

2020 Remembrance Service address

Kate Fraser

Six former pupils killed in World War One

Here I stand before you, in front of the Memorial Door, so central to so many aspects of our school life and tradition. Here I stand before you in front of the memorial plaques listing the names of former pupils of this school who fought and lost their lives during the both conflicts. We are all sitting under the stained-glass windows created to remember the fallen of WW2.

1026 former pupils served with the army during the First World War. Over 300 were wounded, and 182 were killed. During the Second World War 1243 former pupils fought. 131 were killed. The school tried to maintain contact with the former pupils fighting, including sending Christmas cards. One former pupil, a prisoner of war in Italy, wrote, 'I was delighted when I received the old school's Christmas card. The weather at the moment is terrible, about a foot of snow. The cigarettes will be a great treat'.

Indeed, remembering former pupils has long been an important part of the tradition of the school. The school magazine, the Schola Regia, in November 1920 records:

'On November 11th, Armistice Day, the School assembled in Hall for the purpose of holding a short service in memory of the fallen. The Rector read out the names of Former Pupils who were killed during the Great War; and after the two minutes silence had been reverently observed, the Reverend Mr Strang gave a short address. He explained for what high principles these men had died, and encouraged the school to preserve by word and deed the noble tradition of sacrifice and service and the important role the school played in the war'.

Here we are today, our current school community still remembering.

Some of the former pupils of your school won the highest accolade for bravery, with two being awarded the Victoria Cross during WW1 and one during World War Two.

In a year when I have held my own family a little bit tighter, I so often think of all the families left devastated by war. Some of the former pupils I am about to tell you about died in the final months of world war one, which I always feel must have made it even harder to accept.

You will find the name of the late private William Cullen in the lower brass panel to the right of me. He was at the school from 1910 to 1915. He is described as a hard worker and took a good place in his classes. He entered the service of the Royal Bank of Scotland. In 1917 joined up, eventually becoming a soldier within the Royal Scots. He went to France in April 1918. It was understood that after three months' service he would return for further training. He was killed by a shell when in the trenches, just before the time of his return to the country. A companion wrote of him 'his life out here was a model one to all of us'. He was 19 and a half years of age and the only son of Mrs W J Cullen, 7 Howard Street.

Not far from Cullen's name, you will find Douglas Cruickshank, who left the Royal High School in 1898. He served in Gallipoli, Egypt and Palestine before crossing to France in May 1918. He was awarded the Military Cross for bravery in the field. He was the only son of Mr A Cruickshank, 8 Young Street.

Arthur Budge's name is another you will find behind me. He was at school from 1910-1917. He is described as one of the most likeable boys you could ever meet. He enjoyed making all his friends laugh. He joined up on leaving school. A week before his death he wrote 'I feel like an old man, I've gone through such a lot in the last six weeks I can hardly believe I am only 19'. He was killed in his second engagement, aged 19 years and 1 week.

On the other side of the memorial door you will find the name Hugh Mackay who left the school in 1913. He joined the Black Watch in 1916, was wounded at Vimy Ridge in April 1917. He went back to France in July and was killed in 12th Feb 1918. He was on the eve of coming home. He was of a bright and happy disposition. He was an only son.

Finally, if you look closer on the same side, you will find the names of two former pupils, the Menelaws – George and Robert. George left school in 1906 and Robert 1911. George was a private in the Black Watch, and was reported missing in January 1916, and is now presumed killed. Robert was a minesweeper, and was lost at sea on May 1st 1918. Both were quiet, steady boys, of considerable force of character, and on track to do well in the world. They were brothers.

These are a tiny selection of parents who lost their only children during the war.

There is a native American saying which states that someone has only really died when there is no-one left to remember them. To me, this links nicely with the Greek inscription above our Memorial Door which reads they died but did not die. Today we have all remembered George, Robert, Hugh, Arthur, William and Douglas. Imagine someone describing your life as ‘a model one to all of us’, the way William Cullen was described, at only 19 – something for us all to aspire to.

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