

Bury Grammar School Centenary Roll of Honour
Lieutenant John Ernest Hartington MC, 2/5th Battalion
Lancashire Fusiliers, attached 164th Coy. Machine Gun Corps,
died 13th July 1917 aged 21



**Lieutenant John Hartington in 1917, wearing the cap badge of the Machine Gun Corps
and the ribbon of the Military Cross**

John Hartington was the second former Captain of Bury Grammar School to die in the Great War. His successor in the post, John Maddox, was killed on the Somme in August 1916. John Hartington was born in Mexico on 11th May 1896, the second son of George Andrew Hartington and his wife Mona. George Hartington planned and was for many years the manager of, a French-owned textile complex in Orizaba, province of Vera Cruz. George's brother was at the same time managing mills in Bergen, Norway, on behalf of the Norwegian royal family. His son, another John Hartington, was also born in 1896. By a terrible irony, the two cousins would die within 48 hours of each other serving with the British Army at Ypres in 1917. Because of ongoing political turmoil in Mexico the family returned to Britain, settling at Highfield House, Manchester Road in Heywood. John, his two younger brothers Charles and Luis and his three sisters Florence, Gertrude and Kathleen all attended Bury Grammar School. John started in Form Lower VA on 13th September 1909, having previously attended Clee Grammar School. He was a member of Derby House and joined the Officers Training Corps. One of his classmates was Thomas Hope Floyd, who would also go on to serve in the 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers during the Great War. In 1910 he passed the Oxford Local Preliminary Examination and a year later finished in Division I of the Oxford Junior Local Examination under the guidance of the experienced Mr. C.H. L. Zucker. He gained a Third Class Honours in the 1912 Oxford Local Juniors and a Pass in the Oxford Local Seniors in 1913.

John Hartington excelled as a sportsman. By 1911 he was a member of the 1st XI Cricket and Football teams. In 1912, school magazine 'The Clavian' commented that '*Hartington has proved quite a capable wicket keeper*'. He became the Captain of the 1st XI in 1913 and won the Cricket Prize that year for the best batting average. The next year he led the Derby team to victory in the Blackburne Cricket Challenge Cup. In football he initially played Inside Left for the 1st XI in the 1911/12 season. 'The Clavian' reported that he '*Passes well, and has plenty of weight; weak shot*'. However, next season he switched to Centre Half, where he seems to have been more at home: '*Splendid centre half. Infuses plenty of vigour into the play. Distributes the ball well and always seems to be where he is needed*' (December 1912). Twice he led Derby to victory in the Wike Football Challenge Cup and he succeeded his good friend William Morris as Captain of the 1st XI in the 1914-15 season. When he left part way through the season, 'The Clavian' commented:

'...we were still further handicapped by the loss of our captain, J.E. Hartington, who left at Christmas to take up a commission in the Lancashire Fusiliers. He was undoubtedly the finest player in the team and at centre-half was always a thorn in the side of our opponents. An untiring worker, equally brilliant in defence and attack, a clever head, an excellent shot and, above all, a popular captain-he has the team's best wishes for his future success.'



The Bury Grammar School 1st XI football team 1911/12. John Hartington is seated second from the right as we look at the photograph.

John was also an accomplished athlete, helping William Morris to secure Bury joint first place in the Public Schools Athletics Championships at Stamford Bridge in London in 1913. A sprained ankle prevented him from taking part in the event the next year when Morris and John Maddox won the trophy outright. John is also recorded as taking part in dramatic productions, appearing in 'Our Model Parliament' and as 'Bassanio' in the trial scene from 'The Merchant of Venice' in school entertainments in 1911 and 1912. In 1914 he appeared in the school production of Sheridan's 'The Rivals'. 'The Clavian' reported that: '*Honest Thomas, the coachman, was rendered by Hartington with a heartiness which none but he can impart...the hilarity with which Hartington and Wild cracked their jokes was in perfect accord with the spirit of the scene*'. John won the OTC Efficiency Badge for cadets who had trained at the Public Schools Camp in Aldershot in 1911. He was promoted to Corporal and eventually

Platoon Sergeant. He gained the OTC Efficiency Certificate A in November 1913 and spent a total of three years and two terms in the Corps. He made a significant contribution to the future of the school cadets, as recorded by 'The Clavian' in February 1915: *'A new feature of the corps is the band. It has been raised and trained so far by Hartington, who is to be congratulated on what he has done.'*

John Hartington became a Prefect in 1913 and succeeded his friend William Morris as School Captain in 1914. He chose to leave school on 8th December 1914 in order to train as an officer at Edinburgh University. His OTC Record of Service and Qualifications grades him as 'Excellent' for General Efficiency, 'Excellent, 1st Class shot' for Musketry and in Special remarks comments: *'He has throughout his career been an excellent cadet, with a splendid influence on his fellows'*. He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Lancashire Fusiliers, travelling with the 2/5th Battalion (Bury Territorials) to the Western Front in May 1915. This battalion formed part of 164th Brigade of the 55th (West Lancashire) Division. John would go on to celebrate three birthdays in France.

At the end of 1915 it was decided to concentrate the machine guns allocated to individual infantry battalions into special companies of the newly-formed Machine Gun Corps, which would support each Brigade. Officers and men from the infantry battalions were transferred or seconded to these new formations, adopting the crossed machine gun cap badge of the MGC. The 164th Brigade Machine Gun Company was formed on 19th February 1916 and John Hartington became one of its attached officers.

The February 1916 edition of 'The Clavian' featured John in its regular 'Leading Lights' column:

LEADING LIGHTS.-10.

It is with a feeling of utter helplessness that I take up the pen to continue this series of famous personages of Bury Grammar School. Let me say at the beginning what the words of this short article may perhaps fail to express. Among the many illustrious scholars who have risen to the heights of eminence and to whom, in no small part, the school owes its high position today, there has been no more thorough worker and sportsman, no greater favourite with masters and boys alike, than John Hartington.

This remarkable celebrity was born in Mexico some nineteen years ago, but in spite of his foreign birthplace, he had all the fine characteristics of the true Englishman. He was as brave as schoolboys require their heroes to be—in other words, he knew no fear; he loved every form of sport; he was full of fun, slow to anger, yet could be stern and resolute of will when necessity demanded; and what was perhaps the outstanding feature in a personality altogether great, he possessed an unlimited amount of common-sense, energy and determination.

After spending his early youth in that country of ceaseless treachery and bloodshed, Hartington came, or rather was brought, to reside in England, and entered Bury Grammar School more than six years ago. Of all his triumphs there it would take too long to tell: but while the school has produced very many good "all-rounders", Hartington was a brilliant "all-rounder". When he left in December 1915 (actually 1914), he was Captain of the School, Captain of Football and Captain of Cricket. He was besides a strong swimmer and represented his House for several years. He was a dogged, powerful athlete, and represented the School in the Public Schools' sports at Stamford Bridge. He held Certificate A and the rank of platoon-sergeant in the Officers' Training Corps; he was an excellent shot, and his record of camps and inspections extended over many years. He did not allow his military training to stop there, for shortly after the outbreak of war he received a commission in the 2/5 Lancashire Fusiliers and went straight

from school to a military career. Soon he was “doing his bit” in the trenches in France, and we may rest assured that, if anything, his “bit” will be a bit bigger than the average.

There we must leave him for the present. It is no exaggeration to say that every master and boy who knew him hopes and believes that his grit will bring him safely through the trials of this stern contest, as it did through the lesser struggles of the playing-fields. In devotion to duty and noble self-sacrifice he provides an example for rising generations of Bury boys to follow.

“Oui”

On 7th March 1916, John wrote home from ‘Trenches’:

‘My dear father,

I am enclosing a crossed cheque for £10 which I should like you to invest for me either in William Wild’s or any other thing you might think fit.

Everything out here is as good as can be expected after the frightful weather we have been having lately.

I got the copy of the “Clavian” today and read the article on myself. Could you really picture the fellow described in that leading light? It came as rather a shock to me.

We are looking forward to going out of the trenches in a day or two, to move into rest billets and there enjoy our much-longed for and much-needed baths,

Give my love to all.

Hope you are keeping fit.

I am your son,

John’

The summer of 1916 saw the start of the Battle of the Somme. On 28th August, John’s older brother, George Oscar Hartington, a Private in 8th Battalion, Loyal North Lancs Regiment, was captured at Thiepval. A month later, on 27th September 1916, during fighting for the village of Gueudecourt, northeast of Delville Wood, 2nd Lieutenant John Hartington was recommended for the award of the Military Cross. The citation, published in the official ‘London Gazette’ reads: *‘For conspicuous gallantry in action. He fought his machine guns with great courage and determination, continually passing through enemy barrages to supervise the efficient working of his guns.’*

John wrote to his parents on 27th November 1916:

‘My Dear Father and Mother,

You will be glad to know that I appeared in last week’s London Gazette as being promoted to full Lieutenant, so you will address all my letters to Lieut J.E.H. M.C.

I am enclosing the full announcement of my military cross, together with the Corps Commander and the Divisional and Brigade General’s congratulations. Please do not lose it.

Will you also look at the London gazette appendix sometime in the near future and you will see what I won it for. I am sending as a present for Christmas to Mother a miniature Military Cross by one of the men coming on leave, who will call at Highfield with it. Thank you so very much for the leather waistcoat.

All parcels and papers arriving all O.K.


Will you please stitch another star on my tunic before you send it back.

Give my love to all and thank you and all relations for their congratulations.

Your Loving Son,

John’

AWARDED MILITARY CROSS
FOR CONSPICUOUS GALLANTRY IN ACTION.



SECOND-LIEUTENANT J. E. HARTINGTON.
Recently we announced that Second-Lieutenant John Ernest Hartington of the

Lancashire Fusiliers, son of Mr. G. A. Hartington of Highfield House, Hopwood, had been awarded the Military Cross. At the time no details were available of the action for which the honour was conferred upon him, but the "Gazette" notice of the award has been issued this week, and it is stated that the cross has been awarded to Lieutenant Hartington.

For conspicuous gallantry in action. He fought his machine guns with great courage and determination, continually passing through enemy barrages to supervise the efficient working of his guns.

As we stated previously, Lieutenant Hartington is the first Heywood soldier to be awarded the Military Cross. When war broke out he was attending the Bury Grammar School, and was the captain of the school. He obtained his commission in the Lancashire Fusiliers in December 1914, and is now attached to the Machine Gun Corps of the Fusiliers. While at the Grammar School, Lieutenant Hartington was the captain of both the cricket and football teams.

The Valley Ring Mill Limited has declared an interim dividend of 8d. per per share, 5 per cent., absorbing £2300. The last time the company returned a dividend was in September, 1914, when the same rate was paid.

CLARK'S B & L PILLS can be relied upon to cure in either sex, all acquired or constitutional discharges from the Urinary Organs, Gravel and Pains in the back. Free from Mercury. Established upwards of 60 years. In boxes 4s. 6d. each, of all Chemists and Patent Medicine Vendors throughout the World or sent for sixty stamps by the makers, The Lincoln and Midland Counties Drug Company Ltd., Lincoln

The announcement of John Hartington's Military Cross in the 'Heywood Advertiser'

John was the first soldier from Heywood to be awarded the Military Cross. A day later he wrote home again:

BEF Nov 28th 1916

My dear Mother,

An awful calamity has occurred, my pyjamas were burnt Friday, while being dried after washing, will you please send me out a pair by the very next post.

Best love to all.

Your loving son,

John

On 15th December 1916, he wrote to his mother:

'My dearest Mother,

Will you please thank Gertrude and Kathleen for the photographs. I think they are really splendid and they now adorn the walls of my humble room.

I am so glad you liked the Cross (the Miniature MC he mentions in an earlier letter) and the ash tray.

I am trying to get home about the middle of February to be invested by the King, then I shall be able to give you the real Cross.

I am awfully sorry to hear you have been ill, I hope you will be perfectly alright and enjoy Christmas as it should be enjoyed.

We shall feast right royally on Christmas day on some old and very tough cow which, when cut up, goes under the name of beef.

I had a letter from Edgar today, he has got a cushy job on the A.S.C. (Army Service Corps)

Everything all O.K. here except that you may be accused of man slaughter soon, as one of our fellows who had an awful cold, said 'Give me some of your quinine tablets' and he took and swallowed four. And by next morning he had only recovered enough from the effects of the quinine (not cold) to say some very uncomplimentary things about Boots and their capsules.

Best love to all,

Your loving Son,

John'

In fact it was not to be until 7th June 1917, only a few weeks before his death, that John received his Military Cross in person from HM King George V at Buckingham Palace. Apparently he was granted no additional leave but instead went straight back to his unit at the front. Later in June he sent a Field Service Postcard to his cousin Nellie Todd. He indicates that '*Letter follows at first opportunity*' and '*I have received no letter from you for a long time*'. The postmark on the card is 21/6/17, Nellie's 17th birthday. John was now second in command of the 164th Brigade Machine Gun Company. Another of the unit's officers was 2nd Lieutenant Richard Gale. As a Major General, he would command the British 6th Airborne Division in the 1944 D-Day Landings.

In early July 1917, 164th Brigade moved into positions on the east side of the city of Ypres, ready to take part in the major British Flanders offensive due to start on 31st July. Forward elements occupied trenches around the village of Potijze while headquarters were established in the ramparts of Ypres and the canal bank near the Menin Gate. On the night of 12th/13th July, the Germans, knowing that a British attack was imminent, launched a major bombardment of Ypres with high explosive and gas shells. The bombardment was vividly described by John's former school mate, Thomas Hope Floyd, then serving as an officer in the 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers, and stationed close to John in the Ramparts of Ypres:

'About 10-10pm a terrific shelling of the city began. Shells were bursting everywhere: the ground frequently vibrated as if mines were going off; dumps were blown up; and very soon parts of the city were in flames. It was a sight such as I have never seen before; at times the whole scene was as light as day; the flames encircled the already ruined and broken houses, bringing them to the ground with a rumbling crash. It was a grand and awful sight - a firework display better than any at Belle Vue, and free of charge! The sky was perforated with brilliant yellow light, and the shells were whizzing and crashing all round. The air was thick with sulphur' (From 'At Ypres with Best-Dunkley' by T.H. Floyd)

The 55th Division's War Diary estimated that between 10-00pm and 12-30am around 750 high explosive shells and 3-4,000 gas shells fell in the area of the Ramparts, the Canal Bank and Dead End (where the canal finished, just north of the Menin Gate). Three guns of a British 4.5" howitzer battery at Dead End were damaged and the battery's ammunition dump blew up. '*Considerable damage was also caused to M.G. Company Headquarters here*'. Lieutenant John Hartington was struck by a piece of 4.5" artillery shell from the exploding ammunition dump. He died of his wounds next day. Company Sergeant Major Bayly was wounded by the same explosion. In addition, the Company Commander Captain Nichols, Lieutenant Gale and 20 soldiers of the 164th M.G. Company were taken to hospital suffering from the effects of gas. Having been notified of his death by telegram, further details were supplied to John's parents in a letter from 164th MG Company's Commanding Officer, Captain Clifford Nichols:

My Dear Mr and Mrs Hartington,

It is with mingled feelings of grief and pride that I take up my pen to write to you. Grief at the loss of my 2nd in command and close friend, pride at being the company commander who had your son serving under him.

Words quite fail me to express what a loss your son is to one and all here. Although so young he was looked upon by the Brigadier and others in authority as one of the bravest and most efficient officers in the Brigade. And time after time he has justified their confidence.

On that dreadful night when he met his death he was continually outside the dugout looking after others whom he thought might be in need of help. The cause of his death was not enemy shell but a dump in very close proximity to our headquarters exploded and a piece of brass from a 4.5 inch cartridge case penetrated his stomach. We immediately took him to the dressing station, he was in the doctor's hands 5 minutes after he was hit and everything possible was done, but, as you will have heard without avail. He passed away the following evening about 9 p.m. in the C.C.S. (Casualty Clearing Station). He was buried at Lijssenhoek (sic) Cemetery on the Poperinghe-Boeschepe road (near Poperinghe). Plot 13 E 1.

Your son's kit has all been packed up and despatched to the base and you will no doubt receive it in due course.

I regret I have not written you earlier, but I myself, have only just returned from Hospital, having been gassed the same night.

Assuring you of my deepest sympathy - I shall ever hold your son in proud memory.

The family received many letters of condolence from family, friends and fellow officers. John's grave at Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery is today numbered XIII. A.1, and is located close to the Cross of Sacrifice in one corner of the cemetery.

On 15th July, two days later, Sergeant John Hartington of A Battery, 149th Brigade Royal Artillery, John's first cousin and namesake, also aged 21, was killed near Ypres. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial to the Missing. The two cousins are the only John Hartingtons recorded in the entire Commonwealth War Graves Commission database of 1.7 million names.

In September 1917, two months after his brother's death, Charles Hartington became Captain of Bury Grammar School. In early 1918, John's older brother George, who had already made an earlier failed bid to escape from German captivity, succeeded in returning to England by boat.



John Hartington's grave at Lijssenthoek was visited during Bury Grammar School's Tenth Anniversary Battlefields Tour in 2004. The then School Captain, Will Webster, laid the Captain's Medallion, which John himself would have worn, upon the headstone.

Sources: Bury Grammar School Archives; Edward Hartington; Peter Brooks; Mary Mahon; UK Censuses; Commonwealth War Graves Commission; 'Heywood Advertiser'; 'Bury Times'; War Diaries of the 164th Brigade Machine Gun Company and 55th (West Lancashire) Division; 'Prisoners of the First World War' ICRC Historical Archives website; 'At Ypres with Best-Dunkley' by T.H. Floyd; Contributors to the Great War Discussion Forum