

**by Jeremy Archer**

**The Gallant Headmaster**

*Land of our Birth, we pledge to thee  
Our love and toil in the years to be;  
When we are grown and take our place  
As men and women with our race.*

*The Children's Song*      Rudyard Kipling

We only went to one Carol Service at Emanuel School, in mid-December 2006, when we were seated close to the fine memorial to those former pupils and masters who died while serving during the Great War 1914-18. Although a fine canopied carving of St. George and the Dragon forms a distinguished centrepiece, my eyes were drawn to the name '*H. Buchanan Ryley, late Headmaster*', in the bottom right-hand corner of the four columns of names. There was a separate brass plaque, confirming that Harold Buchanan Ryley was Headmaster of Emanuel School from 1905 to 1913, with the words '*A Man Greatly Beloved*' along the bottom. I felt instinctively that there had to be a story here: why would a former Headmaster have gone to war? It was only then that I noticed that a pupil named H. B. Ryley was also listed on the memorial.

Ryley 1 and 2

The following Dacre Day – our son's last at Emanuel – we visited the new library, with its fascinating selection of items from the school archives. Seeing the sepia photographs of Emanuel Officer Training Corps (OTC) reminded me of the unusual case of the Reverend Harold Buchanan Ryley, M.A. I had a brief conversation with the Archivist, Tony Jones, and was rewarded, a few minutes later, with photocopies of sixty pages from *The History of Emanuel School* by Charles Wilfrid Scott-Giles. What I read suggested that he was a talented musician, gifted poet, committed patriot and inspiring leader – and fully deserving of further research.

Ryley 3

Knowing that the Headmaster and – as I had learned from the *History* – both his sons had been killed in action during the First World War, I visited the Commonwealth War Graves Commission web site, which revealed the following information:

Second-Lieutenant Harold Buchanan Ryley, North Staffordshire Regiment, killed in action on 5 September 1916

Lieutenant Donald Arthur George Buchanan Ryley, North Staffordshire Regiment, killed in action on 11 February 1917

Lieutenant Harold Buchanan Ryley, Suffolk Regiment, killed in action on 15 December 1917

These were the facts – but what was the story? The Reverend George Buchanan Ryley, originally from Manchester, trained for the Congregational ministry at Cheshunt College, was ordained in 1867 and, later that year, married Isabella List. During the next few years he served as Independent Minister of the Hanover Chapel, Peckham, with a family home at 9 St. Mary's Road. *Scotland's Free Church: a Historical Retrospect and Memorial of the Disruption*, written by George B. Ryley, with notes on 'Progress and Finance' by John M. MacCandlish was published in 1893, the same year that G. B. Ryley moved to Harley Street Independent Church, Bow. The reviewer in *The New York Times* noted that the book concluded with a description of 'that great act of conscientiousness and sacrifice in 1843 that made eminent Scotchmen proud of their country, and added fresh nobility to the Christian world'. In 1897 G. B. Ryley switched his allegiance to the Established Church, serving as a Curate in Battersea for five years. In 1906 he was appointed Vicar of St. Luke, Whyteleafe in the Caterham Valley in Surrey.

Harold Buchanan Ryley senior, the eldest son of G. B. Ryley, was born at Bocking, Essex on 18 July 1868, educated at St. Olave's Grammar School, Tooley Street, Southwark and awarded a Scholarship to study at Exeter College, Oxford. Having achieved a Second in Moderations (the first set of examinations), he was awarded an undistinguished Class IV Bachelor of Arts in Literæ Humaniores (Classics) on 1 August 1891. On 14 March 1892 at the Congregational Church, Lewisham High Road, he was married by his father to Hughiena Lenny Florence, daughter of the late Donald Fraser. Her father, originally from Scotland, was a Police Superintendent in Carshalton, Surrey and, after retirement, became a local Sanitary Inspector. While he was alive, the Frasers lived at 48 Blenheim Grove, Carshalton; after his death in 1887, at the age of 69, the family moved to 44 Bousfield Road, Deptford. The Ryleys had two children: Donald Arthur George Buchanan Ryley, born at Colorado Springs, United States of America, on 5 July 1893, and Harold Buchanan Ryley junior, born in Wandsworth on 6 June 1896.

Having trained for the priesthood, H. B. Ryley was ordained in 1893 and accepted a Curacy at Grace Church, Colorado Springs. After a brief American interlude, he returned to his old school the following year as an Assistant Master, also serving at St. John's, Battersea between 1896 and 1901.<sup>1</sup> His musical abilities shone through and, during his time at St. Olave's, H. B. Ryley wrote the settings to a number of hymns in the *St. Olave's Hymnal*. When the Census was taken, at the beginning of April 1901, the Ryley family was living at 40 Elms Road, just off Clapham Common. Later that year, H. B. Ryley accepted a challenging new role as Headmaster of Sir Roger Manwood's Grammar School, Sandwich.

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<sup>1</sup> The former school buildings are currently owned by Berkeley Homes, who are proposing to convert them into a 'boutique' hotel. The school moved to Orpington in 1968.

In 1890 the Charity Commissioners had issued an ultimatum to the Trustees of the Sir Roger Manwood Charity: either the school – which had fallen into abeyance in the middle of the century – was successfully revived, or the charitable funds should be used for more general educational purposes. The Trustees were galvanised into action by this edict and, by 1895, Sir Roger Manwood's Grammar School had reopened on a new site, admittedly with a mere 16 pupils. Six years later, the hundredth boy had just been admitted, when the Headmaster suddenly resigned, taking his two senior teaching assistants with him, together with almost a quarter of the pupils. There was also the small matter of the completion of the 1895 building programme, which included a proposed school assembly hall.

The new Headmaster rose to the challenge, leaving the fine 'Big Hall' for his successor, restructuring the classes, changing the examination system, starting a school museum and establishing a preparatory school. The school's history records that 'perhaps the most significant event of Mr Ryley's régime was the founding of a Cadet Corps', commanded by the Headmaster. The entry in the Corps records book reads: 'The Cadet Corps was formed and put into working order some time before July 27th 1902, and was sanctioned as a Half-Company attached to the East Kent Volunteer Regiment, by the War Office, on April 28th 1903.' That autumn it mustered 59 N.C.O.s and men.

The members of the Cadet Corps worked hard, with monthly uniform parades and two drill and two firing squads each week. In a Founder's Day address, the Headmaster emphasised that the training schedule was 'not conceived in any militaristic spirit, but with the positive aim of instilling smartness, discipline and leadership'. One of H. B. Ryley's final duties at Sir Roger Manwood's Grammar School was to command his Corps at a parade of more than 5,000 cadets in Hyde Park, where they were inspected by Field Marshal the Duke of Connaught.

#### Ryley 4

After four years of notable achievement, H. B. Ryley returned to London from Sandwich in September 1905, in order to take up his new appointment as Headmaster (and Chaplain) of Emanuel School. The Governing Body supported his appointment by eleven votes, compared with six for his closest rival, the senior science master at Westminster. Once again, Ryley's dynamic approach soon made an impact and, according to the *History*, Emanuel 'achieved recognition by the Board of Education' the following year. During Ryley's tenure as Headmaster, there were enhancements and innovations in all aspects of school life: pupil numbers increased from 359 in 1906 to a pre-war peak of 562 in 1912; examination results steadily improved; the school was divided into 'classical' and 'modern' sides; the house system was adopted in 1906<sup>2</sup>; a new school library was built in 1907; the Debating Society was founded in 1910, the same year that transition to a day school was completed with the boarding dormitories converted into classrooms; on the sporting front, Rugby

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<sup>2</sup> The five houses – Marlborough, Wellington, Lyons, Clyde and Howe – were called after the two naval and three military heroes whose names were painted on the doors of the dormitories of the orphanage erected by the Trustees of the Royal Victoria Patriotic Fund after the Crimean War. Three more houses – Rodney, Nelson and Drake – have since been added.

Football was adopted as the school game while the origins of Emanuel as a rowing school can be dated to 1913.

#### Ryley 5

Five years after Ryley took over, the Inspectors reported: 'There is, indeed, every indication that the school promises to become a very important day school.' In short, Emanuel School had been transformed during his Headmastership into an institution of the first rank, with traditions and standards that have stood the test of time. Among his personal achievements were a setting to music of Rudyard Kipling's *Recessional*, adopted as one of the school songs, and an introduction to Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Earlier Poems*, published in 1910. On the night of the 2/3 April 1911, when the Census was taken, the Ryley family was living in the Headmaster's House at Emanuel School. It was a large household comprising the Ryley family; 81 year-old mother-in-law, Kate; two unmarried sisters-in-law, Margaret and Eugenie Fraser; and a nephew, Donald George Johnson, an 18 year-old engineering student, together with two servants.

#### Ryley 6

In the meantime the Headmaster had lost none of his enthusiasm for military matters. In May 1906 he was appointed to command the Cadet Company at Emanuel School, designated as Z Company, Queen's Westminster Rifles, initially with 82 members. On 11 February 1909 Ryley took command of Emanuel School OTC, when it 'emerged' from the Cadet Corps. He retained that commission until resigning, on 'proceeding to America', on 21 January 1914. It is noted in his Army records that '*Inspection Reports of Emanuel School OTC, which he commanded, were uniformly good for the years he was in command, viz:- 1909, 1910, 1911, 1912 & 1913*'. As the photograph suggests, Harold Buchanan Ryley was an imposing figure: 5 feet 11 inches tall, he weighed fourteen-and-a-half stone and had a 42-inch chest.

#### Ryley 7

In the *History*, Scott-Giles was naturally reticent, writing that 'private troubles and ill-health led Mr. Ryley to relinquish his headship in 1913'. The truth was slightly more complicated but, in the light of the subsequent, tragic events, it was perfectly understandable that no further explanation should have been forthcoming while many of those involved were still alive. Despite his many and varied achievements during the preceding eight years, the strain had clearly begun to tell on H. B. Ryley. On 17 March 1913 the minutes of the Governing Body reveal that his behaviour led to the resignations of two preparatory school mistresses. Meanwhile he readmitted as scholars, on his own initiative, boys whose scholarships had been formally terminated.

Having apologised to the Governing Body, pleading that he had the best interests of the school in mind, he then compounded his error by writing ill-considered letters to the two mistresses. They, in turn, raised the issue once again with the Governing Body, who were already of the view that the Headmaster was close to

nervous collapse. Feeling that their authority had been undermined, the Governing Body demanded Ryley's resignation, which was accepted on 28 July 1913.

Despite his protestations, the Governing Body were given no reasons for doubting that they had taken the correct decision. On 9 Feb 1914 the Governing Body minutes reveal that the Headmaster's personal finances had become thoroughly intertwined with those of the school, and that the school's financial situation was chaotic. It also emerged that Ryley had made improper use of school fees for his own account, charging to petty cash for weekly wages and board a sum greater than the actual cost, while he had retained profits from the sale of school caps and cap-badges. H. B. Ryley sailed for the United States on 23 January 1914 and no further action was taken.

In his new history, Nigel Watson summarised Ryley's period of office: 'A man of immense energy, he set himself such ambitious aims that, without any secretarial support, he often suffered from nervous exhaustion brought on by overwork.' As we will discover, he was a lonely figure – with no-one to turn to during times of stress. Interestingly, his replacement as Headmaster, Shirley Goodwin, was soon given a secretary in order to assist him with his heavy work-load, and particularly administrative tasks. Ryley's two sons remained in England to complete their education.

Donald Ryley was educated at Sir Roger Manwood's Grammar School and later at St. Olave's, Southwark. In May 1912 he was awarded an exhibition to read Classics at St. John's College, Cambridge, joining the Cambridge University Officer Training Corps as a private soldier in October 1912. However, he was never awarded his degree, applying instead for a special reserve commission in the Army on 26 August 1914. Posted initially to 1/8th Manchester Regiment (Territorial Forces), he saw service in Gallipoli from 20 October 1915, it being noted that he did '*good reconnaissance work in Turkish trenches*'. On 29 August 1916 he was '*order(ed) home from Egypt by first public opportunity*', joining 3rd (Reserve) Battalion, North Staffordshire Regiment, with a permanent commission, on 12 October 1916.

Ryley 8

Harold Buchanan Ryley junior, Captain of Emanuel – popularly known as 'Bay' – spent three years in the OTC, achieving the rank of sergeant. On 30 November 1913 he received Officer Training Corps Certificate 'A', signed by the future Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Major-General William Robertson, confirming that he had '*fulfilled the necessary conditions as to efficient service, and has qualified in the Infantry syllabus of examination*'. It was therefore natural that, on 16 September 1914, Harold Buchanan Ryley '*requested that [he] may be appointed to a temporary commission in the Regular Army for the period of the war*'.

Bay Ryley was commissioned in The North Staffordshire Regiment and, though officially on the books of the 4th Battalion, served with the 1st Battalion in France. On 16 September 1916 the War Officer addressed a telegram to H. Ryley, The Taft School, Watertown, Connecticut that was to set off a tragic sequence of events:

*Deeply regret to inform you that 2 Lieut. H. B. Ryley North Staffordshire Regiment was killed in action September 5. The Army Council express their sympathy. In The Times of the same date, there was a notice: Killed in action on 7th Sept., while leading his men in an attack, Lieut. Harold Buchanan Ryley, of the North Staffordshire Regiment, son of the Rev. H. B. Ryley, and grandson of the Rev. G. Buchanan Ryley, Vicar of Whyteleafe, Surrey. Bay Ryley was killed at Delville Wood on the Somme and, having no known grave, is commemorated on the Thiépval Memorial. Of the Emanuel School 1st XV 1912-13, eight were killed (including Bay Ryley), three were wounded and one was missing in action, presumed dead.*

After learning that their telegram had not been delivered successfully, the War Office duly contacted the Reverend G. B. Ryley, who, on 21 September 1916, gave his son's address as Hotel Walton, De Funiak Springs, Florida. The news of his younger son's death reached H. B. Ryley in Florida and his immediate reaction was to return to England and volunteer for active service. No-one should have been surprised at this decision. Many years earlier Harold Buchanan Ryley had written a poem, *Adsum*, published in *The Portcullis*, the Emanuel School magazine, in 1910, a verse from which reads:

*So when the banded nations stand,  
And the day has dawned of England's fate;  
When the war-clouds gather o'er sea and land,  
And the foot of the foe is at our gate;  
Oh then, in the time of our Mother's need,  
Be ours the will, be ours the deed,  
Ours be the strength elate,  
Ours be one voice outringing clear:  
'England! I'm here!'*

Both his sons had already answered the call – and now it was his turn. On 27 September 1916 Lewis Moses Ltd., Naval, Military and Civil Outfitters, of 67 New Oxford Street were insensitively quick to submit a final account to the Secretary of the War Office in respect of the sum of £1 11s 9d that they were owed by their recently-deceased client. The bill was later settled by his father. On 16 November 1916 H. B. Ryley senior completed and signed his application for a commission and, shortly afterwards, was posted to 2nd Garrison Battalion, The Suffolk Regiment. The Battalion's role was to defend the exposed coastline and vital installations. Ryley was based initially at the Golf House, Felixstowe and later at Harwich, where he was billeted at 29 Esplanade and formed part of the Shotley Barrier Guard.

On 15 February 1917 Donald Ryley's paternal grandfather – given by both sons as their next-of-kin while their father was in the United States – was sent a telegram by the War Office informing him that his grandson was 'missing'. This distressing news was also reported in *The Times* on 20 February. On 21 August 1917 G. B. Ryley wrote to the War Office, noting that '*since then we have heard nothing, save that by private enquiry we find his brother Officers & others believe him to be killed*'. Three days later the War Office replied that no trace of Donald Ryley's fate had been discovered,

despite searches of hospital and internment camps in Germany under the auspices of the Netherlands Legation.

On 13 September 1917 C. F. Watherston of C.2 Casualties Department at the War Office wrote to H. B. Ryley: *I am directed to inform you that it is regretted that no further report has been received concerning Lieutenant D. A. G. B. Ryley, The North Staffordshire Regiment, reported Missing 11th February, 1917. It is regretted that it will consequently be necessary for the Army Council to consider whether they must not now conclude that this officer is dead.* Notice of his presumed death appeared in *The Times* on 8 November 1917. Lieutenant Donald Ryley is now officially recorded as having been killed in action near Hulluch in France and is commemorated on the Loos Memorial since he has also no known grave.

Just five weeks later, on 18 October 1917, Lieutenant H. B. Ryley embarked on S.S. *Huntspill* to join the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. Having arrived at Alexandria on 1 November, he joined the 1st/5th Battalion, The Suffolk Regiment, 163rd Infantry Brigade, 54th Division from details camp at Belfa at 0600 hours on 6 November 1917. The Battalion's War Diary records that it was a rude introduction: *Enemy bombardment also increases and becomes intense about midday: from which time it continues heavily without intermission until 1745.* Five days earlier the 1/5 Suffolks had captured the El Arish Redoubt, an important defensive feature, during what later became known as the Third Battle of Gaza, at a cost of almost 100 casualties, including 29 killed. Despite this final show of resistance from their artillery, the Turks finally abandoned Gaza – which they had successfully defended during the two previous battles, in March and April 1917 – the night of Lieutenant H. B. Ryley's arrival. The Turkish Eighth Army then withdrew on Jerusalem to make a final stand between that city and the sea. Meanwhile the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, under General Allenby, pushed forward relentlessly. The 54th Division advanced up the coast road towards the ancient port of Jaffa, now known as Tel-Aviv.

During the next three weeks, spent out of contact the enemy, the Suffolks made a number of route marches, interspersed with training days. By 1 December they were established in trenches at Yehidiyah, opposite the final Turkish defence line in front of Jerusalem. Apart from sporadic shelling, and an abortive Turkish attack on Norfolk Post on 11 December, the next two weeks passed relatively quietly. The Battalion War Diary notes: *Rainy weather. Companies work on trenches whenever possible. But work and drill by day impossible owing to enemy aeroplane activity.* On 13 December the War Diary recorded 'warning received of intended attack on Kh Bornat W. 13 D. on the 15th'. The Brigade Operation Order No 34 reads: *The 163rd Brigade will advance and prolong the line from Kh Ibanneh (exclusive) through Cistern Hill to Kh El Bornat and Et Tireh to the Railway (inclusive) at a point which links up with the Wilhelma defences.* It was a two-phase assault, with 1/5 Suffolks performing the role of left assault battalion during the second phase.

On the following day 'all Company Officers and Platoon Sergeants inspect the ground and the objectives during the morning ... Battalion order for attack issued at 1430'. On 15 December 1917 'at 0800 the Battalion debouches from the trees for attack – after a preliminary bombardment of 1st Objective – Sangar Hill – for 10 minutes. Met with

*heavy fire from 4 M.G.s causing about 30 casualties but they quickly get into dead ground and good cover among the rocks. The enemy is observed dismounting his gun and getting behind hill. Hill gained at 0820 – 1 prisoner – 4 dead observed. There being no fire from flanks the assaulting Companies A & C press on. B follows in support and D the reserve Company remains on Sangar. A & C Companies gain the crest of Bornat without opposition and commence to consolidate at 0850. B Company join them and watch the right flank. D Company commences to carry up material for consolidation.*

*'Enemy heavily bombard summit of Bornat causing many casualties as the advanced slope is very exposed. Battalion Headquarters move to Bornat at 0945. At this time the enemy is shelling the approaches but has apparently not registered the main valley of approach near Bornat – few casualties – Total casualties during advance and after found to be 1 Officer & 7 O.R. killed – 2 Officers 62 O.R. wounded. Positions improved at night by digging in, building up sangars etc. Night bitterly cold and the arrival of the blankets and greatcoats at 2300 gives the men a chance to rest.'*

That rest was eternal for Lieutenant Harold Buchanan Ryley, the only officer from 1/5 Suffolks to be killed that day. Hedley J. Evans, Music Master at Emanuel School, wrote in *The Kipling Journal* that *'we were able to glean few details of his death beyond that he received a bullet through the head while gallantly leading his men'*. This suggests that he was killed by a burst of machine-gun fire at the start of the attack. Initially buried with Yehudiyah District Military Graves, his body now lies in Ramleh War Cemetery, some twenty miles south-east of Tel Aviv in Israel. At the bottom of his gravestone is the simple legend, *'For the Motherland'*.

Ryley 9

*There was An Appreciation by the VI Form of Emanuel School in The Portcullis: One by one, with heavy hearts and loving memory, we have recorded the passing of many dear friends we have known and respected. And now the sad news has reached us that the Rev. H. Buchanan Ryley has laid down his life for King and Country, treading the path of honour and glory over which, only a few months previously, his two sons had walked and given their all for England ... We can almost imagine his tall, imposing figure, with his genial smile, coming across the playing fields to watch a match. Perhaps the most familiar sight of all, when he was with us, and one that showed a most human and gentle side of his character, was to see him walking along the corridors with his favourite collie.*

There was now just one member of that branch of the Ryley family left alive. Harold Buchanan Ryley's application for a commission reveals an added dimension of sadness, which may explain much of what happened later. On the form he wrote tersely: *I lost my wife 11 years ago.* However, his Letters of Administration confirm that he died *'intestate without child leaving Hughiena Florence Ryley his lawful widow and relict who is now a person of unsound mind'*. On 7 September 1918 the Reverend George Buchanan Ryley summarised the tragic situation in a letter to the War Office: *My daughter-in-law, mother of these officers, has been many years in a lunatic asylum; and their father and after him, they, were her natural support.*

Throughout his challenging time at Emanuel, Ryley therefore had no-one with whom to share the burden of his onerous responsibilities. On the contrary, it is quite likely that his wife's mental illness may have been a major factor behind his own state of nervous exhaustion. There was one further, tragic twist. On 29 July 1919 Hughiena Ryley died at the City of London Mental Hospital at Stone, near Dartford, Kent from '*septic inflammation of the liver and perforation of the stomach and gall bladder due to swallowing a bristle from a bass broom*'.<sup>3</sup> The Reverend Harold Buchanan's Ryley's parents did not long survive her, his father dying on 26 October 1925, aged 82, and his mother on 16 October 1930, at the age of 84. Towards the end of their lives, they had endured much sadness.

#### Ryley 10

On 24 December 1924 P. V. Hincks wrote to the War Office: *I shall be greatly obliged if you will kindly inform me of the actual date in December 1917 on which Harold Buchanan Ryley was killed in action. He was a Lieutenant in the Suffolk Regt., & was serving in Palestine, I believe, at the time of his death. The information is required in connection with the erection of a memorial tablet at Emanuel School, where Mr. Ryley was Headmaster for some years.*

One of the poems that H. B. Ryley set to music was *The Children's Song* from Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*. In 1929 years later Hedley J. Evans wrote a fine epitaph of the 'Gallant Headmaster' in *The Kipling Journal*: *It is singularly fitting that the name of a brave man, who, after years devoted to the education of children, and giving himself and his sons to the land of their birth, should be associated with a song beloved by every child that has learnt it.*

Under the rules of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the family of the deceased may choose a modest inscription to appear at the foot of the Portland stone grave marker. On the Reverend Harold Buchanan Ryley's gravestone are engraved the simple – but expressive – words:

*For the Motherland*

#### Ryley 11

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<sup>3</sup> The institution closed in 2003 and English Partnerships are currently pursuing plans to convert the former premises of Stone House Hospital into luxury apartments. Although she was probably unaware of the fact, Hughiena Ryley was a fellow inmate of Ivor Gurney, the First World War poet.

## References

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*Emanuel School: An Illustrated History* by Nigel Watson, published in 2008

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National Archives: WO339/88635 – Papers of 172911 Second-Lieutenant Harold Buchanan Ryley, North Staffordshire Regiment

National Archives: WO339/65416 – Papers of 140489 Lieutenant Donald Arthur George Buchanan Ryley, North Staffordshire Regiment

National Archives: WO339/27426 – Papers of 49049 Lieutenant Harold Buchanan Ryley, Suffolk Regiment

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission: [www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)

General Register Office

Census Returns

*Crockford's Clerical Directory*

## Illustrations

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