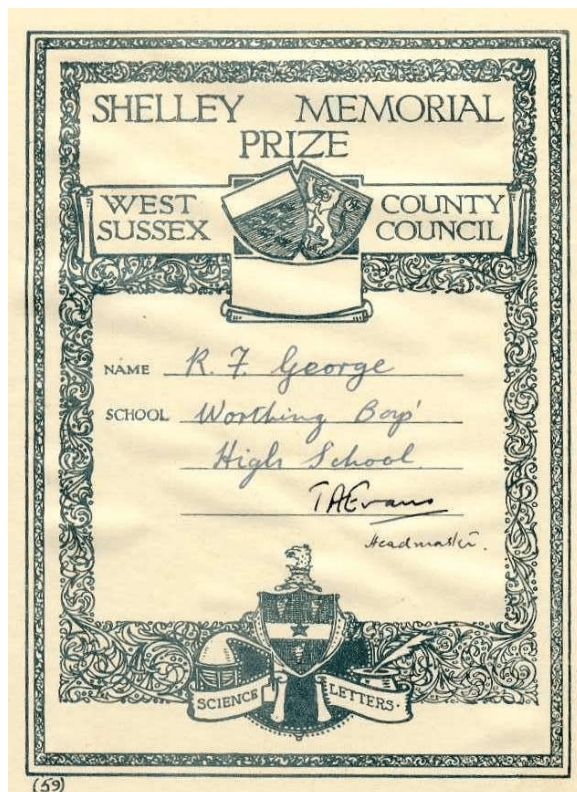


The Shelley Memorial Prize

by Ray George, Angles House, 1951-1959

Upon my bookshelves is a copy of “An Elementary Course of Infinitesimal Calculus” by Sir Horace Lamb. Inside the front cover is the price of 37s 6d and a printed bookplate with the words “Shelley Memorial Prize”, “West Sussex County Council” “Science” and “Letters”.



Bookplate by the artist Morgan Rendle

investigation would be the West Sussex County Record Office. The lady on the help desk did not give me much hope that I would have any success. Nevertheless, I suggested that I look at some committee minutes and I was soon rewarded. For the report of the Higher Education Sub-Committee of the 24th March 1927 said “The Sub-Committee had before them a copy of a memorandum drawn up by the Secretary on the proposed scheme for the award of book prizes under the Shelley Memorial Fund. After referral to the Joint Examination Board, the subcommittee recommended approval of the scheme at their next meeting on 21 April.1927:

- (i) *A prize of the value of £2 may be given annually to one pupil in each of the Secondary Schools in West Sussex on the recommendation of the Head Master or Mistress.*
- (ii) *The Head Master or Mistress shall make application for such prizes at their discretion.*
- (iii) *Prizes shall be given solely for proficiency in any of the natural sciences that may at any time form part of any approved syllabus of Universities or other bodies recognised by the Board of Education for School Examinations, special preference being shown to those who express themselves best in English, but it shall not be necessary to hold a special examination for such prize.*
- (iv) *If book prizes are given each volume shall contain the Shelley Book Plate.*

I was introduced to this beautiful book by Mr R P Macrae. Throughout my time at Worthing High School for Boys, I had not had him as a maths teacher until my final year, when I was preparing for the Open Scholarship Examination at Cambridge. As a teacher of mathematics, he was in a class of his own for the exquisite clarity of his teaching.

I had always supposed that Shelley of the Shelley Memorial Prize was the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. But my own memory was not a sure foundation and it was even suggested to me that the prize commemorated a boy at the school who had died young. I set out to discover the truth. My father A.F.George had started at Worthing High School on the day it opened. I still have all his Azurian school magazines and they told me that this prize was first awarded at the 1928 Speech Day. As the name of county council had been on the bookplate, I thought a good place to begin my

As is usual these days, my next step was to ask Google about the “Shelley Memorial Fund” and I discovered an item in the Essex Record Office Online Archive, namely a receipt for a contribution of £2 to the Shelley Memorial Fund. This was accompanied by a circular inviting subscriptions towards a Shelley Library and Museum and an invitation to attend the Shelley Centenary Celebration at Horsham on 4th August 1892. Could the prize really have anything to do with events in 1892? The lady at the help desk suggested that the establishment of the prize might have been reported in the newspapers and soon I was searching through a huge bound volume of the West Sussex County Times and Standard. On the 4th June 1927, the newspaper reported an inaugural dinner for the Shelley Memorial Prize held at the Black Horse Hotel, Horsham. The event was reported in detail and filled more than three full columns. The prize did indeed have its origin in the Shelley Centenary Celebration at Horsham in 1892 and the principle organisers and trustees of the fund were still the same, James Stanley Little, a writer, and J.J. Robinson, editor and manager of the West Sussex Gazette. In the intervening years, no satisfactory use had been found for the money until in 25th February 1927, J.J. Robinson formally handed to the Chairman of the County Council the trust deed of the Shelley Memorial Fund. This comprised £500 of War Stock, which yielded £25 per year for prizes. Stanley Little seemed to be somewhat disappointed that little weight was being given to English in deciding on the prizewinner.

J. Stanley Little, who lived at Buck’s Green not far from Horsham, was a Shelley enthusiast and had served as honorary secretary of the Shelley Society. It is convenient to start our story with an article in the West Sussex Gazette on 19th November 1891. This article reproduced a letter to the Pall Mall Gazette from Charles William Dalmon at Roffey, Horsham, dated 8th November. He laments that there is no monument to the “red rose of English song” in his birth place and asks “Will no man of letters take the matter up? Will not the Shelley Society?”. The article goes on to report the meeting of the Shelley Society on 11th November 1891 when the chief matter for consideration was the commemoration of the centenary of Shelley’s birth. The Society was already planning a private performance of Shelley’s five act tragedy “The Cenci” in May. They were to be disappointed, as they could find no theatre prepared to host the performance. Despite being private, theatre managers were deterred by this play having no licence for public performance. In addition, among the suggestions put forward, were the erection of a suitable memorial at Horsham in Sussex, where the poet was born, placing a bust within the precincts of Eton, where Shelley received his education and the contribution of a statue by his daughter-in-law, Lady Shelley, with a view to it occupying a site in Oxford. In response to this article, the newspaper received a letter from Stanley Little, published on 3rd December. He notes the practical difficulty of producing a bust, because there is no unimpeachable portrait of Shelley. But he is scathing. “*Post mortem* busts may be appropriate enough in the case of mediocrities, but to offer such a tribute to our greatest poet after Shakespeare, I can but regard as little short of an insult”. He does not say what would be appropriate, but it did not take him long to decide. In a letter dated 5th December, to the Pall Mall Gazette, he suggested that the proposed memorial at Horsham should be a public library, to be called the Shelley Library. The town of Horsham had shown little interest in the poet, who as a child, lived at Field Place in the nearby parish of Warnham. Indeed, Stanley Little, complains in another letter to the West Sussex Gazette, published on 26th May 1892, that he has heard of nothing being done locally to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Shelley. This provoked the editor, J.J. Robinson into convening a meeting at Horsham Town Hall on 10th June chaired by a prominent member of the Horsham community, R.H. Hurst J.P. The proposal for a Shelley Memorial Library was well received, but there were also alternative suggestions. In view of future developments, we note that Mr Jury Cramp, who owned a jewellery shop in Horsham, thought it might be found desirable to

establish a museum to be combined with a free library. A committee was appointed “to thrash out the suggestions made” and at its meeting on 17th June decided that a fitting memorial would be “A Shelley Library and Museum” at Horsham. A letter appeared in the times on 15th July 1892 inviting subscriptions to the “Shelley Memorial Fund”. The letter was signed by a number of literary and other well known figures, including Lord Tennyson, William Morris and Henry Irving. An identical letter was also published in other newspapers around the English speaking world. On the day of the anniversary, 4th August 1892, a meeting was held at Horsham in the Albion Hall. Edmund Gosse was the main speaker. On display was a simple memorial tablet to Percy Bysshe Shelley which was put up in the church that evening.

The Shelley Memorial Fund was launched with great optimism. Edmond Gosse said that he had “been told that it was a mere trifle of money required, some £5000. He was a sure that in so wealthy a county as Sussex and with the sympathy of the whole of England, that sum of money would soon be brought together. In direct contrast, two days later, the editor of the West Sussex County Times and Standard, perhaps reflecting the general view of the people of Horsham where his newspaper was published, said “I do not think there is much prospect of raising £10,000 for the Shelley Library and Museum at Horsham. There are too many people living who believe that a pure and noble mind and an honest life are more worthy of honour than the trick of writing wild ravings, however gaudy the language used. He was right, the appeal was a complete flop. The following year on the 13th May 1893, a letter to The Times announced that the money collected had been wholly inadequate. Only £72 had been donated in the United States and that was more than a quarter of the total. It was proposed to use the money to establish a literary prize at Horsham Grammar School. I have not yet discovered why this did not happen, but a further letter in The Times on 3rd June 1899 said that no use had been found for the money which had unanimous or zealous support. The trustees were anxious that the money should not be wasted on some small object that would neither give adequate expression to the wishes of the subscribers nor be in any large sense a permanent memorial to Shelley. The only later reference to the fund, I have discovered, was in The Citizen, Gloucester for 15 October 1907 which said there were plans to use the balance in the fund of £280 for a bust of the poet in the public square in Horsham. But, it would seem the money stayed in the bank, accumulating interest, until 1927.

And what of today? The West Sussex County Council's Financial Report and Accounts for 2009/10 shows the balance in the Shelley Memorial Trust Fund to be £2,300.

Shelley Memorial Prize Winners
at
Worthing High School for Boys

1928	H.R.Cripps
1929	H.O.Leal
1930	E.C.Newman
1931	A.J.Ingram
1932	E.C.Newman
1933	E.C.Newman
1934	L.H.Cobb
1935	L.H.Cobb
1936	J.Nivison
1937	J.Nivison
1938	P.L.Wilmore
1939	P.L.Wilmore
1940	R.F.Crocombe
1941	A.C.F.O'Hanlon
1942	S.Gill
1943	G.A.Ratcliffe
1944	?

1945	H.M.Fleischman
1946	?
1947	G.E.Brown
1948	A.M.Harper
1949	J.O.V.Oubridge
1950	B.W.Moss
1951	J.R.Bethell
1952	B.W.D.Sarjeant
1953	K.E.Johnson
1954	A.A.Morden
1955	S.J.Macdonald
1956	R.P.Wayne
1957	V.K.Diver
1958	R.F.George
1959	T.W.Stevens
1960	K.L.Q.Read

1961	M.C.S.Buckingham & P.C.Knight
1962	J.B.Perkins
1963	?
1964	J.C.Apsey
1965	C.R.M.Ward
1966	P.B.Gibbs
1967	P.W.Ball & C.C.Knapitt
1968	T.A.Bolderston
1969	?
1970	K.M.Long
1971	A.W.Allen
1972	C.G.L.de Grouchy
1973	A.D.Ardagh

4 May 2013