

A Sermon

Preached
in the Chapel

of

ALL SOULS COLLEGE

by

The Warden

on

Sunday, 11 November 2018

The Olympic Games of 1912 were held in Stockholm. England's champion hurdler, Laurie Anderson of Trinity College, was thought to have a medal chance, but in his semi-final he fell. The following year he met with success, in a much more parochial competition, when he was elected to a Prize Fellowship here at All Souls. In August 1914, a few days after the outbreak of war, he joined up and was commissioned as a second lieutenant. Three months later, on or about the eighth of November, he was shot and killed near Ypres, at the age of twenty-five.

You can see Laurie Anderson, in his Cheshire regiment uniform, in one of the six photographs in the common room of Fellows killed in the Great War. His name is one of thirteen on the memorials in the ante-chapel to members of this College who died in the first and second world wars. Today, in this Chapel founded to commemorate the dead of a war centuries ago, I will say a little about each of them. Other colleges, with their student communities, are of course remembering far greater numbers lost.

Another tribute to Laurie Anderson stands before us today. This fine antique table, perhaps an Elizabethan communion table, was given to the College, for use in this Chapel in his memory, by his mother, brother and sisters.

Three of the fallen – John Bath, Aubrey Neale and Francis Stonex – were Bible Clerks. These were undergraduate members of All Souls who received a free education in return for reading the lessons at the two daily Chapel services. The last of this line was appointed in 1921. The Chaplain with whom they read and prayed was the splendid figure of Arthur Johnson, who, as John Davis would relate, was the first Fellow of All Souls to play in an FA Cup final. Johnson was a 'muscular Christian with

forthright views and uncomplicated opinions'. He was also a pioneer of workers' education and husband of Bertha Johnson, the first principal of what is now St Anne's College.

John Bath, the eldest of the three Bible Clerks we remember today, was twenty-one at the outbreak of war. His father was organist at Marlow parish church, and he planned to take holy orders after Oxford. He too joined up, and by the autumn of 1915 was promoted to captain. He was struck and killed by a shell fragment just before Christmas that year.

Aubrey Neale was studying for a degree in Music. He was commissioned in the Scottish Rifles in November 1916. He was killed in action at Ypres the following August. A fellow officer told his mother that 'when I last saw him in the trench where he was killed some 12 hours later, he was as cheerful as if on parade far behind the lines'. He was twenty-three.

Francis Stonex, the son of a vicar, was a lieutenant in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. He served in Dublin during the rebellion, and was then posted to Flanders. In June of 1917 he was sent home to hospital with shell shock, and died eight months later, aged twenty-five. He is buried at the cemetery in Wallasey in Cheshire.

Younger still was Edward Pember, son of the Warden, who had won a Mathematical Exhibition at Balliol, but went straight from school to war. A reconnaissance photographer in the Royal Flying Corps, he was killed at the age of nineteen when his plane was shot down in September 1917.

On the war memorial on the Marston Road, as well as in our ante-chapel, you will find the name of Lewis Heath. At the time of the 1911 census, when he was fifteen, he

was a college servant, a messenger, living here. As a Private in the Ox and Bucks Light Infantry, he was killed by shellfire at the front in August 1917. The letter informing his parents of the loss of their son, which, together with photographs, is available thanks to local historians, is moving beyond words.

George Walker was another Private in the Ox and Bucks. Having been a farm labourer in his home village of Cassington, he came to the College, probably as a scout, a year or so before the war. He was killed, at the age of twenty-two, in a raid on enemy trenches near St Quentin in April 1917.

The oldest member of our community to die in combat, at the age of forty in 1916, was Major Sir Foster Cunliffe, baronet, military historian, and bursar. He is also the College's best cricketer to date, better even than Wardens Pember and Chelmsford, both of whom had played some county cricket. Cunliffe bowled left-arm medium, and took 235 first-class wickets. For Oxford University against the Australians in 1896 he took 5 for 124. I wonder what he would have thought about the fact that the granddaughter of his team-mate Plum Warner would become a Fellow of All Souls.

Those common room photographs of the Great War dead came to mean more to me one evening in the spring of 1984. The University's Chancellor, Harold Macmillan, then aged 90, came to dinner in College. Afterwards, in what really was a smoke-filled room in those days, he stood for some time gazing at the wall of pictures, with visible emotion. Many of his Balliol generation who had gone to the front, the exact contemporaries of our Bible Clerks, had not returned. He had been seriously wounded, but had lived through it.

Raymond Asquith, the eldest son of the Prime Minister, had been in the intelligence staff but insisted on returning to active service. On the fifteenth of September 1916 his division of the Grenadier Guards received fatal fire in an advance during the Battle of the Somme. He had been a Balliol classicist, a Fellow here elected in 1902, a barrister, and a father of three children. A memorial to him stands in Amiens Cathedral. His friend John Buchan wrote that 'debonair and brilliant and brave, he is now part of that immortal England which knows not age or weariness or defeat'.

Alan Hulton, an only son, was a barrister who had come here from New College in 1908 and won the Eldon Law Scholarship the following year. He was wounded near Ypres in April 1915 while serving as a lieutenant in the Army Service Corps, after a shell burst under his horse. He died in hospital in London some weeks later. The inscription at the foot of the brass plaque in his memory in St Mary's Church in Bolton states our duty today: 'Let those who come after see to it that his name be not forgotten'.

Let us also remember today those who fought and died in the Second World War. Tony Honoré, who is now 97, was wounded at El Alamein. Michael Howard, now 95, led a night attack under heavy shellfire at Salerno in 1943 and was awarded the Military Cross. The following morning they buried the German dead. 'The scene still remains etched on my mind', he wrote more than sixty years later, 'the sprawling corpses with their dead eyes in a cold dawn light that drained all colour from the scene, leaving only mournful blacks and greys'. Peter Fraser and Charles Wenden were also awarded MCs, but never would they mention it.

To the left of the fireplace in the common room are photographs of the two Prize Fellows killed in that war – H.W. Davies and R.T.E. Latham.

Davies, known to his Oxford contemporaries as Bill, was born in India in 1914. He was the eldest son of the Dean of Worcester, a Balliol classicist, and apparently a member of the Communist party. He was elected here in 1938, by which time he had a position on the Philosophy faculty at Aberdeen. He joined the Navy early in the war, and served on the destroyer HMS *Electra*. By chance, we have a vivid account of Lieutenant Davies and his voyages in a book by the ship's gunnery officer, and his closest companion on board, who survived. In May 1941 *Electra* joined the hunt for the *Bismarck*, and rescued survivors from the *Hood*. She then escorted the first Arctic convoys to Russia, before sailing for Singapore to be with the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, both sunk in the days following Pearl Harbour. Then on to the Java Sea, where *Electra* was sunk by the Japanese in February 1942, with the loss of most of her crew, as she sailed through the smoke to protect HMS *Exeter*. A memorial window commemorates Davies in the cloister of Worcester Cathedral.

Richard Latham was an Australian Rhodes scholar who came to read Jurisprudence at Magdalen College in 1931. His tutor in his final year of studies was a visiting professor from Harvard, Felix Frankfurter, future Justice of the Supreme Court. Latham was elected to a Prize Fellowship in 1934, was called to the Bar, and became a lecturer at King's College, London. At the age of 27, he wrote a celebrated essay on sovereignty, *The Law and the Commonwealth*, which was published posthumously as a book. Latham spent the summer of 1937 driving relief supplies along the Bordeaux-Barcelona route during the

Spanish civil war, and the following year he was in Berlin to help Jewish refugees flee. At the outbreak of war he worked in the Foreign Office, on behalf of Polish refugees, where he outspokenly and successfully condemned the British policy of indiscriminately interning aliens. (One was the nineteen-year-old Karl Leyser, who would become Chichele Professor of Medieval History. His parents, being Jewish, lived in hiding in Holland, and in 1945 Lieutenant Leyser of the Black Watch drove his jeep into the town of Edam, and found them.)

Richard Latham, seeking a more active role than a Foreign Office desk job, volunteered for the RAF in 1941 and was commissioned as an observer. In August 1943 his plane was lost off the Norwegian coast. Keith Hancock, the only prior Australian Rhodes scholar to be a Fellow here (there have been four since), saw Latham as driven by the

‘... brutal abuse of power which threatened both the freedom of intellectual life and the decencies of common life. He believed in both. In defence of both he offered not only his intellect – for him that was not enough – but himself’.

The Latin inscription on the memorial in the ante-chapel to Latham and Davies, airman and sailor, is taken from today’s psalm:

If I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea;
Even there also shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

The two Prize Fellows elected in 1910, like Harold Macmillan, both came from Eton and Balliol. John Radcliffe joined his father in business as a solicitor, and hoped to enter politics. He married the year before the war. He enlisted in the King's Royal Rifle Corps in September 1914, became a captain, and was killed defending a village in Flanders on the western front in July 1915, aged twenty-nine. He is commemorated on a bronze plaque in the church in Widecombe-in-the-Moor.

And finally there is the dazzling figure of Patrick Shaw Stewart. Winner of the top Classics prizes, then the Eldon Law scholarship, then a director of Barings bank, and socialite extraordinaire. He joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in 1914 and the following year commanded the firing party as they buried Rupert Brooke. For his work with the French in Salonika he was awarded the Croix de Guerre. In the words of Evelyn Waugh:

‘The brilliant and beguiling youth who had never failed in anything, for whom all life’s prizes seemed to wait his taking, had little wish to outlive his friends. He now used all his charm and influence in high places to get into the firing line’.

He was killed in action in France at the end of 1917. Earlier in the war, in a brief respite during the Gallipoli campaign, he wrote these famous lines on the fly-leaf of his copy of Housman’s *Shropshire Lad*:

I saw a man this morning
 Who did not wish to die
I ask, and cannot answer,
 If otherwise wish I.

Fair broke the day this morning
 Against the Dardanelles;
The breeze blew soft, the morn's cheeks
 Were cold as cold sea-shells.

But other shells are waiting
 Across the Aegean sea,
Shrapnel and high explosive,
 Shells and hells for me.

O hell of ships and cities,
 Hell of men like me,
Fatal second Helen,
 Why must I follow thee?

Achilles came to Troyland
 And I to Chersonese:
He turned from wrath to battle,
 And I from three days' peace.

Was it so hard, Achilles,
 So very hard to die?
Thou knewest and I know not—
 So much the happier I.

I will go back this morning
 From Imbros over the sea;
Stand in the trench, Achilles,
 Flame-capped, and shout for me.