

THE HODGSONS OF SHERBORNE, 1881-1922.

By Michael Hanson

Charles Herbert Hodgson was born in 1857, the second son of the Reverend Richard Hodgson (1828-95), Curate of Warton (near Kirkham), Lancashire, and his wife Caroline (1828-89, née Fletcher). He was a scholar of Harrow School 1870-76, head of school in his last year, and a member of the football XI. Charles was Harrow Scholar of Hertford College, Oxford, where he obtained his BA in 1880 and MA in 1884.¹ He became an assistant master at Sherborne (King's) School in 1881 and was to serve there for nearly 40 years. His 'greatest distinction of all [was] to teach and teach very well the lowest form through these long years without once grumbling at his fate.'² Like the young Hamlet, Charles was 'the glass of fashion, and the mould of form'.³ He had narrowly missed his cricket blue at Oxford; he was readily identified at School matches by his green sunshade.⁴

In 1891 Charles lodged in Newland, Sherborne with the Minifie family. On 18 April 1893 he married Leonora Mary Cecilia Saunders (b. 1870) in Sherborne Abbey, daughter of the Reverend George Eveleigh Saunders (1822-1911), former Rector of Maperton, Somerset. Charles was 'a competent and popular'⁵ housemaster of Abbeylands from 1893 to 1900, when he moved to Abbey Grange in Hospital Lane, Sherborne Abbey's tithe barn converted into a house in 1827.⁶ There in 1901 the Hodgsons had a cook, a child's nurse - Harriette Louisa Ruck (1870-1921) - a housemaid and an under-housemaid. By 1911 Harriette was housekeeper, assisted by a parlourmaid and a kitchenmaid.

Charles Hodgson had succeeded Louis Napoleon Parker (1852-1944) as director of music in 1892, without emolument. 'He was in no sense a professional musician, but a cultured and enthusiastic amateur. For 24 years as honorary director of music he brought to his self-appointed task unflinching zeal, a kindling enthusiasm, and an infinite capacity for taking pains. His programmes show him to have been less daring than his predecessor, but ... there was a distinct advance in the quality of instrumental music performed ... Hodgson had a happy knack of endearing himself and his artistic aims to a wide circle of musical friends'. He resigned his position in 1916.⁷

In the summer of 1905 in the grounds of Sherborne Old Castle was held the Sherborne Pageant, commemorating the Twelfth Centenary of the founding of Sherborne Abbey and the School by St Aldhelm. It was composed and produced by Louis Parker, the first of a series of pageants that swept

the country. The chorus was trained by Charles Hodgson, and other members of staff assisted in the production and played many of the parts.⁸

One of Charles's last tasks was to edit with the Reverend William James Bensly *The Sherborne Register: Supplement, 1900-1921*, published in 1921.

Charles endured the deaths, one by one, of all his children. Cecil Roger died in October 1898 at Abbeylands aged ten months. Douglas Kyrle died of marasmus (wasting of the body) aged four months on 3 June 1903. Next was Mary Verena (1901-05), who suffered from measles for one and a half months and from enteritis for more than a month; she was nearly four. They rest in adjoining graves in Sherborne Cemetery.

The family moved in March 1913 to a house called Wharton in Acreman Street.⁹ Leonora predeceased her husband at some time after the 1911 census.¹⁰

The two eldest boys survived until the end of the First World War. Richard Eveleigh was born on 12 March 1894 at Abbeylands. He was educated at St Christopher's, Eastbourne and at Sherborne School, which he entered as a scholar in 1908. Richard was head of school, in the cricket eleven 1911-13, and won a leaving exhibition to New College, Oxford. He was gazetted Second Lieutenant in the 4th (Extra Reserve) Battalion, the King's (Liverpool Regiment) on 29 September 1914, serving with the Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders from the following May. After a few months in the trenches he was sent, because of ill-health, to a training school abroad. He was invalided to England in April 1917 to undergo an operation for appendicitis. On recovery he was attached to the Royal Air Force, and qualified as a Pilot Officer in July 1918. He returned to France on 7 August, 204 Squadron. Lieutenant Hodgson was killed by gunfire from the ground whilst flying near Dunkirk on 15 September 1918, his first action over the enemy trenches, and is buried in Coxyde Military Cemetery, Belgium. Richard's fiancée was Violet Mabel Grimley, of St Crispin's, The Avenue, Sherborne; they were to have married during his next leave.¹¹

Francis Herbert Hodgson was born on 11 March 1896 and attended Connaught House, Weymouth and Harrow School, winning an entrance scholarship at the latter in 1910 and the Roundell Scholarship in 1914. He gained a Science Demysip at Magdalen College College, Oxford and went up in October 1914, starting medical training at St Mary's Hospital in the summer of 1915. In common with many others he joined the Beatty School of Flying and upon receiving his certificate obtained a commission in the Royal Flying Corps. He served in France from May 1916 as a pilot on

artillery reconnaissance. In September 1916 he was severely wounded and was in Oxford for a while but returned to France in June 1917. A year later he was sent to Cambridge for a staff course but insisted in returning to the Front that October. He was accidentally killed on 19 November 1918 whilst on a trial flight over Elincourt, France.¹² Captain Hodgson is buried in Premont British Cemetery.¹³

Both brothers are commemorated on the Sherborne War Memorial which stands to the south of the Abbey, and by their father's gift of altar rails to the School Chapel.¹⁴ Charles 'passed through a long vale of tears: and the words on his grave are the cry of his heart, In die tribulationis dominum exquisivi [In the day of affliction I sought the Lord].'¹⁵ He bequeathed over £15,000 to provide entrance scholarships for the sons of clergy.¹⁶

With the deaths of Charles's children and wife before he retired in July 1920, followed soon afterwards by those of his brother and Harriette Ruck, his faithful nurse and housekeeper, it was 'no wonder that he broke down before his time, and displayed some of those oddities which are often the fruit of much sorrow. Few could realise when they saw the weary half-vacant form being wheeled about in a bath chair that he had been ... one of the most versatile of men, as he was the smartest in appearance and most polished in manner.'¹⁷ Charles went to live in Flat 3, 4 Bodorgan Road, Bournemouth, Hampshire.¹⁸ His brother Francis Roger Hodgson, Archdeacon of Zanzibar (1882-89) and Devonshire parish priest, died in late 1920 aged 67, and Harriette Ruck in July 1921. Charles himself died at Greenhill, Sherborne on 30 March 1922 and is buried in Sherborne Cemetery. He was cared for at the last by Mary Priscilla Ruck (1881-1956), Harriette's sister.¹⁹

1. R.C. Welch, *The Harrow School Register 1801-1893* (1894), 453; J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses 1715-1886*, vol. 2 (1887-88), 672.
2. H.R. King, 'Obituary. Charles Herbert Hodgson', *Shirburnian*, vol. 31 (July 1922), 230-31. I am grateful to Rachel Hassall for identifying several items in the Sherborne School Archives.
3. *Notes, Old Shirburnian Society Report* (October 1920), 4. 'Dapper' was another description: G. O'Hanlon, 'H[enry] R[obinson] K[ing]. Retrospect and Prospect', in R.S. Thompson (comp.), *Duffers Jubilee 1898-1948* (December 1949), 37. Author's collection.
4. King, 'Obituary. Charles Herbert Hodgson', 230; G. O'Hanlon, 'H.R. King', *Shirburnian*, vol. 38 (November 1935), 222.
5. *Notes, Old Shirburnian Society Report*, 4.

6. M. Hanson, 'Abbey Grange, Sherborne Abbey's Former Tithe Barn', *SDNQ*, vol. 37 (September 2011), 73-78.
7. Pick, B.P. (ed.), *The Sherborne Register, 1550-1950*, 4th edn (1950), 529.
8. A. B. Gourlay, *A History of Sherborne School*, 2nd edn (1971), 194-95.
9. G. O'Hanlon's pocket diary, 20 March 1913. Author's collection.
10. King, 'Obituary. Charles Herbert Hodgson', 231.
11. *The Times* (25 September 1918), 4f; R.E. Hodgson's entry in *The Sherborne School Book of Remembrance*; 'Lieut. Richard Eveleigh Hodgson', *Flight Magazine* (3 October 1918), 1122. Accessed 2 October 2011. www.flightglobal.com/flightpdf/archive/1918/1918-1121pdf.
12. *Times* (27 November 1918), 4c.
13. Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), *Debt of Honour Register*. F.H. Hodgson. Accessed 10 February 2011. www.cwgc.org.
14. *Notes, Old Shirburnian Society Report*, 4.
15. O'Hanlon, 'Henry Robinson King', 37.
16. Pick, *Sherborne Register*, 517.
17. King, 'Obituary. Charles Herbert Hodgson', 230-31.
18. CWGC, *Debt of Honour Register*. R.E. Hodgson.
19. Charles Hodgson's death registration certificate.



Charles Hodgson with headmaster Nowell Smith to his right, and Thomas Bell to his left, c.1913.

Author's collection.