

Bury Grammar School Centenary Roll of Honour Second Lieutenant Harold Wild, 27 Squadron, Royal Air Force, died 16th June 1918, aged 20



(Courtesy St. John with St. Mark's Church, Bury)

Harold Wild was born in Bury on 31st December 1897, the son of Harry Wild and his wife Annie, nee Cooper. Harry Wild, who had been born in Rochdale, was the Secretary of a Cotton Spinning Company. Harold was the youngest of the couple's three children, the others being William (born 1893) and Ethel (born 1896). By the time of the 1901 Census, the family was living at 14 Tile Street, Fernhill, Bury and attended St John's Church. Tile Street is now part of an industrial estate and the house no longer exists. The Vicar of St John's at the time was the Revd. Richard Hudson, whose son **Austin Patrick Hudson** attended Bury Grammar School and was killed serving with the Lancashire Fusiliers at Ypres on 31st August 1917.

After early education at St. John's Elementary School, Harold won a Kay Scholarship to Bury Grammar School worth £9 9s and joined Form Lower VB on 16th September 1910. He became a member of Derby House. His classmates included **Jack Binns**, who would also become a pilot and **Joe Morris**, brother of three BGS School Captains and the last old boy to be killed in action in the Great War. He was a member of the school's Officers Training Corps (now CCF). In 1911, Harold secured a pass in the Oxford Local Preliminary Exams and in 1913 achieved Third Class Honours in the Oxford Local Juniors, beating his friend and near neighbour in Fernhill, **Jack Binns**, who only managed a Pass. Harold left BGS as a member of the Lower VI on 28th January 1914 and, following the career path of many old boys at the time, became a clerk with the Lancashire and Yorkshire Bank.

Harold Wild was called up for military service in 1916, completing his Attestation Paper at Bury on 5th June. He was recorded as 5' 5 ¾" tall with 35" chest. On 15th June he was posted as Private 60562 to 28th (Reserve) Battalion, Royal Fusiliers at Edinburgh. He was appointed a Lance Corporal on 11th September 1916 and promoted to Acting Corporal on 25th January 1917. On 9th April 1917, he was transferred to the Officer Cadet Battalion of the Royal Flying Corps, gaining his commission on 20th July, at which point he was discharged from the Royal Fusiliers and was gazetted as a Flying Officer in September. The same month, his schoolfriend **Jack Binns** of 29 Squadron RFC was shot down and killed near Ypres, aged 19. Harold Wild was posted to the Western Front in April 1918, the month in which the Royal Flying Corps joined with the Royal Naval Air Service to become the independent Royal Air Force.

Harold joined 27 Squadron, RAF. The squadron was equipped with Airco DH 4 and 9 bombers. Harold Wild is known to have flown two of the DH9 aircraft while serving with the squadron. The DH9, designed by Geoffrey De Havilland (hence DH) was designed as an upgarde of the successful DH4 bomber, with a redesigned fuselage and a new BHP/Galloway 'Adriatic' engine. In anticipation of even better performance than the DH4, the government ordered over 4,000 DH9s even before its first flight. Unfortunately, the Adriatic engine proved unreliable in service and failed to produce the expected power. As a result, the DH9 was slower and more vulnerable to enemy fighters than the aircraft it was designed to replace.



Airco DH9 C6109, which Harold Wild was flying when he was shot down and killed on 16th June 1918. The DH9 could carry up to 209kg of bombs and was equipped with one forward firing Vickers machine-gun and one or two rear-firing Lewis guns on a ring mounting. It cannot be known for certain whether the photograph shows Harold Wild at the controls (JM Bruce/G.S. Leslie Collection)

We know little of Harold Wild's service with 27 Squadron, other than that on one occasion he crashed DH9 Serial Number C2152 on landing but he and his Observer, Sergeant J. Little were unhurt. On 16th June 1918 seven DH4s and 9s of 27 Squadron set off to bomb Roye, a town captured during the German Spring Offensive. Before they reached the target the bombers were set upon by between thirty and forty German Fokker Triplanes, Albatros and Pfalz scouts. One enemy aircraft was quickly shot down by 2nd Lt. H.M Stewart, an Observer in one of the DH4s but he was almost immediately killed by fire from an Albatros. Altogether, four 27 Squadron aircraft were shot down in the dogfight, with only one crew member surviving. Harold Wild, flying with his Observer **Sergeant Ernest Scott** (ex-Royal Warwickshire Regiment), was last seen in a spin with an enemy aircraft on his tail near Bus-La-Mésière, two miles west of Roye. The DH9 is believed to have been shot down by one of the leading German 'Aces', Oberleutnant Karl Bolle, flying a Fokker DR1 Triplane.



Oberleutnant Karl Bolle, Staffelfuehrer of Jasta Boelcke, with his triplane, 413/17



Karl Bolle in the Fokker Dr1 Triplane in which he shot down Harold Wild's DH9 on 16th June 1918, together with a modern painting showing the aircraft's probable colour scheme. (Robert Karr). One of the most famous aircraft of the Great War, the DR1 was exceptionally manoeuvrable but slower than allied fighters in level flight or a dive, with a maximum speed of 115mph. It also had a tendency to suffer structural failures in its wings, which led to the deaths of several pilots. However, it proved more than a match for the underpowered DH9 bomber.



Karl Bolle (**left**) was born in Berlin on 20th June 1893. He studied Economics at Oxford University but on the outbreak of war in 1914 returned to Germany and enlisted in a cavalry regiment. He saw action on the Eastern front before transferring to the air service in February 1916. He received pilot training in France and survived being shot down and wounded in October 1916. For a time his Observer was Lothar Von Richthofen, brother of the Red Baron. In early 1917 he retrained as a fighter pilot, joining Jasta (Fighter Squadron) 28 in July. Although he only scored a relatively modest five victories over the next six months, in January 1918 he was promoted to command Jasta 2, which was being re-equipped with the new Fokker Dr1 Triplane. Bolle proved an excellent Squadron Commander. He eventually scored 36 victories, seven in June 1918 alone, including Harold Wild's DH9. Bolle won many decorations, including the coveted 'Blue Max'. He survived the war and died in 1955.

ROYAL AIR FORCE.					A.M. Form 472.	
CASUALTY CARD.						
Surname WILD		Branch File No. Rf D 020233				
Christian Name HAROLD						
Regiment RAF		Squadron 27				
Date of Report.	By whom reported.	Reference to List.	Date of Casualty.	NATURE OF CASUALTY.	Date published in Press.	
7.3.21	EXTRACT	020233	PD29/5	16.6.18	german death reports state died 16.6.18	
					Memo from S.W.G. to state grave was located in the vicinity of Andechy and the body removed to Bouchoir British Cemetery, North West of Roye, Plot 5 Row D grave 54. In view of the above additional evidence it has now been decided to accept 16.6.18 as the actual date of death (Died of wounds)	
					P.T.O.	

Harold Wild and Ernest Scott were originally posted as 'missing' but later reports from the Germans indicated that they had died on 16th June 1918 and that their bodies had been buried by the enemy near the village of Andechy, North West of Roye. In 1920, the remains were exhumed and reinterred at Bouchoir New British Cemetery, Grave References 5.D.34 and 35.

Left: Harold Wild's RAF Casualty Card (RAF Museum)

Harold's father paid for the inscription '*For Ever With The Lord*' on his headstone. Sergeant Scott's mother, Mrs A. Scott of 59 Streatfield Avenue, East Ham, London paid to have '*Lost To Sight, To Memory Dear*' on her son's grave.



The Grave of 2nd Lt. Harold Wild at Bouchoir New British Cemetery. Not long after this photograph was taken, in Spring 2018, Bouchoir Cemetery was flooded and was inaccessible to visitors at the time of the centenary of Harold's death (Martine Vasse)

Sources: Bury Grammar School Archives; Ian Banks (St John with St Mark's Church, Bury); Bury Times; Ancestry; Nick Forder; RAF Museum Archive; Martine Vasse; 'The Flying Elephants; a History of No 27 Squadron RFC/RAF' by Chaz Bowyer; Commonwealth War Graves Commission; Robert Karr; Contributors to the Great War Forum.

Written by M.J. Hone 2018