

Rev. Vincent Coke Boddington (1886-1917)



Rev. Vincent Coke Boddington is buried in the churchyard of St Sebastian's Church in Wokingham, one of 28 war graves from the First World War, of whom the majority are British, but 11 are Canadians, one New Zealander and one Australian. All died while being treated at the London Open Air Sanatorium at Pinewood, which was in the parish.



Boddington's gravestone is the standard pattern for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and has the simple inscription: 'Chaplain Rev. V. C. Boddington, Chaplain to the Forces 4th Class, 13th March 1917, Age 30.' His obituary tells us that he died 'of tuberculosis, aggravated by active service'¹, but there is more to his story than either the grave, or the rather formal obituary reveal.



Vincent was born on 16th April 1886, the son of Arthur Cavendish Onslow Boddington and Lucy Theodora Coke.² The family lived in Hereford and Vincent was the eldest, having two younger sisters, Agnes and Mary.³ He was educated at Hereford Cathedral School (see picture⁴), Shrewsbury School (1899-1901), and St John's College, Cambridge, where he was a Choral Student⁵, graduating with a B.A. on 17 December 1908.⁶ While at St John's he was a member of the Discord Club⁷, which was dedicated to bad behaviour, and which led to its founder, the war poet T. E. Hulme, being sent down from Cambridge in 1904.⁸

¹ <http://www.ww1photos.com/ArmyChaplains.html>

² http://www.boddington-family.org.uk/families/display_person.php?p=3670

³ http://www.boddington-family.org.uk/families/display_person.php?p=1542

⁴ Photograph of Vincent Boddington taken from a 'A History of our Pupils in WW1', a presentation available at <http://www.oldherefordiansclub.co.uk/frmWebDisplay.aspx?A= 2>

⁵ Calendar Cambridge University 1916-1917 p 815. St John's College. <http://www.mocavo.co.uk/Calendar-Cambridge-University-1915-1916/377431/815x>

⁶ Joseph Jackson Howard, Visitation of England and Wales, vol. 16.

http://www.forgottenbooks.com/readbook_text/Visitation_of_England_and_Wales_v16_1000436077/247

⁷ In St John's archive there is a photograph of Boddington with other members of the club.

<http://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/db/node.xsp?id=EAD%2FGBR%2F0275%2FPhotographs%2F31%2F37>

⁸ <http://www.warpoets.org/poets/t-e-hulme-1883-1917/>

Perhaps surprisingly for a former member of the Discord Club, Vincent was ordained deacon in 1910 and appointed Curate of East Ham in Essex⁹. It was probably during his curacy that he met Florence, the second daughter of Segar Richard Bastard and Gertrude Littlewood Garrett of Chigwell in Essex. Florence's father was a solicitor, who in his youth had played football for Upton Park FC (1873-1887), and on one occasion for England (1880)¹⁰. They were married at St. Mary, Abchurch, London (pictured right), on 6th November 1915, when Vincent was 29 and Florence 27. Just a year earlier, on 22nd November 2014, Vincent had joined up as an army chaplain 4th class (equivalent to a Captain) attached to 35th General Hospital, Royal Army Medical Corps¹¹.



We have a brief window into Vincent's life on the Western Front through the official War Diary of Revd G. A. Weston, Senior Chaplain to the 18th Division on the Western Front, August-November 1916¹², which records events relating to the outbreak of the Battle of Thiepval Ridge. On 31st August 1916 Weston lists Vincent as one of those who attended a chaplains' meeting at the Mairie about the Village School in Roellecourt. They engaged in devotions and heard an address on the National Mission of Repentance and Hope and its bearing on the work of army chaplains. A few days later, on 6th September, Weston tells us that Boddington and his colleague, Rev G. F. Stopford, had so many soldiers attending Holy Communion that they ran out of Pocket New Testaments to give them.

With battle expected, Boddington and Stopford were temporarily detached from the Regiment's 55th Brigade and transferred on 25th September 1916 to the 55th Field Ambulance, Main Dressing Station, at Clairfay Farm. When battle commenced the following day they took charge of arrangements for giving refreshments to the walking wounded, as well as giving spiritual and physical support in whatever way they could. Not surprisingly, one of their duties was to take burials at the Varennes cemetery. Enemy action was not the only danger faced by those in the trenches, however, and at some point in 1916 Vincent succumbed to tuberculosis, forcing him to relinquish his commission on grounds of ill health on 1st December 1916¹³. On 13th March 1917 he died, leaving Florence a widow after only 16 months of marriage.

**Rev Andrew Marsden
30th December 2014**

⁹ Visitation of England and Wales by Frederick Arthur Crisp, Vol 17, 1911. Additions and Corrections, p 251.

BODDINGTON. Vol. i, page 126. http://archive.org/stream/visitationenglan17howa/visitationenglan17howa_djvu.txt

¹⁰ <http://www.englishfootballonline.com/TeamPlyrsBios/PlayersB/BioBastardSR.html>

¹¹ <http://religiousarchivesgroup.org.uk/tag/world-war-one/>

¹² Held at The National Archives, reference WO 95/2023 (4). <http://religiousarchivesgroup.org.uk/tag/world-war-one/>

¹³ Supplement to the London Gazette 12th May 1917.

<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/30065/supplement/4606/data.pdf>