



Unveiling Memorial to Rowing Men

“Strength and Steadfastness”

A huge rough monolith, brought from Blackberry Lane, Conkwell, in its natural state - a symbol of rugged strength and steadfastness - such is the memorial, unveiled on Sunday afternoon, which, possibly, four countless generations, will keep sacred the memory of five members of the Rowing Club, who, in the years of the war, marched into the unknown, never to return, but never to be forgotten.

The stone is mounted by the side of the Rowing Club Bowling Green, and has affixed a bronze tablet, bearing at the head the Club badge and monogram, whilst underneath is the inscription:-

“in memory of the members of the Bradford-on-Avon Rowing Club
Who gave their lives for their country in the Great War 1914 - 1918”

Charles A. Brooks
Stanley A. Couldridge
Leslie L. Long
Alfred L. Selfe
Wilson F. Vennell

The first three were active rowing men, had all won honours for their Club at open regattas. Charlie Brooks, as he was known by all, acted as stroke and in that position led the Club colours to victory in both the Maiden and Junior Fours in 1913 - 1914. His pluck and dash often brought success to the crew behind him, at both open and Club regattas. He fell in characteristic fashion, fighting in the air over Jerusalem with an inferior aeroplane, against a patrol of six German machines.

S. A. Couldridge, an employee at one of the Trowbridge Banks, took a great and active interest in rowing, and won his Maidens at Ross regatta.

Leslie L. Long, the only son of Mr. A. W. Long, an old member of the Club and well known in the town for his great interest in public affairs, was also one of the successful crew at Ross. He was of fine physique, his health, however, was by no means good, and the horror and strain of the war proved too much. He returned to England but only lived for a few months. Alfred Selfe was more closely connected with the organisation of the Club, having acted as assistant secretary. He was a bowls enthusiast, was with others instrumental in the formation of the bowls section, and proved himself an efficient secretary.

Wilson Vennell was but a recent acquisition to the Club when war broke out. He was the only son of Mr, F. J. Vennell, who took such a great interest in the bowls section until his departure to take up a position in South Africa.

With the depletion from their ranks of such gallant comrades, it was but natural that the Club should desire to preserve for posterity the record of "services faithfully rendered", and the matter was placed in the hands of Mr. R. W. Bendle (secretary) and Mr. R. W. Gale, who, acting for the Committee, carried out all the arrangements in such an efficient manner. The unveiling, conducted with simple yet impressive ceremony, took place on Sunday afternoon. A large company of members and friends assembled in the Club grounds near the Old Barton Bridge and the historic Tithe Barn, and surrounding the memorial were the following comrades in arms of those commemorated:

Captain W. J. Wilkins, Captain A. H. Baker, Messrs. H. J. Taylor, W. H. Gale, R. W. Bendle, H. A. Summers, Howard E. Moore, J Selfe, Mundy, Deacon, A. Wilkins and J. Beavan. Mr. Alex Wilson captain of the Club, presided, and read apologies from Mr. John Moulton (Club President), Brig-General Palmer M. P., and Dr. C. E. S. Flemming. At the request of the Captain, the Rev. S. Carter, M. A., recited the introductory prayers, after which Mr. George Brooks, the father of one of the fallen heroes, unveiled the tablet, and then thanked the Committee for the opportunity given him. It was, he said, an honour to his own son and to the other brave lads who fell in the war.

The "Last Post" was sounded by Messrs. Grist and Evans, and following an impressive two minutes silence, a laurel wreath with crossed sculls was placed on the stone by Messrs. H. J. Taylor and W. H. Gale, two ex-service members of the club.

Captain Walter Wilkins said it was no wish of his to re-open old wounds or add to the grief of any of those present who had lost those near and dear to them, taken in the pride of their manhood, in the terrible war they had so recently passed through, but he assured them, on behalf of the members of the Club, that they had their heart-felt sympathy, and as they were joining with them in their grief, so also were they sharing with them in their honour. The memorial would for ever keep green the memory of those it had been a pleasure to claim friendship with, and would be a splendid example to future members of the Club of the unselfish patriotism shown by those true sportsmen who had gone forth into the Beyond. Captain A. H. Baker, an old official of the Club and a personal friend of all those whose names were commemorated, in an eloquent address, paid a tribute to the organising abilities shown by Messrs. Gale and Bendle in arranging for the memorial.

Turning to the monolith, Captain Baker said, "When we look at those names inscribed on the stone, I am sure that our thoughts are too great to express. We knew them all as sportsmen, and when the call came they immediately responded. They fell on different fields. The bones of one lie in the soil of that land hallowed by the very footsteps of our Lord Himself. And others lie in the great ocean where the Roman galleys used to ply and where Richard the Lion-heart sailed on his great adventure. His bones may be alongside those of some of the great Crusaders. Another was of that vast number reported missing, probably killed, and it is just possible that his bones may now lie in Westminster Abbey - the 'Unknown Warrior' -

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symbolising the sacrifices made by the manhood of our great Empire. Another survived to reach home and his remains lie in his native soil. When we think of what sacrifices they made and the spirit in which they died, we have to ask ourselves: Were we worthy of such things? Had we been faithful to the great purpose for which those men gave their all? They had to acknowledge that they had not. They had allowed the spirit of bitterness and rancour to come into their lives. It was for all, reminded continually as they would be by that stone of the bravery and purpose of their brothers, so to live that the great ideals for which they died should be preserved”

The closing prayers were read by the Rev. C. J. Nelson, thus closing a dignified and impressive service, after which the large company filed silently past the memorial.

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