



Remembrance Sunday Address

10 November 2019

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We will and do remember them. On this day, in this sacred place surrounded with the names of 1003 of our departed Trinity family: 619 killed in the First World War, inscribed on the oak panels around the altar; 384 killed in the Second World War, their names carved on Portland Stone in the Ante-Chapel.

WW1 was the first major conflict when a mass movement of grief, with one million British and Empire dead, caused to be publicly recorded the individual names of the fallen in their home towns, villages, schools and colleges, and churches. When panels were erected here in the Twenties, it would have been inconceivable that after that 'war to end all wars' there would be need, a couple of decades later, to carve several hundred more names. On both boards so many repeated surnames – siblings, cousins – in a chapel they all knew in their short lives: it is impossible not to be profoundly moved by their sacrifice.

The familiar exhortations of Remembrance weekend – the prayers, hymns, Elgar's *Nimrod*, poppies, balsa wood crosses – and thousands of ceremonies and services across the United Kingdom right now create a rare moment of national togetherness and a powerful sense of intergenerational connection.

My late foster mother Gertrude Hilleard, born in 1904, would often recall how in November 1918, aged 14, she was left alone for days in a cottage at Gamlingay, unconscious with the Spanish flu, feared to be infectious and dying, but was woken by the parish church peeling out the bells to celebrate the signing of the armistice on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day. She recovered and her father, Alfred Lucas, who had served four terrifying years on the western front in the Royal Horse Artillery, was demobbed and came home. Scared of being sent a white feather he had enlisted at the start. He brought back from Belgium two black terracotta medallions – Christ with Crown of Thorns and the Virgin Mary – he had found in the ruins of a church at Ypres, which we still treasure in the family. I was holding them last Sunday. I remember in the early Sixties Alfred as a stern old gentleman who wore his medals with pride, kept poodles and would cut my then curly Afro hair with poodle clippers. The same gentle hands which had delivered so many weapons of war to the front line.

Just I was fond of him, we all can connect with a new name engraved on the WW1 panels last year – Lieutenant David Clemetson, whose handsome face was in an exhibition in the Ante-Chapel this Spring. He was one of the very first Black British Army officers, and the first to be made a full Lieutenant. David Clemetson came here from plantation Jamaica, grandson of a slave, studying law at Trinity from 1912. A keen rower and rugby player, he dropped his studies to enlist in the Sportsman's Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers; served in Egypt, Salonika, described as 'close to Hell as you can imagine', where he suffered shell shock, then the ship bringing him to convalescence was sunk off North Africa. After a spell at Craiglockhart Hospital alongside Wilfred Owen, he served at the Somme through the Ludendorff

offensive and tragically David was killed on 21 September 1918, around 50 days before the end of the conflict.

I recall another black officer who died that year on the Somme, Walter Tull, who had played for Spurs as the first black professional footballer.

There is only time each year to tell a couple of stories which represent the lives of a lost generation. All the Trinity biographies are online on the Roll of Honour, and I was thrilled when I was responsible for Heritage Lottery Fund grants that so much hidden history was unearthed about WW1, such as the untold stories of the tens of thousands of Sikh volunteers, amongst over a million from the sub-continent who joined up, and the massive mobilisation of women on the Home Front.

At the Royal Parks where I am a Trustee we care for 14 war memorials to those who died in the world wars, including a Holocaust memorial. In a few minutes' time 10,000 ex-service-men and women will march or be wheeled from the Cenotaph through St James Park and Horse Guards, following the national wreath-laying by a Trinity alumnus, the Prince of Wales. Up the road at the Commonwealth Memorial Gates on Constitution Hill an eternal flame is burning today. And a new memorial in Brixton's Windrush Square commemorates the African and Caribbean contributions.

At Brompton Cemetery, run by Royal Parks, we care for many war graves, including a mass grave for more than 2,600 Chelsea Pensioners – and we have just planted wildflower meadows and unveiled a memorial tablet to the park staff who died in the Word Wars. And we can keep the parks beautiful. Just as you have beautiful borders outside the Chapel with African plants *ensete* bananas and *amaryllis belladonna*. Beautiful gardens and conserving our inheritance is another way of remembering.

Some say we should not memorialise these twentieth century wars. This week my former colleague, Polly Toynbee, wrote a column entitled 'Surely it's time to lay to rest the empty, vainglorious memorialising of war'. We need to look forward not back. Last week a young Instagram influencer said on TV that teaching schoolchildren about the War was too intense and might affect their mental health. I disagree. We are celebrating people and their lives. We must avoid repeating mistakes, in a world awash with weapons and competing for resources.

Those who died, and all those who served and still serve, ensured the survival of western civilisation and great institutions like this one. Many of our 1003 dead had this college constantly in mind as a happy place. In 1948 the Reverend F.A. Simpson – a Trinity Fellow for 63 years – in his Remembrance Day address invoked the letters he had received from 'members of the college then far sundered from it' ... 'From barracks, billets, hospitals, from prisoners of war ... whose thoughts came back to this place'. He quoted one sent by a scholar of this college a month before he was killed. 'The war,' he wrote, 'has done one thing for me; it has shown me again what I really knew already, what a grand thing it is to have known and loved people like all of you.' Reverend Simpson concluded: 'With how much greater reason may we say that of them – What a grand thing it is to have known – and loved – people like all of them.'

That message resonates through time. Today reminds us of our own mortality and perhaps gives us a lively hope of being remembered ourselves, even of Resurrection.

We will remember them. Their gift to us is Christ-like. Their lives for our security and freedom. *All of these died in faith without having received the promises.*

When we remember we put together things which have become disjointed. Today as a nation and college community we renew our fellowship in one body. They died for us. Time may bear away its sons and daughters, but they are not forgotten. To quote John Keats, 'They will never pass into nothingness'.