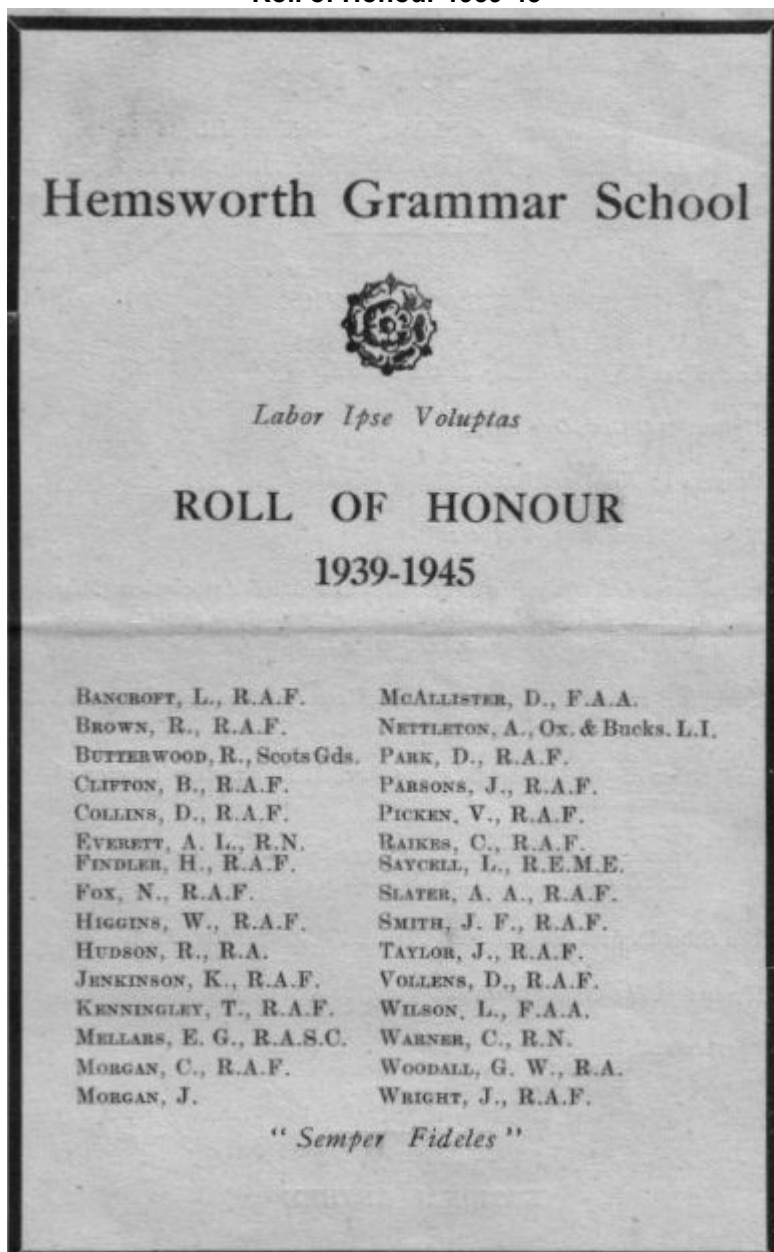


The Lectern

Roll of Honour 1939-45



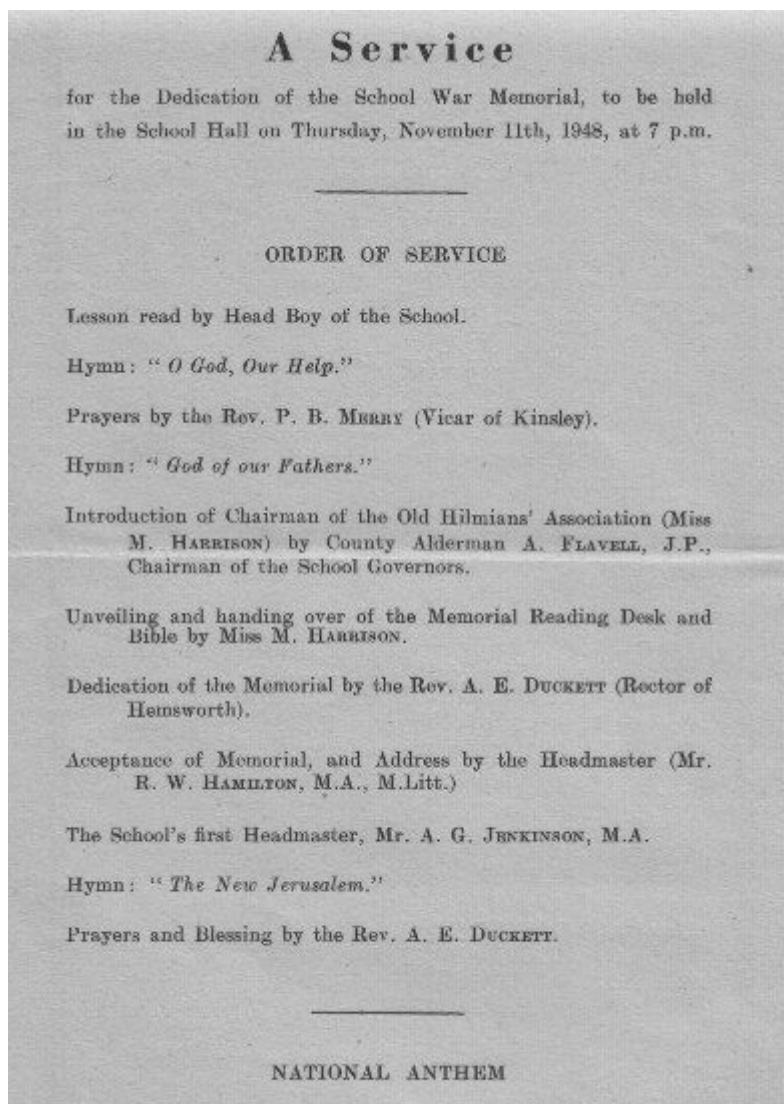
This image comes from Celia Asher, HGS 1943-50. Thank you, Celia.

All those of us who attended HGS after November 1948 will remember the lectern which stood on the stage during Assemblies. It was primarily associated with one man - Mr. R.W. Hamilton, our Headmaster. A Bible reading; items of School news; sports fixtures and results; House positions and results; Staff news; correspondence from Old Hilmians; encouragement towards good behaviour and conversely the condemnation of bad behaviour; examination information, the swearing-in of the Prefects and Assistant Prefects; the awarding of Colours; news of School and Staff Plays and the Music Concerts; announcements about the many clubs and societies in School and probably many more items too numerous to mention were broadcast from this dais. In November of each year a Remembrance Assembly was held, and the names which were carved on the front of the lectern were reverently read out by the Head.

Sheila Kelsall 1955-62

My abiding memory of Assembly was RWH reading out a roll call of Old Hilmians killed, wounded in action, missing, or prisoners of war - a sobering experience.

Eric Jones 1942-49



This image comes from Celia Asher, HGS 1943-50. Thank you, Celia.

How did this item of church furniture come to be on the stage at the School? Our first clue comes from the School Magazine of 1948.

"After about eighteen months since your Committee first put the idea to a meeting at School, the final stages have now been reached in connection with the "Memorial" to be placed in the Hall. A carved lectern and a suitably inscribed Bible have now been purchased, and it is felt that these are a worthy mark of the sacrifice made in the war by our colleagues."

In January 1947 the Hilmiens' committee first broached the idea of opening a fund to provide a memorial at School for those Old Students who had died on active service during the war with Germany and its allies. This Second World War ended in late 1945 and by 1948 the carved lectern and a suitably inscribed Bible had been purchased, and were ready to be formally presented to the School. In those days of rationing and shortages of most of the essentials in life, it was an admirable effort to raise the amount needed for this purpose in such a relatively short time.

The Lectern (War Memorial Reading Desk)



This image comes from Terry McCroakam 1949-57. Thank you, Terry.

1949 School Magazine

"The Old Students are happy to see the memorial lectern in use and they sincerely hope that a suitable table will shortly be found that will be a fitting ornament for the stage. If any funds are left after the purchase of the table the old boys and girls would like them to be used for the library."

The Presentation of the Lectern



Some of the officials on the stage are mentioned in the 1948 magazine report. Marjorie Harrison, seated on the extreme right of the front row, was Chairman of the Hilmians Committee. No doubt James Halsall of South Kirkby, the Vice-chairman, would be present on the stage, together with the all-important Hon. Treasurer, Leonard W. Brewin. Also present were William Marsden, who ran the Hilmian rugby team at this time, and his wife Edna (nee Wilson), the Social Secretary. Standing at the front of the group to the left of the lectern were Helen and Albert Lawton, and Colin Moxon stood on its right. This photo seems to show the Hilmians who had been concerned in the fund-raising for the lectern, but at the handing-over formality I would have expected to see Mr. Hamilton and some of his senior staff. Perhaps another photo is in existence somewhere to show this?

We have been told that the Memorial lectern is still at the community college, and it has been recently renovated. To this date, there has been no mention of the whereabouts of the Bible, the accompanying footstool or the table mentioned in the 1949 School Magazine.

I have assumed this photo was taken on the stage in the Hall, as I have a faint memory of the large cinema-type screen rolled up on the wall behind the group. This was taken down at some point during my years at School.

Sheila Kelsall 1955-62

The Lectern's Footstool



The footstool with the Lectern - has that survived? Mr. Hamilton always rearranged its position as he arrived at the Lectern for Assembly.

R.G. Hodson, HGS Staff 1956 onwards

Comment



As we all stood and bowed our heads during those annual Assemblies while the names were read out to us, the soldiers, sailors and airmen who had once stood in our shoes and were now gone from life were just names, but we hope that sometime in the future more information about them will come our way, so that we can better appreciate their sacrifice.

Sheila Kelsall, HGS 1955-62

Bernard Clifton 50589 Biography



Born 15 October 1920. Son of Hubert and Beatrice Clifton of Purston, Yorkshire. Date of RAF enlistment: 27 June 1939. **Missing, declared killed in action, 29 February 1944, age 23. Rank when shot down: Flying Officer 1st wireless operator/air gunner on "Daring Diana". Commemorated on Singapore Memorial, Column 432, at Kranji War Cemetery, Singapore**

Always a fun-loving extrovert, Bernard was the youngest of three sons born to a Pontefract police constable and his wife. Bright, ambitious, fearless, and full of zest, from an early age he showed great promise and determination in all endeavours. At 11 he was awarded a scholarship to Hemsworth Grammar School, where, in addition to attaining high marks, he excelled at athletics (**Junior Victor Ludorum 1935 - cup engraving photo to follow**) and rugby, winning prestigious medals and cups in both. In 1938 he created a record in points scored for Hemsworth Rugby Union Football Club. Following the completion of his schooling in 1937 until his enlistment, Bernard was employed as a clerk at Sainter & Sons Fruit Merchants, still in existence in Hemsworth. It was also during this time that he met his sweetheart, Ilsa.



In Blackpool on a pre-war outing with brother Eric, Bernard was allowed a pleasure flight in a visiting airplane. It was "love at first flight," and from that moment on his goal was to fly for the RAF. Attempting to volunteer for pilot training, he was turned down because of an eye imperfection but was wholeheartedly endorsed for wireless operator/air gunner training. Superior proficiency ratings and very good character marks, recorded in his RAF personnel file, indicate how readily he was assimilated into the air force. In fact, acknowledging his fondness for service life, he told Ilsa that he wished to make a career of the RAF, a goal that she enthusiastically supported.

With the outbreak of war came Bernard's first combat posting: to 58 Squadron, flying Whitley bombers from Linton-on-Ouse in Yorkshire. Continuing to prosper during this period of pioneering night bombing operations, he completed 29 flights over Germany, France, Holland, and even Italy, including the first-ever raid on Berlin (25 August 1940). In recognition of Bernard's "gallantry and devotion to duty on night operations", King George VI personally awarded Bernard the Distinguished Flying Medal at Buckingham Palace in October 1941. Beaming with pride, parents Hubert and Beatrice Clifton were in attendance.

A variety of assignments occupied Bernard's time until his next combat posting came through in December 1942. On the 15th of the month Bernard and his new crew departed the UK, bound for India in a B-24 bomber, but an engine fire forced them down in neutral Spain, not far from their intended destination of Gibraltar. Two months of internment followed, during which period Bernard and his crewmates (including his pilot of 29 February 1944, Vic Whitehall) were treated exceptionally well by their Spanish counterparts. This time, at least, the "missing airman" telegrams sent to the Clifton and Whitehall families proved to be false alarms, unlike those of 16 months later.

In mid-summer 1943, and now engaged to Bernard, Ilsa sang him a goodbye tribute, "My Hero" from The Chocolate Soldier, amidst tumultuous and appreciative cheers as his train departed the blacked-out Sheffield rail station. It was like a scene from a cinematic love story. Days later Bernard and Vic were off again to India by air, this time successfully completing the journey in July.

On the evening of 29 February 1944 Bernard, Vic, and their seven crewmates died when B-24 Liberator serial number BZ962, christened "Daring Diana", was shot down while attacking Mahlwagon Rail Yards in Rangoon, Burma. Bernard was lost on the 24th op of his 159 Squadron combat tour, all of which were flown as first wireless operator/air gunner. Japanese Army Air Force aces Hiroshi Takiguchi (9 aircraft destroyed) and Bunichi Yamaguchi (19 aircraft), working in tandem and in cooperation with searchlights, approached "Daring Diana" from the rear in their single-engine Oscar fighters and quickly destroyed the blinded bomber as it was held by the searchlights.

Officially Bernard and his crew were declared missing, with no known graves. In 1993, however, the individually unidentified remains of seven of the nine "Daring Diana" crew were discovered in Plot 4, Row E, Graves 14 to 20 of Rangoon War Cemetery, Burma. They have rested in these side-by-side graves since interment in January 1953, but not one of the nine families of the "Daring Diana" casualties had ever been notified. The bodies had been exhumed from two original 1944 burial sites located approximately thirteen miles north of Rangoon, close to where "Daring Diana" wreckage was found. Each grave marker reads:

AN AIRMAN OF THE 1939-1945 WAR, ROYAL AIR FORCE, 29TH FEBRUARY 1944, KNOWN UNTO GOD.

The individual identities of the seven airmen shall remain a mystery, as will the burial site or sites of the last two crewmen. It shall never be known with certainty whether one of those buried in Rangoon War Cemetery is Bernard, though there is a seven-in-nine chance that he does, indeed, lie in this beautifully-maintained setting.

A photo of one of the seven graves, each bearing the identical inscription:



D.F.M. from the King 1941



The young Purston airman, Flight Sergeant Bernard Clifton, received the Distinguished Flying Medal, "for gallantry and devotion to duty on night operations," from the hands of the King, at an investiture at Buckingham Palace on Tuesday. Sergt. Clifton was accompanied by his parents. Many exciting adventures have come his way since he was posted to a Bomber Command Station as wireless operator air gunner, and he has included visits to Berlin, Genoa, Stettin, Magdebourg, Hanover, Zeebrugge and Bordeaux in his 30 "trips" over enemy territory. A native of Pontefract, he spent his infancy at Fitzwilliam, where his father was a police constable. His education was received at the Kinsley Council and Hemsworth Grammar Schools, and he excelled at sport, winning the Schorah Cup at the Grammar School in 1935. He created a scoring record while playing with the Old Hilmians' Rugby Football Club.