

Memorial Boards at Crossley Heath



The ornate Heath memorial boards



Crossley and Porter memorial board

There are probably many of us who have walked past the Old Crossleyan memorial boards in the front entrance to the school without much of a second glance, more intent on getting in on time. A second much more decorative memorial board was transferred from Heath GS when the schools were merged in 1985. This is now located in the right hand corridor leading from the entrance but was originally on the top corridor at Heath and I am told was not examined by very many. It is well worth a close scrutiny both for the names it records but also for the superb workmanship of the carver who created it.

An exhibition was put together at King Cross library in November to commemorate the centenary of the ending of WW1 and visits were arranged for any member of the public who may be interested to view the memorial boards at school.

A group of us met in front of the school and in front of the war memorial which had been erected by the Old Crossleyans

perb woodcarving for churches and for the houses of wealthy businessmen.

Some 300 Heathens served in WW1 and Grayham Smith of Heath Old Boys Association has carried out a detailed research of 58 former pupils who died and who are named on the central panel of the board. The HOBA published a booklet about what is known of the '58'. The board and the booklet stand as a tribute to their bravery, fortitude, patriotism and loyalty in the carnage of WW1. The stories are very poignant and show how young men, many of whom were not long out of school, had enlisted to serve their country but died in harrowing circumstances. These stories can be seen on the HOBA website.

I went to the Calderdale reference library to find out more about the old Crossleyans who were on the Crossleyan memorial board and discovered that Vernon Brearley, former Chairman of the Old Crossleyans Association, had already done some research on those names he could

follow. This can be found in the reference books 'Calderdale Book of the War Dead'.

The detail is very sparse but there is a very emotional theme running through the old Crossleyan names, which is that they were all orphans, having lost a father and possibly a mother already, to qualify for attending the Crossley and Porter Orphan Home and School. Their lives had been emotionally affected before they were subjected to the horrors of trench warfare and their untimely death. In some instances they had barely left school before they were killed. Mothers who had found a safe place and education for their sons would suffer again when they were taken from them by the war.

While in the library I had a brief look at a book entitled 'Bradford Pals' by David Raw. This gave an illustrated account of the history of the formation of the Bradford Pals Battalion from the early days of patriotic recruiting, when young men signed up to 'teach the Boche a lesson' and 'it would be all over by Christmas' through to the horrors of trench warfare with incessant shelling, gas attacks and vile living conditions. Many of those who survived would suffer from shell shock and life changing disabilities. They were not taken back into civilian society with the understanding and care they should have received.

'All Quiet on the Western Front' by Erich Remarque is a novel based on his experiences serving as a German soldier in the WW1 trenches. It could have been written by a British soldier about his experiences fighting the Germans. The same applies to the novels written by Michael Morpurgo, 'Private Peaceful' and 'Warhorse'. All tell of the first mechanised war on an epic scale, which drew millions of innocent people of different nations, led by politicians and military commanders, into bloody conflict. After the initial bravado of conscription and then the realities of war, soldiers on both sides could not understand why they were fighting people with homes and families like themselves and why they were being made to regress into savages to survive.

World War 1 was supposed to be the war to end all wars. It wasn't but it is very unlikely we will be facing each other again in our thousands cowering in holes and trenches dug into the mud, firing shells and releasing poison gases at each other. We can but hope that these memorial boards will remind succeeding generations of the enormous suffering of this conflict and to strive for it never to happen again.

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