

## Farnhill Volunteers and the WW1 Poets – 4

### Fathers and Sons – Common Form by Rudyard Kipling

We don't know what Albert Rhodes thought when his step-son Cecil volunteered to serve in the Army during WW1 but we do know quite a bit about how he felt when his younger son Norman was conscripted, early in 1917.

He was not happy about it. Not happy at all.

Perhaps feeling that he had already given up one boy and unwilling to risk another, Albert appealed to a local Military Tribunal for an exemption on his son's behalf; but this appeal was turned down, and Norman was ordered to join the Army.

Like the Rhodes family, the chairman of the tribunal that considered the case was also a Farnhill man, the Rural District Councillor George Bottomley and, because of his position on the tribunal, Albert Rhodes subsequently held Bottomley personally responsible for his son's safety. Over the following months he repeatedly threatened Bottomley with dire consequences if Norman came to any harm, including saying that he was not afraid to die and would "*do Bottomley in*" and that he would "*swing for him*" if his boy was sent to face winter in the trenches.

On January 3rd 1918 Albert received a letter from Norman saying that he was going to be shipped over to France within a very few days. Later that day Albert accosted Bottomley in the street, shouting:

*"I shall go [expletive deleted] mad. I give you fair warning that I will have my revenge. My son would never have joined the army if he hadn't been sent; you are the man that sent him and I shall hold you personally responsible. The Tribunal is, like the war, a [expletive deleted] fraud."*

The police were called, Albert Rhodes was arrested, and appeared before Skipton Magistrates on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1918. He admitted threatening Mr. Bottomley, but persisted in voicing his belief that he was fully justified. He took some persuading to agree to cease troubling Mr. Bottomley in the future, but was eventually bound over to keep the peace for six months with a personal surety of £50 and surety of £25 from another person.

View the full news report of Albert Rhodes' feud with George Bottomley -- [Craven Herald, 18th January 1918](#)

The writer Rudyard Kipling could not have been more of a contrast with Albert Rhodes.

Rudyard Kipling had little but scorn for those men he saw as shirking their duty. Early in 1915 he wrote:

*This much we can realise, even though we are so close to it, the old safe instinct saves us from triumph and exultation. But what will be the position in years to come of the young man who has deliberately elected to outcaste himself from this all-embracing brotherhood? What of his family, and, above all, what of his descendants, when the books have been closed and the last balance struck of sacrifice and sorrow in every hamlet, village, parish, suburb, city, shire, district, province, and Dominion throughout the Empire?*

When his son John (known as Jack) was turned down for an officer's commission in both the Royal Navy and the Army, due to his poor eyesight, Kipling wrote to Field Marshall Lord Roberts, a former Commander-in-Chief of the British Army and a family friend, asking him to intervene.

As a result of his father's efforts, Jack Kipling received a commission, as a second lieutenant in the Irish Guards, on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1914. He was just 17.

On 27<sup>th</sup> September 1915, during the Battle of Loos, Jack Kipling was seen to be wounded whilst commanding a platoon. He disappeared and was subsequently reported *Missing, presumed dead*.

Rudyard Kipling was said to be distraught at the loss of his son and may have felt guilty about his part in his son's death. Throughout the rest of the war he wrote a collection of short poems which he called Epitaphs. Among these was the following self-recriminating couplet:

### ***Common Form, by Rudyard Kipling***

If any question why we died  
Tell them because our fathers lied

It is worthwhile contrasting this with Kipling's better known poem "[If---](#)", written in 1895 but first published as paternal advice for Jack in 1910.

Both during and after the war Kipling made several visits to the area of Loos, unsuccessfully searching the Gohelle Plain for the body of his son.

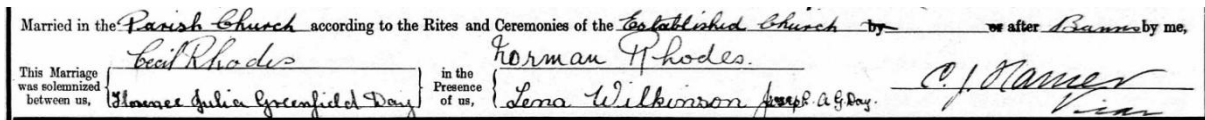
He also joined the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and was responsible for the inclusion of the words "Their Name Liveth For Evermore" on plaques in larger war cemeteries, and the phrase "Known unto God" on the gravestones of unidentified British or Commonwealth servicemen.

Rudyard Kipling died in 1936.

The body of John Kipling was discovered in 1992, among 1500 unidentified dead buried in St Mary's advanced dressing station cemetery in Haisnes, south-west of Lille.



Happily, both Norman and Cecil Rhodes survived the war. In 1929 Cecil married Florence Julia Greenfield Day, in Ilkley, and Norman was one of the witnesses – probably Cecil's best man.



Farnhill WW1 Volunteer Cecil Rhodes died on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1962. Despite considerable efforts made by the project his final resting place remains unknown.

