

Manningtree, memorials: October 1914

William Cecil Holt Cree: 24th October 1914

Known as Cecil, William was born on the 4th August 1882 in Milton Abbot, Tavistock, Devon, the eldest son of the Rev William Cree and Edith Mary Holt from Paddington, London. His younger brother Arthur Stanley Holt Cree was born a few years later in 1887. Their mother died only a year after whilst living back in Islington. The family then lived for a while in Newton Reigny, Cumberland where father was rector and in 1894 moved to Manningtree where the Reverent Cree (known as Dick) was Vicar of St Michael and All Angels Church that once stood in the middle of Manningtree High Street. Whilst living in the vicarage opposite the Church, the Vicar also pursued interests with the meteorological society. He remarried in 1895 to Ruth Southgate, having five more children, two whilst living in Manningtree, where he continued to serve the spiritual needs of the Town until 1899, moving then to St Matthias church, Earls Court, Kensington, London.

In September 1895, at 13 years of age Cecil (William) was sent from Manningtree to Marlborough College, Wiltshire, a special school for the sons of Church of England Clergy, studying there till Easter 1899.

Unlike his father and other Clerical relatives, Cecil decided on a military career and in January 1900 joined the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, living and training as a single Gentleman Cadet. He was 'Gazetted' (passed out) as a 2nd Lieutenant on the 23rd July 1901 and added on the army list as an Officer. He was promoted to full Lieutenant on the 23rd July, 1904 with the Royal Horse and Royal Horse artillery. In July, 1909, he was appointed an Adjutant of the Territorial Force, which he continued until March 1913.



He met Wilmet Avis Hichens from Brixworth, Northamptonshire, her father Thomas also being a Vicar from Guilsborough, Northampton. They married in Falmouth in early 1910 and lived there, though for a while, in April 1911, Cecil, by then Captain, was living in Dinas Powis, Cardiff, employing two servants to look after him. This may have been linked to the birth of the couple's first child Jennifer who was born in about the same time in Falmouth, Devon. The couple's second child Naomi was born on the 3rd February 1913, again in Falmouth.

Cecil (William) was assigned as Captain to the 71st Battery of the Royal Field Artillery, reporting to Major. C. W. Scott along with three other officers. They were part of the 36th Brigade (2nd Division) and left for France not long after war was declared, disembarking on the 17th August 1914.

Captain Cree may have been injured at what became known as the 'first Ypres' battle. He died on the 24th October 1914 whilst in No 7 Stationary hospital base, Boulogne, from wounds received two days earlier. His body was brought back for burial at Falmouth Cemetery, near the family home, reference I. B and left an estate of £316, to be administered by Arthur Boeden, solicitor.

His widow Wilmet Avis Cree, remained single and lived at Waldens Cottage in Farnham for many years with her daughter Jennifer Mary Cree. She later lived with her other daughter Naomi Avis Primrose Cree, in Hendon before returning to Farnham where they lived together right through WW2. She died in Winchester in 1955.

Cecil's younger brother, Arthur Stanley Holt Cree, who also lived in Manningtree, followed his father into the church and in 1907 moved to Ontario, Canada, where he later married, had three children (one named William) and lived until 1973.

Cecil's half brother, born in Manningtree Rectory, became Captain Thomas Norman Beckett Cree. Having joined the Royal Navy at a young age he had a distinguished career, being mentioned in dispatches whilst acting Sub-Lieutenant in March 1917, served through WW2, rising to Commander and receiving an OBE in 1952.