

# Who was H K Ward?

Paul Lancaster (MBBS '66), president of the University's Medical Alumni Association, went to London to find out

sport

Anyone who has visited the University in recent decades and walked down the leafy road between the two main ovals will have seen the HK Ward Gymnasium. Standing beside the pathways to the Faculty of Veterinary Science, St John's College and Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, it has been used by countless students and staff since opening in 1967.

But how many know anything about HK Ward? Very few, my straw poll suggests. I, too, was unaware of why we should remember this illustrious former student and academic until last September when researching the World War I experiences of our medical alumni at the National Archives in Kew, London.

For inquisitive visitors to the gym itself, the inscription on a small framed card behind the desk tells us that "Emeritus Professor HK Ward" was "... Bosch Professor of Bacteriology, 1935-52, Rhodes Scholar, University blue and Olympian, in recognition of his valuable and devoted service to the Sydney University Sports Union as Chairman of the Ground Committee from 1937 to 1951." An impressive start, but there's so much more.

Hugh Kingsley Ward was born at Petersham, Sydney, on September 17, 1887, the youngest of eight children. His father, Frederick, was editor of the *Sydney Mail*, then the *Daily Telegraph*. His brother, Leonard, also a Sydney alumnus (BA 1900, BE 1903), became a prominent geologist and public servant.

Like many bright students of his era, Hugh K. Ward came to the University and St Paul's College from Sydney Grammar School. He gained his blue in rowing, as stroke for his college in an inter-collegiate race, was a member of a winning inter-varsity crew, stroke of the winning crew in the champion Fours of NSW and later a member of the victorious NSW Eight.

Ward graduated with first-class honours in medicine in 1910, equal third in his year. In 1911 he was a Resident Medical Officer at Sydney Hospital. He was awarded the Rhodes Scholarship for that year, just the eighth from Sydney and the third from his faculty. This took him to New College, Oxford, where "he experimented with serological tests for syphilis and in 1913 gained diplomas in anthropology and public health". While at Oxford he rowed in the winning crew in the annual Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race and then, somewhat controversially, was selected in the Australian Eight at the Stockholm Olympic Games in 1912. (In his *History of Australian Rowing*, Andrew Guerin notes that, before the Games, Ward had rowed for New College against the Sydney Rowing Club at the Henley Royal Regatta. The Sydney Eight won the Grand Challenge Cup and then went to the Olympics with Ward as the only change in the crew, losing in the semi-finals. Critics said that Ward had "assimilated the New College (Oxford) style of rowing" and "it is always dangerous ... to alter a successful crew.")

At the outbreak of World War I, Ward already had a commission in the Royal Army Medical Corps Special Reserve. He was soon serving in France and Belgium, in 1914 with a casualty clearing station and the field ambulance and then in 1915-1919 as Regimental Medical Officer of the 2nd Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps. He was wounded at Loos (1915), the Somme (1916) and Zeebrugge (1917). After eight months as a prisoner of war in Baden, Germany, he returned to duty and was gassed at Arras (1918). For his gallantry, he was awarded the Military Cross and two Bars, an exceptional feat.

In his four-page handwritten report "on the action of Nieuport-Les-Bains, Belgium, July 10th 1917", Ward described in graphic detail the artillery bombardment: how all his company's officers were killed or wounded, and how the only communication with their superiors was by pigeon. With devastation all around, "I surrendered my wounded, my staff and stretcher-bearers, & no bombs were thrown into the dressing-station". Ward, in an understated note to his Colonel, said he was "treated fairly decently by the Badeners. All the same we were jolly glad to get out."

During Ward's extended stay at Harvard, first as a Rockefeller Fellow (1923-1924) and then later as Assistant Professor of Bacteriology (1926-1934), his mentor was Hans Zinsser, author of the classic *Rats, Lice and History*. While there, Ward influenced John F. Enders to switch from a business career in real estate to research in bacteriology and immunology. Enders later won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or (sic) Medicine (1954) for his team's laboratory research cultivating poliomyelitis viruses.

In Montreal in May 1927 Ward married Constance Isabella Docker, a librarian, also from Sydney, the daughter of the NSW District Court judge Ernest Brougham Docker, who had graduated BA (1863) and MA (1865) from Sydney. The Wards went on to have a son and a daughter.

Back at Sydney as Bosch Professor of Bacteriology, while giving "undergraduate teaching a high priority", Ward inspired Don Metcalf (1951), Gus Nossal (1953) and Jacques Miller (1954) to take research BSc (Med) degrees in bacteriology before completing their medical studies. All three subsequently became eminent pillars of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research at the University of Melbourne.

"A man of vision, personal integrity and charm, Ward did not seek recognition and was embarrassed by praise," says his entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. He died on 22 November 1972, aged 85. **SAM**

*Acknowledgements: University of Sydney Archives and other sources including; National Archives, Kew, UK; and Australian Dictionary of Biography.*



Hugh Kingsley Ward and, left, a page from his WWI journal

Report of Capt. H.K. WARD R.A.M.C. attached  
2<sup>nd</sup> Inf. Bde, 1<sup>st</sup> Div<sup>n</sup>, B.E.F. on  
the action of NIEUPORT-LES-BAINS, BELGIUM  
July 10<sup>th</sup> 1917

On the morning of 10.7.17, the 2<sup>nd</sup> K.R.R.C. was holding the line in the sector of the Dunes with its ~~right~~<sup>left</sup> resting on the N. SEA, & its right in touch with 1<sup>st</sup> NORTHAMPTONS. For the preceding 6 days in the line, the enemy had bombarded with trench-mortars & howitzers fairly steadily & had registered the bridge-heads over the R. YSER with 8 in. howitzers pretty thoroughly.

A heavy bombardment started about 8 a.m. on the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> July, & the bridges (3) were soon reported broken by shell-fire, & in a short while the only communication possible with the rear was by pigeon. Visual signalling was tried but found impossible owing to the drifting smoke & dust.

I was in the right company ('B' Coy) front line up till mid-day & by that time all the officers were killed or wounded. Lt. GOTT was subsequently sent by the C.O. to command the company but was severely wounded on the way up.