

6. Casualties

When the First World War was declared large numbers of OKS volunteered. *The Cantuarian* reported the story of Thomas Scott (KSC 1884-88). He had been born in December 1870 and so was 43 years old. He joined the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry on 6 August. "At the outbreak of war he was running a mine in Cornwall, and immediately on hearing the news he closed down the mine and together with all his workmen marched off to the nearest recruiting station and enlisted."¹ The son of a clergyman, he ended up serving in India, Aden and Egypt.

Scott was unusual on account of his age, but otherwise typical of the professional and commercial classes who volunteered disproportionately in 1914. According to Hew Strachan's chapter 'Willingly to War' in *The First World War* "over 40% of those eligible in both categories joined the army"² Equally notable – and typical – was the fact that so many who had left for the Empire returned in 1914 and later, either to join the British army or in imperial forces. Among the OKS who were to be killed, Stuart Baily, Reginald Beardsworth, William Foord-Kelcey, William Aubrey Fortescue, Innes Hopkins and St John Methuen came from Canada, Hugh Cannell, Frank Dann, Eustace Fishbourne and Edward Johnson from Australia and Bernard Horsbrugh from the United States. The headstone for Basil Maclear, born in Canterbury and buried at Essex Farm Cemetery near Ypres, is inscribed: "Came home to serve in August 1915 from his farm in Cape Province."

OKS were definitely willing. The *Kentish Gazette* went so far as to claim "it is perfectly safe to say that few schools can show a more honourable record of men on naval and military service"³ This was understandable in its expression of a sense of pride, but in fact misleading. The Headmaster on Speech Day 1915 was more accurate in stating that "the public schools of England had not been backward in responding to their country's call"⁴ The King's School record was indeed typical of boarding schools of the period.⁵

The first wartime *Cantuarian* in November 1914 published a list of 'O.K.S. in His Majesty's Forces'. According to this there were 46 in the Royal Navy and Marines, almost all of whom were career officers. 40 were 'regulars at the front', but the magazine added that "about eighty other O.K.S. are known to have been in the regular Army at the outbreak of war; many of these must be at the front, but we have no news of them" and a further 75 names were duly added in the December issue. 39 were recorded as having 'territorial commissions' and 66 as having 'commissions in Kitchener's Army' (with a footnote

¹ The *Cantuarian*, December 1914, p. 779.

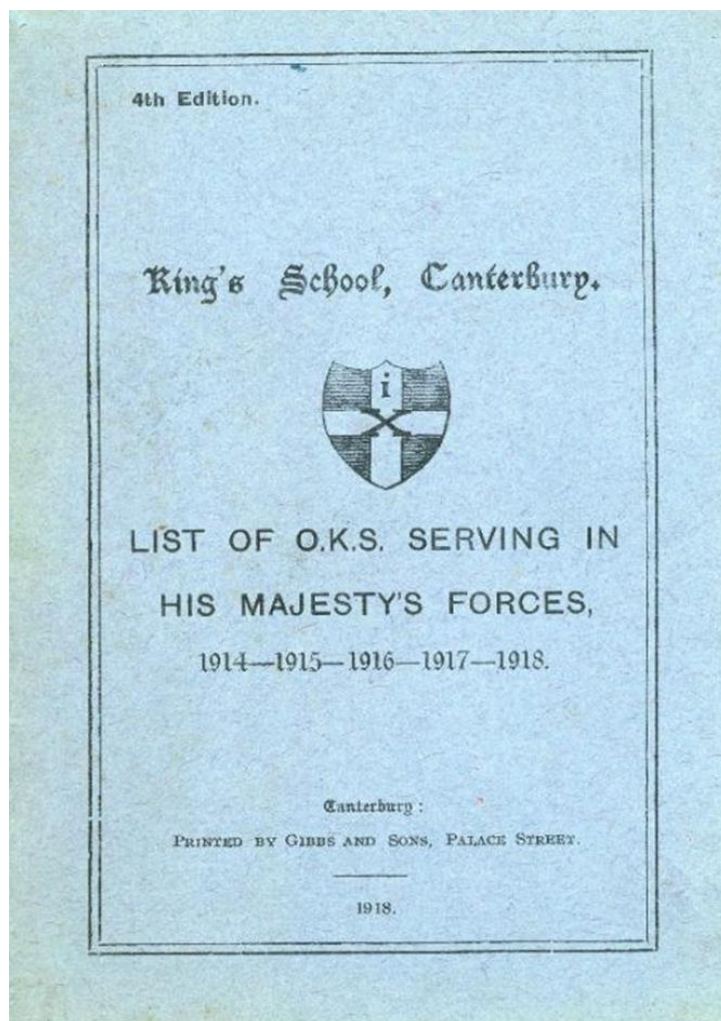
² Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, vol. 1, p. 160.

³ K.G. 28.11.1914.

⁴ The *Cantuarian*, November 1915, p. 94.

⁵ For an attempt to summarise statistics on public schools, see: Seldon and Walsh, pp. 254-61. There are many problems in such calculations, in particular deciding who counts as 'serving'. Comparisons between schools should therefore be treated with caution. The King's School statistics have been amended since the book was published, but remain provisional.

explaining that this was not a correct title); and finally, there were 67 ‘N.C.O.’s and Men’, many of whom would eventually obtain commissions.⁶



The total of 258 at this point was a serious underestimate. An exercise book entitled ‘Record of Old King’s Scholars serving in His Majesty’s Forces’, now in the School Archives, was first compiled in 1915. It was regularly updated and formed the source of several later published lists. *The Cantuarian* continued to make ‘additions and corrections’ to their listings throughout the War. The School List Midsummer 1915 ended with a section on ‘The School and the War’. This included those ‘Killed’, ‘Missing, believed Killed’, and ‘Mentioned in Despatches, with other military distinctions’. (On Speech Day 1915, the Headmaster gave the total known to be on naval or military service as 512.⁷) Succeeding years included statistical summaries, headed ‘Number of Old King’s Scholars serving’.⁸ These were issued as separate pamphlets by Gibbs & Sons of Palace Street, Canterbury.⁹

⁶ The *Cantuarian*, November 1914 pp. 728-37; December 1914, pp. 772-6.

⁷ The *Cantuarian* November 1915, p. 94.

⁸ School List, Midsummer: 1915: pp. 28-30; 1916: pp. 22-28; 1917: pp. 18-28; 1918: pp. 17-31; 1919: pp. 18-36; 1920: pp. 19-38. Numbers serving were recorded as: 1916: 640; 1917: 750; 1918: 820; and 1919: 850.

⁹ The first edition was advertised in *The Cantuarian*, July 1915, p. 47; the second in July 1916, p. 190; the third in July 1917, p. 475; and the fourth in December 1918, p. 708.

It was not easy to keep these records up to date as numbers became so large. In the summer of 1917, a letter to *The Cantuarian* commented:

There hang in the Gym. several large lists of O.K.S. serving in the Forces, to which, so far as I can see, no additions have been made of late. An effort was made at one time to present in this way a complete list of all those serving. Owing, I suppose, to the difficulty of keeping pace with the numerous promotions, casualties, etc., the attempt appears to have been abandoned. Would it not be better, instead of so displaying an incomplete and misleading record, to remove these cards until such time as a satisfactory list of all O.K.S. who are serving call be compiled?¹⁰

It is apparent that the School did not have any news of a significant minority of old boys during and after the war. In the absence of a formal OKS Association this is hardly surprising. It is perhaps more remarkable that so many kept in touch and that the School, aided no doubt by the *London Gazette*, Army Lists and newspapers, was able to acquire as much information as it did.

The final summary, published in the School List of Midsummer 1920, has 850 – ‘approximately’ – as serving. Of these, it records 141 as killed or died, and 213 as wounded (also 33 wounded twice, nine wounded three times and one wounded four times: it is not clear whether these are included in the 213). These numbers are incomplete. There were 137 obituaries recorded in *The Cantuarian*, but some of the omissions are surprising, in particular that of Charles Trueman, the first casualty.¹¹ By the time the war memorial plaque was unveiled in 1925, there were 146 names to be included, but several were still missing. The King’s School Register published in 1932 was compiled from information supplied by individuals, and made a deliberate effort to include details of war service. The results are remarkably comprehensive – and indeed, so far as one can tell, accurate. Nonetheless more recent research suggests that at least a hundred more names should be added to the total of those serving and seventeen more to the deaths.

The total fatalities are, according to the most up-to-date information, 163. Even this number is open to dispute. Some names on the School war memorial are not recognised by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and one could argue that some who are listed are not genuine war casualties.¹² Of the 163, 100 were ‘killed in action’ and a further 33 ‘died of wounds’. Six were killed ‘on active service’; 23 ‘died’ (from a variety of causes, including disease and accidents unrelated to the war); and one was a civilian killed by enemy action. The lists do not include some OKS who died while in war-related occupations – such as John Pooley (KSC 1865-?), a munitions worker, who died in 1917.¹³

The first OKS killed was Charles Trueman at Le Cateau during the retreat from Mons on 26 August 1914. The last to be killed as a direct result of combat was Gerald de Mattos

¹⁰ *The Cantuarian*, July 1917, p. 474.

¹¹ K.G. 12.9.1914. The *Gazette* provided a photograph and details of his career. He was reported killed in K.G. 6.3.1915. His father, Colonel Trueman, lived at Blean and was himself an OKS.

¹² The CWGC recognises those who died during the designated war years (4 August 1914 to 31 August 1921), while in military service or of causes attributable to service.

¹³ *The Cantuarian*, March 1917, p. 389.

near Archangel in Russia on 10 August 1919.¹⁴ The distribution of casualties by year shows an unsurprising pattern:

1914	9
1915	30
1916	43
1917	42
1918	31
1919	6
1920	2

July 1916 was easily the most deadly month in the war for OKS with sixteen killed, followed by May 1915 with eight deaths. There are twelve OKS names on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, the most recorded in one place (though not all died in July). The only months with no OKS killed were November 1915, May 1916, June 1917, and February 1918.¹⁵

Two thirds of the fatalities (109) occurred on the Western Front. Of the rest, seventeen died in Britain; eleven in Greece and the Dardanelles; ten in the Middle East; five at sea; four in Africa; three in India; and one each in Italy, Russia, Singapore and New York.¹⁶ Just over a quarter (43) of those killed were already in the armed forces in 1914 or were ex-regulars who re-enlisted. Just over half (82) volunteered in 1914. Of the remainder, several joined up on leaving school (five in 1915, two in 1916), a few had been rejected in 1914 but were accepted later on, and several came from overseas. None, it seems, were conscripts. Just over half (83) were lieutenants or second lieutenants. Only twenty-one (13%) were more senior officers.¹⁷

The majority of those killed – 101 out of 163 – were in their twenties. A further thirteen were still in their teens. Of the 268 boys who entered the school between 1906 and 1910, 227 (85%) are known to have served. 65 (29%) of the 227 are recorded as wounded and 45 (20%) as killed. The youngest fatality was Ross Ferguson, who had left school at seventeen and was killed a few days before his eighteenth birthday. The oldest was Robert Frowd Walker, who had been at King's in the 1850s. He was a career soldier and retired in 1910. He returned to the service in 1914 as Commandant of the prisoner of war camp at Alexandra Palace and died of cancer in 1917 aged 67.¹⁸

The following table analyses the pre-war generations by the year in which the boys entered the School.¹⁹

¹⁴ Bertram Wills committed suicide on 19 August 1919; James Pipe died in January 1920; and Frederick Long died of consumption on 23 October 1920.

¹⁵ For a comparison with some other schools, see Seldon and Walsh, p. 241.

¹⁶ These figures are not always precise. In particular, a few who were wounded and returned to England only to die in hospital are counted as killed on the Western Front.

¹⁷ Cf. Seldon and Walsh, pp. 241-2. 'Nearly a third of all public school deaths' were second lieutenants.

¹⁸ Casualties by age: teens: 13; twenties: 100; thirties: 33; forties: 11; fifties: 3; sixties: 1. Of the teenagers, one was 17, five were 18 and seven were 19. Almost all of those over 40 were career soldiers. Cf. Seldon and Walsh, p. 242 for figures from other schools.

¹⁹ Most of the information comes from King's School, Canterbury Register 1859 to 1931. It is possible that the figures may slightly underestimate the numbers who served and the numbers who were wounded. Cf. Seldon and Walsh for comparisons with some other schools.

Year	Nos.	Served	Served as % of nos	Wounded	Killed	Killed as % of served	Killed as % of nos
1890	47	19	40%	2	1	5%	2%
1895	40	23	57%	4	2	9%	5%
1900	59	37	63%	8	7	19%	12%
1901	64	42	66%	12	6	14%	9%
1902	59	42	71%	5	10	24%	17%
1903	68	49	72%	8	7	14%	10%
1904	58	45	78%	11	11	24%	19%
1905	60	50	83%	11	9	18%	15%
1906	57	49	86%	13	10	20%	18%
1907	49	41	84%	15	9	22%	18%
1908	59	48	81%	16	8	17%	14%
1909	47	40	85%	8	8	20%	17%
1910	56	49	88%	13	10	20%	18%
1911	24	24	56%	2	5	21%	12%

The fate of particular cohorts brings home the impact of the war. Of the 56 boys who entered the school in 1910, six were too young to serve in the war and Robert Blair went to Liverpool University as a medical student in 1916. All the remaining 49 joined the forces (overwhelmingly the army). Of these ten (20%) were killed and at least thirteen (27%) wounded. The casualty rate of the 32 boys who left in July 1914 is even more startling. It is not known what became of four of them, but of the remaining 28, 22 joined the army, two the Royal Navy, one the Royal Flying Corps, and three went to university (including Alec Sargent, later Archdeacon of Canterbury). Of those serving, ten (40%) were to be killed and at least six (24%) wounded.

Whether it was the brightest and strongest who died disproportionately is an interesting question.²⁰ Five of the thirteen Captains of School from 1901 to 1915 – Edward Roper, Roland Brinsley-Richards, Charles Adams, Charles Kidson and William Janson Potts – were to be killed. Of the ten Monitors in 1914, eight served and five were to be killed. In that respect, leadership, continued from School to the Western Front, came at a cost. In most respects, however, those who died seem to have been a reasonable cross-section of King's School boys. 28 of those who died were King's Scholars; 39 had played for the 1st XV and 19 for the 1st XI. On the other hand, it was the youngest of the sporting heroes who perhaps suffered most. Five of the 1912-13 1st XV (Alexander Barrett, Ross Ferguson, Roland Jukes, Ralph Kirton and Charles Pullan) were to die, and, even more disconcertingly, four of the 1914-15 team (George Kelly-Lawson, Derrick Osborne, Frank Straker and the Captain, William Janson Potts).

Many of the individuals were notable, either for their careers cut short or for their bravery as soldiers.²¹ Roland Gordon and Digby Watson were rugby internationals, indeed Watson was a member of the England Grand Slam winning side of 1914; and John Hellard

²⁰ For some comparisons with other schools, see Seldon and Walsh, pp. 239-40.

²¹ Full details of all those killed can be viewed on the King's School Roll of Honour website: <http://www.hambo.org/kingscanterbury/index.php>

and Cecil Bodington had played first class cricket.²² Vernon Austin was the son and heir of Herbert Austin of the motor company and Bruno Garibaldi was the grandson of the Italian hero of the Risorgimento. Ralfe Whistler was wounded at the Aisne in September 1914, at Festubert in May 1915 and at Kut in Mesopotamia in March 1916, before dying of wounds near Aubigny on the Somme in April 1917. He was still only 21 years old.²³

The 1912 photograph of Form 4A, some of whom left in 1914, brings home the impact of the War. Seven of the fifteen boys whose names are known, and their master, were to be killed. All the other eight boys served in the War and four were wounded (two of them winning the Military Cross).

Historians have argued over whether the fatalities of the Great War constituted a 'lost generation'. As far as the King's School is concerned, the young men educated under Galpin and MacDowall undoubtedly bore the brunt of the fighting. More than three quarters of them served and nearly one in six were to be killed. They were called upon to be leaders, which meant that they were most at risk. In doing what they saw as their duty they paid a heavy price.

²² Andrew Renshaw, *Wisden on the Great War* includes sixteen OKS.

²³ Paul Atterbury, *Antiques Roadshow: World War I in 100 Family Treasures*, pp. 230-2.



Form IVa in 1912

Back row (l to r): GHW Gough†, RA Faro, JS Wachter†, WT Champion, HEB de Gruchy, HG Evans, CF Hodgson†, GMcF Kelly Lawson†, [unknown*], ADC Macaulay

Front row: JAR Ferguson†, EF Hyde, EH Gough, Mr RE Everitt†, EC Bing†, TH Keble, CFW Wait†

†First World War casualties.

*In the form list but missing in this photograph are: TL Gordon, FJB Maggs, JD Watkins and ES Wills. Gordon and Wills served in the First World War; Frederick Maggs was to die as a prisoner of war in the Second World War.

