

## Major Clive Macdonnell Dixon (Died 5<sup>th</sup> November 1914)



Clive Macdonnell Dixon was the first Great War fatality associated with Great Ayton. His father, Sir Raylton Dixon, once voted the most popular man in Middlesbrough, owned the largest shipyard on the River Tees and was a notable figure in Middlesbrough's social, civic and political life. Sir Raylton and Elizabeth Dixon had two sons and six daughters; their elder son, Clive Macdonnell Dixon, was born on 10 February 1870. After education at Rugby and Sandhurst, Clive joined the 16<sup>th</sup> (The Queen's) Lancers in 1890. He spent nine years with the regiment in North West India and South Africa, where he was present at the Siege of Ladysmith.

In 1898 he briefly returned to England to marry Lilian Bell, the daughter of John Bell, one of the Bell Brothers of Port Clarence Ironworks. Gertrude Bell, daughter of one of Lilian's cousins, was delighted with the marriage, writing 'we could scarcely have wished for anything better'.

Like many of the Dixon family, and like his wife Lilian, Clive was an excellent amateur artist. During the siege of Ladysmith he produced a humorous picture book 'The Leaguer of Ladysmith' which was well received; Queen Victoria had a copy. With the end of the siege of Ladysmith Clive returned to Middlesbrough where he received a hero's welcome. The following year, 1902, Major Dixon retired from the army and settled down to civilian life, enjoying his great love of horses, hunting and painting.

Initially Clive and Lilian lived at Langbaugh Hall, Great Ayton. Then in 1909 Clive built Chapelgarth at Little Broughton, which became the family home. Clive and Lilian had three sons and three daughters. Their charmed life came to an abrupt end with the start of the Great War. Clive had to surrender his beloved horses to the army, and then he volunteered to rejoin the 16<sup>th</sup> Lancers, although by now he was forty-four years old. Within two weeks of war being declared, he was in France as second-in-command of his old regiment. The 16<sup>th</sup> Lancers, as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), were fighting alongside the French, in an unsuccessful attempt to halt the German advance at Mons.

After the retreat from Mons, and action at the Battle of the Marne, the 16<sup>th</sup> Lancers moved to Flanders. Memories of magnificent cavalry charges across the open veldt of South Africa were lost in the mud of the trenches. During the First Battle of Ypres, in October and early November 1914, four out of five members of the BEF were wounded or killed. Major Dixon lost his life on 5 November 1914. In the trenches to the left of the Lancers were French troops in some disarray. Major Dixon drew his sword and attempted to rally them into a counter attack, but received a bullet in his stomach. Seriously wounded, he was carried by an army padre to a field ambulance, but later died from his wounds.

Clive Macdonnell Dixon is buried in the Nieuwkerke Churchyard in Belgium. His headstone carries the inscription 'Strong and of good courage, Sans peur et sans reproche'. The earlier wooden cross marking the grave is now preserved in St Augustine's Church in Kirkby-in-Cleveland. Although his name appears on the War Memorials at Great Broughton and Kirkby, it is missing on the Great Ayton memorial. This is hard to understand given that he had lived in the village for seven years prior to 1909, his mother was still living in the village (she had moved into Undercliffe Hall after Sir Raylton's death in 1901) and Clive's uncle, Waynman Dixon, lived in Ayton House and was organising the village War Memorial. However Clive Macdonnell Dixon is the first name on the memorial panel inside Christ Church, and it is fitting that we remember him on the centenary of his death.

**Ian Pearce**

