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Laurence Binyon (1869 -1943), War Poet

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Bowdon's Link with the War Poet Laurence Binyon

by Ian Bryce

Dr Robert Laurence Binyon CH, commonly known as **Laurence Binyon (1869-1943)** secured a lasting place in history. He was one of 16 great war poets commemorated on a slate unveiled in Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner on the 11th November 1985. It is not generally appreciated that this man who penned ***The Fallen***, a poem which contains some of the most evocative words in the English language and most often recited, was from a Bowdon family.

The fourth stanza has been claimed as a tribute to all casualties of war, regardless of nation:

***They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn,
At the going down of the sun, and in the morning,
We will remember them.***

Laurence Binyon was educated at St Paul's and Oxford, where he read classics. He worked at the British Museum between 1892 and 1933 and was Keeper of the Prints and Drawings department. In 1904 he married Cicely Margaret Powell, a historian, with whom he had three daughters. Later in life he was appointed Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard and Byron professor of English Literature at Athens University. Throughout his life he worked as a poet, playwright and art historian. In the first world war he volunteered for the Red Cross, assisting wounded soldiers as an orderly in 1916. Two years earlier, moved by the outbreak of war and the high number of casualties of the British Expeditionary Force, while visiting cliffs in Cornwall, he penned the poem ***The Fallen*** which was published by The Times on 21st September 1914. It was later to adorn war memorials throughout Britain, is often recited at Remembrance Sunday Services here and Canada and is an integral part of Anzac Day services in Australia and New Zealand.

The Quaker Binyon family had moved here from Kendal and were generally respected for their sterling integrity. Lawrence's grandfather **Alfred Binyon (1800-1856)** was one of eight children born to **Benjamin Binyon (1768-1835)** and Deborah Burt. His father had been one of six children born to **Benjamin Busby Binyon (1727-1823)** and Ruth Wakefield. Tradition stated that her father Roger was a rich banker who provided Richard Arkwright with the capital to begin business in the cotton trade, though it was her half-brother John (1738-1811) who founded the Wakefield bank in 1788.

Alfred's father was a partner in a twine manufacturing firm called Binyon and Taylor, and later had a shop and restaurant. He had an uncle who was a cotton manufacturer. There was also two male cousins who were tea dealers, coffee roasters and chocolate makers and two female cousins who carried on a tea business and a ready-made linen warehouse. His own early business ventures were not, however, very successful. He built the Borough Buildings, where most of the shops remained empty, and after changing hands several times they were disposed of by means of a lottery, the tickets costing a pound each. Around 1820 he took over a failed dye works at Ardwick Bridge, Chorlton-on-Medlock and running it for five years, by which time he was financially embarrassed.

His fortunes evidently improved markedly from 1828 when he married Lucy Hoyle, two years his junior, at the Friends' Meeting House in Manchester. She was one of the daughters of the proprietor of Thomas Hoyle & Son, a large and successful calico printing business. Six years later her father died and he was admitted a partner, along with his brother-in-law William Neild, subsequently of High Lawn Bowdon (see my booklet on *High Lawn*) and another brother-in-law Joseph Compton, into the business that her grandfather had founded in 1782.



Alfred Binyon and Lucy Binyon

The 1841 census records them living at Chorlton Lane, Stretford, with three sons and two daughters (two more daughters died in infancy), a governess and four house servants. In 1851 they were at a house named *Bella Villa* in

Moss Side, a pleasant and respectable neighbourhood. The eldest son and two daughters were still there, another daughter had been born, the second son was away at school and the third apparently died. There were also a governess, a nurse, a cook, an under cook, two housemaids and a footman. The house had disappeared by 1931 when the Whalley Range estate was being built.

Over in Bowdon, Alfred's sister, also named Lucy (1811-1883) lived with her husband George Robinson, a tea and coffee merchant, at *The Cedars* on Langham Road (now a care home). Just across the way his in-laws the Neilds were living at *High Lawn*. They, in turn, on the East Downs Road side of their house, had their married daughter living at an adjacent house *Fir Bank* and only a few years later their married son would be living at another one *Dingle Bank East*. One gains the impression that this lovely neighbourhood was being colonised by these inter-related families. Alfred bucked the general trend of settling here himself (though we will see later that his son and namesake was to follow it) and instead decided to re-locate much further afield.

On impulse he bought a small estate about a mile outside Grange-over-Sands on the Windermere road leading to Lindale with a view to erecting a family residence there to be called *Merlewood*. It was chosen for its elevated position, having extensive views to the south over Morecambe Bay and to the North-East over inland country, the West and North-West being sheltered by a romantic woody hill called Eggerslack. The Ulverston Advertiser reported that on 19th May 1853 there was a ceremony in which the first stone was laid followed by a speech from Alfred. The Lancaster Borough Band played the national anthem and other airs, and his workmen were given a lunch of bread, cheese and ale. The Binyons took up temporary residence at a nearby house named *Yewbarrow Lodge* while the Elizabethan-styled gabled house was being constructed. On 11th September 1853 whilst on holiday in the Pyrenees he wrote home to his architect George Webster saying "I often think of Merlewood and wish I could have daguerreotypes sent me of its progress. I am getting anxious to return although I have received decided benefit from the change of air and scene."

Lucy Binyon is known to have died in the Pyrenees eight weeks later on 6th November 1853, age 51, which prompts the question of whether she may have been ailing for some time. If so, that would account for them taking a long holiday in this region and might shed some light on their decision to move so far away from Manchester and its polluted atmosphere. She is recorded as being buried that month in the Protestant part of the public cemetery at Bagneres de Bigorre, Hautes Pyrenees. The town was famous for its 50 hot springs, which were recommended for nerve, lung and digestive complaints, and in August the following year the Westmorland Gazette reported that a grand fancy bazaar had been held at *Yewbarrow Lodge* in aid of the erection of a protestant church there. Work continued on not only the construction of the mansion but also the creation of landscaped gardens with extensive plants and shrubberies. Large quantities of goods were transported there, causing considerable extra work for officials of the Lancaster and Carlisle railway. The Lancaster Gazette reported on the 14th April 1855 Alfred hosted an evening for them at the King's Arms in Milnthorpe, where they were treated to a grand supper. The station master "proposed the health of Mr Binyon, and long may he live to enjoy his new habitation", but this was not to be, for he died on 21st April 1856 (age 56) from atrophy of the heart and dyspnoea, and was buried in Lindale.



Merlewood

The house in which he had invested so much time, money and commitment (pictured from Eggerslack) became a Grade 2 listed building in 1975 and has had a chequered history. After his death it was sold to Eliza Horrocks, widow of Samuel Horrocks of the cotton manufacturing firm Horrockses, and stayed in her family till 1930. A few years later it was turned into a hotel, before being requisitioned by the War Office in 1940 as a training centre. It was converted back into a hotel in 1947 before being bought by Nature Conservancy in 1951 and turned into laboratories known as Merlewood Research Station. In recent years it was acquired by HPB (Holiday Property

Bond – a timeshare company) who completely renovated and restored the house, created nine apartments and leisure club in the mansion and built 46 cottages in the grounds.

As the elder son it is perhaps only to be expected that **Alfred Binyon junior (1832-1907)** appears to have joined the family business. In 1851 at the age of 18 he was living in the parental home and described as an apprentice calico printer. He would have become a man of substance following the deaths of his parents, and by 1861, still in his twenties, he was living in Bowdon on Green Walk with a wife (Sarah Clarke, whom he married in 1857 at Bowdon Parish Church) with a daughter, son (yet another Alfred) and three house servants. Later that year another son was born but he died aged 10 months. By 1871 there was another son and daughter (though only two servants) but they had moved to another house – *West View* – on an unnamed highway off Park Road (now known as The Springs). Interestingly, his occupation was now showing as a Captain of the 40th Lancashire Rifle Volunteers. They had been formed in 1859 and the records show that he had first been commissioned as an Ensign in June 1862 and made a Lieutenant in February 1863.

The volunteer corps were spare-time soldiers, rather like today's Territorial Army. Largely middle-class organisations, they were dominated by “gentlemen”, tradesmen, artisans and clerks. Evidently on census day Alfred was involved in some activity with his battalion, although the British Empire does not look to have been engaged in any military campaigns at the time. They were at the same house in 1881, by which time the elder son and daughter had left home, and his occupation was described as a merchant in printed cotton, so he had possibly parted with the family firm. By 1891 he was described as living on his own means and at *Laurel Bank* on Stamford Road, the younger son now having left home, and just one servant. By 1901 they were in South Road, the younger daughter Ethel, 36, still at home and described as a governess, working on her own account at home. At the time of his death in 1907 they were at *Leanfield* on Winton Road. His wife Sarah survived him and lived until 1922, when she would have been about 83.

There is a noticeable tendency for the younger sons of wealthy textile families to have entered the clergy, and this was the path followed from a young age by Alfred junior's sibling **Frederick Binyon (1838-1920)**. In

1851, age 12, he was a scholar living in Grantchester, Cambridgeshire, at the home of a curate. Completing his education at Cambridge University he was ordained a Deacon in 1861 and started his career as a curate, firstly at Blackburn, then Lancaster. Ordination as a priest, by the Bishop of Manchester, took place in 1865, and the following year he married Mary Ann Dockray, from a Quaker family. Her father, Robert Benson Dockray, was the main engineer of the London and Birmingham Railway. They would go on to have seven sons and two daughters, though only four sons and one daughter survived childhood. Between then and 1892 he had four ministries in total, at Burton-in-Lonsdale (Yorkshire), Hammersmith, Fulham (both London) and finally Winchcombe, (Gloucestershire). It was Frederick's second son, Laurence whose rose to fame as the War Poet.

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Marjorie Dilys Cox, 1923 - 2014



Gordon & Marjorie Cox

Marjorie Cox (née MacHattie) died on 6th October 2014 at Bickham House Care Home, Bowdon. A respected historian in her own right, she was the chairman (never the chair) of the Bowdon History Society from its foundation until she withdrew from the position in 2008.

Marjorie, as everyone knew her, was a native of Liverpool where she was born in 1923. She attended Aigburth Vale High School for Girls and from there went to Newnham College Cambridge in 1941 gaining her degree in 1944. However, like all Cambridge women at that time, she was not formally allowed to graduate.

Marjorie then participated in a government initiative recording wartime transport provision; for this she was recruited by her college principal, Betty Behrens whom she greatly admired. She then returned to her own research, working at Manchester University with the distinguished historian Sir Lewis Namier. It was at Manchester that she met and married her husband, R.G. (Gordon) Cox, a member of the University's English Department.

Marjorie and Gordon became fixtures, both in Manchester and in Bowdon. Few couples can have shared their interests so affectionately. Both were fine scholars in their respective fields, both were dedicated musicians regularly playing in quartets, and each had memories of Cambridge friendships. During the war Gordon had served in Italy and in Egypt with the Society of Friends, and Marjorie too had Quaker affiliations. They travelled regularly on the

continent, mostly in Italy, and it was thus all the more a tragedy when Gordon died, very suddenly, in the summer of his retirement in 1981.

Inevitably Marjorie was bereft. But she coped with her loss and Gordon's sister, another Marjorie and also a widow, came to live with her in Bowdon while Marjorie returned to her work with Bowdon History Society. At meetings her great skill as a chairman was to get the most out of visiting speakers. Often on these occasions the request for questions and further discussion can fall flat but with Marjorie in the chair it never did: her enthusiasm, together with the range of her historical knowledge always ensured a lively evening. She was particularly interested in Bowdon's great houses, and in 1994 she published, with Peter Kemp and Ronald Trenbath a detailed study of Bowdon Hall. She published articles in the *Bowdon Sheaf* - were ever such articles so carefully prepared?

Her final research uncovered an early chaplain to the Earl of Warrington, a Huguenot refugee, who eventually became vicar of Ashton-under-Lyne. One of the Manchester History Department's professors told us that in draft this promised to be a fine piece of work. But Marjorie, who gave a lifetime of research to her subject, did not live to complete it. As many of us know from experience she had an unquestioning capacity for friendship, better described perhaps as love. Members of Bowdon History Society were certainly fortunate in having had her at their head.

Marjorie ended her days at Bickham House, perhaps appropriately since it was a house she knew of from her own research, and if you visited her there you would find her still investigating its distinguishing features. Marjorie always enjoyed living in Bowdon where she had so many friends. Bowdon History Society gave her the opportunity to use her many talents and its members will surely miss her.

Alan and Dorothy Shelston

William Ronald Trenbath, 1921 to 2014



Ronald & Valerie Trenbath

Ronald was born and lived all of his life in the Hale/Bowdon area. He attended Altrincham Grammar School for Boys and then worked on a farm during the war.

After the war he studied architecture at Manchester University School of Architecture where he and Val met. After they married they designed their and his parents' houses in Bow Green Road, next door to each other, and which Ronald said were the first to be built in the road. Val and he lived there throughout their married life, and after his parents' deaths, they sold their own house and moved next door into Bow Lodge.

Ronald held many architectural positions, including with the old Coal Board, the Coop, and the Inland Revenue, but the great pride and joy of his professional life was his appointment to the planning and development of Warrington New Town.

After he retired he concentrated on his art, love of and interest in the countryside (including their dogs) and local history, being a founder-member of Bowdon History Society. He was a committee member until his death.

He and Val helped to edit the Bowdon Sheaf, for which Ronald did all the drawings and illustrations.

We hope that many of his history records and architectural drawings will be going to the Cheshire Records Office at Chester.

Beryl Chartres

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