

ALFRED VICTOR RATCLIFFE (MASTER)



Date of Birth	1 February 1887 in Gravesend, Kent
School Information	Attended Dulwich School before going to Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge in 1907, where he got his BA in 1914.
Career Information	Master at the College. He enlisted at the outbreak of the war, abandoning his studies to become a barrister at Inner Temple and poet.
Date Of Death	1 July 1916
Cause of Death	Killed in action leading his company on the opening day of the Battle of the Somme.
Location	Fricourt, Somme, France
Cemetery	Fricourt New Military Cemetery, Somme, France Grave : C 8 He is also mentioned on Harrogate Cenotaph and on the Harrogate St Roberts RC Church War Memorial
Rank	Lieutenant
Branch of Service	10 th Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of Wales Own)

While in the trenches he wrote the poem "Optimism" –

At last there'll dawn the last of the long year,
Of the long year that seemed to dream no end,
Whose every dawn but turned the world more drear,
And slew some hope, or led away some friend.
Or be you dark, or buffeting, or blind,
We care not, day, but leave not death behind.

The hours that feed on war go heavy-hearted,
Death is no fare wherewith to make hearts fain.
Oh, we are sick to find that they who started
With glamour in their eyes came not again.
O day, be long and heavy if you will,
But on our hopes set not a bitter heel.

For tiny hopes like tiny flowers of Spring
Will come, though death and ruin hold the land,

Though storms may roar they may not break the wing
 Of the earthed lark whose song is ever bland.
 Fell year unpitiful, slow days of scorn,
 Your kind shall die, and sweeter days be born.

He also put together other poetry in "A Broken Friendship and Other Verses", prior to 1913 and this has been republished in 2013.

The following poem by him was read out at the Remembrance Service in the College Chapel on 9 November 2014. It is believed he wrote this about 2 weeks before he died.

JUNE SONG

It's sweet to love, ah, very sweet
 But then, God knows,
 The thorn climbs swift to tear the hand
 That loves the rose
 But if the heart's dear blood shall touch
 The gathering flower,
 It will but make a redder rose
 A rosier hour.
 For life is short, and love, ah! Love
 Is fleet to fade.
 Oh, pass not the red roses by
 Dear man, sweet maid

