WHITLEY BAY ROCKCLIFF RFC

WAR MEMORIAL DEDICATION

4 November 2023

PALMAM QUI MERUIT FERAT

Welcome

WE LOST THEM. WE'VE FOUND THEM. WE'VE BROUGHT THEM HOME.

TIMINGS FOR TODAY

- **10.45 – Pitch:** Scabbard Match (Colts) – to be preceded by two minutes silence
- **12.15 – Clubhouse:** Presentation of the Scabbard to the winning Colts team
- **12.30 – Clubhouse:** President's Lunch
- **13.30 – Memorial:** Inauguration Ceremony
- **14:00 – Pitch:** British Legion Poppy Sword Ceremony
- **14.15 – Pitch:** Poppy Sword Challenge Match: Whitley Bay Rockcliff 1st XV v Hartlepool Rovers 1st XV
- **16.45 – Clubhouse:** Presentation of the Poppy Sword to the winning 1st XV team

Our project

It is uncertain when the original Whitley Bay Rockcliff RFC war memorial was mislaid, but when a group of members, players and former players began to look in earnest for it a couple of years ago, it definitely couldn't be found. It is unlikely that there was not one. Remembrance of the fallen as we know it developed in an unplanned way following the Great War, as loss on such a scale was unprecedented. The temporary Cenotaph on Whitehall proved hugely popular when it was unveiled in 1919, and a permanent version was erected the following year. Civic authorities, schools, employers and recreational societies across the country joined the movement to commemorate the men they had lost. Indeed, local sports clubs that existed at the time virtually all retain a memorial of some kind, and Rockcliff was almost certainly not an exception. Perhaps it was lost when headquarters changed or were renovated? Whatever the reason, its absence was something that needed to be put right. Initial research uncovered four names, and a group of Whitley Bay Rockcliff members visited the Ypres Salient in 2021 to pay their respects to those four on behalf of the club.

Since then, methodical and dedicated research - spearheaded by Richie Bloomfield, Eric Brooks and Micky Knott - has revealed a total of 14 names of players who fell in the Great War of 1914-18. The researchers painstakingly

analysed team listings in the press in the years before the war, and identified names that were not present when Rugby resumed at the end of the hostilities. Those names were then cross referenced against press reports, casualty lists and rolls of honour to establish the fate of the men. Still further enquiry has established the story of their lives, their Rugby, and the circumstances of their death. The situation was complicated by the fact that, two years before war broke out, a 'Great Secession' occurred: leading members of Rockcliff RFC, for reasons unknown, left the club, and formed another. Monkseaton RFC played for two seasons from their base at the Black Horse, until sport was suspended with the outbreak of hostilities. After the war, those who had seceded returned to Rockcliff. This was possibly the impact of war casualties on playing numbers, or perhaps, in the aftermath of the conflict, whatever differences had led to the schism no longer seemed important. Whichever was the case, the reunited club grew, thrived, and developed into the successful community Rugby Club we are so proud to call Whitley Bay Rockcliff today.

Everyone who has played, coached or watched Rugby knows the fierce camaraderie, friendships and loyalty to each other the game can engender, and Whitley Bay Rockcliff has always been a fine example of a club that does this well. Although it was over a hundred years ago, it is fitting that players and teammates, whose names had been forgotten, are now remembered, celebrated and talked about by their 21st century WBR friends and family.

Primarily, our project has been to reinstate the names from the Great War that have been lost. Indeed, encapsulated inside the memorial is soil collected from the battlefield at the Somme. However, the names of members who fell in World War II are also listed, and the intention is that this memorial is a place to remember everyone who has enjoyed, participated, and contributed to our club, but is sadly no longer with us. We remember them all.

FRANK BASTOW

DIED AT RHEIMS, 27 MAY 1918

> Captain Frank Bastow was killed in action. He was one who if he had been spared would have made his mark in the world
>
> **St. George's Church, Cullercoats, Roll of Honour**

FRANK'S STORY

Frank took a rather unusual route to Whitley Bay. Born on 14th July 1893 in Rheims, France to parents Thomas and Margaret Rose Bastow, he had one brother, Norman. Following the death of his father in 1902 Frank's mother remarried to a Revered Alfred Charles Starling (who was the vicar of a church in Stanwick, near Richmond in North Yorkshire). By the time of the 1911 Census the family home was recorded as 45 Victoria Avenue in Whitley Bay, although Frank was not living there himself, as he was being schooled at the prestigious Dulwich College in London. In 1914 he then gained a Mathematical Scholarship at Clare College, Cambridge, intending to take an engineering degree. As well as his family living in Whitley Bay, Frank also had a sweetheart/ girlfriend, Miss Doris Kate Swan, a nurse, who lived in Mona Terrace, John Street, Cullercoats, and on 14th February 1917 it is known that he was residing at Cliff House in Cullercoats.

Frank was clearly a talented sportsman. In in his final year at Dulwich College he was a member of the Rugby 2nd XV (as well as the cricket 3rd XI, and also winning the school Challenge Cup for Fives). Given Dulwich's reputation for being one of the country's top private schools and also that rugby was one of its core sports, he would have been an excellent player. He is first recorded as playing for Rockcliff Rugby Club towards the end of the 1911/12 season, on Saturday 6th April 1912 in their home fixture vs. West Hartlepool (scoring a try during the match). He also played foe the Rockcliff II team in their Northumberland Challenge Shield final vs. Tynedale II on Saturday 20th April at Northern RFC. Frank also represented Rockcliff RFC during the 1912/13 rugby season. It is known that he played in the New Year's Day (Wednesday 1st January 1913) fixture against Percy Park, and in the sheet away fixture against Monkseaton on Saturday 11th January 1911, both at First Team level. His final known game for the club was on Easter Monday (Monday 24th March) 1913 again against Monkseaton RFC. Given his age at the time of playing for Rockcliff, and the dates on which he played, it is believed that Frank would probably have been visiting his family in Whitley Bay during his school holidays.

When war broke out Frank suspended his university studies and applied for a commission, being gazetted in September 1914 as a 2nd Lieutenant with the Special Reserve Battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment. On 16th In March 1915, Frank, now with the 1st Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, landed in France, initially at Armentieres, but thereafter for the next 12 months they were almost continuously in the trenches in the Ypres Salient in Belgium. In August 1916, the battalion moved onto the Somme battlefield and in September Frank was severely wounded in the elbow at Les Boeufs. This injury kept him back home in the U.K. for eighteen months, however in February 1917 he was promoted to Captain. Though his arm was permanently bent, he returned to France in April 1918, joining the 2nd Battalion of his regiment. On the morning of 27 May 1918, the Germans launched Operation Blucher/Yorck, a full scale offensive on Allied positions on the Chemin des Dames in France, commencing with a bombardment from over 4,000 artillery pieces and followed up by a gas attack. Frank's unit was positioned in front line trenches in front of La Mussette and the battalion War Diary noted, '(about 1am) the enemy opened an intense bombardment with H.E. (high explosives) and gas shells on our positions which lasted for about 4 hours'. At 4.30am the German infantry attacked and inflicted very heavy casualties upon the battalion, which was then forced to withdraw to avoid encirclement. When the battalion had moved into the frontline trenches on 20th May their strength had been 18 officers and 524 men. After this attack all that remained of the battalion were 6 officers and 128 men.

MEMORIAL

Frank's body was never located after 27th May and so he is recorded on the Soissons Memorial in France. Frank is also commemorated on the Whitley Bay Cenotaph, St George's Church, the war memorial at St. John's Church, Stanwick, Yorkshire, and the Clare College War Memorial, Cambridge University.

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OSSIE CHAMBERS

DIED AT KEMMEL, 7 MAY 1916

> Though not blessed with height or weight, as many Rugger men, he possessed rare pluck, and, especially with the Rockcliff Club, he gave many fine performances.
>
> ***Shields Daily News* 11 June 1916**

OSSIE'S STORY

Ossie was born in North Shields on 6th August 1881, the fourth son of Charles Chambers and Isabella Kell of 38 Dockwray Square, North Shields. He married Elizabeth Sparr on 27th November 1901, at St Georges Church in Cullercoats, and the couple lived at 5 Dove Street, Cullercoats with their five children Ethel Maud, Esther, Mary Lizzie, Andrew Taylor and Arthur Oswin. In the 1911 census Ossie is listed as employed as a general labourer.

Ossie started his rugby career playing for Percy Park however he transferred his allegiance to near neighbours Rockcliff at the beginning of the 1900/01 season. He made his debut for his new club's First Team on Saturday 8th September in the home game against Hartlepool Old Boys. Ossie became a regular in the First XV during that season, always playing at half back, and represented the club in the 1900/01 Northumberland County Cup final against Northern at Jesmond on Saturday 23rd March 1901. They won the game 19-0. Almost a year to the day later (on Saturday 22nd March 1902) Ossie played in the following season's Northumberland County Cup final 9-0 victory over fierce rivals Percy Park at Jesmond. His last game for Rockcliff came at the end of the 1903/04 season, on Saturday 16th April 1904 in the home fixture against Carlisle, a game they won 16-0. As well as playing for Rockcliff First XV Ossie also represented the full Northumberland County side during the 1901/02 and 1902/03 seasons. Ossie's career in rugby union ended in July 1904 when he was 'poached' by Kingston Rovers Football Club on Humberside (the predecessor of the Rugby Super League side Hull Kingston Rovers). At the start of the 1899/1900 season this club joined the Northern Union of rugby clubs which had broken away from the English Rugby Union in 1895 following a dispute over the paying of players for 'broken time', time lost at work through playing the sport, and this new union was the foundation of the modern day sport of Rugby League. Although full-time professionalism was still banned, Northern Union clubs were allowed to pay players up to a maximum of six shillings per day for the loss of earnings as a result of playing. The Hull Daily Mail heralded Ossie's signing, reporting that he was, 'expected to prove a valuable addition to their (Kingston Rovers') back division'.

Ossie enlisted at North Shields on 3rd February 1915 into the Northumberland Fusiliers.
He was killed in action on May 7th 1916. His widow was given his outstanding pay of 7s 11d and a £3 war gratuity.

MEMORIAL

Ossie is remembered on the War Memorial at St George's Church, and the Memorial Plaque at Percy Park RFC.

He is buried at Kemmel Chateau Military Cemetery, Grave N.13.

RICHARD CHRISTOPHER

DIED AT ST. QUENTIN CANAL, 29 SEPTEMBER 1918

> A shell struck the nose of the tank in which the Lieutenant was serving, and exploded, killing him instantly
>
> ***Whitley Seaside Chronicle* 12 October 1918**

RICHARD'S STORY

Richard was born in 1893 in Co. Durham but later moved to Whitley Bay, initially living at 50 North Parade and then 'Hendersyde', Marine, Drive, Monkseaton where he resided with his parents, Richard and Emma, his three sisters, Kathleen, Norah and Emmie, and his brother John. He was a pupil at Park School in Whitley Bay before moving in 1907 to the Royal Grammar School in Newcastle. Upon leaving school he was employed as a clerk in a shipping office.

Records have been found which showed that Richard played club rugby for Rockcliff Rugby Club during the 1912/13 and 1913/14 seasons, and that he played in the forwards, probably in the second row. His last known game of rugby for the club was on Saturday 7th March 1914 when he played for Rockcliff II team against Tynedale II's in the semi-final of the Northumberland Second Teams Cup. The team lost the match 24-0.

Richard enlisted in the 27th Battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers where he was promoted to the rank of Sergeant. On 29th October 1916 he was promoted again, this time becoming an officer, holding the rank of Second Lieutenant in the Machine Gun Corps (Heavy Section). The Heavy Section split from the Machine Gun Corps in July 1917 to form the Tank Corps, and Richard moved into that Corps, joining the 16th Battalion. He was further promoted to the rank of Lieutenant whilst with the Tank Corps.

On Sunday 29th September 1918 the Battle of St. Quentin Canal commenced. This was a pivotal battle in the last two months of the war, which saw the Allied armies on the offensive, attacking the highly fortified German Hindenburg Line. The 16th Battalion of the Tank Corps were attached to 3rd Australian Division in the Templeux-le-Guerard - Ronssoy area of Northern France, their role being to assist and protect the infantry as they attacked very strong German positions. At Zero Hour, and in dense fog, the tanks picked up the infantry and moved forward, only to come under immediate heavy fire before actually reaching their start line. As the attack progressed all of the assaulting tanks were eventually put out of action, with the battalion having two officers and twenty one men killed, forty seven officers and men wounded, and 17 officers and men missing. At the age of twenty five, Richard was one of the casualties sustained during this action. He was buried in Unicorn Cemetery, Vendhuille not far from where he fell in action, along with 128 other soldiers who died on that day, including 18 of his colleagues from the 16th battalion of the Tank Corps.

MEMORIAL

Richard is recorded on the 1914-1918 Park School Plaque (which is currently sited in Marine Park First School, Whitley Bay); the Whitley Bay Cenotaph; and in the Newcastle Royal Grammar School 1914-1918 Book of Remembrance

He is buried at Unicorn Cemetery, Vendhuille Grave IV. B. 17.

FREDERICK GIBBON

DIED AT CAMBRAI, 8 OCTOBER 1918

> For us, and for the World, their death is full of promise of a better day
>
> **Rev. Overton, Trinity Methodist Church, Whitley Bay, dedicating the memorial to Frederick and comrades**

FREDERICK'S STORY

Frederick was born on 26th January 1891 in Whitley Bay and was the son of John George and Minnie Gibbon of 13 Esplanade Avenue, Whitley Bay. He had one sister, Eleanor. He was a pupil at Whitehead's Bede College in Whitley Bay and subsequently attended Dame Allan's Endowed School in Newcastle. He was also a member of the Whitley Bay Trinity Methodist Church. Upon finishing his education Frederick found work as a railway clerk in the Estate Agent's Office of the North East Railway Company in Newcastle.

Records have been found which show that Frederick played rugby for Rockcliff Rugby Club during the 1912/13 and 1913/14 seasons, playing in the forwards. His last known game of rugby for the club was on Saturday 7th March 1914 when he represented Rockcliff III team in an away fixture against Tyneside Rovers II's (from Hexham) in the First Round of the Northumberland Third Teams Cup. Rockcliff lost the game 14-0.

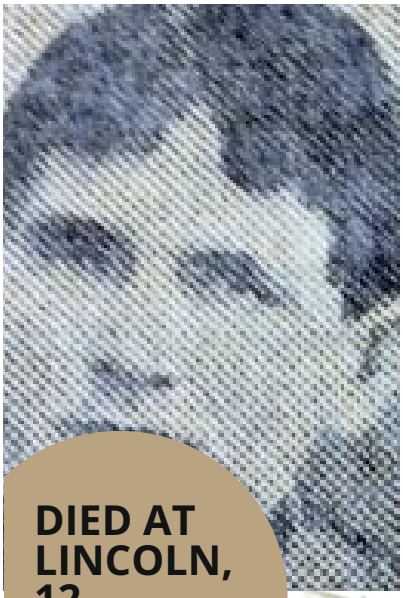
Frederick enlisted into the 16th Battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers on 11th September 1914 and landed in France on 22nd November 1915. He was promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal in July 1916 and served continuously on the Western Front for almost two years before being recommended for Officer training in late August 1917, and returning to the U.K. Having completed his training, on 18th December 1917 Frederick was promoted to the officer rank of Second Lieutenant and he was posted to 12th /13th Northumberland Fusiliers, returning back to active service on the Western Front.

On Tuesday 8th October 1918 the 12th/13th Northumberland Fusiliers attacked enemy positions at Walincourt, France as part of the general Allied advance upon the German Hindenburg Line. The battalion came under heavy machine gun fire during the attack and Frederick was one of eight members of his battalion who died on that day, and whose body has not subsequently been found. His name is recorded on the Vis-en-Artois Memorial along with 307 other soldiers who died that same day.

MEMORIAL

Frederick is recorded on the 1914-18 Stained Glass Window at St. John's Methodist Church, Whitley Bay; on the Parish Plaque in St Paul's Church, Whitley Bay; on the Whitley Bay Cenotaph; and on the North Eastern Railway Memorial at York. He is named on the Vis-en-Artois Memorial to the Missing, Panel 3.

THOMAS JOBLING



DIED AT LINCOLN, 12 DECEMBER 1915

> Thomas was more particularly known in swimming circles, and for some years was hon. Sec. to the Rockcliff Swimming Club, in the fortunes of which natatorial association he always took a keen interest
>
> ***Whitley Seaside Chronicle,*** **18 December 1915**

THOMAS'S STORY

Thomas was born in 1889 at Swalwell, Gateshead to parents Nicholson and Isabella Jobling. He had one sister, Lilian, and one brother, John William. Nothing is known about his education however he subsequently found work as a 'photographer operator'. By 1911 Thomas was living at 'Rivelin, South Parade, Whitley Bay and in 1913 he was married to Annie Symington in the Tynemouth Registration District. He became the father to two girls, Lilian and Dorothy. Thomas was clearly well established in Whitley Bay as he was a member of the United Methodist Church in Margaret Road, and also the Honorary Secretary of the Rockcliff Swimming Club.

Records have been found which show that Thomas played rugby at Rockcliff Rugby Club during the 1912/13 and 1913/14 seasons, mainly in the lower 3rd and 3A teams (although he did play for the club II team on 13/12/1913) and he appears to have been a forward. His last known game for the club was on Saturday 14th February 1914 when he played for Rockcliff 3A team in their away match against Rutherford College on the North Road in Newcastle.

There is very little evidence available to shed any light on Thomas's military service during WW1 however he is recorded as serving as a Corporal with the 2nd/1st Battalion of the Northern Cyclist Battalion (N.C.B.). Formed in 1908 the Northern Cyclist Battalion was a bicycle infantry battalion of the Territorial Force, part of the British Army. It served solely in the United Kingdom throughout the First World War. The 2nd/1st Battalion was formed in late 1914 as a second line unit. By 1916 it was based at Skegness and in June 1918 was at Burton Constable as part of the Humber Garrison. Although the Northern Cyclist Battalions themselves never left the U.K. after 1st July 1916 a draft from the NCB was sent to the Western Front to supplement the Tyneside Scottish battalions of the Northumberland Fusiliers.

As Thomas is recorded as having died, aged twenty six, on Sunday 12th December 1915 this probably means that he did not serve overseas. The cause of death was given as 'Pleurisy and Empyon' (probably empyema) at the 4th Northern General Hospital in Lincoln. Thomas was returned to his home town and buried in St. Paul's Church graveyard in Whitley Bay on Wednesday 15th December 1915 in a full military ceremony, his coffin being carried by members of his battalion.

MEMORIAL

Thomas's grave can be seen in St Paul's churchyard in Whitley Bay, he is also remembered on the Whitley Bay Cenotaph. His name was engraved into an Oak remembrance table and stained glass window at St Margaret's Methodist Church in Whitley Bay, until the church was demolished in 1989.

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EDWIN LAIDLOW

DIED AT YPRES, 1 NOVEMBER 1914

> Edwin was a member of Rockcliff Rugby Football Club. His death will be deeply mourned at the coast.
>
> ***Shields Daily News* 13 November 1914**

EDWIN'S STORY

Edwin lived with his parents at 42 Marine Avenue. Before the war he had been a Commercial Traveller (a travelling salesman) with a London-based firm.

Records have been found showing that Edwin played for Rockcliff II team as a forward during the 1913/14 rugby season, including playing on Saturday 25th October 1913 in a home fixture against Gosforth Nomads. Edwin's last game for the club came on Saturday 7th March 1914 when he played in the Northumberland Second Teams Cup for the club II Team away against Tynedale at Hexham, losing 24-0. In this match he played alongside his brother, Charles, who played primarily for the club First team also as a forward.

Edwin was in London when the war broke out, and was eager to enlist straight away. He tried the Engineers, then the Flying Corps, both of whom were over subscribed. He eventually was accepted into the London Scottish regiment 'on account of his being a North countryman'. He enlisted on 3rd September 1914 and left Southampton for France on the 15th. The London Scottish were packed onto 34 London Buses and taken to the front.

The *Shields Daily News* initially reported, under the headline 'Rockcliff Footballer Killed' that Edwin's brother Charles had been killed in action. The *Newcastle Journal* corrected this error, reporting: 'Mr W. Laidlow, of Marine Avenue, Whitley Bay, informs us that it is his son Edwin, and not Charles, who is reported to have been killed in the charge of the London Scottish'.

Edwin was killed during the First Battle of Ypres (during the 'Race to the Sea'), on 1st November 1914. Having initially been wounded, he was stretchered to the safety of a haystack, which was subsequently shelled, and Edwin died of shrapnel wounds. The London Scottish were the first battalion of volunteers to be used in WWI. On their initial deployment in Ypres they were tasked with digging trenches, but at 8am on 31st October a breech in the allied lines saw them sent to defend Messines Ridge. Three German attacks were repelled, and the London Scottish lost 394 of their 700 men, Edwin being one of them, during their short time on the Ridge. However, their actions inflicted heavy losses on the Germans, and prevented them from taking Ypres, which resulted in the salient, and the maintenance of Ypres as a railhead for the rest of the war.

He was a keen motorcyclist and a member of Tynemouth Rowing Club, as well as Rockcliff RFC.

MEMORIAL

Edwin was the first man from Whitley Bay to be killed in the Great War. He is remembered on the Cenotaph in Whitley Bay, and Plaques at St Paul's Church and Tynemouth Rowing Club. His body was not recovered and his name is on the Menin Gate, Panel 54.

Edwin's brother, Charles, survived the war and returned to play again for Rockcliff once peacetime resumed. He is in the 1911-12 season team photograph, above the fireplace in the back room of the clubhouse.

ROBERT MEIKLE

DIED AT THE SOMME, 15 SEPTEMBER 1916

> Though native of North Shields, Lieut. Meikle has been for some time a resident, and was well known and respected on the seaside
>
> ***Shields Daily News* 26 September 1916**

ROBERT'S STORY

Robert was born at 11 Railway Terrace, in Chirton, but by the time of the war he had moved, with his parents, to 'Gershom', a house at 93 Marine Avenue in Whitley Bay. The report of his death in the Whitley Seaside Chronicle remarked that: 'though native of North Shields, Lieut. Meikle has been for some time a resident, and was well known and respected on the seaside'.

Robert represented Rockcliff Rugby Club throughout the 1912/13 season playing mainly for the First Team, however on occasions he did turn out for the club's Second Team, playing as a forward for both sides. He began the 1913/14 season by again turning out for Rockcliff I team on Saturday 20th September in their home match against Carlisle, and thereafter was a regular in that side until his final appearance for the club, on Saturday 1st November 1913 at home against Winlaton Vulcans. They lost the match 6-3.

Robert worked as an insurance clerk at the Allied Assurance Company in Newcastle. He was a keen sportsman, being a member of Whitley Bay Golf Club as well as Rockcliff RFC. He was also a cyclist, and enlisted on 1 September 1914 into the Northern Cyclists battalion. As the war went on, the ranks of cyclist battalions were depleted as cyclists were required to serve in other ranks. Robert received his commission in the DLI in May 1915, and served with them at the Somme. Robert died in the opening moments of the Battle of Flers-Courcelette. This was the first battle in which tanks were deployed, and a tank was with the 2nd Battalion of the DLI as they attempted to take the 'Quadrilateral' – a German trench system. It was in this attack that Robert was killed. The next day, 16th September 1916 was the bloodiest day in the history of the DLI, with 412 soldiers killed. The Quadrilateral was finally captured on 18th September.

MEMORIAL

Robert's older brother William also served in WWI, and was also killed in action in August 1918. Robert is remembered on their family memorial at Preston Cemetery, the plaque at Whitley Bay Golf Club and the Cenotaph in Whitley Bay. He is buried at the Guard's Cemetery, Lesboeufs, XII. C. 6.

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LUCIEN PENTHER

DIED AT LENHARREE, 7 SEPTEMBER 1914

> Great regret will be felt in Rugby circles generally at the death of Mr L Penther, the young Frenchman who played in the forward line of the Monkseaton RFC since its formation
>
> ***Shields Daily News* 26 September 1914**

LUCIEN'S STORY

Lucien was born on 10th April 1888 in Morlaix, in the Breton department of Finistère, to parents Jean and Marie Penther. He had two brothers, Charles and Marcel. Nothing is known regarding Lucien's education, nor how he came to be living in the Whitley Bay area in 1912, however as he is recorded on a plaque at the 1914-18 Newcastle Commercial Exchange monument at the Guildhall on Newcastle Quayside it is believed that he was probably involved in the import/export trade.

Lucien never represented Rockcliff Rugby Club. He only played for the newly formed and short lived Monkseaton Rugby Club, from its formation and through its inaugural season (1912/13), to virtually the end of its brief existence at the rear of the 1913/14 season. He represented his club mainly at First Team level although on occasions, during the 1913/14 season, did play for their Second Team. He was reported as being, 'a very fine forward'. His last game for Monkseaton Rugby Club was on Saturday 28th February 1914 when he played for their Second Team in their home tie against Old Novocastrians II in a Northumberland Second Teams Cup First Round tie.

At the outbreak of the First World War Lucien returned to France and enlisted as a Private in the 19th Regiment D'Infanterie . He was very soon in action at the front line at Lenharrée (a town 150km due east of Paris), helping defend his homeland against the invading German Army in what became known as The First Battle of the Marne. On 7th September 1914 Lucien was killed during the battle. His death was actually witnessed by his brother Charles, who was a sergeant in the same regiment, and his testimony was subsequently recorded in a book called, *Les Coquelicots de la Marne* (The Poppies of the Marne):

'At 1600 hours a shell exploded in a tree at Lenharrée killing eleven soldiers, one of whom was my brother Lucien. I will never forget the sight in this corner of the battlefield and I will not attempt to describe the crimson carnage which I saw. From that point on, there are large gaps in my recollections. I tried to bury my brother, and as evening fell I walked about in this blood-soaked area with a lantern, unable to tear myself away from it. Soldiers and officers who came to make me put out my lantern (for it seemed I was being shot at) were unable to understand what I was doing, in spite of my explanations, and I did not understand why they could not understand! In the end they got some of the chaps from my section to lead me back to the rear area, and I staggered through Lenharrée in flames, climbing over burning structures or losing myself in the dark.

The Official Journal of the French Republic, published in 1921, recorded Lucien as being an:

Excellent soldier, very brave and very courageous. Participated with the regiment in all the fierce battles at the start of the campaign. He was consistently noticed for his enthusiasm, his calm and his great disregard of danger. On the 7 September 1914, at Lenharrée, was gloriously killed at the head of a handful of men that he had taken command of, with whom he valiantly resisted in a position of fierce bombardment.

MEMORIAL

Lucien was buried in the Fère-Champenoise National Cemetery, which holds the remains of around 6000 soldiers who died for France, mainly in the first Battle of the Marne (September 1914). He is also recorded on Le Monument des Bretons at Lenharree, France and on the 1914/18 Plaque and the 1914/18 Commercial Exchange Monument at the Newcastle Guildhall.

ERNEST PHILLIPS

DIED AT THE SOMME, 23 AUGUST 1918

> True love by life, true love by death is tried;
> Live thou for England, we for England died'
>
> **Dedication ceremony programme of the Park School memorial, to Ernest and comrades**

ERNEST'S STORY

Ernest was born in 1896 in Whitley Bay to William and Annie Phillips. He had five siblings; two brothers, John William and Norman; and three sisters Elizabeth, Catherine and Sarah. The family are recorded as living at several addresses at the Coast, including 72 Belford Terrace, North Shields and 21 Clifton Terrace, Whitley Bay, and at the time of his death in August 1918 Ernest's address was known to be Station House, Station Road, Whitley Bay. He attended Park School in Whitley Bay. In October 1912 Ernest found employment with the North Eastern Railway as a 'lad platform porter' at Percy Main Station.

Ernest does not appear to have been a regular rugby player, as the only evidence of him representing Rockcliff Rugby Club was found on 28th February 1914, when he played for the 3A team in an away match against the Royal Grammar School II team. One possible explanation for this could have been his young age, being aged only 17 at the beginning of the 1913/14 rugby season.

The exact date of Ernest's enlistment into the army is unknown however it is known that he arrived in France on active service on 22nd November 1915 with the 16th Battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers. He was subsequently transferred to the 12th Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers and finally into the 1st Battalion of the same Regiment, whom he found himself on active service with in August 1918. On the 21st of that month the Allied armies commenced the Second Battle of the Somme, and the 1st Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers went into action attacking near the Bapaume Arras railway in Northern France. The battalion remained in action over the following two days and, on 23rd August they attacked an objective South of Gommecourt. This attack proved to be successful as the objective was gained and around 250 German prisoners were taken. The battalion did incur 44 fatalities however, one of whom was Ernest, and he is amongst the nineteen men from 1st Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers who are buried at Railway Cutting Cemetery, Courcelles-le-Comte.

MEMORIAL

Ernest was a Park School Boy (along with many of his Rockcliff teammates) and is remembered on the War Memorial there (now in Marine Park First School). He is also recorded on the Whitley Bay cenotaph and the NER Memorial in York. He is buried, perhaps appropriately given his NER career, at Railway Cutting Cemetery, Courcelles, Grave A. 66.

ARTHUR ROBINSON

DIED AT THE SOMME, 18 AUGUST 1916

> One of the earliest pupils at the Park Schools and while there gained a scholarship which enabled him to finish his education at the Royal Grammar School... He was a playing member of Rockcliff... by whom he was always highly esteemed.
>
> ***Whitley Seaside Chronicle* 23 December 1916**

ARTHUR'S STORY

Arthur was born in 1892, and lived with his parents at 20 Windsor Gardens in Monkseaton. He was one of the first pupils at the Park School in Whitley Bay (now Marine Park First School), and gained a scholarship to the Royal Grammar School in Newcastle. Before the War he worked as a clerk for the North Eastern Railway at their offices in Newcastle.

Arthur turned out regularly for Rockcliff throughout the 1912/13 and 1913/14 rugby seasons, representing both the III Team, but predominantly the II team during this time. He mainly played as a half-back. His last two games for the club came on Saturday 28th February 1914, playing for Rockcliff II team vs. Northern at home in the First Round of the Northumberland Second Teams Cup, a game Rockcliff won 5-3; and finally for the same team the following week, on Saturday 7th March 1914, vs. Tynedale away at Dene Park, Hexham in the Semi Final of the same competition, Rockcliff bowing out with a 24-0 defeat.

Arthur enlisted with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders on 10th November 1915. After training in Edinburgh, he left for France on 23rd April 1916, to join the huge British Offensive at the Somme.

The 2nd Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were part of the 33rd Division, who were charged with taking High Wood, which crowned a Ridge about 30m high, behind the German 2nd line. The attack on the 18th August was a disaster. The 33rd Division advance with two large flame-throwers, pipe-pushers (devices to force a pipe filled with explosives underground, parallel with the surface, to create an opening to attack when the explosives were detonated), and Livens Projectors (a mortar weapon which hurled drums of flammable liquid or gas) to deliver 30 oil drums. The flame throwers failed and the projectors were buried by British artillery-fire which fell short; the pipe pushers hit tree roots in the wood and one was deflected backwards, blowing a crater into the trench line of the attacking battalions. High Wood was not captured until September 1916, during the subsequent Battle of Flers-Courcelette.

It was in this chaos that Arthur was killed. His body was never recovered.

MEMORIAL

Arthur is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing (Pier and Face 15 A and 16 C), and at Whitley Bay Cenotaph, the Park School plaque(now in Marine Park First School), St John's Methodist Church, and the NER Memorial in York.

THOMAS ROGERSON

DIED AT THE SOMME, 1 JULY 1916

> Rogerson, Tom W, - Sgt. Tyneside Scottish. Killed 1st July 1916. 39, Cambridge Avenue, Whitley Bay.
>
> ***Whitley Seaside Chronicle***
> **Roll of Honour 1914-18**

THOMAS'S STORY

Thomas was born in 1894 at Newcastle-upon-Tyne to parents Thomas and Margaret. He had an older sister, Annie, and in 1911 the family were living at 8 Victoria Terrace in Whitley Bay. They subsequently moved to 39 Cambridge Avenue in the town. Thomas was educated at Park School in Whitley Bay and upon leaving found work as a junior clerk for a coal exporter.

Records show that Thomas played for Rockcliff Rugby Club during the 1912/13 and 1913/14 seasons, mainly representing the Second Team. He appears to have played in the forwards. Thomas's last match for Rockcliff was playing away for the Second Team against Tynedale II's in the semi-final of the Northumberland Second Teams Cup, a match they lost 24-0.

The exact date that Thomas enlisted into the British Army is unknown, however he was posted to 21st Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers (better known as the 2nd Tyneside Scottish). This battalion, one of Lord Kitchener's 'New Army', made up of citizen volunteers, was formed at Newcastle on 26th October 1914, by the Lord Mayor and City. It landed in France in January 1916.

On 1st July 1916 Thomas held the rank of Lance Sergeant, and at 7.30am that day, ' Zero Hour', he and his battalion left their trenches and attacked strongly fortified German positions at La Boiselle on the opening day of what was to become forever known as The Battle of The Somme. He was one of 131 men from his battalion who were killed that day, contributing to a total of almost 60,000 British casualties on the opening day of the campaign. Each of the four battalions of the Brigade to which the 21st Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers belonged to suffered an average of 600 casualties, more than any other brigade in the battle.

MEMORIAL

Thomas's body was never recovered and so his name is one of the 72331 names recorded on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme (Pier and Face 10B, 11B, and 12B). Thomas is also recorded on the Park School Plaque (currently sited at Marine Park First School in Whitley Bay), and the Whitley Bay Cenotaph.

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WALTER PLATTEN

DIED AT VERMELLES, 10 SEPTEMBER 1916

> Your son was a most promising young officer and remarkable for his keenness
>
> **Letter of condolence to Walter's parents**

WALTER'S STORY

Walter was born at Newcastle-upon-Tyne on 18th October 1894 to parents Walter and Alice Platten. He had four sisters, Elizabeth, Alice, Eva and Dora, and one brother, John. At the time of his birth the family was living at 69 Cleveland Road in North Shields however by 1911 they had moved to 'Burnham', Holywell Avenue, Whitley Bay. Walter was educated at Park School in the town and upon finishing his education he found employment as a shipbroker's clerk with Messrs. R.B. Avery, on Newcastle Quayside.

Walter represented the short lived Monkseaton Rugby Club during its second season in 1913/14, playing for their Second Team. His last game was at home against Old Novocastrians II in the Northumberland Second Teams Cup First Round on Saturday 28th February 1914.

On 18th November 1912 Walter enlisted in the Territorial Army, joining the Tyne Electrical Engineers branch of the Royal Engineers, and on 31st July 1914, with war looming, he was called up for service. On 10th June 1915 he applied and was accepted for a temporary commission in the regular army (for the duration of the war), and he was appointed as a Second Lieutenant in the 16th (Service) Battalion of the King's (Liverpool) Regiment on 7th July 1915. He was subsequently attached to South Wales Borderers' 14th Battalion and then moved on attachment to the 19th Battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers on 1st August 1916. Walter arrived on the Western Front for the first time later that month, and on the night of 9th-10th September he found himself in front line trenches at Loos in Northern France. The battalion War Diary for that night recorded: 'Aerial torpedoes were very frequent & on the night of 9th sec. Lt. W.H. Platten ('A' Coy) was killed. This was his first night on duty in the trenches, this loss was most unfortunate.' Walter's parents subsequently received a letter from an officer in his battalion, B.L. Jones who as well as offering his condolences to them, offered an insight into how their son had died, '... Your son was a most promising young officer and remarkable for his keenness. He was visiting sentries..... when he was killed by an aerial torpedo, which seems to have burst right in the trench. A sergeant was killed at the same time and three men wounded. Your son, by all accounts died so soon after being hit that I do not think he suffered much.'

MEMORIAL

Walter is buried at Vermelles British Cemetery in France, near to where he was killed. His grave is II. C. 20. He is also commemorated on the Whitley Bay Cenotaph, the 1914-1918 Park School Plaque (now in Marine Park First School in Whitley Bay), the 1914-1918 Painting and Plaque in St. Edward's R.C. Church, Whitley Bay, and the 1914-1918 Plaque at Whitley Bay Golf Club.

PATTISON READY RIDLEY

DIED AT ARRAS, 3 MAY 1917

> This officer led his party with great dash, shooting one German and capturing another on entering the trench. He showed considerable coolness and ability in the attack and in organising the defence of the trench
>
> **L*ondon Gazette* report on Reay receiving the Military Cross, February 1917**

REAY'S STORY

Although he was given two forenames research seems to indicate that Pattison Ridley was known by his middle name of Reay, certainly when playing rugby at Rockcliff Rugby Club. Reay was born in 1893 at Heworth, Gateshead to parents Pattison and Elizabeth Ridley. The family subsequently moved to 20 Linden Terrace in Whitley Bay (and were living there from at least 1911). Reay had one brother, Alfred, who coincidentally also played rugby for Rockcliff. He was educated at Park School in Whitley Bay before moving to the Royal Grammar School in Newcastle. Upon leaving school he found employment as an apprentice naval architect. He was also a member of the Trinity Wesleyan Church in Whitley Bay.

Records have been found showing that Reay played rugby for Rockcliff Rugby Club during the 1912/13 and 1913/14 seasons, and during the latter season he was a regular in the First team. His last known match for the club was on Saturday 28th February 1914 when he played in the 14-5 defeat to local rivals Percy Park in the First Round of the Northumberland Senior Cup. It is believed that Reay was a pre-war member of the Northern Cyclist Battalion (N.C.B.) a Territorial Force made up of volunteers (as he was posthumously awarded the Territorial Force War Medal, the least common of the WW1 Campaign medals, which indicates this), and that he saw active service from August 1914. A report found in the *Newcastle Daily Journal* dated 19th August 1914 corroborates this fact. It is known that Reay was promoted to the rank of Temporary Corporal with the N.C.B. and also that he was promoted to the officer rank of Lieutenant whilst still serving in the same battalion. At some point thereafter he was attached to the 2nd/5th Battalion of the Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment, and it was whilst serving on this attachment that he was awarded the Military Cross for his actions on the evening of 26th/27th February 1917. The citation for this reads, 'On the evening of 26th/27th February 1917, he was in charge of three officers' patrols, of one officer and one hundred and fifty ranks, detailed to rush Orchard Valley from Gudgeon Trench. Lieutenant Ridley was responsible for maintaining the direction, marching on a compass bearing for five hundred yards across unknown and difficult country. This officer led his party with great dash, shooting one German and capturing another on entering the trench. He showed considerable coolness and ability in the attack and in organising the defence of the trench.' (*London Gazette* 30023 17 April 1917). In late April and early May 1917 Reay was still with this unit on the Western Front in Northern France, which was engaged in the Arras Offensive. At 3.45am on 3rd May the 2nd/5th Battalion took part on the opening day of The Battle of Bullecourt, moving forward to attack German Hindenburg line defensive positions to the South East of Arras The battalion came under very heavy shell, rifle and machine gun fire from the outset and sustained very heavy casualties during the attack. Reay was reported 'missing believed killed in action' on that day and his body was never found.

MEMORIAL

Reay is commemorated in the Royal Grammar School's Book of Remembrance, the Whitley Bay Cenotaph, and the Roll of Honour at the Park School (now Marine Park First School). His name was featured in a stained glass window commemorating the Northern Cyclists Battalion at St Barnabas Church in Jesmond, until it was demolished in 1977. His name featured in a similar window at Trinity Wesleyan Church in Whitley Bay, until it was destroyed by bombing in 1940. His name appears on the Arras Memorial to the Missing, Bay 10.

JOHN ROUTLEDGE

DIED AT YPRES, 23 SEPTEMBER 1917

> Lieutenant John Frederick Routledge, a well known Rugby footballer in the North of England, has been killed in action… he played in the Blaydon, Rockcliffe and Old Novocastrian Rugby teams before the war
>
> ***Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer,* 04 October 1917**

JOHN'S STORY

John was born in 1884 at Blyth, Northumberland to parents John and Elizabeth Routledge. He had four brothers, Barras, Arthur, James and Thomas, and a sister, Patience. Having originally lived in Blyth the family moved to Whitley Bay, and in 1901 were living at 1 Park Terrace in the town. He was educated at St. Oswald's College, Tynemouth, the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle and also at the Bedford County School in Bedfordshire. His father, John Routledge Snr., who had been a Northumberland County Councillor, was a Wine & Spirit Merchant and it appears John Jnr. followed into his father's line of work, as the 1901 Census showed him working as a, 'wine & spirit merchant (worker)' On 1st February 1917 John married Miss Evelyn Dawe at the Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in Tring, Hertfordshire. The couple honeymooned in Brighton.

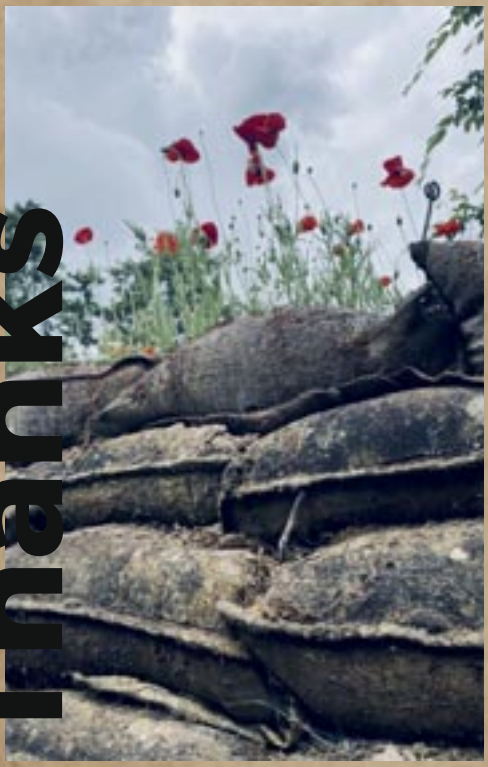
John was clearly a very good rugby player. Whilst at the Royal Grammar School in Newcastle he represented the First XV during the 1896/7 season. He also represented Rockcliff during the 1903/04 season; Blaydon during the 1904/5 season; and Old Novocastrians between November 1907 and February 1912; all at first team level. He played in the fullback and centre positions. When news of his death was made public in October 1917 the press reports about him clearly reflected his rugby prowess and reputation: 'widely known in North of England rugby circles' (*Newcastle Daily Journal*); 'well-known North County rugby player' (*Daily Mirror*); 'a prominent North of England rugby footballer' (*Sunderland Daily Echo*); and 'a well known rugby footballer in the North of England' (*Yorkshire Post*). The last date that a record can be found of John representing Rockcliff Rugby club is Friday 12th February 1904, when he was shown in the Newcastle Daily Chronicle as being selected for the Second Team away fixture against Winlaton Vulcans the following day. It is also believed that two of John's brothers, Barras and Arthur, also played rugby for Rockcliff during the 1903/4 season, and a team sheet published in the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* on Saturday 3rd October 1903 shows all three selected for the First Team away match against Tudhoe at Spennymoor.

John seems to have had a varied military career during WW1. He initially enlisted as a Private in the Duke of Lancaster's Yeomanry however he later underwent officer training and in March 1915 he was appointed a Lieutenant with the 13th Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers. At some point thereafter he served with the Cameroon Expeditionary Force in an African campaign that was particularly arduous, as the troops had to contend with thick bush, wide rivers, swamps and rugged and hilly country, and very stiff enemy resistance. The campaign ended when German forces surrendered in February 1916. John was subsequently transferred to 1st Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers and on 20th May 1917 he arrived on the Western Front in Northern France. By 22nd September 1917 the battalion had moved North to Flanders and were holding a front line position in shell craters in the Ypres Salient (West of the Hanebeek). At 6am the following day the battalion came under heavy shell fire and sustained 18 casualties. Thereafter the situation quieted down however at 11.30am the battalion war diary recorded, 'Lt. J.F. Routledge commanding Z Company was sniped and died before reaching the R.A.P. (Regimental Aid Post) in the vicinity of which he was buried'. The area where John's body was buried was the scene of further fighting before the Armistice in November 1918 and his grave and body could not be located once peace returned.

MEMORIAL

He is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial in Belgium, Panel 66-68. He is also commemorated on the Newcastle Royal Grammar School Book of Remembrance and Organ, and the Bedford County School Memorial in the Church of St. Mary & St. Helen, Elstow, Bedfordshire.

Thanks



WE LOST THEM. WE'VE FOUND THEM. WE'VE BROUGHT THEM HOME.

- To Richie Bloomfield and Eric Brooks for their research, not only on this project, but on the overall history of the club, which has often been neglected.
- To Shaun Mullarkey for his work on the Poppy Sword Challenge, and links between Whitley Bay Rockcliff RFC and the Royal British Legion.
- To Nigel Jamieson, for his work in designing and constructing the memorial, and to Andy McMullen for his assistance.
- To Andy Partis, for designing and sourcing the plaque, in Honister slate, direct from Honister mine.
- To Micky Knott for compiling this commemorative programme.
- To the Northumbria World War One Commemoration Project, whose database was a valuable research tool, and was the source for some of the images used in this programme. The database contains information on over 4000 men and women from modern North Tyneside who were casualties of the Great War.
- To all the members of the Rockcliff History Society, whose enthusiasm and engagement has driven this project forward.
- To the players and members of Rockcliff and Monkseaton Rugby Football Clubs, who gave their lives in the service of their country. We lost you. We've found you. We've brought you home.

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