

1942

Billie Bartusek Cooper

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Number 5 BRITISH FLYING TRAINING SCHOOL (BFTS) Clewiston, Florida

1941-1945



In Memoriam

Billie B Cooper: Course 3. Died on active service on September 21, 1942 aged 19

In a Fly Paper dated November 20, 1942, 'Riddle Round Up' mentioned a letter received from Mr R E Cooper of Edinburgh in which he says that his son, Billie Cooper, has been reported missing. Billie Cooper was a member of Course 3, who were at Clewiston from October 1941 to March 1942. He had been a member of the Edinburgh University Air Squadron and was a close friend of my father, George.

Sadly, any hopes held by Billie's parents were dashed as Billie had died, aged 19, on September 21, 1942. His plane was officially, "*Lost Without Trace Over the Western Approaches After Running Out of Fuel in Bad Weather During an Anti-Shipping Patrol*". In reality, Billie was on a training antisubmarine patrol in the Bay of Biscay and did not return. He had been posted to No. 10 OTU (Operational Training Unit) flying an Armstrong Whitworth Whitley. He is remembered on the Runnymede Memorial on Coopers Hill overlooking the River Thames at Englefield Green.

I originally intended to include this in the September 2022 newsletter to mark 80 years since Billie died, but I hesitated, and the reason why was intriguing. I knew that Billie had been selected for 5BFTS Course 3 as a member of the Edinburgh University Air Squadron and that he had died on active service in 1942. During early 2022, I visited Edinburgh Castle where the Scots Roll of Honour is in the Scottish National War Memorial. Anyone can search the Roll, but I was unable to find any record of Billie which surprised me. Nor could I find details of his birth on any UK genealogy website.

I then searched the CWGC website. I found Billie and his recorded home address – in Essex!

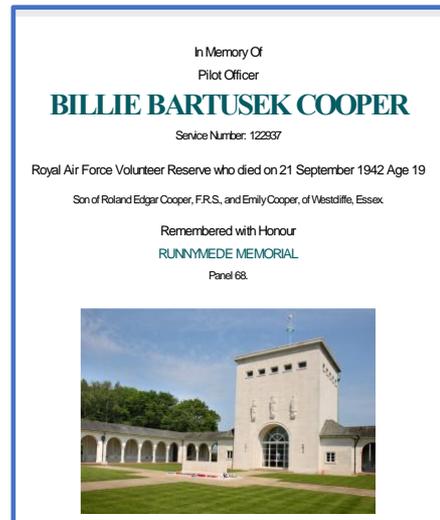
Billie's full name was Billie Bartusek Cooper, Bartusek being his mother's maiden name. His parents were Roland Edgar and Emily Cooper née Bartusek. Both Roland and Emily had backgrounds which impacted significantly on their lives and led to Billie, who was educated in Scotland, being born outside the UK and having a recorded home address in Essex.

Billie's father, Roland Edgar Cooper was born in Kingston-on-Thames in 1890. Roland's father was Harry Conrad Cooper, an auctioneer, and his mother was Jessie Cooper née Huntsman. They married in 1878 in Chingford, Essex, but the marriage did not last, and Jessie petitioned for divorce in December 1889. Roland was born during the summer of 1890 and Jessie's divorce was made final on November 11, 1890. In April 1891, Jessie and baby Roland aged about 10 months were living in Stoke Newington; Jessie calling herself a 'widow'. Jessie sadly died aged 33 in December 1893, leaving the young Roland Edgar in effect an orphan at nearly 4 years as there is no evidence that he ever saw his father again. His father, Harry Conrad Cooper left the UK for Australasia after the divorce, remarried in New Zealand in 1897 and died in Victoria, Australia in 1912.

Young Roland came under the guardianship of his aunt Emma Wiedhofft in 1905. Emma, the half-sister of Roland's mother Jessie, married William Wright Smith (later Sir William Wright Smith) in 1907. William Wright Smith was born in Dumfriesshire in 1875. He graduated from Edinburgh University in 1896 and, with a teaching diploma from Moray House, taught in Edinburgh schools for 6 years while developing an interest in natural sciences. He became a botanist and horticulturalist and was appointed Curator of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, and later Regius Keeper (Director) from 1922 to 1956. William greatly influenced his nephew Roland's choice of career and between 1907 and 1910, William and Roland went travelling in northern India collecting botanical samples. Roland then continued his horticultural education at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.



Course 3: Edinburgh University Group. Back: George 2nd from left. Billie far right. Front: Sandy Manson 2nd second right.



From the CWGC website

Billie's mother, Emily Cooper née Bartusek was born in Islington, London, on May 15, 1893. Her parents were Josep and Marie Louise Bartusek and she had an older brother, Joseph Wellard Bartusek. Josep, a furrier, was born in Bohemia (then in Austria) on January 18, 1867. His father, John Bartusek was a farmer. It is not known why Josep came to England, but aged 23, he married Marie Louise Gardiner, aged 24, on April 6, 1890 in Islington. Josep and Marie Louise set up home in Islington and first Joseph Wellard and then Emily was born. Josep became a naturalized British Subject in 1909. The 1911 Census shows that the family had moved to Finsbury Park.

I am not aware how they met, but Roland, aged 26, and Emily, aged 23, married in Islington,

London on January 10, 1919. On their marriage certificate, Roland is recorded as being a 'Botanical Explorer' as indeed he was having been to Sikkim in 1913, Bhutan in 1914 and 1915 and the Punjab in 1916. In 1921, Roland became Superintendent of the Botanic Gardens at Maymo, Burma (Myanmar) and it was here that Billie was born in 1923.

The family returned to Britain in the late 1920s so that Billie could be educated in Scotland. In 1930, Roland became Assistant Curator of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh and in 1934, was promoted to Curator (Head Keeper) following in the footsteps of his uncle. During his curatorship Roland lived in the East Gate Lodge with his wife, Emily, and this was Billie's home while he was growing up in Edinburgh.

Sailing to Halifax on the SS Capetown Castle in 1941, wasn't the first time Billie had been to North America and Canada. In 1937, aged 14, Billie was one of 108 Scottish boys who sailed back from Montreal to Glasgow in August. I am not sure why the boys were in Canada nor which school Billie attended, but he did follow his father, Roland, to Edinburgh University.

At Clewiston, Billie shared a hut with my father, John Penman and Alexander Wilson (Sandy) Manson. These four spent most weekends at the Fort Myers home of Ed and Ruth Simpson where the 'boys' were able to stay in rooms built over their garage and were really well looked after. Sandy was also killed during WW2 in July 1944 and is buried in France. John went to live in Rhodesia after WW2. I am not sure if George (my father) went to see Billie's parents while he was in Edinburgh on leave during WW2, but after WW2, my parents went to visit Roland and Emily at their home at East Gate Lodge. Roland retired in 1950 moving to Westcliffe in Essex which was the address recorded against Billie's Commemoration on the CWGC website.

Emily died in 1982 in Southend on Sea in Essex aged 88.



L-R: John, Sandy, Billie, George Billie, Ken MacVicar (Obit Newsletter 17, Sept 2020), George

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The Commonwealth War Graves Commission is acknowledged as the source of the CWGC Certificate.

*This amended Obituary written by Dr Jenifer Harding (Daughter of George Hogarth, Course 3)
November 11, 2024*