career: born in Germany, he fought under Gen. Stonewall Jackson in Mexico when he was 14, was taken prisoner by the Danes during the Schleswig-Holstein campaign, and served under Omar Pasha in the Crimean War, before moving to Colchester in the late 1850s to practise medicine. His surgery was initially in Crouch Street, then in Eld Lane and finally at The Minorities. He had several children: two of his daughters ran a restaurant on the High Street, while his sons included an army officer, a colonial administrator and the artist Harry Otto Becker, who lived at Flatford for a few years and was a well-known Suffolk painter.

Dr. Becker's youngest son, Jonathan Ernest Augustus George Becker, followed him into the medical profession, practising first in Colchester before moving to Harley Street, London, in about 1908, where he worked as a cancer specialist.

Charles left CRGS when the family moved to London. He attended Colet Court, the preparatory school for St. Paul's, and although CRGS records state that he went to both St. Paul's and Westminster schools, his name appears in neither of their archives. What we do know

is that in 1912 he was back in East Anglia, studying at Framlingham College, where he completed his education in 1914. He played in the football, cricket and hockey teams and was a sergeant in the school's OTC.

After leaving Framlingham, Becker joined the East Surrey Regiment, in which his elder brother, Jonathan Otto Gustavus Becker, was already serving. But the two brothers were not in the same regiment for long: Jonathan was killed in France in March 1915. Charles continued to serve on the Western Front, and was wounded at least twice. It must have been an enormous relief when, in the spring of 1918, he learned that he would be sent to America as part of the British training mission.

The Americans had joined the war in 1917 but had never experienced the sort of trench warfare that had developed on the Western Front. Before new recruits were sent to France, they received training in one of the massive training camps that were built in the summer of 1917.

One of these training facilities, Camp Sherman, sprang up on the outskirts of Chillicothe, Ohio, on 2,000 acres of land purchased by the federal government. British and French training officers began to arrive in the autumn of 1917, instructing the recruits on how to throw grenades, fix bayonets and make their way across no-man's land.

Becker was among a contingent of officers who arrived in April 1918. With the final German offensive taking place on the Western Front,

the outcome of the war was far from certain, and Becker was no doubt thankful that, after years of fighting for his country, he had been rewarded with a less dangerous role far away from the muddy trenches. He was promoted to the rank of Temporary Captain and was attached to the Royal Fusiliers.

Sadly, however, he would never see his family again. In the early hours of Friday, 8 August 1918, Becker was being driven to an artillery range south of Chillicothe. The driver was unfamiliar with the road, and at a place called Pride they slowed down to cross the small iron bridge over Stoney Creek, not far from where it joins the Scioto River. One of the passengers, realising they needed to make a sharp turn after the bridge, shouted, 'Turn to the right'. The car skidded, rolled over and ended up in a ditch. The driver and one of the passengers escaped unharmed and two others were injured, but the vehicle had landed on Charles Becker and its weight had killed him instantly.

As we left Chillicothe the next day, Chris and I took the road that Becker's vehicle was travelling on. It runs parallel to the railway line and follows the course of the Scioto River. We reached Pride, crossed the modern concrete bridge, and got out to have a look. It was quiet, and the morning breeze moving through the woods was cool and refreshing. There were a couple of houses, but no signs of life. The peaceful scene gave no indication of the tragic events that occurred almost a hundred years earlier. Becker was buried with full



military honours in the hill-top cemetery called Grandview. His Sam Browne belt was sent home to his mother, who in the space of three years had lost her two sons as well as her husband.

There is more of this story to be told. There is a file on Becker in the War Office papers at the National Archives, which I hope to consult for more information about his war service. I have also contacted a cousin of Becker's through a family history website, who has promised to send some photographs. The complete story will eventually be included in a book that Laurie Holmes is putting together as a companion to the recently published 'The Colcestrian: Colchester Royal Grammar School and the Great War'. It will recount the lives of the 76 pupils and teachers from CRGS who lost their lives during the First World War.

Anybody interested in visiting one of the other graves or memorials on behalf of CRGS is invited to get in touch with Laurie Holmes (lholmes@crgs.co.uk) or the OC Society.



1. Chris Wright OC and Jonathan Spurrell OC at Becker's grave
2. Charles Becker's grave in Chillicothe, Ohio
3. The site of Becker's fatal accident: the car crossed the bridge on the left, skidded as it turned right, and ended up in a ditch, probably near the stop sign
4. The cross, provided by the British Legion, which was placed at Becker's grave

