

Mortem Obierunt

Looking Back 100 Years

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Compiled by Peter Harrod

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“The Crucible of War”

The Battle of Passchendaele, one of the bloodiest and most controversial of the Great War, has recently been in the news as part of the commemoration of those dark days of 1917. The battle ended just over one hundred years ago, and the name Passchendaele, along with Ypres and Somme, has come to symbolise the Great War itself.

Wikipedia informs us that the Battle, also known as the Third Battle of Ypres, was a First World War campaign fought by the Allies on the Western Front against the German Empire from July to November 1917. It formed part of a strategy designed to gain control of the ridges south and east of the Belgian city of Ypres.

Passchendaele lay on the final ridge east of Ypres near to a railway junction at Roulers, vital to the supply system of the German 4th Army.

A recent article in the Daily Telegraph reported that the Allied assault was launched in the early hours of 31 July 1917. Because of the torrential rain, the British and Canadian troops found themselves fighting not only the Germans, but a quagmire of stinking mud that swallowed up men, horses and tanks.

The article reported that, after three months, one week and three days of brutal trench warfare, the Allies finally recaptured the village of Passchendaele, but by then

around a third of a million British and Allied soldiers had been killed or wounded in some of the most horrific trench warfare battles of the long conflict.

This is not the time to present a detailed account of the battle, but it does seem an appropriate moment to look back and reflect on those alumni of Lincoln School who sacrificed their lives at Passchendaele and elsewhere during those months of the summer of 1917, as the Great War reached its climax and so many young lives were lost. It is also a time to reflect on what it must have been like for the pupils and staff of Lincoln School, whose buildings had been taken over by the 4th Northern General Hospital.

For this article I am drawing largely on the pages of the December 1917 edition of '*The Lincolnian*' which, in its Editorial, reminds us of the effects that a war can have on the daily life of a school.

'For each term finds us more nearly touched with the business of war. Daily the enemy passes our gates, unarmed and under guard, but in a uniform hateful to our eyes and threadbare with war against our countrymen...It is perhaps in this country alone that a squad of hostile aliens may pass without a taunt, and with merely a movement of natural curiosity. Teutons throw incurious eyes up and along our classroom windows; the gargoyles of the Minster look out unmoved against strange shapes and strange sounds; the wounded rest unknowing in our batting crease; we ourselves cease to wonder at the change of circumstance.'



Lincoln School at that time was housed in temporary quarters at the junction of St Anne's Road and Sewell Road. No doubt the 'aliens' were heading towards the 4th Northern General Hospital, where they would have received medical attention and been housed in special hutted accommodation situated on the Lincoln School site shown above. Note that the huts are on 'stilts' to prevent escape tunnels being constructed. The reference to the 'batting crease' probably refers to those twenty or so huts which were erected on the Lincoln School playing field, including the hallowed cricket square on which some of us were to learn how to 'occupy the crease' during calmer years to come.



Lincoln School during the Great War on the Sewell Road site now the hospital car park
The house in the distance is still there surrounded by nurses' homes
Photograph by Catherine Forbes

The Editorial goes on to describe its grief at the number of those Lincolnians who had sacrificed their lives in the cause of the Great War.

'We share with other schools the grief and pride of an ever-growing list of those who have left their names to be enrolled by us with honour.'

Those names, and those who lost their lives in the Second World War, are enshrined on the Lincoln School War Memorial which is now located in its original position on the School cloisters.

A list of nine names under the heading *Mortem Obierunt* in the December 1912 edition of *The Lincolnian* magazine presents a stark but highly poignant reminder of those dark days of the 'Great' War, and the effect they had on Lincoln School.

The list is printed as follows:

BARON, M.N. Flight Sub-Lieut., R.N.A.S

FAWCETT, G.A. Sergt., Lancs. Fusiliers

GIBSON, W.R. 2nd Lieut., Lincs. Regt.

GILLIATT, F.R. 2nd Lieut., Lincs. Regt.

HEMSLEY, G.H. 2nd Lieut. R.F.A.

MANSELL H.C. 2nd Lieut. M.G.C.

NEWSUM, C.N. Capt. Lincs. Regt.

READE, L.E. Lieut. S. Staffs. Regt.

RICHARDSON, W.Q.N. Capt. R.F.C.

The list, representing a sizeable proportion of the forty-seven World War One victims, commemorated on the Lincoln School War Memorial, is followed by a brief tribute, to which I have added details provided by Mick Wall's *Past Heroes of Our School*, and Graham McAdam's *Lincoln School Great War Memorial* article (Occasional Paper 15 from the Garton Archive). Both are meticulously researched and highly informative.

Maurice Nelson BARON was admitted to Lincoln School in September 1914 from the original Christ's Hospital ('Bluecoat') School in Horsham. He was a prominent and popular member of the Sixth Form, a prefect, and holder of a commission in the School Corps. He left the School at Christmas 1916 for the Royal Naval Air Services, and trained at Redcar and Cranwell. In July he was drafted to France but returned shortly on sick leave. At the beginning of August he returned to the Front, but was killed in action two weeks later. The article reported that it was a great shock to everyone at the School by reason of his very presence, and a disposition which won everyone's appreciation.

From the account submitted by his Wing-Commander it was evident that Baron's characteristic boldness proved fatal to him before he had gained sufficient experience. Ordered to leave his squadron before reaching the German lines, he seems to have followed those orders but ventured back and paid the penalty for his rashness. His wing-commander concluded his report as follows:

"He had only joined this squadron the previous day, so I had no opportunity to get to know him well. But he was sent here with very flattering reports and was expected to prove a pilot of the very first class."

Mick Wall's report on Maurice Baron further informs us that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) record showed that he died on the 15th August 1917 at the age of 18, and is buried in Ramscappelle Royal Military Cemetery, Grave Ref. VI. D4. He is also remembered on the War Memorial in the churchyard of St Wilfred's Church, Alford, Lincolnshire.

George Henry FAWCETT was killed by a shell in France on 4th October 1917. He was a pupil from September 1895 to July 1898 at the Middle School, prior to its amalgamation with the Grammar School. He had received two years' training at the

St Mark's Education College in Chelsea, and had been Assistant Master at St Peter-at-Gowt's School. A year before the war, he had been Headmaster of Stone Lough School near Manchester. He enlisted in the Army, became a Private in the Lancashire Fusiliers, and was eventually posted to the Front in Belgium where he was killed by a shell. His Commanding officer referred to him as one who was always most willing in his duties, keen in his work, and whose place would be very difficult to fill.

Mick Wall reported that the CWGC record showed that George Fawcett died on the 4th October 1917 at the age of 33. He has no known grave, but is one of the 34,874 servicemen remembered on the Tyne Cot Memorial in Belgium; Ref. Panel 54-60 and 163A. The cemetery, near Ypres in Belgium is the largest CWGC cemetery in the world, and is on the site of the Third Battle of Ypres, also known as the Battle of Passchendaele.

Walter Reginald GIBSON was remembered by the School community as a prominent member of the Sixth Form who, early in the war, presented himself for enlistment but was rejected on account of his eyesight. However, he succeeded in joining the Lincolns in May 1915, and returned following a year of active service to secure a commission. He was attached to the County Regiment and crossed once more into France in August 1917. He was killed in action in Belgium on 4th October 1917 in what was reported by his fellow officers as an early morning attack in which he was hit by a machine gun bullet. His death, they added, had cast a gloom over the entire Mess.

Mick Wall has recorded that Walter Gibson was born on 11th December 1896, and was the son of Walter and Emily Gibson who, at the time he was admitted to Lincoln School, lived at 17 Foster Street in Lincoln. His father was a clerk in the County Offices for Lindsey in Lincolnshire. The CWGC record showed that he died at the age of 20, and had no known grave, but is also remembered on the Tyne Cot Memorial; Ref. Panel 35-37, and 162-162A.

Francis Ralph GILLIATT was born on 26th February 1897, the son of Charles and Elizabeth Gilliatt who, at the time he was admitted to Lincoln School, lived in Frith Bank, near Boston in Lincolnshire. He attended Lincoln School from 1908 to 1912 and excelled at sport, being described in *The Lincolnian* as a vigorous and effective forward, and a brilliant batsman. In August, 1914, he enlisted in the 4th Lincolns and was drafted to France where he was severely wounded on 13th October. Mick Wall has given a graphic account of the events leading up to his injury:

On 12th October 1915 he received orders to prepare for an attack on the German lines. The Regiment marched to the trenches, and arrived at midnight, tired and footsore. The next day gas was released towards enemy lines, and they charged towards the famous Hohenzollern Redoubt, a strongly fortified German position. His Regiment took the first line of trenches and

charged on towards the Redoubt and its machine guns and maze of trenches. As they fought, they ran out of bombs and were driven back a short distance where they received a supply of bombs from the Notts and Derby Regiment, and pressed forward once more towards the Redoubt. By this time all their officers had died. Francis wrote in an account of that experience that it was '...exciting, grizzly work. We were going along having to walk over the bodies of the dead Germans as they were so thickly laid in the trench.' A bomb then fell about three yards from him which caused severe wounds on his right arm, thigh and leg. It was surprising that he survived that attack, but having had his wounds dressed by a stretcher-bearer, he was evacuated to Bethune, Estaple and finally back to England.

For his conduct on that occasion, Francis received an autographed letter from Major General Stuart-Wortley promising recommendation, and praising him for his valour in carrying on the bombing after all his officers had become casualties and he himself had been wounded. He was in hospital for several months but recovered to join a Cadet Battalion, and obtained his commission in February, 1916. He trained at Saltfleetby, and returned to his regiment in France at the end of June. His death was reported on 26th July by the Colonel, who explained that he had been encouraging some men with a Lewis Gun, who were under heavy fire, when a shell burst directly in the trench. He was the only casualty of the twenty men at the spot.

Mick Wall cited the CWGC record showing that Francis Gilliatt died on the 26th July 1917 at the age of 20, and is buried in Mazingarbe Communal Cemetery; Grave Ref. II. D. 1.

Godfrey Hamilton HEMSLEY was born on 31st March 1886, the son of George Thomas and Rebecca Hemsley who, at the time he was admitted to Lincoln School, lived at Hilton Cottage, Steep Hill, Lincoln. He was a pupil at the School from September 1897 to July 1904, when he left for a place at Manchester University. After a spell of teaching, he went to Canada in 1914 where he answered the first call but was rejected for defective eyesight. After eight attempts he succeeded in joining the Canadian Field Ambulance in September, 1915, and went to Belgium as Quarter-Master Sergeant. He returned to England in January 1917 to train for a commission in the RFA, and was back again in Belgium in September of that year. He was killed by a shell on 12th October, while on duty as Forward Observing Officer. In announcing his death, Major J H Edwards referred to him as a very capable officer, in whom he had the utmost confidence. He knew his work well, was very brave, and always wished to be where there was fighting to be done.

Mick Wall's research recorded the CWGC record showing that Godfrey Hemsley died at the age of 31 and is buried in Vlamertinghe New Military Cemetery in Belgium; Grave Ref. VIII. H. 1. He is also remembered on the Lincoln High Street War Memorial.

Harry Champion MANSELL was born on the 24th October 1897, and attended Lincoln School during the years 1907 to 1913. He was the son of Mr and Mrs William Mansell, who lived in Silver Street in Lincoln before moving to Heigham House in the Swallowbeck area of the city. Harry's father was a jeweller and silversmith, and on leaving school he entered the same trade but also joined the Lincolnshire Regiment Territorials. Those Lincolnians of a certain age will remember the Mansell shop which was located adjacent to the Stonebow on Lincoln High Street. Harry was in camp with the Territorials in Bridlington when the war broke out, and was immediately mobilised. He was attached to the RAMC and was stationed at the 4th Northern General Hospital at the Lincoln School site until November 1913, when he was transferred to the Lincolnshire Yeomanry.

The photograph below shows the main dormitory of the boarding house at Lincoln School which was used as a ward by the 4th Northern General Hospital. It is one of many photos of the hospital that we hold in the Garton Archive. The room is now the library at Lincoln Christ's Hospital School.



Harry later trained at Bisley for a commission in the MG section, which he gained in April 1917, and was drafted to France soon afterwards. He was killed on 30th June 1917, while leading his men. His Commanding Officer described him as the best officer he had sent out from England. He knew his work, had gained the affection and respect of officers and men alike, and was as brave as a fellow could be.

Mick Wall's research recorded the CWGC records showing that Harry Mansell died at the age of 20. He has no formal grave, but is remembered on the Ypres Menin Gate Memorial in Belgium; Ref. Panel 56. He is also remembered on the War Memorial in St Swithin's Church in Lincoln.

Clement Neill NEWSUM was born on the 5th October 1896, the son of timber merchant Clement Henry Newsum and his wife Alice Maud Newsum, who lived on Greetwell Road in Lincoln at the time Clement entered Lincoln School in September 1901. He was a pupil at the School from 1905 to 1908, and left to join Gresham School in Holt, where he became School Captain. At the end of 1914 he left the School to train for his commission, which he obtained in February, 1915. He served with his battalion in the rebellion in Ireland, and afterwards in France. He was granted his Commission in the spring of 1917, and from Colonel Roffrey's report it appears that he led his men most gallantly into action on 26th October, but was killed later in the day during shell fire.

He was described by the Colonel as one of his best officers, and a great loss to the regiment both on account of his soldierly qualities and kindly disposition. A fellow officer wrote that he was by a long, long way the best Company Commander in the battalion; essentially unselfish, thoughtful for his men, the essence of common sense, and having thoroughness and pride in his Company, which his men answered to and never betrayed.

Mick Wall has summarised the CWGC records showing that Clement Newsum died at the age of 26. He has no known grave, but is another Lincolnian who is remembered on the Tyne Cot Memorial in Belgium; Ref. Panel 35-37 and 162-162A.

He is also remembered on the War Memorial on Lincoln High Street and in St Peter-in-Eastgate Church in Lincoln.

Leonard Edwin READE was born on the 21st January 1893, the son of elementary school teacher Harry Edward Reade and his wife Kate, who lived at Ashfield House, South Park, Lincoln at the time Leonard was admitted to Lincoln School in January 1903. He was a member of the Lincoln School Sixth Form and the School cricket eleven in 1910, came twentieth out of 1,700 candidates for the Civil Service Exam, Division 2, and started work for the Royal Insurance Company. From there he enlisted in the RAMC, was transferred to the Northumberland Fusiliers, and finally obtained a commission with the South Staffords.

Following almost two years of service in the Balkans, Leonard was killed on 30th August, 1917. Popular at Lincoln School, he proved equally so with his men. His servant wrote that his death would be most sincerely regretted throughout the Company, and especially in the platoon in which his devotion to duty made him a general favourite.

The CWGC record, reported by Mick Wall in *Heroes of our School*, showed that Leonard Reade was killed at the age of 24 and is buried in Doiran Military Cemetery in Greece; Grave Ref. V.B. 22. He is another Lincolnian who is also remembered on the Lincoln High Street Memorial.

William Quintus Newsom RICHARDSON was born on 25th July 1898, the son of agricultural merchant Mr W Richardson and his wife who, at the time their son joined Lincoln School, lived at Lindum House in Lincoln. William was admitted to Lincoln School in 1908, and later transferred to Shrewsbury School in 1910. He began his training for the Royal Flying Corps in April, 1917, and gained his commission in the following September. He was tragically killed on 7th October 1917 while making a practice flight at his Wing Headquarters in Essex.

The CWGC record, faithfully reported by Mick Wall, shows that William Richardson died at the age of 19, and was buried in Maldon Cemetery in Essex; Grave Ref. 42. 54

William Anthony TAYLOR was born on the 6th October 1893, the son of bank accountant Percy Taylor and his wife Hester, who lived at Caer Lodge on Nettleham Road in Lincoln at the time William entered Lincoln School in September 1905. He excelled in all games, being described as by far the best athlete of his year, and was Captain of both the Cricket and Football First Elevens.

On leaving school in 1911, William became a clerk with an insurance company, but later joined the Army and gained a Commission in the Machine Gun Corps. He was killed by a sniper near St Julien during the advance on 31st July 1917. Having advanced to ask his servant to choose positions for his guns, he died "as an officer would like to die; in front of his men, and leading them gallantly to success."

Mick Wall's booklet draws on the CWGC records showing that William Anthony Taylor died at the age of 23. He has no known grave, but is remembered on the Ypres Menin Gate Memorial in Belgium; Ref. Panel 56. He is also remembered on the memorial Window in St Peter-in-Eastgate Church, and on the Lincoln High Street Memorial.

Arthur TEMPLE was born on 26th October 1897, the son of Newlands and Annie Temple. His father was a Clerk in the Office of the Official Receiver in Bankruptcy. Arthur was a pupil at Lincoln School from 1912 to 1914, and left to join the staff of the Lincoln City and Midland Bank. In September of the same year he enlisted, but was obliged to return home as he had not yet reached the age of nineteen. Eventually, however, he was attached to the Lincolns, and later proceeded to France on 4th February 1917. Lieut-Colonel G H Gaiter DSO wrote that he was in his battalion of Headquarter's Signallers and was a most gallant and reliable soldier, who would have made an excellent officer.

It was recorded in Mick Wall's *Past Heroes of Our School* that Private Temple died on the 22nd August 1917 at the age of 19, and is buried in Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery in Belgium. He is also remembered on the War Memorial on Lincoln High Street.

The story of the Great War at Lincoln School is not without its more optimistic and successful outcomes. The same edition of *The Lincolnian* celebrated the award of the Military Cross to Lieutenant John Duckworth Irving, who had recovered from a wound incurred in battle, and had re-joined his regiment, the West Yorkshires. Showing commendable awareness that a gap had occurred between two companies, Lieutenant Irving at once grasped the seriousness of the situation, and dashed into the gap with two platoons.

He set a most inspiring example to his men, charging ahead of them although wounded in the left shin and thigh early in the attack, and personally accounted for many of the enemy at close quarters. He later took command of a company and *shewed* splendid resolution and determination under the heavy barrages that were often fired on the eastern ridge where his responsibility lay (adapted from a feature in the magazine, *Military Honour*).

I am concluding this article with a poem by Siegfried Sassoon, whose poetry highlighted the horrors of war and particularly of trench warfare. It alludes to soldiers from a lower-class background, who were 'nagged and bullied' into fighting for their country under Lord Derby's scheme. The poem was written a few weeks before the end of the Great War, and was first published in 1919 in his anthology *Picture-Show*. The poem is narrated by a dead soldier, who might well have been one of the heroes of Lincoln School, commemorated in this article.

Squire nagged and bullied till I went to fight,
(Under Lord Derby's Scheme). I died in hell.
(They called it Passchendaele). My wound was slight,
And I was hobbling back, and then a shell
Burst slick upon the duck-boards, so I fell
Into the bottomless mud, and lost the light.

At sermon-time, while Squire is in his pew,
He gives my gilded name a thoughtful stare;
For, though low down upon the list, I'm there;
'In proud and glorious memory'...that's my due,
Two bleeding years I fought in France, for Squire;
I suffered anguish that he's never guessed.
Once I came home on leave: and then went west...
What greater glory could a man desire?

The photograph below, taken by Catherine Forbes, shows the Lincoln School War Memorial on the cloisters. It commemorates those Lincolnians lost in both world wars, and includes the nine men featured in this article.



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