
From the Archives

A couple of weeks ago I had the pleasure of visiting Canberra and spending some time in the Australian War Museum undertaking research regarding Past Grammarians involved in overseas conflicts.

Over the past year I have been undertaking research into past students whose names appear on the two Honour Boards recognizing those who served in various conflicts since the Boer War 1899-1902. By and large this research has been successful and, as a consequence, some minor changes will have to be made to the Boards. Names that have been omitted have to be added and the initials of some past students will also have to be amended. The majority of names omitted are those of past students who fought with the British Army in World War One. An example of this is our first Rhodes Scholar, George Hall, who enlisted in the Royal Air Force. My research has also found that eighteen past students received major military awards for acts of bravery in World War One. Only four past students were awarded military honours in World War Two. These awards will also have to be added to the Honour Boards.

As a result of my research I can now confidently write that I have been able to track down every Past Grammarian killed in conflicts. In this respect the help I obtained at the War Museum must be recognized. My last query centered on Alexander Francis Fraser. Mr Rowland's School records show that he was killed in June 1916 but the War Museum was able to show that this was incorrect. Fraser, in fact, had two overseas' tours being wounded on his first tour. It may have been assumed by the School that he had been killed. A consequence of this research will mean that changes will have to be made to the Memorial which stands in the School Quadrangle. The Past Grammarians Association will undertake this task before the end of the year.

During my visit to the Museum I went to the exhibition highlighting the 90th year of the battles around the French town of Pozieres. C.W. Bean, the official war historian at the time, writes that these battles were probably the most horrendous of the entire conflict. Over 23,000 Australian troops were killed over a period of a couple of months including six Past Grammarians. Three of our past students were in the 25th Battalion, a group that experienced a huge loss of life. I was told by the Museum that the Unknown Warrior who lies buried in the Museum in Canberra was taken from that particular battlefield.

While the Grammar School should be justifiably proud of its contribution to national causes not all our past students can be deemed perfect. While in Canberra I made use of their excellent facilities and did some in-depth research into our past students. I came across one student, who shall remain nameless, who deserted during World War One. While training in Australia he came back two days late from leave and was appropriately fined two days' pay. The records show that he took umbrage to this and bit the officer that passed the sentence on him. He then took off and was deemed to have deserted. He was finally found, punished and finished his service without too many problems. Another past student, who will also remain nameless, was given a six month suspended sentence for untoward behaviour. It obviously had a good effect on him because he went overseas and won the Military Medal for bravery on the battlefield.

I would like to conclude that my son, Jonathan, was recently at Pozieres and at the Australian War Memorial situated close by and he rang to say he has some good photographs of graves and memorials recognizing some of our past students. Coupled with the photographs taken at Gallipoli by our Principal, I feel the School could now build a solid photographic archival record of past students who gave their lives for their country.

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