

SCHOOL PERSONALITIES

James McLeish (1891-1932)

James McLeish was born in Edinburgh on July 24th, 1891, and he came to London with his parents at the age of four. He was educated at Latymer Upper School, Borough Road College, Isleworth, and at London University, where he took his BA degree with honours in history, Later he was awarded his MA degree for special historical research on British Honduras, work which was later used in the official history of that country.

He was a schoolmaster under the LCC for two years, and from 1913 until 1925, with the exception of the war years, he was an assistant master at Ashford County School (Middlesex), being appointed Headmaster of Kilburn Grammar School in September 1925. This post he held until his death on 22nd December, 1932, from pneumonia, after less than a fortnight's illness.

Before the 1914-1918 war he was a member of the London Scottish Territorials, and he went to France as a private in that regiment in 1914. Being wounded at Messines, he was sent home after being promoted to the rank of sergeant. On his recovery he went to Porton, Salisbury, in charge of the gas section. After important experimental work he returned to France with a gas company and was given a commission, but was again wounded and sent home. Later he was promoted to captain and was placed in charge of Porton Gas Station. While he was commanding officers there, experiments were about to be carried out with a new gas-helmet, and a private had been assigned to wear it in the gas chamber. Captain McLeish refused to let him do so, and placing the helmet over his own head, he himself entered the chamber. Unfortunately the mask was not satisfactory and Captain McLeish was badly gassed. It was for this act of gallantry that he received the Military MBE. He remained in this service until the end of the war, and undoubtedly the gassing he received contributed ultimately to his death.

Mr McLeish was one of six brothers who served in the war, all of whom were gassed or wounded on active service.

He took a keen interest in the welfare of the KGS both outside and inside the school walls. He never spared himself in the service of the school, and he was known, after a belated school function, to miss the last train from Richmond and walk from there to Ashford at midnight. His sporting capabilities were due to the fact that he had always been an “all-rounder” having been famous as an Amateur Association football player. He glorified in the success of the school teams, and watched their progress with keen interest. He is also remembered for those end-of-term sing-songs of his creation which will live in the memory of many, long after other memories of their schooldays have become dim with age.

He was a man of infinite good fellowship, a good “mixer” – for he had many other interests outside the sphere of the school. If the confidence which he inspired in maintaining and enhancing the reputation of the school was the explanation of his professional success, then his geniality, earnestness and consideration for others were the true measure of his popularity, and he was a very popular man.

To all those who knew him at Kilburn he will always be remembered as “The Head”. He was loyal to those in his trust, understanding and progressive, stern when the occasion demanded, but loved and esteemed by all those who knew him.

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