

Elmfield College, York, June to August 1914:

Before the lights went out

On 3 August 1914 Sir Edward Grey made his famous quote: 'The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime'. He was speaking to his friend, the journalist John Alfred Spender. The following paragraphs give a flavour of life at Elmfield College in the months leading up to the declaration of war.

In York, the old boys of Elmfield College were celebrating their Golden Jubilee weekend. Elmfield had been founded in 1864 with funding from the Golden Jubilee Fund of the Primitive Methodist church, which itself had been founded in 1810. (*The name Primitive Methodists was first used in 1812*)

On Sunday 31 May the College had *three* celebratory services in the relatively new John Petty Memorial Chapel on Monkgate (named in honour of John Petty the first Governor of Elmfield).

The *Primitive Methodist Leader* of 4 June (p.382) provided a detailed report extending over two long columns: "The celebration of the jubilee of a great public school is an event of no ordinary significance", it began. "... The celebration began on Friday afternoon, when the guests assembled for tea"; much credit was due to "the princely hospitality of Dyson Mallinson, Esq., the chairman of the directors, who entertained at the Station Hotel a large number of ministerial students of that day [i.e. of the 1860s] – many of them are now on the superannuation list. ... During the evening not a few greetings and reminiscences were exchanged between 'old boys' Some of them had not met for considerably over forty years. ... The hours sped swiftly by till the witching hour of midnight warned us that there is a time to sleep as well as a time to talk".

"Saturday was a great day. There was a large influx of visitors – old boys, parents of the present boys, and well-wishers of the College from many distant places." A cricket match between Old Boys and present pupils started at 11am. "... (I)t was soon evident that (the Old Boys) were not quite equal in skill and dash to their junior competitors". The Jubilee Dinner in the De Grey Room started at

7pm: “about two hundred and fifty guests were present. Ample justice was done to the bill of fare, and several songs were excellently rendered ...”. Dr. Herbert Smith (a leading London barrister) was present, as was H G Chancellor, MP, along with many other Reverend and Doctor old boys. Dyson Mallinson was Chairman: his “extremely interesting address” claimed as a “red-letter day in the history of the College ... hundreds of students had been helped to face the duties and responsibilities of life. From small beginnings, though it had had its ups and downs, ... its future was exceedingly bright”. There were now 102 students on the books.

A toast to “The Directors” was then proposed by Sir John Tweedy, Old Boy. This “was received with prolonged applause, which culminated with the singing of ‘For he’s a jolly good fellow’”. A portrait was then presented for the school; it was “in a handsome stained oak frame, 3½ feet by 3 feet, ... At the foot of the picture was the inscription on a brass plate: “Sir John Tweedy, Kt., President of the Royal College of Surgeons, 1903/4/5. Presented by an old schoolfellow, 30 May, 1914”.

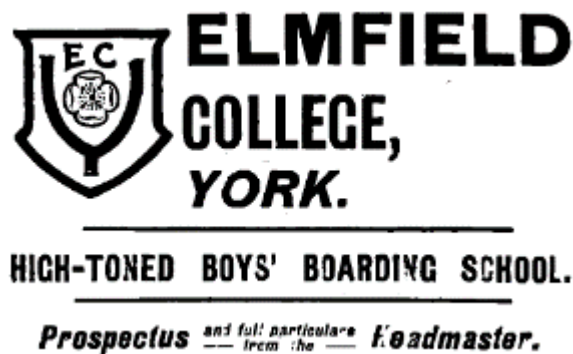
Mr. Guttery confirmed some details of Sir John’s “remarkable career. Of all the distinguished sons of Elmfield, he was the most distinguished”. He then spoke of the “practical question of a memorial fund to commemorate the jubilee of the school.” Improvements were needed in the College buildings, as was a sports pavilion, and “it is thought desirable to provide some entrance scholarships for ministers’ sons ... (and) to perpetuate the University scholarships”. This would cost over £2000, but Sir W. Hartley had offered to provide £500 if £1500 could be found from elsewhere.

“Sunday was a great day. The John Petty Memorial Church was well filled, morning, afternoon and night. The spiritual tone of every service was of a high order, the singing was hearty and enthusiastic ... The proceedings began with the procession from Elmfield to the chapel – almost a mile – of the distinguished visitors, the old boys, and the present scholars and staff.” Rev. Guttery’s “eloquent sermon” took the text “Thou hast the dew of thy youth”, He urged

the young men to “retain their juvenility of spirit ... and to pursue righteousness as the supreme aim of life”.

“The afternoon service was again largely attended” and “The evening service had again a large congregation” and “The sports were held on Monday, and another cricket match was arranged and played on Tuesday”.

Primitive Methodist Leader 4 Jun1914:382

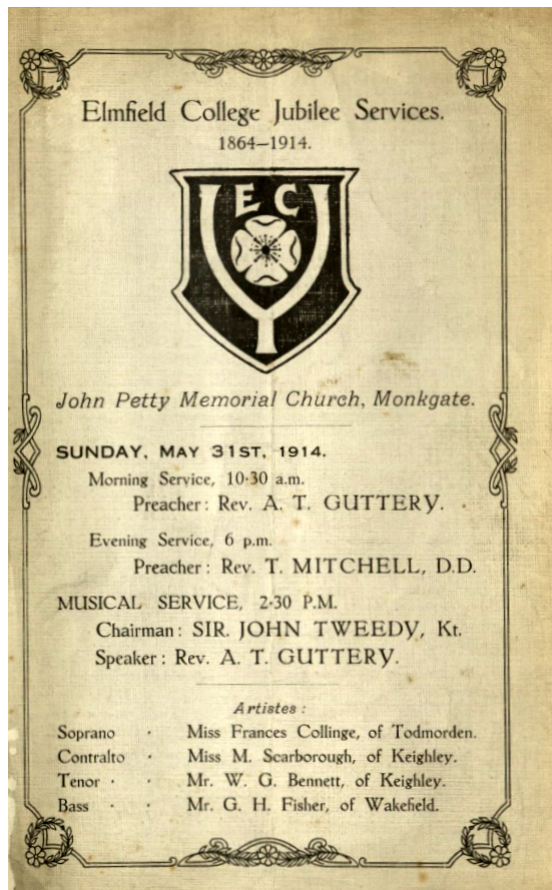


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PM leader 18 Jun1914 p.413 ; Middlesbrough conference;
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Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer 29 Jun 1914 - News of the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand.



from then onwards he had kept in close touch with the Club. He strongly believed in the helpful influence of the Club, and urged all Old Boys to further its interests by attending the gatherings and bringing other Old Boys with them.

Dr. C. Herbert-Smith roused us all to a lively pitch of enthusiasm by his reminiscences. He recalled the tramp, tramp through York streets to Ebenezer in Little Stonegate on Sundays, and the canter up the wooden stairs and measured tread along the aisle. He told a story of having during prayer at Ebenezer found a cow's bladder in his pocket, how he blew it up until a portion of it soared above the pew top and caught the eye of one of the stewards, who came in great wrath to reprimand him; the violent indignation of Mr. Baron, who would have administered "strong physic" but for Mr. Gough seeing the humorous side of the situation. Dr. Smith also reminded us of a corner in the large classroom where delinquents were banished, and how some artistic "criminal" had pricked out on the woodwork the form of a pig, and how each occupant of the corner kept alive the design of that pig, no varnishing or painting ever permanently effacing it. The form of that pig was indelibly fixed on his memory.

He intended marching to chapel in "line" on Whit Sunday, and hoped there would be a very large number of Old Elmfieldians, both

Elmfieldian March 1914 p12; Herbert-Smith