

From the Archives: Two Sides of a Post-Card

No-one can doubt that every post-card has two sides. Few can be as dramatically different, though, as the one depicted on this page. This photograph, of the Emanuel 1st XV of season 12-13, has the bleakest of contrasts when one thinks of the glad tides a postcard usually brings. The top photo side is an obvious depiction of the team sitting proudly in their school rugby kit. The reverse side is as shocking as it is startling. Showing, in an unknown hand, what befell most of the boys in the First World War.

Although this particular Emanuel rugby squad didn't have the greatest of seasons (by the high Emanuel standards of the day) they still managed to win 50% of their games in their final season. A few of the boys were slightly younger and still had a further school campaign ahead of them. There isn't any doubt that few of them had much experience of life beyond school before enlisting. Indeed, the boys who were in their penultimate year probably went straight from the class-room to the trenches. Portcullis accounts detail the excitement (and frequent envy!) of the younger boys eager to join their Emanuel predecessors in the trenches. Amazing Portcullis accounts describe being too young to enlist as a personal humiliation to boys desperate to see action.

We have no idea who wrote the details shown on the reverse of the post-card. However, we have checked our records and can confirm that nine of the 1st XV of season 12-13 died in the War, with at least three more being wounded. Only a couple went unscathed. This article will revisit, in some way, these young lives.

A Portcullis published as the War broke out called The Officer Training Corps "the back-bone of the school". The OTC was an extra-ordinary powerful group in school life. It was split into 4 platoons, each consisting or around 50 house members with junior reserves. Most Platoons would meet up every Saturday for parades, inspections and national military manoeuvres. The Commanding Officer, Captain Goodwin, cheerfully notes in 1913 when discussing parades: "the greatest difficulty is getting recruits to understand that they must stand still and let the rest of the world look after itself".

Most senior boys took great pride in being members of the OTC (indeed, there is evidence when numbers were lacking boys were pressed ganged into joining!) When the War started most OTC members took up commissions in the Regular Forces, Territorials or Special Reserves. As a result there was an incredibly high number of OEs fighting in France and, consequently, the school suffered some of the highest casualty rates anywhere in the country.

Statistically we will probably never, accurately, know the exact number of OEs who fought in WW1 as the school roll is incomplete. The Spring Portcullis of 1915 states that at least 508 were at War, *but*, that most of them attended the school from 1908 onwards. OEs from before 1908, unless they had stayed in touch with the school, were not included in these figures. In the last year alone several descendents of OEs have proven that their relatives attended the school who we have no record of. Only recently we added **H S Hilner** and **Harry Wyborn** to our WW1 Fallen list. Their relatives proved, beyond doubt, that they attended Emanuel in the late 1880s, but for

whatever their association with the school was broken. As internet access makes amateur family research easier we expect the Emanuel Fallen list to continue to grow dramatically as tracing family trees continues to grow in popularity.

When the War broke out the Portcullis did its best to report deaths and injuries. Many OEs wrote letters to the Portcullis and the Portcullis Editorial Team could not cope with the volume of letters it received. To combat this a special OE 1915 Association was formed and they had a dedicated section in the Portcullis which became the place many OEs discovered the deaths of their friends. It wasn't all doom and gloom though, and it also included stories of miraculous escapes, heroism and exploits from the trenches comparing "War to a game of rugby". School went on as normal during the War and the Chapel became the school centre-point as it was here that boys were to hear of Fallen OEs and were given the most current War news.

The Portcullis itself, as a literary and sporting record, was also much more direct than it is now. It frequently dealt out scathing criticism for sporting underachievers. If one is to glance at these boys' final rugby reports; you can't help but shiver! Although the way we use English may have changed I wonder how **H N White** felt when he read his first 15 rugby profile in issue 58; "*A player with more pluck than science; very prone to get off-side, passing with faulty lines at times*". I suppose he took it on the chin and resolved to do better. White was also one of the few boys to escape the War uninjured. Some other more positive reports include:

E W Dilnutt (Lyons) Forward. Was captain of the team until Christmas. Did excellent work in the "Scrum", a trifle wild in open play. **(KILLED)**

H B Ryley (Clyde) Forward. A greatly improved player; his tackling and following up are both good; works hard in the "scrum". **(KILLED)**

C. Harvey (Marlborough) Full-Back. Coming into the team late, he strengthened the side and played a very sound game. He is cool and both tackles and kicks well. **(KILLED)**

If we now take a closer look at the photo: 2nd from right on the front row is **Leslie Stuart Clinton**. Clinton was the first Emanuel Boy to be awarded the Military Cross "for conspicuous bravery on the Front." He defended two machine-guns under enemy fire whilst the wounded were being evacuated, he was wounded himself before rescuing one of the machine guns and destroying the other beyond the use of the Germans. When he first returned to the school after the award he was carried shoulder high down the school drive. After the War the senior school house rugby competition was named after him. We still contest the Clinton Cup today on the rugby field. Leslie entered the insurance business after the War, stayed in touch with the school, and died in 1974 aged 78.

Second-Lieut Ivor Austin While who was a Prefect, Captain of Lyons, and Senior Cadet Officer and Captain of the First XV was a regular contributor to the Portcullis before his death. Not long before his death he wrote: "The great that that strikes me hear is the cheerfulness of the Tommies. They march all day, are on fatigue, and in the night go as working parties to dig and yet they are cheerful. None like the War, but we have never had a single case of discontent." Austin's brother **Eric Martin While**, also in

the photo, also lost his life. In one of his many letters Ivor wrote of his joy of frequently meeting other OE's on the front and the great relief he always had in hearing news from his old school and it wasn't uncommon for copies of the Portcullis to end up in the trenches!

One of those who was also to die was **Bay Ryley**, 7th from left on the back row, the school captain in the following year and the younger son of the recently retired headmaster at the time, **Harold Buchanan Ryley**. After both his sons were killed in the trenches Harold Buchanan Ryley joined up himself and was killed in Palastine in 1917. The school suffered several such double family tragedies. Both **Grundy** brothers were killed during the Battle of the Somme and in late 1918 both Villa brothers, **Tom** and **Archiband** were also killed within the same week of October.

Some families sent several children to War. Emanuel's Scrum Half **Harry White**, affectionately known as "the dark haired White" was the only of four White Brothers to lose his life. This was a pretty good statistic for the White family.

Upon scanning the various magazines from before and after the War, although information available on some it at best sketchy, one can discover an amazing array of interesting facts. Fourth from the left on the backrow is **Serge Trechatney** who is a pivotal figure in the history of Emanuel School in that he was the founder, in 1913 of the Emanuel Boat Club. How many current rowers know their founding father was a Russian from St. Petersburg?

P J Knight (who was wounded) returned to school to regularly turn out for the OE First XV. Many WW1 survivors were to play pivotal roles in the development of the OEA in later years. Actually, after the War the school was awarded a machine gun which from the Battle of the Somme as a "thank you" from the Nation for it's loss in the battle. Emanuel folk-lore tells us the machine gun was proudly placed opposite the Headmaster's lawn but was later removed as it made War OEs jittery! Where the machine gun was moved to still remains a mystery.

Basil Horswell was another tragic loss. He was killed whilst flying a new proto-type of plane. He had made a successful flight of 10 minute duration before it nose-dived from 600 feet. Horswell was thrown 300 feet into the sea and later died from his injuries. Many, very brave, test pilots suffered the same fate.

This is a very, very important period of Emanuel School history, but sadly there are too many names we know precious little else about. However, the new Library Resource Centre will have a dedicated mezzanine for the school archives where pupils and OEs will be welcome to conduct their own research.

TRJ