



## **2010 St Andrew's College Anzac Day Address** **Wayne Erickson - Principal**

The first lesson, from Ecclesiasticus, exhorts us to sing the praises of famous men, our ancestors in their generations.

There are representatives here today of the fresher intake of 2007, 08, 09 and 10. Some of you have made friendships which will last all your lives.

The fresher intake of 1907 saw 22 young men enter St Andrew's College. Within a decade, 14 of those freshers had answered the call of king and country to serve in the killing fields of Europe. One of those Andrewsmen did not return.

John Hay's life ended in the skies over northern France at the hand of the Red Baron, Manfred von Richthofen. He is the only Australian among the 89 airmen shot down by the most famous of the German fighter pilots of World War I. Hay had gone to England to enlist in the Royal Flying Corps and had spent the bleak winter of 1916-1917 with 40 Squadron at Arras, escorting allied bombers over France and Belgium. His body landed in no-man's-land just south of Lens, was recovered and buried at Aire-sur-Lys. The grave was marked by an aircraft propeller cut down into a cross and a brass plaque inscribed 'The earth holds not a braver gentleman'. This plaque is now in the Australian War Memorial at Canberra.

Known universally as Jack, he had been born in Australia on 22 January 1889, into a family of prosperous graziers, formerly of Aberdeenshire. His uncle, Sir John Hay, had established large runs on the Murrumbidgee and was a member of the New South Wales Parliament successively for the Murrumbidgee, the Murray and Central Cumberland from 1856 until his death in 1892. Sir John's younger brother, William, bought the 140,000 acres of Gunningbah near Warren in 1902, when his son Jack was thirteen.

Educated at Shore, young Jack entered St Andrew's College in March 1907, studying Arts. He did not persevere with his studies, however, and left at the end of 1907, returning to assist with running Gunningbah. His father died in 1912 and Jack seems to have assumed control of the run.

He fell in love with a family friend, Emma a'Beckett, whose father had represented Warren in the State Parliament, but decided to sail to England alone in 1915 to enlist in the British rather than the Australian forces. He joined the Royal Flying Corps in 1916. Just before his posting to France, he sent an engagement ring to Emma with a proposal of marriage, which was accepted, but three months later he was dead.

His fiancée never married and until her death in 1973 she always wore the diamond ring.

When the University of Sydney decided to install a War Memorial Carillon in the Blacket Clock Tower, Jack's widowed mother, Isabella, donated over £600 for bell no. 6 in memory of her son. Incidentally, bell no. 10 was paid for by St Andrew's College. Isabella Hay wrote to the University saying of her son Jack that:

He had everything in life to make him happy – youth, health, an occupation he loved, and the brightest of prospects. I am only one of the thousands of others who gave their sons, but every mother thinks her tragedy the greatest.

The bell first rang on Anzac Day 1928.

But from the flames of the conflagration which was that great and terrible war rose a phoenix of hope and opportunity. Thirteen of Jack Hay's fresher mates came home, bringing with them a deep understanding of duty and a commitment to turn those awful experiences into positive energy for the life force of this new nation. One of those inspired and inspirational freshers was Alan Holmes à Court.

Alan Worsley Holmes à Court was born in Queensland on 19 June 1887. After Brisbane Grammar School, Alan enrolled in Medicine at the University of Sydney in 1906. For the last years of his medical education, from December 1907 until 1910, he was resident at St Andrew's College. He was a fine oarsman and rowed both for the College and for the University in 1908 and 1909. In these years the College rowers reasserted their ascendancy over Paul's and John's while Holmes à Court was rowing at no. 2 or 3 and they helped the College to commence the sequence of holding the Rawson Cup for seven consecutive years up to World War I.

Holmes à Court graduated Bachelor of Medicine in 1910 and Master of Surgery in 1911. He began his lifelong association with Sydney Hospital in 1911, but he moved to general practice in Manly in 1913, taking a Sydney Hospital nurse with him in matrimony.

His service in World War I began in 1916, as a captain, later a major, in the Medical Corps. In 1918 he was prominent in the 4<sup>th</sup> Australian Field Ambulance, was mentioned in dispatches and early in 1919 was given a French award, the *Médaille des Epidémies*.

Holmes à Court returned to Australia in August 1919 after qualifying as a Member of the Royal College of Physicians in London. Although he resumed his general practice in Manly, he soon moved to Macquarie Street and to positions at Sydney Hospital. He taught in the clinical school at this University from 1931 until his retirement in 1945.

Alan's surviving son, Peter, born in 1925, graduated in Engineering at this University in 1943 but did not attend College. Like his father before him he

rowed for the university being awarded 3 blues, and rowing for Australia being successful in the 1950 Empire Games beating New Zealand and Britain for the gold. By his marriage to Margaret Campbell, Peter had two sons and two daughters.

One of the sons is Alan William, known as Will, who has recently become Chief Executive Officer of the National Trust in New South Wales. Will's brother, Campbell Worsley, is the father of Nicola Holmes à Court, now in her first year in St Andrew's, following in the footsteps of her distinguished great-grandfather and one of a number of cousins attending as the fourth generation at the university.

We extend a warm welcome to members of the Hay and Holmes à Court families here today.

We mourn the tragedy of life lost, and celebrate the contribution in war and beyond of these brave men. This is a difficult balance. In the vestibule downstairs, written in Latin, is an inscription, a passage from the Old Book commemorating duty and sacrifice.

"Whatever we loved in them, whatever we admire, remains and will continue in the hearts of mankind, and the fame of their deeds will be eternal."

*The Archival material in relation to A W Holmes à Court and John Hay was prepared by Professor Jack, whose work is acknowledged with thanks.*