

Remembrance Day Service

Saturday November 11th, 2023 at 10:30a.m.

On behalf of the Old Cestrefeldians Trust, which organises the service, OCT Trustee, Tony Hine welcomed all present including representatives of Brookfield School – see transcript below.

The service was led by Revd Ron Smith, the current President of the Old Cestrefeldian Society. Brookfield School and OCs took part in its delivery.

Tony Hine also gave a presentation on the life Charles Neil Newcombe who fell in WWI. Again the transcript follows.

The Last Post was heard before two minutes' silence was observed. The service concluded with the singing of the National Anthem.

[A video of the whole service is accessible here.](#)

Immediately after the service, those present reassembled outside the former Headmaster's Study.

First memorial wreaths were laid between the WWI and WWII memorials by Sonny Bostock representing Brookfield School and the OCS President.

Then the President delivered a tribute prior to unveiling a memorial tablet in memory of long serving and much loved Deputy Headmaster Russell Varley. The transcript is to be found below.

[A video of the wreath laying and memorial unveiling is accessible here.](#)



After the service, Tom Roberts presented, on behalf of the OCs' Trust, a copy of Philip Riden's History to Ron Smith as a thanks for his service to the OCs' Trust.

Those present from Brookfield included, left to right: Keith Hirst (Head Teacher), Bess Dawson, Ms Andrea Williams (Asst. Head Teacher), Sonny Bostock, Pippa Stanton, John Barker (Chair of the Governors and OC) and Revd. Ron Smith.

We are very grateful to Chesterfield College, West Studios, for their assistance in making all of the above possible.

Photographs and videos are courtesy of Derrick Priestley, OCS Chairman.

2023 OCT Remembrance Service Introduction – OCT Trustee, Tony Hine

Welcome everyone to the Old School, and to our Act of Remembrance. The Trust chairman, Frank Gorman, is unable to be with us today as his wife Marian is unwell. We send our best wishes to them both.

Since the Trust was formed in 2014, the service has become an annual event. We are again grateful to Chesterfield College in allowing us to use their premises and for providing refreshments, which will be available after the service.

A particular welcome to representatives from Brookfield School who will be taking part in the service: Keith Hirst, Headteacher, Andrea Williams, Assistant Headteacher, John Barker, Chair of Governors, and himself an OC, and three students, Sonny, Bess, and Pippa.

After the service, we will move to the Memorial Corridor, where both the Old Cestrefeldians and Brookfield School will lay wreaths. Ewe will also be unveiling a plaque to recognise the long service of a member of staff, Russel Varley. There will be a short delay while Derrick Priestley relocates his camera and sets up the Facebook live session. This service is also currently live on Facebook.

I'd now like to hand over to Rev. Ron Smith. WE are pleased that he is again able to be with us and in particular this year when he is President of the Old Cestrefeldians' Society.

A Tribute to CHARLES NEIL NEWCOMBE – OCT Trustee, Tony Hine

A few months ago, we were contacted by a relative of Charles Neil Newcombe, whose name is on the WWI Memorial Board, asking if we could supply him with any information regarding his great-great-uncle. A few years ago, we would not have been able to help as his name, like that of the others on the board were just names. Fortunately, thanks to substantial work undertaken by Old Cestrefeldian Mike Briggs in consulting regimental records and other archives, we now have details of all 83 OCs whose names are recorded there. These, together with further information extracted from editions of the school magazine, the Cestrefeldian, by our webmaster, John Drabble, have been combined in a booklet published by the Old Cestrefeldians' Trust.

Charles Newcombe was born in Yarmouth on 15th March 1891, the son of Percy and Helen Newcombe of Matlock. He entered the School in 1900 which, from his age, indicates that he would initially have joined the preparatory form. His school career coincided with the first publication of the Cestrefeldian in 1908 and the 1908/09 edition records that he was school captain, a member of the athletics committee and the secretary of the debating society. The following edition records that he was business manager of the magazine and had been awarded the School Patriotism prize in 1906. He continued as school captain until he left in 1910. He was a talented athlete, playing football for a number of clubs, including Chesterfield Town from 1910 to 1912, and playing once for Derbyshire County Cricket Club in 1910.

On leaving school, he attended Nottingham University College from 1910 to 1913 and then became a mining pupil. In November 1914 he gained a commission and served on the Western Front as a lieutenant in the 7th Battalion of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. On 27th December 1915, he was killed with two of his men when a German artillery shell hit their dugout in front line trenches near to Fleurbaix. He is buried in the Y Farm military cemetery near Bois-Grenier. He was 24.

The April 1916 edition of the Cestrefeldian paid tribute to him as follows:

“When we think of the death of Newcombe, we immediately call up before our mind's eye his image as he used to be at school, the centre of every group, the life and soul of every movement. In those days everyone admired and idolised Newcombe, none the less for his modest bearing and sensible conduct than for his athletic powers and prowess in sports, and he in his turn denied none his friendship. There was no one in

the school too insignificant for him to encourage and help. He was an example by whom all set their conduct, and yet neither in deed nor word did he show himself conceited or priggish. For he always thought it no shame, thought it indeed but right to submit to authority. Thus, he won the respect of the masters as well of the love of the boys, and was trusted by both alike in any capacity. All who knew him at school must have been influenced by him; he helped to mould the character, to raise the ideal of the place. And not only at school; for despite the shortness of his career in the Army, he gained the hearts of all his men, and the same wonderful influence held sway; there too his name has become a tradition. None of those who were his friends will ever cease to think of him as one who needs no greater monument than our memory.”

A Tribute to Mr. Russell Varley – OCS President (2023/24) Revd. Ron Smith

The following tribute was delivered by the Society President prior to unveiling the tablet installed outside the former Headmaster’s Study. The information was derived from Philip Riden’s book, “A History of Chesterfield Grammar School”.

Russell Varley was born in South Lancashire in 1891, He went from secondary school in Rochdale to Manchester University in 1909, graduating in 1912 with both a BA and a secondary school teacher’s diploma.

He was appointed here to the Grammar school the following year, initially as a form master on £ 60 / annum, teaching a range of subjects to the lower and middle years. He was also a House Master and lived in, looking after the boarders.

Russell joined the Army in 1916 as a private in the West Yorkshire Regiment, but a year later was commissioned into the 2nd Battalion, Royal Lancaster Regiment. In September 1918, as a temporary Lieutenant, he was awarded the M.C. during the campaign in Salonica for reconnaissance work before an attack and for taking over command of the company during the attack itself. He was also decorated by the Greek Government. He was later promoted Captain, transferred to the Reserve in November 1919 and returned to the Grammar School as geography Master, where he was on a salary of just over £ 400.

Back in Lancashire, he married Elsie Holt in 1922 and the couple made their home in Chesterfield on Cromwell Road. He commanded the Corps for a few years after the war and for a much longer period organised the annual Athletic Sports. Varley was an active member of the Chesterfield branch of the Royal British Legion, of which he was chairman during the Second World War.

In 1950, four years after he succeeded Howard Smith as second master, Varley was accorded the unusual distinction of being elected President of the Old Cestrefeldians’ Society (an office that we know is normally filled by a former pupil). The recently appointed headmaster W. E. Glister, speaking at a particularly well attended annual reunion, paid tribute to his wise advice, adding that “No man loves the old school as much as Mr Varley”.

He retired in 1956, when (exceptionally) the common room gave him dinner at the Station Hotel. He had taught at the school for 43 years, under six head masters. Russell Varley died in 1965 aged 74.

It was agreed, by the Common Room that Russell Varley’s retirement that summer, after a long and dedicated service to the school, should be marked by more than a presentation. A dinner at 12 shillings and 6 pence a head (excluding drinks and tips) was organised at the Station Hotel, although it was informal, rather than Black Tie, as a similar event before the war would almost certainly have been.