

LEST WE FORGET



One of the duties of a great school is to teach true values. Worthy examples have been given by many of those who were once boys at this school.

– Howard Kippenberger

When World War One began the school roll was 340. Four years later at the end of the war 786 Christchurch Boys' High School students had enlisted and more than 20% of that number had died. 1600 served in World War Two with more than 12% dying.

The school's tradition of armed service goes back to the opening day in 1883 when a Staff Sergeant Major was appointed and the school cadet corp was established. Since that first day students from Christchurch Boys' High School have made a significant contribution and sacrifice.

Cries of “School!” were said to be heard at the bayonet charge at Galatos during the Battle for Crete and Old Boys have served with distinction throughout the ranks during New Zealand’s wars.



The casualty list read out on

ANZAC Day at the school service is a moving story of the sacrifices made by old boys over the years. The sacrifice of the old boys of the school mirrors New Zealand’s experience. The CBHS class of 1909 had 83 pupils, 29 served in the war and eight were killed. Of the 225 students who started at school in 1935, 128 served overseas and ten were killed in action.

Remembering our former students does add to the sense of belonging at Christchurch Boys’ High School and ANZAC Day will remain the significant occasion in the school’s calendar.

WWI - Old Boys killed in action

Corporal Robert John Petre

15 April 1894 - 5 June 1915

Robert John Petre attended Christchurch Boys’ High School 1909-1912. He was the son of Mr R G Petre of Andover Street, Merivale and a grandson of the late Honourable Henry Petre, one of the pioneers of Wellington.

Born in Reefton, Petre was first educated at the Blenheim and Christchurch Convent schools. While at Christchurch Boys’ High, Petre proved himself a fine all-rounder. As a sportsman he gained selection in both the 1st XV Rugby and 1st XI cricket teams. The school magazine of 1912 described him as: “a hard-working forward; collaring good; shows up in both the loose

and on the line; breaks away quickly from the scrum onto the opposing backs.”

As a precursor to his role in World War One, he took a keen interest in the cadets. He was Lieutenant in command of the team that won the Snow Shield in 1912. Petre was also a keen debater and was elected onto the committee of the debating society in 1912. He was a deputy monitor in 1911 and a monitor in 1912. In 1912, he was also the runner up to the Deans Medal winner Rupert Hickmott.

The school magazine of 1915 records that it is hard to describe the sort of chap that Petre really was. “Probably no boy ever passed through Boys’ High who had a greater affection for his school, or who was prouder of his connection with it. These feelings were readily translated into vigorous action when he found himself in a position to be useful after school.”

After leaving school, Petre played rugby for High School Old Boys and was a rep player in 1913. He was appointed as a special editor of the school magazine in 1913 to better represent the deeds of Old Boys’ in their post school years. Prior to his departure for war in 1914, he had made a “brave and promising beginning on this.”

He enlisted for the war effort on 13 August 1914 and joined the Canterbury Infantry Battalion, where he was appointed Corporal. He left with the main body, from Lyttelton, 16 October 1914, on the Athenic HMNZT 11. They arrived in Egypt 4 December 1914.

Petre’s writings of his trip to Egypt gives us an insight into the men and the camaraderie that quickly developed. In reference to his platoon he records:

“In this platoon are all the Old Boys, also College Old Boys and Varsity men. We have a few arguments as to the merits of the two schools, but they all end peacefully. Sleeping in the bunk beneath me is a College prefect of 1908 by the name of Norris—we are no longer rivals, but good friends.”

“They all seem a happy-go-lucky crowd and the only subject that everyone seems to avoid is one that is really a real live one. We all expect to land back safely in New Zealand, which I think is not possible.”

It is unknown when Petre left Cairo, for Gallipoli, but he wrote to the headmaster Charles Bevan-Brown in early 1915. His dedication to his old school was quickly revealed. These are some of his thoughts:

“We had intended to hold an Old Boys dinner somewhere about the end of January, but it had to be postponed.....when we arrive back we find that the chief mover, Captain “Shag” Withers has been sent back to New Zealand in charge of the medically unfit unit and would not be back for some months....so the matter dropped.”

“I have seven Old Boys’ in my section.....the first four and myself have been in the same tent all along and we were very pleased to hear of the game fight that School put up in the rowing race.”

“We have been following up on Hickmott’s scores and rejoice that an Old Boy should bring such credit to the school’s athletic training.”

“We are all about sick of Egypt. It is nothing but sand and flies. But I must not forget the fleas. They are as big as elephants and go about in droves.”

“Every company has different coloured flags at the corners of its lines. Ours are BLUE and BLACK, a circumstance that we probably owe to Major “Bobbie Row”

There are a great number of Old Boys in the force...I ran across a lot while chasing Old Boys for the reunion.”

“Please remember me to Mrs Bevan-Brown and to the Old school good luck.”

Old Boy, W. J. Steven wrote from Gallipoli also and referred to the deaths of both Petre and of Charlie Bain. “They were both killed in front of the spot where I am now writing. It is at the spot where the two lines are closest. They are so close that bombs can be thrown by either side so you can imagine that this is a warm corner.”

Another Old Boy, Lieutenant Gordon Harper DCM wrote to the headmaster in 1915. He had this to say about Petre:

“Petrefaced death with the courage born of a clean heart. He came in company with Cookson to see me the day before he was killed. He and Cookson, with A.C.W. Bain were the three surviving members of a band of 14 mates.....Everyone had been killed or wounded and the next night, Petre and Bain joined the rest whose lives had been spent in the same classrooms and on the same playfields.”



Corporal Robert John Petre

Petre was killed in action 5 June 1915 at Quinns Post. He was just 21.

The Old Boys killed at Gallipoli



TROOPER R. F. BAYLIFFE

[View the photos](#) of 28 of our 32 Old Boys' killed at Gallipoli

WWI - Old Boys killed in action

Click [here](#) for CBHS Old Boys in WWI

WWII - Old Boys killed in action



KENNETH J. L. S. ROBERTS

LANCE N.W. FARNHAM

For ANZAC day 2010, we revisited the contributions of CBHS Old Boys in WWII. Click [here for photos](#) presented at our commemoration.

CBHS Roll of Honour

The wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries featured large numbers of Old Boys from CBHS. It is reported that during the First World War, the Headmaster of the time, Mr C.E Bevan-Brown, was visibly moved at each assembly as he read the names of recent Old Boys who had died in the war. This roll of honour has been revised in consultation with the

memorial being prepared for the Arts Centre, but please contact the school if there are still changes to be made that we are unaware of.

[View the full list](#) of old boys' names of those who have died in these wars.

Cyril F Carey Commemoration

Revisit our ANZAC 2014 Commemoration of Cyril F Carey, an old boy of CBHS (1906-1907). After the Christchurch earthquakes, his tattered scrapbook was found by a demolition crew in the debris of a house and was returned to his family. Lieutenant Cyril Fuller Carey died of wounds on November 7th 1916 at Sling Camp, Salisbury Plain, England. [Read his story here.](#)

CBHS ANZAC Day Prayer

Every year, we read aloud a prayer for the old boys who have lost their lives in the service to their country. You can [find that prayer here](#) for your review and reflection.