



Brothers in arms

From Wandsworth to the Western Front

Jack Grundy became Headmaster of Emanuel School in 1953, staying in that post for ten years. Each time he walked to the pulpit to read a lesson in the School chapel he couldn't have failed to notice the brass plaque affixed to the wall bearing the names Cecil Boyce and Ronald Edwin Grundy, Jack's older brothers whom he last saw leaving for the Western Front in 1915 and 1916 respectively.

At the turn of the millennium a box of letters and papers were found in the attic of one of Jack's former homes, which now belong to the Archive of Modern Conflict. These letters allow us to share the experiences of a young Cecil and Ronald Grundy and their family shortly after they left Emanuel School, through the last years preceding the Great War and on to the Western Front.

Cecil, Ronald and their younger brothers Jack and Rupert all attended Emanuel School. They lived on St James' Road [now Drive], Wandsworth Common and were the sons of John Francis Edwin and Emily (Brownsdon) Grundy.

John was a printer, publisher and one time President of the Fine Art Trade Guild, who persuaded the then Prime Minister Lloyd George to sit for his portrait in 1916.¹

At Emanuel Cecil was a gifted young man, a recipient of prizes, a soldier boy in the cadets, a sports player and Prefect. Within a year of leaving Emanuel he worked at Burberry and travelled to Argentina to work in that Company's branch before returning to England in 1914. Ronald too was a keen sportsman; he was one of the School's first members to take up rowing when a few boys from the School started doing it at Putney in 1913. He also became Captain of Howe House. He wrote the following lines in the House notes in *The Portcullis* of 1913:

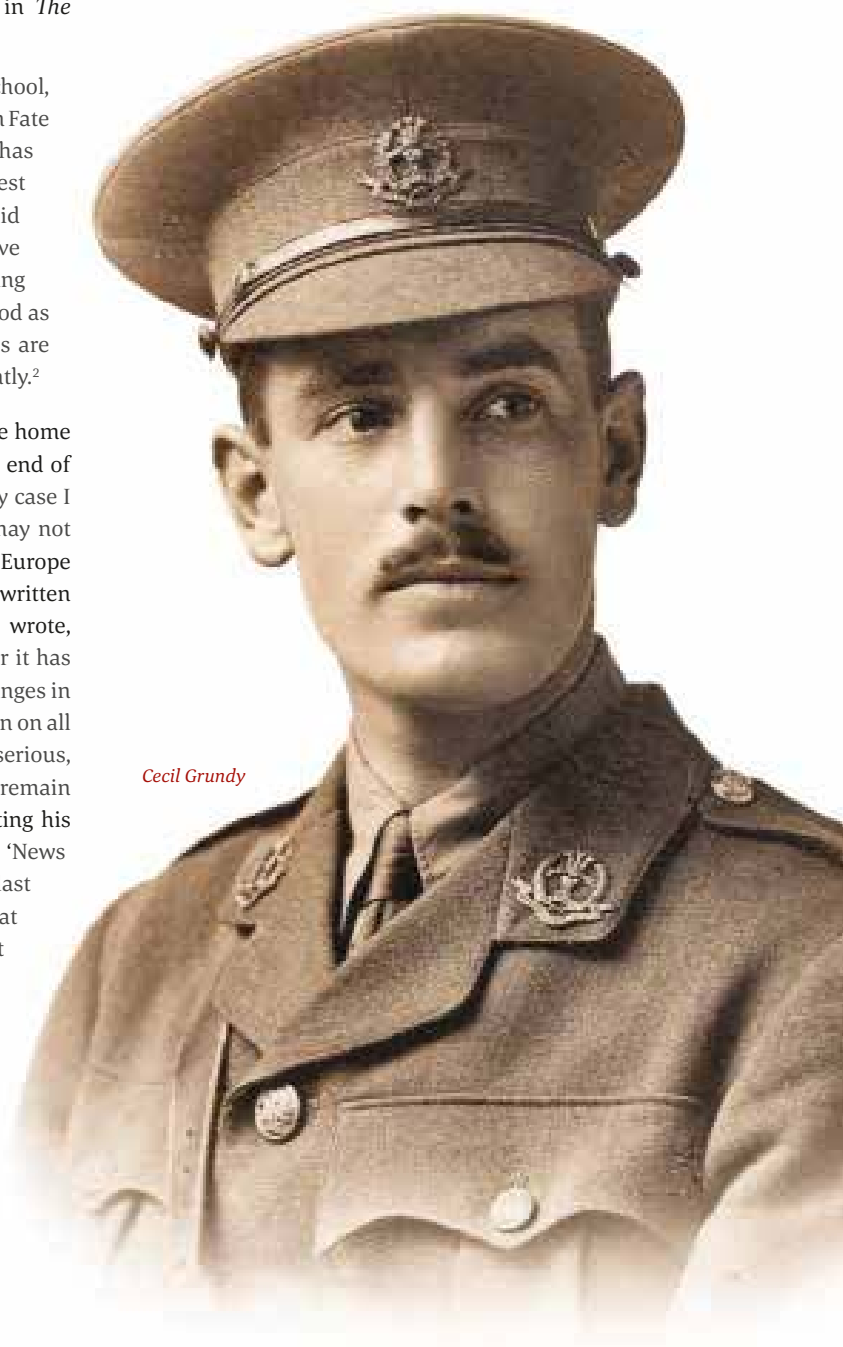
At last we have gained our correct position in the School, that of leaders in the 'Rugger' competition. Although Fate has once more been against us (that perverse deity has always borne us a grudge) by twice crocking our best men just before a match, yet by means of a splendid start last term and a strong revival this term we have secured first place. The finish was very close, leaving us champions by one point only, but a miss is as good as a mile. The coveted position reached, all Howeites are hereby exhorted to see that we occupy it permanently.²

Whilst Ronald was searching for a career, Cecil, wrote home to his parents on the evening of 31 July 1914, at the end of a month known in history as the 'July Crisis', '...in any case I join with you all in sincerely hoping that England may not be drawn into the conflict.'³ In the next few days as Europe went to war Cecil continued to write home. In a letter written on the day Britain declared war on Germany, he wrote, 'Although we are so very securely away from the war it has already caused several startling and unlooked for changes in our Republic. As was to be expected there was a big run on all the banks the first day that things began to look at all serious, and in reply the government at once ordered them to remain closed for the following week.'⁴ Cecil continued writing his letter over a two day period and on 5 August wrote, 'News was received that England had declared war late last night and no sooner was it thrown upon the screen at the 'Prensa' newspaper building than the crowd went mad with delight, for the Latins are anti-German to a man and any little success on the part of the 'entente' provokes the greatest enthusiasm.'⁵

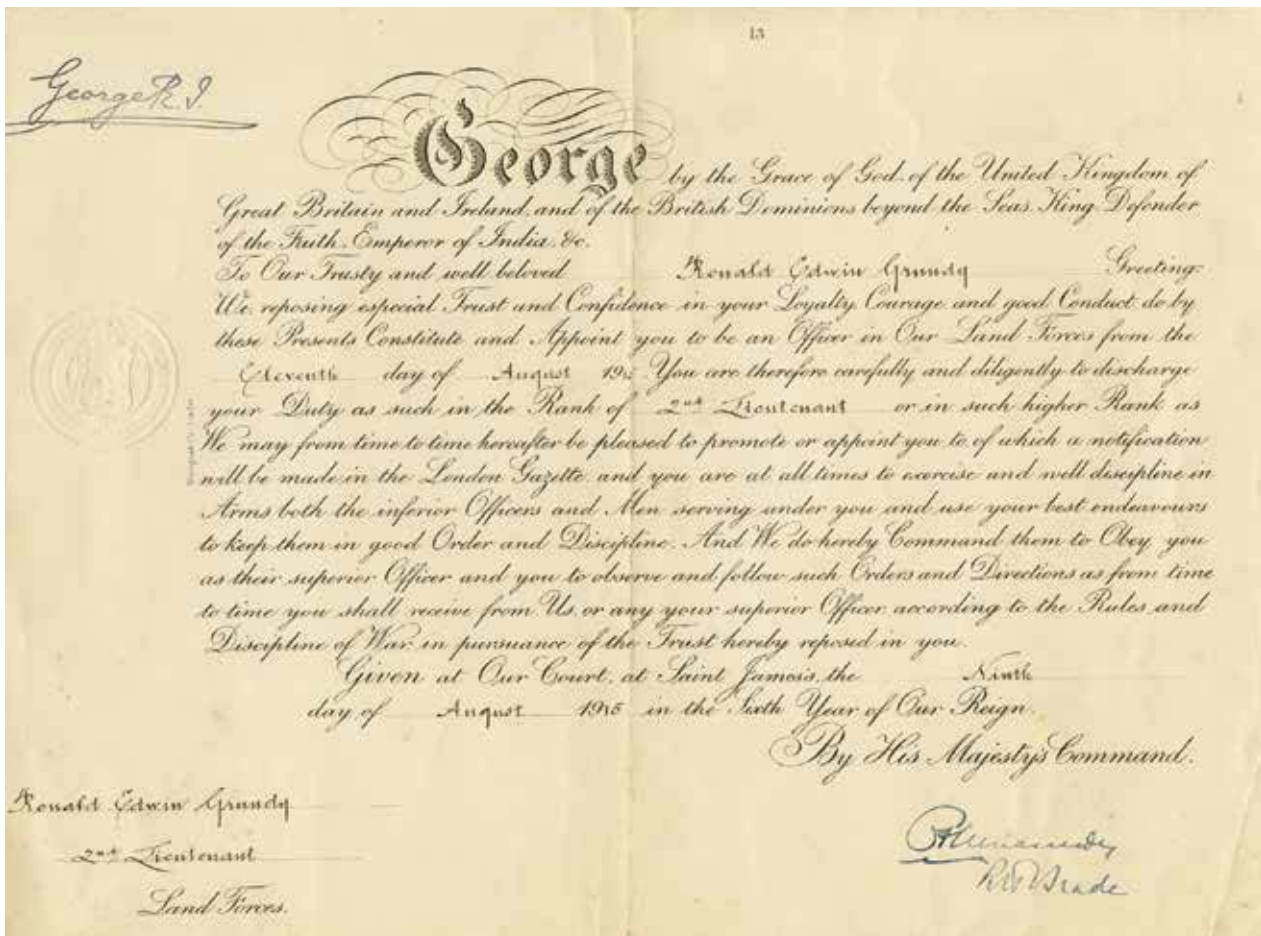
John Grundy wrote to Cecil at the end of August 1914 and from the letter we can glean Ronald's efforts in attempting to join the forces:

Ronald is trying to do his little bit against the Teutons and has spent hours getting

about making enquiries, all the recruiting places being jammed with candidates. First he went to Cornford (our next door Captain) at headquarters opposite the station near the 'Empire' Clapham Junction. Personally, I don't think much of that crowd so advised Ronald to apply to the Honourable Artillery Company which he has done, and they sent for him. He says there were hundreds there, nearly all men of the public school type. His turn has not yet come to be examined but is due on Monday and if they pass his spectacles I have no doubt but that he will get in.⁶



Cecil Grundy



Ronald Grundy's Commission

Ronald replied to Cecil, addressing him as Bill, describing his experiences of the tests he had to complete as part of determining whether men were 'fit' enough to join the armed forces. It is a revealing letter and shows the viewpoint of a young man upon an older generation of men who were in charge of recruitment.

On Monday last, after several hours waiting, I was examined by the doctor of the Honourable Artillery Company, and passed as a fit person, including eyesight (I passed this test by learning the bottom lines of the test by heart before I was questioned). Then I appeared before the Court of the Regiment, with a lot of other recruits...The Court is composed of rather old jossers who I suppose were once officers... The Court are a very particular set of old fogies, and keep the Regiment very select and exclusive... The Standard of efficiency is very high, and a fellow stands little chance of getting in unless he has been to a public school. The fact that I have been in the OTC will give me a good leg up, I hope.⁷

Ronald passed out as Private Grundy Honourable Artillery Company (HAC) on the afternoon of 7 September 1914 at the age of 17. Cecil too enlisted with the HAC on 23 October 1914.

Mrs Grundy wrote to Cecil on 1 September 1914 expressing her wishes, 'that the battle will be short and decisive not long drawn out.' With those sentiments went a chorus of a million voices but as days turned into weeks so, in turn, weeks became months and both Cecil and Ronald were fully engaged in their army training.

Cecil was 20 years old standing at 5ft. 11in tall with a 35in chest. He spent four months with the HAC before entering Sandhurst and being appointed to a commission in the Duke of Cambridge's Own, The Middlesex Regiment commencing on 14 July 1915. Ronald too received a commission commencing on 11 August 1915. By the summer of 1915 they were both Second Lieutenants in The Middlesex Regiment.

Between late 1914 and the summer of 1915 both brothers would have undertaken various training and exams on the



Trench digging in Gillingham, summer 1915



The revolver range butts at Camberley



*2nd Battalion HAC paraded for General inspection
Belhus Park, Aveley, Essex - 14 October 1914*

road to becoming officers. Their daily routines would have consisted of kit inspections, route marches, lectures and practical field exercises. We know from one of Cecil's letters what the lighter moments of a soldier's life could be like. It would be the last summer that both Cecil and Ronald spent together. On Saturday 29 August Cecil wrote of their activities the previous day, 'Ron and I took the motor bus to Maidstone yesterday afternoon and there took a boat on the Medway and rowed to a little place called Teesew, some five miles upstream. We had tea there in a quaint little garden served by a [sic] old man and his wife...'

Cecil sailed for France in late September 1915 at a time when the British were engaged in the Battle of Loos. He wrote home to his parents 2 October 1915 saying he had arrived safely and indicating that his 'stuttering French' carried him along well. On 7 October he wrote to his mother as he was sitting in a train carriage. Including news of trips from Le Havre to Rouen with other soldiers he revealed the duties which had occupied him since landing in France. On 6 October we know that he was busy with 'machine gun and bombing demonstrations in the morning and a visit to the ordnance dept to complete one or two minor items of kit in the afternoon.'⁸ He continues his letter with an account of his first day in France, 'But I think the day I arrived took the biscuit for hard work, as that evening we practised manning and relieving trenches from 5 to 9 o'clock all in the pouring rain on the blackest of inky nights. It was too realistic for me!'⁹ He continued with news from the evening of 6 October, 'Last night I got my marching orders and was given a draft of 100 men to entrain and hand over to their own regiment on arriving at billets...they are



Painting of Cecil Grundy

the dickens of a trouble to keep in or get back into their carriages whenever we stop at any station! Cecil gave his address at this time as 1st Middlesex, 19th Brigade, 2nd Division BEF.

During the course of October 1915 Cecil was not involved in any battle but life in the trenches was arduous as snipers and shells

were a regular occurrence in the waiting game being played out by both sides. Cecil wrote several letters home that month from which we gain insights into his life on the Front:

On Saturday 10 October he wrote:

I was posted to A Coy... we have our work cut out and I get more responsibility than I wanted for a start off, having two platoons Nos 3 and 4 all on my own... The fellows are a nice lot but terribly raw so I hope for a peaceful first bout to give them and myself a chance to settle down somewhat.

On Tuesday 12 October he wrote wishing his father a happy birthday and penned, 'the best of luck for the next year!' He also wrote:

Nothing much doing, we are still in billets, with ordinary parades and manoeuvres just as at home. The afternoons are free and we often get in some revolver practice then. I'm not half a bad shot. I got a horse from the transport officer this afternoon and set out, unfortunately I seem to have forgotten all I have ever learnt and was never so bumped about in my life. It's quite painful to sit down this evening!... by sheer bad luck the Colonel (Rowley by name) rode past, out for a ride himself, and witnessed my most interesting display.

On Monday 18 October Cecil headed the letter address with 'Really There' and recounted his first impressions of being in the trenches.

We came down here – which is the firing line trenches – on Saturday so we've already had two days of it.

It was some march down here, everyman being loaded to his utmost capacity and carrying all manner of things 'for use in the trenches.' In consequence we fairly staggered along and although it was only a six mile

march in a dead straight line to the trenches a lot of the men were quite fagged out with it.

My first impression was being lost in an interminable maze, an impression which still holds good, for though I have learnt my way about in my own company lines I should be absolutely lost elsewhere. Somehow or other I had always imagined that one had to kill time and would while away the time by reading and playing cards in a dug out, but that's all wrong for I've never been so busy in my life, and sleep is to be sought after like gold! Of course we are short handed, but then everybody seems to be out here – all except one Scotch – Reg which turned out with 30 officers and 200 men.

The Bombardment or 'Gunning' as it is called absolutely incessant, never leaving off for ten seconds but thank heaven it has all been on our part so far. However I'm not sure that it means that we have entire superiority of fire for friend Bosche is a wily bird and is doubtless safe in deep dugouts to reappear when he feels inclined and I guess when he wants he can bombard as much as we can.

Our servants are marvels! Even here we get quite a good mess including porridge in the morning so we don't do so badly and our Coy is as cheery as ever.¹⁰

In his next letter to the family Cecil gives further details of life in the trenches and in particular his experiences with a German sniper:

Most of the men never saw a German the whole time, and it was only when searching for a particular sniper that I sighted one – three of them in fact – and in the very act. We forthwith set out to snipe the sniper, but unfortunately missed and of course once shot at he did not appear again. Still he was quite a sport about it, for he signalled back my first shot a 'miss' and then turned to look for me, in which time I got in another, and by the time I'd looked up to see the result (in another place) there was nothing to see. Another time I shall have an observer with a periscope.

Cecil went on to describe daily life in the trenches and the types of duties they were expected to carry out.

The day is pretty well occupied with various working parties on all sorts of jobs – building 'fire steps', 'dugouts', filling sand bags, drawing stores from the RE or preparing wire to put out at night, so our Company being somewhat short of officers we get no time to ourselves. As soon as it gets dark everyone has to be on the alert, one in every third man is posted as sentry and an officer has always to be on duty on the spot; so as everyone has to 'stand-to'

(or turn out) for half an hour or so at dusk and dawn we get precious little time to study our dugouts.

We are rather short of wire in front of our particular bit of line and so we are busy rigging up another row. Our little party sallies forth an hour or so after dark and carries on, but it usually isn't long before Bosche thinks something's up and starts sending up star shells. These are nothing more than first class Roman candles which give a regular blaze of light all around so there is nothing for it but to drop flat if you've seen it in time or remain dead still if you are caught in the act.¹¹

Five days later on 28 October Cecil wrote to his mother:

We are now in the very thick of it – the mud I mean! When we took over there was quite six inches of water in half the trenches and a soft thick base of mud below that again.

The water we managed to bale out more or less – rather less perhaps – but that mud still remains and nowadays every step is a laborious task, for you've sunk in so that it requires quite an effort to move it; so there you go Squelsh! Splosh! Squelsh! along miles and miles of slimy trenches.

Cecil went on to describe the heavy task of travelling through the trenches to billets whilst the men had to carry 'full packs, rifles, ammunnition and shovels', but on a lighter note he also asked his parents to send two more mouth organs before signing off, 'In best of health. Love to all. Cecil.'

The next morning 29 October, 2nd Lt. Athelstan Douglas Dempster Bonnor of "A" Company, Middlesex Regiment, wrote a letter to Mrs. Grundy:

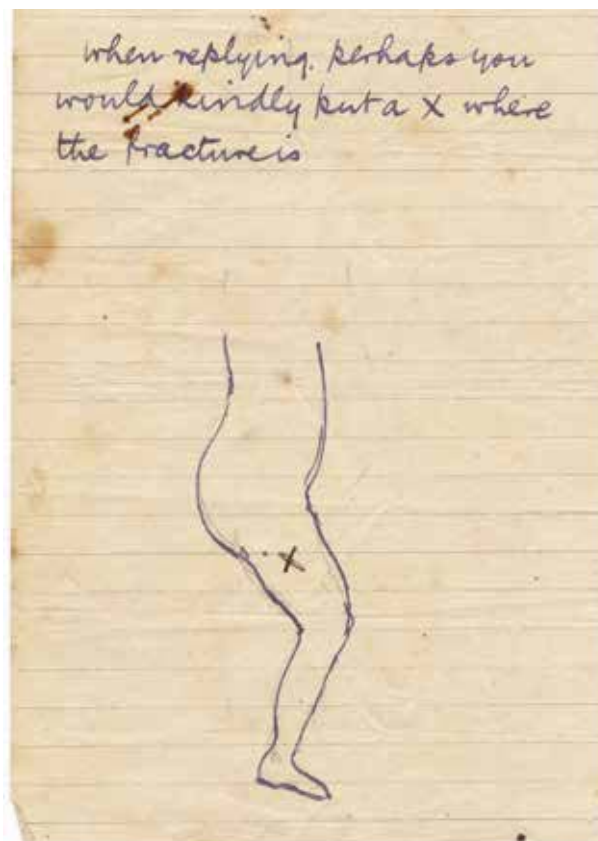
Dear Madam,

I am sorry to say that your son was slightly wounded last night in the right thigh, but it is nothing to worry about and he is quite as well as can be expected under the circumstances.

A German sniper had hit Cecil as he was inspecting the trenches and on 30 October Cecil dictated a letter to his mother from the 6th Field Ambulance.

Dear Mother,

Have been unlucky enough to stop some German lead, and now here with a broken thigh bone in right leg. I don't think there is anything very complicated about the affair, the only trouble is that it is likely to be rather long and tedious, as they say it may be close on six months before I am hopping around again.



A letter sent by John Grundy to Field Ambulance nurses asking them to indicate the position of Cecil's fracture

In the next two weeks Cecil dictated letters home, as well as writing a couple himself. Unknown to him the nurses who were looking after him also corresponded with the Grundy family. On 2 November his night Sister, Margaret Donnellan wrote to Mrs Grundy:

Dear Madam,

enclosed you will find a letter from your son Lt. Grundy – written by me but I could not possibly send it to you without letting you know how dangerously ill is he and how very anxious his medical advisers are about him – you know from previous letters he has a compound fracture of the thigh and... gangrene... We are all anxious to pull him through we cannot bear to lose one of our brave men.

Letters came nearly every other day with news on Cecil's condition. From his bed he wrote and dictated letters home. Mostly penned by the day Sister, nurse Catherine Elston, who in the summer of 1915 had been awarded the Royal Red Cross by King George V,¹² in addition to her own personal correspondence with Emily Grundy. On 14 November

No 6 Field Amb Hospital
BEF
Monday Nov 8th

Dear Mother

I received your letter of Saturday afternoon first thing this morning which is quite quick work. But how is it that this is the first letter I have received at all? Did you never write between the last letter I got in the trenches & Sat last?

The nurses were the most anxious for they were so afraid they had ^{written} too much & though of course they never said anything I think a personal acknowledgment from you or Father would be very acceptable to them.

Of course Father & the boys can't come out here; we are only 6 miles from the firing line so our mite friend Kitchener might intervene, & besides I can't stick talking to anyone beyond 2 minutes so there would not be very much

Original letter written by Cecil Grundy from the BEF's No. 6 Field Ambulance Hospital, 8 November 1915

(2)

in it after all or Dad could not really help at all. No really I'm very glad things are turning out like this for it is quite probable that after another week or so here they may send me through practically straight to England i.e. instead of keeping me at the Base for the serious part they may keep me here.

9PM Nurse Donnellan tells me she has just had letter from Dad & I guess she's the nurse (I know her just as well but I don't know her name - she is in charge) will get one to-morrow going to painting operations all the "slight" cases from upstairs have been put in our ward temporarily. It does annoy me! Then I must be terribly cross sometimes now. ~~tomorrow~~ I will tell you all about the wound & the dressings

Catherine wrote a letter on Cecil's behalf in which he relayed an operation he had undergone. The tone was upbeat with news of his condition but the following day Catherine wrote to Mrs Grundy notifying her that Cecil's condition had worsened. At some time after 11pm on 16 November 1915 Margaret Donnellan penned the following lines:

Dear Mrs Grundy

It is my very painful duty to write and tell you of your son's death at 11 pm tonight. I was with him when he died and I am glad to say his end was happy and peaceful and he died like the hero he was. He knew he was dying and regretted not seeing any of you - He spoke of you all. His mother and father particularly and also mentioned Vera several times.

In addition to correspondence between the family and Cecil's nurses, letters of condolence came from John Grundy's acquaintances who had read the news in *The Times*; Cecil's

former servant in the Middlesex Regiment; and Lt-Col F. G. M. Rowley, the Commanding Officer (CO) of Cecil's battalion the 1st Middlesex.

Ronald, who was still training in England, received a letter from an Old Wellingtonian boy who was serving as a Lieutenant in Cecil's battalion. William Hugh David De Pass wrote on 20 November:

My dear Grundy,

It was very great grief that I saw in the papers this morning the sad news about your brother. I had hoped from your letter that he would recover, so it came as a terrible shock to me. I only trust that he did not suffer much pain. He has given his life, as I know he himself would have wished, in the service of his country and this at any rate must be a small consolation to you.

Harris and I were only talking of him the other day, and were saying what a good officer he made.



Painting of Ronald Grundy

Please accept my deepest sympathy, which I feel for you, and express my great regret to your people.

On 22 November Ronald wrote to his mother from Belvedere Camp in Rochester where he was stationed and wrote the following to comfort her regarding Cecil's loss:

Bear up, Mother dear, and find a little comfort in the fact that in 21

years he had made himself more loved and respected than most people do in a lifetime; and that he died the finest death there is. As Macaulay says: How can man die better, than fighting fearful odds. For the ashes of his fathers, And the temples of his gods.

With Love to you all, Your affectionate son, Ronald.

During December 1915 Ronald wrote home with news of the signalling work he had been carrying out. Although he spent Christmas Day with his family, he spent the rest of late December occupied with theory and practical tests in signalling which included reading and sending messages by flags and lamps and laying wires between an imaginary battalion and brigade headquarters over an area of three miles, all exercises which were essential to Front Line combat. At this time he was also pre-occupied with finding himself a motorbike.

On 21 March 1916 Ronald wrote to his mother about being confirmed with his elder brother never far from his mind, 'Isn't it a coincidence that I am to be confirmed on the day that dear Cecil, had he lived, would have been 22. I am trying to be like him and in some way to make up for his loss.' Cecil continued to occupy Ronald's thoughts when he too was sent to France. In a letter on 6 June he wrote:

I wish dear old Cecil were with me now. We could have helped each other a lot, or rather he could have helped me. When he was alive, he did lots of things for me which I never appreciated. I used to look upon him as slow and priggish; in fact at times I was almost ashamed of being his brother. That was because I wanted to be thought as well, and he tried to curb me. And now I am absolutely thankful that he was with me, and did check me; or else I might have gone to the devil. I wish I had been kinder to him and backed him up more. Out here I

meet fellows who were in the 6th Middlesex and when they hear my name, they ask me whether I am brother to the Grundy who was killed with the 1st. And although he was only with the 6th about 2½ months they all say how much liked he was, and what a good fellow he was. And they mean it too: men in the Army never flatter or compliment each other without good cause. If I come back I shall try to be as good a brother to Jack and Rups as Cecil was to me.

On 4 June Ronald writes about the Battle of Jutland, the most significant naval battle of the War which began on 31 May:

The Naval Battle seems to have been very even, I was afraid it was a victory for the Germans, but it is more in favour of us. At any rate, it will affect their fleet more than it will ours. What a terrible fight it must have been! But nothing to what the Army will be going through shortly.

Ronald alludes here to the offensive, which the British and French High Commands had been planning since late 1915 and what we know as the Battle of the Somme. On 5 June he wrote to his father:

It is somewhat of a coincidence that I should be going up to the firing line on my birthday. I can't say I am at all sorry to go; it has been my chief ambition for a long time and I want to get it over. I don't suppose for a moment that, should I get the opportunity, I shall ever want to come out again. But it is a wonderful experience and one I would not miss for worlds. I used to be afraid my eyesight would stop me coming out, or that the doctors would find some hidden physical defect. But I have got out here at last, and it's up to me to make the most of my opportunities. I hope and pray I shall come back to you all again, to be a help and comfort to you and Mother. But if I don't, you will know I've died quite happy. I have had a happy life – the best parents a boy could wish for, and the best home.

Ronald left for the Front on the afternoon of Tuesday 6 June at 4.10pm and considered himself rather lucky as 'most people going up the line leave here at 4.10am.' He joined his battalion the next day on 7 June.¹³ On the same day he left for the Front Ronald left instructions for how his property should be divided in the event of death. In the letter, in which he asked his father to dispose of his goods should the worst happen, he requested that money be left among others to family members, Emanuel School and Dr Barnardo's Homes. His gold ring was to be left to Janet who we presume was his girlfriend who is mentioned on more than one occasion in his letters.

Letters sent home from the front lines were censored to avoid information getting into the wrong hands but Ronald devised ways around the censors several times. Writing on the day he joined his battalion he ended his letter, 'P.S. I wrote Albert today, but am not sure of his address. Ask father about it.' We know through what he described in his letter that Ronald was stationed in the town of Albert, which sat a few miles from the British Front Line. He also asked his parents to tell him if any of his letters were ever censored.

The letter details the scenes he witnessed on that first day, being full of descriptions of landscape, life and the minutiae of army life at the Front such as the wearing of tin helmets.

The town in which we are billeted is only just behind the firing line, and is always being shelled. The Bosch must know I've arrived for he has put several over this afternoon, quite near this house. No one takes any notice of them, and people walk about the streets quite unconcernedly. The Cathedral has had a good knocking about and the statue of the Virgin on the tower has been knocked over and is only hanging by a few threads of iron. They say when it falls, the war will be over...I am posted to "D" Company...We all have to wear these tin hats, like pudding basins, they look most picturesque.¹⁴

On 10 June Ronald writes home describing trench life and writes of his dislikes being, 'artillery fire, and rain.'

At the moment I'm off duty, or should not be writing this. These trenches are very muddy, and have suffered considerably through artillery fire. It rained all Thursday and throughout the night and on Friday things were awfully messy – up to your ankles all the time, and

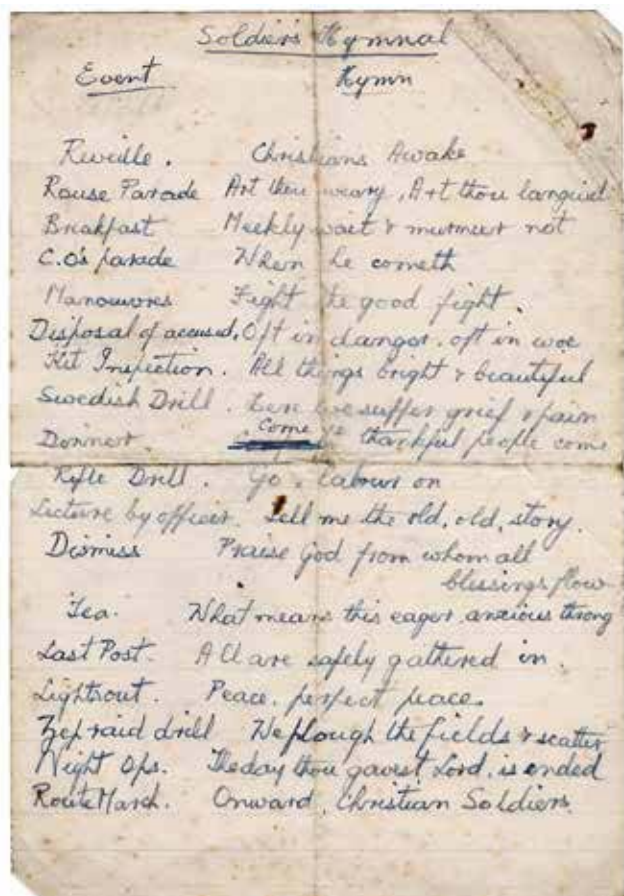
of course covered with mud from head to foot. The trench coat and boots are unrecognisable; the boots are comfortable, but after 24 hours in the rain my feet were wet, which was hardly to be wondered at... Trench life is rather boring after the first day or two, especially when it rains (it has started again today). This bit of line is quite a hot bit – there is generally something on the move, especially at night. Consequently we get very little sleep at night...

On 12 June Ronald describes the life of an officer in the trenches, 'An officer has a tremendous lot of walking about to do, up and down the trenches, seeing that sentries are alert, and everything is all right. The men are splendid – of course they grouse amongst themselves, but they stand an awful lot – rain and cold, and mud and lots of hard work.' He continues his letter with what life was like for him being so close to bursting shells, 'the first time I was near it was one night, when I was trying to sleep in a little shelter, about 18 shells came flying over and burst about 20 yds away. I could see the flash from the door and didn't know what on earth to do – there was a terrific noise, and if I moved out, I might walk into it; on the other hand, I might get it if I stayed where I was.' Ronald also mentions his brother and Howe House, which he had once captained and now his younger brother Jack is a member of it, 'Tell Jack I'm very glad to hear that Howe are doing so well – I hope they continue their success... is he training for the sports?' Ronald was looking forward to returning to his family and as he put it, 'I want to enjoy the delights of civilisation again.'

On 15 June Ronald wrote to his mother describing the 20-miles march he and his fatigue party had to complete as



Officers of the 6th Battalion Middlesex Regiment, Gillingham, August 1915. Cecil Grundy standing second from right.



Soldier's Hymnal written by Ronald Grundy and intended for publication in The Portcullis

part of their training. Interestingly he also mentions putting his watch forward due to the French Daylight Saving Bill which reminds us that even though one hundred years have passed since he wound his watch, Ronald's world was very much, in this respect, the world we still live in – the twenty-first century. He also makes reference to his battalion:

My servant is quite a nice fellow. Very polite and attentive. The battalion is one to be proud of, as far as the NCOs and men are concerned. They are thorough soldiers, ready for anything. They stand any amount of hardship and fatigue, and though, like all tommies, they grouse, they aren't really disconcerted. Their humour is of the type that can only be found in the British Army... to appreciate it really you want to be with them in the trenches during a bombardment – I will tell you some funny stories when I get back to 'Blighty' (Tommies name for England). My platoon is a good one; the fellow who had it before me was very popular. He got the military cross and a wound in a successful little raiding affair last month, in which 'Fritz' was severely strafed and is now in England recovering.

On 16 June Ronald took the extraordinary decision to send a letter home with one of the men who was returning to England. It certainly would never have passed the censor if it had been ordinarily posted, a fact Ronald was all too aware of. The letter to Ronald's father detailed British plans for what became known as the 'Big Push' or 'Great Advance'. Since Christmas 1915 Allied Commanders had been planning to break through the German lines in what was hoped would break the stalemate on the Western Front. As 1916 developed the plans evolved, with several strategies being contemplated. By June 1916 the plans would see an artillery bombardment attempt to destroy the German defences, the preparation for which is noted in Ronald's letter. It was hoped that such a heavy bombardment would cut the German wires and reduce the capacity of the Germans to attack when the 'Big Push' was to be launched on 1 July. Ronald wrote:

My Dear Father,

I am taking the opportunity offered by a man going home on leave of getting a letter posted England, where one can avoid the censor. I enclose some postcards of places in this neighbourhood; they will tell you exactly where I have been... In a week or two we shall be involved in about the biggest attack that has happened along this front. The whole 4th Army will be going for the Bosch and I can tell you from the preparations made that we are going to give him worse hell than he has ever given us. Whether the rest of the British line will advance, I cannot say. But I feel sure, if our affair realises expectations, Mr. Bosch will be feeling very sick. Several days artillery bombardment, followed by all sorts of things. Then the advance – 2nd Devons and our regiment will be first over the parapet in this division, attacking on quite a small front; but with other divisions on our right and left. Of course we go into battle light – all our kits will be left behind. I shall wear my body shield, and carry revolver, glasses, compass, one or two necessaries, and some food. We look to the artillery to do a lot of the dirty work, and I'm sure they will, for there are simply heaps of huge guns and unlimited ammunition. Some of our officers will be left behind as a reserve to replace casualties; but I'm glad to say I shall be one of the first over the top.

Ronald went on to list the contents of his two kits bags and then continued:

Well, Dad, I won't go into further details, as I have told you enough to let you understand what is about to happen. As it is information that would be useful to the enemy keep it to yourself at least till the show has started. I should advise you not to tell Mother, until it is over, as it would only make her more anxious.

I'm not dreading; but if I don't come back – Goodbye, and God Bless you All. However I'm full of hope, and trust to come through with nothing worse than a wound. Perhaps in a month's time I shall be with you all once again – I hope so. Well, let's hope the fellow remembers to post this.

Love to all,
Ronald.

On 18 June Ronald tells his mother about the few luxuries he enjoyed at the Front, 'Just think of this. Yesterday I had strawberries and cream for tea – pretty good for a place as near to the firing line as this! And we always get bacon and eggs for breakfast in the trenches! This evening I have been over to the local village and had another hot bath – about four inches of warm water in an ancient slipper bath in an old stable. Still, it was greatly appreciated.'¹⁵

Ronald wrote home on the weekend before the opening of the Battle of the Somme. His letter contains both personal and general information and from it we can almost be transported back to his own times as he mentions the song he was listening to on the gramophone:

Sometimes you get a good deal of time for writing in the trenches, but this last trip there was such a crowd of us in one little dug out, that there wasn't much opportunity for writing a decent letter...we were up all night and did a long march across country.

Our billet is a French farm house. I don't think much farming is done by the inhabitants just now, but there are still some people living in the house. The barns and outhouses are full of men and I share a room with 3 other officers on the ground floor. Two others sleep in the garden in a bell tent. It is something to have a roof over one's head and to be able to stand upright. The men are simply wonderful. I admire them more every day. It poured with rain last night, and we had a most gruelling march, heavily laden, across country, over our ankles in mud. Not one of my platoon fell out, and this afternoon, after a few hours sleep, they are as chirpy as anything, busy scraping the mud off their clothes and cleaning their rifles. It is a hard life for them, with few comforts, and only an ultimate return to England to look forward to.

Once again, Ronald went on to give his appreciation that Howe, his old House at School, were doing so well and he suggested that his younger brother Jack should practise batting with patience if he was to get into a School team. He wrote that the memory of the ruined cathedral at Albert would always remain with him and paints the scene of life in the garden of the farmhouse in the last week before one

of the most tragic and significant moments of the twentieth century. The juxtaposition between the garden scene and what was to follow is almost unbelievable, yet we can survey this panoramic scene on the Somme, sweeping from the comedy of a popular song to the tragedy of an artillery chorus through Ronald's experiences:

Well, here I am, seated in the garden of my farmhouse, smoking the pipe of peace. With our gramophone a few yards away playing a comic song, 'Another little drink wouldn't do us any harm.' We've got heaps of very good records, but are running short of needles, so you might send me two boxes of medium 'His Master's Voice' needles in your next parcel.

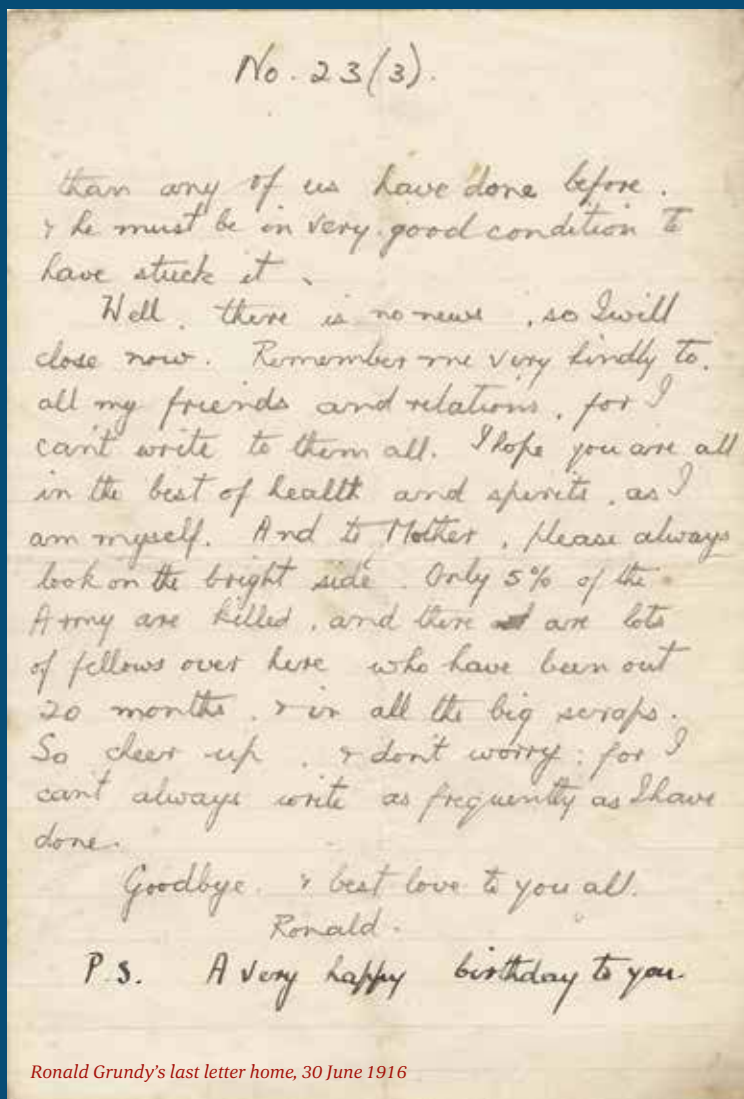
It is very peaceful in this garden... In the distance we can see the firing line and the artillery of both sides blazing away. Our people are fairly handing it out to Fritz. I should imagine he is strengthening his dugout feverishly!

His letter gives us an insight into what life was like for the inhabitants on whose country this war was largely being fought:

The French are extraordinary people. Only old men and children and women are to be seen. The women are mostly old farmers' wives, and have a splendid spirit. They have all got sons; husbands or brothers fighting and most of them have had near relations killed. And yet they carry on a few miles from the firing line, resigned to everything. "C'est la Guerre" they say and after that there is nothing more to be said. Our landlady has lost a son at Verdun and told me all about it. She said to me, "Pauvres enfant et pauvres parents".

The next letter Ronald sent was to wish his mother a happy birthday for 5 July, expressing his desire for the war to be ended and to be home with his family. He also observed the peculiar uses to which Tommies put their tin hats, 'A universal thing out here nowadays is the tin hat. Every regiment that goes into front line trenches is equipped with them and they have to be worn as soon as you get within reach of enemy shellfire. To the Tommy they are invaluable, apart from their protective properties, for he makes tea in them, or soup, or uses them for washing purposes as every man has to wash when in the trenches, and no basins are supplied.'¹⁶

On 28 June Ronald writes a short letter to accompany the one he sent the day before which mentions that he has a document called, *The Soldier's Hymnal* which his younger brother Jack might use for the *The Portcullis*. It was never used in the School magazine but for the first time is reproduced here, almost a century after Ronald sent it.¹⁷ Ronald wrote in



Ronald Grundy's last letter home, 30 June 1916

the previous letter that it was 'a hymn for all the important events of a soldier's life.' Essentially it is a list of hymns to be used at various moments in a soldier's life, from 'Christians Awake' at Reveille to 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' at kit inspection to 'Onward Christian Soldiers' on route march.

On Thursday 29 June Ronald's mind was on his old House and the part his brothers were playing in its fortunes, 'I was sorry to hear of the defeat of Howe by Clyde, but there is no reason why you should not win the championship even now. When Howe won the Rugby championship 3 or 4 years ago, we won the first 5 matches straight off, lost the next 3, won the fourth and drew the fifth. Result - champions by 1 point.'

When one looks at the next letter one can see written in ink, 'recvd July 4 1st post'; a day before Emily Grundy's birthday and three days after the opening day of the Battle of the

Somme. The letter was written on Friday 30 June. He mentions men in the services he has known, family news, the weather and the fact that he hasn't long to wait, which is an allusion to the Battle of the following day. The last page of that letter is a plea to his mother not to worry, 'Please always look on the bright side. Only 5% of the Army are killed, and there are lots of fellows over here who have been out 20 months and in all the big scraps. So cheer up and don't worry: for I can't always write as frequently as I have done.' The last words Ronald Grundy was to write were birthday wishes to his mother.

Saturday 1 July 1916

We can imagine that Ronald Grundy rose early this morning: his mind on preparing his platoon, number 14 2nd Battalion Middlesex Regiment. The evening before he had stayed with a team of machine gunners in one of four dugouts occupied by number 14 platoon in Rycroft Street. That morning his thoughts may have causally drifted to Wandsworth Common and the walks along the railway line from home to school and back or those long cycle rides with Cecil to the coast, but chiefly his thoughts would have been on those men whom he thought so much of and on doing his best for them.

Ronald would have heard the roaring thunder of the artillery as the guns opened and shells flew furiously across No Man's Land towards the German trenches. A rising mist covered the void between the belligerents' positions, while smoke from shellfire covered the ominous and

unknowing landscape ahead.

We have a fairly accurate description of Ronald's last moments. A friend in the Middlesex Regiment asked Ronald's servant, Lance Corporal W. Noyes, who was three feet behind him as they left the trenches, to write to the Grundys. In turn they asked Noyes several questions about their son's last moments and from Noyes's replies we can piece together Ronald's journey across No Man's Land.

Ronald had left his trench shortly after 7.20am. Leading his platoon he was waving a yellow swagger stick and had covered roughly 900 yards when at a distance of 100 yards from the German lines, all of a sudden he just crumpled without making a sound. Noyes thought that it was most likely that Ronald had been hit by a German sniper for, 'He was killed by a bullet which went in about a quarter

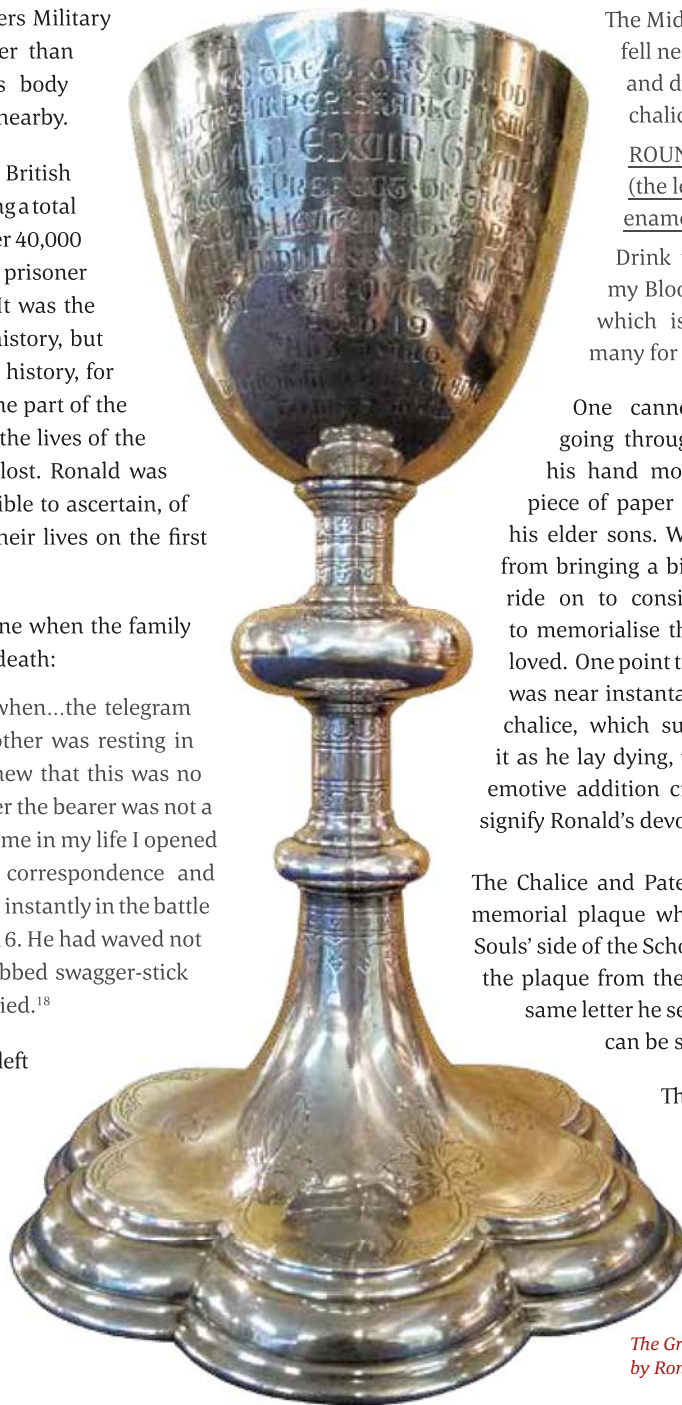
of an inch above the collarbone close up to the neck on the left side and came out through the spine between the shoulderblades.' Noyes dragged Ronald to their advanced sap but he had to leave Ronald where he was so he took Ronald's jacket and covered his body. Ronald was later buried, Noyes having left his identification disc around his neck for this purpose and having removed any valuable items to be returned to his family. Due to the continued fighting Ronald's original grave was lost and so the headstone which bears his name in Ovillers Military Cemetery is a memorial rather than a final resting place but his body is believed to be buried nearby.

On that fatal day over 19,000 British servicemen lost their lives among a total of nearly 60,000 casualties. Over 40,000 received wounds, were taken prisoner or were recorded as missing. It was the worst day in British military history, but perhaps we should say British history, for the military aspect was only one part of the tragic story that encompasses the lives of the families and friends of those lost. Ronald was one, as far as it has been possible to ascertain, of four Emanuel boys who lost their lives on the first day of the Somme.

Jack Grundy described the scene when the family received the news of Ronald's death:

I happened to be at home when...the telegram came about Ronald. My mother was resting in the early afternoon and I knew that this was no hour for a telegram. Moreover the bearer was not a boy but a man. For the first time in my life I opened what was clearly parental correspondence and learned that Ronald had died instantly in the battle of the Somme on 1st July 1916. He had waved not a sword, but the yellow-knobbed swagger-stick that British officers now carried.¹⁸

Ronald, as already noted, left money to the Emanuel School chapel and also requested that a trophy be purchased to, 'foster the Inter House spirit'. Ronald allocated the sum of twenty pounds to Emanuel and it was his father who carried out the bequest.



The Grundy Chalice, bequeathed by Ronald Grundy

The following instructions were given to the engravers,

Dear Mr. Hayco

Thanks for yours of the 4th and 8th. Will you please tell me the cost of Chalice 8¾" no 21 in catalogue solid silver with paten plate inscribed round base:

To the glory of God and the imperishable memory of Ronald Edwin Grundy sometime Prefect of the School, Second Lieutenant 2nd Bn

The Middlesex Regiment, who fell near Ovillers July 1 1916 and dying bequeathed this chalice to his School.

ROUND THE RIM INSIDE
(the letters to be filled in with enamel)

Drink ye all of this; for this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins.¹⁹

One cannot imagine the thoughts going through John Grundy's mind as his hand moved the pencil across the piece of paper detailing the memorials to his elder sons. Within a few years he went from bringing a bicycle home for his sons to ride on to considering appropriate words to memorialise them for the School they so loved. One point to note is that Ronald's death was near instantaneous so the words on the chalice, which suggest that he bequeathed it as he lay dying, were, we could assume, an emotive addition created by John perhaps to signify Ronald's devotion to Emanuel.

The Chalice and Paten were accompanied by a memorial plaque which was placed in the 'All Souls' side of the School chapel.²⁰ John requested the plaque from the same engraver and in the same letter he sent to Mr. Hayco. The plaque can be seen on the following page.

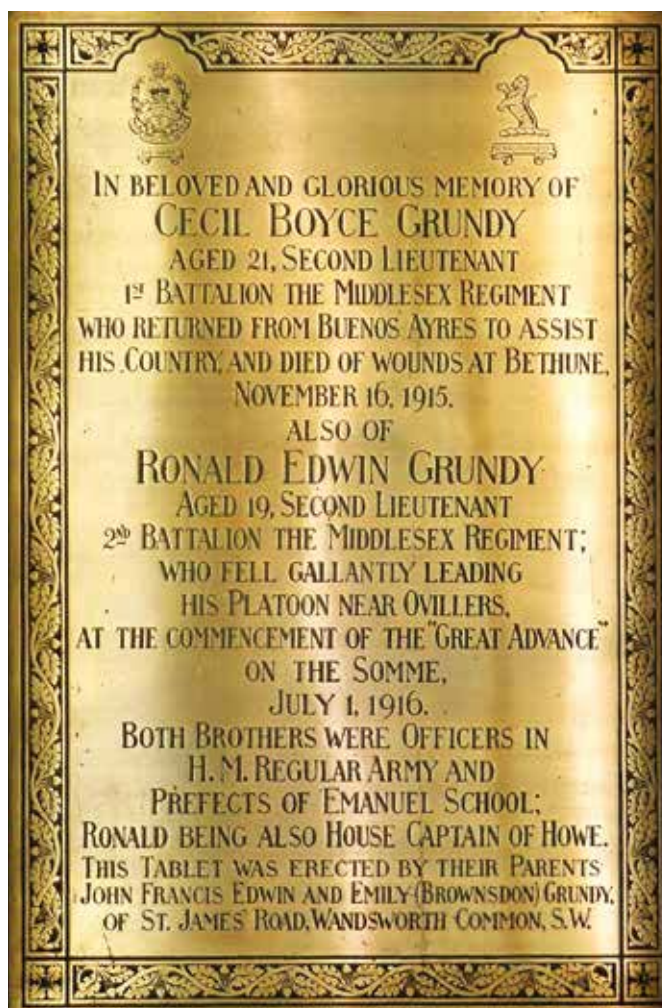
The Grundy Cup, as it became known, was the last memorial given to Emanuel in Ronald's memory. Again, John Grundy noted the details of the words to

be engraved on the cup, which was to be instituted as a trophy for shooting competitions. It was 'a silver covered-cup surmounted by the figure of a private soldier in the time of the Great War, 1914–18, in full kit with rifle at the slope. It bears the School Arms and the inscription':

THIS CUP WAS BEQUEATHED TO HIS SCHOOL BY RONALD EDWIN GRUNDY (SOMETIME PREFECT OF THE SCHOOL) 2ND LIEUTENANT IN THE 2ND B'N THE MIDDLESEX REGIMENT WHO FELL NEAR OVILLERS, JULY 1ST, 1916, AS A PERPETUAL TROPHY FOR HOUSE COMPETITIONS IN MARCHING AND SHOOTING. 'STAND FAST, BRAVE HEARTS; WHAT WILL THEY SAY OF THIS IN ENGLAND.'²¹

It was fitting that the first House to win this cup was Howe, Ronald's old House.²² In 1935 Mrs Grundy, in the presence of Emanuel School pupils, staff and Mr. John Grundy, presented the cup to Richard Kemp Wildey, who was a Company Sergeant Major in the OTC and also Captain of Nelson House. Interestingly Richard lived in St James' Road, the same road on which the Grundys had lived. Richard lost his life when the Halifax he was piloting crashed on the night of 15 October 1942 on a bombing operation on Cologne.

The significance of Ronald's death can be gleaned from the fact that his name appears in the Emanuel School Prayer, alongside that of the School's Elizabethan Founders.



The Grundy Plaque

References

- 1 This was made into a coloured lithograph, copies of which can be found in the National Portrait Gallery.
- 2 *The Portcullis*, No. 58, Spring Term 1913, pp. 9–10.
- 3 Letter 81 from Cecil to parents dated 31 July 1914.
- 4 Letter 82 from Cecil dated 4 August 1914.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Letter 90 from John Grundy to Cecil, 29 August 1914, pp. 3–4.
- 7 Letter from Ronald to Cecil, Wednesday 2 September 1914.
- 8 Letter from Cecil to Mrs Grundy 7 October 1915 p. 5.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 Letter from Cecil to family 18 October 1915.
- 11 Letter from Cecil 23 October 1915.
- 12 *The British Journal of Nursing*, July 3, p. 8. A photo of Catherine Elston can be found in the same edition on p. 9.
- 13 War Diary of 2nd Battalion The Middlesex Regiment, June 1916, see 7 June.
- 14 Letter from Ronald to his parents No. 10, June 7 1916.
- 15 Letter from Ronald to Mrs Grundy, No. 15, 18 June, p. 3.
- 16 Letter from Ronald to Mrs Grundy, No. 21, 27 June 1916.
- 17 Letter from Ronald, No. 21 A.
- 18 J. B. C. Grundy, *Life's Five Windows*, (1968), quoted, pp. 20–21.
- 19 Letter from John Grundy to Mr. Hayco dated 16 August, no year date.
- 20 *The Portcullis*, Spring Term 1917, No. 70, p. 5.
- 21 Scott-Giles, *History of Emanuel*, pp. 287–288.
- 22 *Ibid.* p. 202.



The Grundy family in happier times. Ronald seated centre and Cecil seated right