

GLENALMOND AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR



***They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.***

Glenalmond boys played a major part in the First World War. In total, 685 OGS fought in the war. 157 of these were killed with a further 120 being wounded. 149 received awards for bravery – and this from a school, much smaller than it is today with only around 150 boys altogether in 1918. In other words, the number of OGS killed was slightly more than the total number of Glenalmond pupils at the time. This statistic was not uncommon in the independent schools.

Our war memorial in Chapel, behind the altar, commemorates the OGS who were killed in the First World War. Teachers and other staff also fought in the war and, for the first time in Glenalmond's history, women were employed in the Dining Hall and even as teachers to replace men. They had to leave after the war and it was many years until another woman was employed as a teacher at Glenalmond.

Conditions were hard at Glenalmond during the war. Hot water and heating were strictly limited and boys took rugs to classes and to Chapel. There were not many games as most of the younger masters were away at war. Boys helped local farmers and made other contributions to the war effort, including working in timber camps.

ARTHUR BLACKWOOD GOWAN 1896-1916



Arthur Blackwood Gowan was the only son of a Newcastle-upon-Tyne family. He was born on 28th August 1896 and came to Glenalmond in 1909 when he was 13. He left in 1914 and went straight into the Army.

He was killed in action during the Battle of the Somme two years later on 15th July 1916, only six weeks before his 20th birthday.

When Arthur was at Glenalmond, there were no Houses as we have today, although Mr Patchell, Mr Goodacre and Mr Reid were on the staff. Boys lived according to which Form they were in. Arthur joined the IIIrd Form in 1909 and was promoted the following year into the IVth Form. This was not automatic as it is nowadays. Boys only moved up Forms if they had done well enough in their lessons and Forms contained boys of all ages. Arthur remained in the IVth Form until his final year when he was promoted to the Modern Vth Engineering Division – boys in this Form did practical subjects rather than Greek and Latin. We can assume, therefore, that academics were not Arthur's strongest point.

However, Arthur did show considerable sporting talent – abilities that were to stand him in good stead in his war exploits.

He was a keen runner and in his first two years at Coll was 4th and 3rd in the Junior Steeplechase. In his third year, he won the Junior Steeplechase as well as coming first in the Under 16 Quarter Mile race and 3rd in the half mile handicap.

By the time he was 16, he was one of the top athletes in the school. In the 1913 Athletics competition, in the equivalent of his Lower Sixth, he came 2nd in the Open Quarter Mile, 3rd in the Open Half Mile, 2nd in the High Jump and 1st in the Open Steeplechase. He was 2nd in the overall prize for the best athlete of the competition – the Victor Ludorum.

In his final Athletics competition, the following year, he did well in a whole range of races – 3rd in the Open 100yards, 3rd in the Open Quarter Mile, 1st in the Open Half Mile, 1st in the Open Steeplechase and, once again, 2nd in the Victor Ludorum. That same year – 1914 – saw him win the College Fencing Competition and later the same day he took part in the school Boxing Competition. Perhaps not surprisingly, he was beaten in the first round.

At various times throughout his school career, he represented the College at Football, Hockey, Shooting and Rugby and, after a season in the Seconds, he was promoted to the First XV in 1914. He played as a three-quarter (the equivalent of winger or centre in today's team), scoring several tries.



Glenalmond Rugby XV 1914-15 – Arthur Gowan is second from the left in the back row.

All of the members of Arthur's First XV team, except one who came from Chile, went on to fight in the First World War. Out of the fifteen, five were killed in action and a further three were wounded. Two were awarded the Military Cross.

One of his team members, David Bruce Waddell (back row, third from left), was killed in action in France on 21st March 1918. He is commemorated at Glenalmond in the stained glass window on the north wall of the Chapel – to the right of the altar as you face it. This window, which was erected in Waddell's memory, was designed by another OG, Sir John Ninian Comper who also designed our First World War Memorial. He was a famous church architect and is buried in Westminster Abbey. Our window features Comper's special "signature" which is a little strawberry plant.

Another member of Arthur Gowan's team was Francis Faithfull (front row, third from right). He was killed in action on 4th July 1915 and was one of the youngest OGs to die in the war. He died only six months after he left school and only one month after he arrived in France.

As well as being a good sportsman, Arthur was a keen member of the Corps (CCF). He joined as a Private and rose through the ranks to Colour-Sergeant. He was an occasional member of the Shooting VIII although not one of their top shooters. In his final year, he was the winner of the Jermyn Cup which was awarded in those days to the Cadet who had done best in the Corps examination. He received his commission into the Durham Engineers while he was still at school.

Arthur was a highly respected Lieutenant in the Durham Engineers and a very brave soldier. He arrived at the Front in September 1915. Before the Battle of the Somme, he saw a lot of action and on many occasions led parties of volunteers at night to successfully recover sections that had gone missing – no doubt his abilities as an athlete were of benefit to him on these sorties.

On the night of the 14th July 1916, in the thick of the Battle of the Somme, he advanced with his men to consolidate positions in a wood which turned out to be strongly defended. He did not return and was posted as missing. Later it was discovered that he had been shot dead about 12.30 on 15th July.

The tributes were many. Arthur was described by his Colonel as “one of my best young officers” and was recommended for, although did not receive, the Military Cross for his good work and gallantry during the first advance. His Captain wrote “You will have heard how well he has done all along out here, and I am sure that he would have received some award very soon. I know that I relied on him more than I care to think of now and he was always keenness itself”. He apparently “never asked a man to do what he dare not do himself” and was described by a fellow officer as “a fine noble boy, who ably bore the traditions of an officer and a gentleman”.

One can hardly imagine the anguish that Arthur’s parents felt when they heard that he was missing and the agony they endured waiting for news. Arthur’s body was never found but his name lives on at Glenalmond today in the Scholarship that was founded by his parents in his memory. The current holder of the Arthur Gowan Scholarship is Tom Francis.

THIEPVAL MEMORIAL

The Thiepval Memorial, the Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, bears the names of more than 72,000 officers and men of the United Kingdom and South African forces who died in the Somme sector before 20 March 1918 and have no known grave. Over 90% of those commemorated died between July and November 1916. The memorial, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, was built between 1928 and 1932 and unveiled by the Prince of Wales, in the presence of the President of France, on 1 August 1932.

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Altogether, there are ten OGs who are commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial. You will find them as follows:

Arthur Blackwood Gowan	Pier and Face 8 A and 8 D.
James Morrison Low	Pier and Face 15 C.
Eric George Vincent Luis	Pier and Face 10 A and 10 D
William Robert Benny McJannet	Pier and Face 15 C.
Ralph Marillier Miller	Pier and Face 13 A and 14 C
Robert Duncombe Oxley	Pier and Face 15 B and 15 C
Robert MacLeod Paul	Pier and Face 15 C
Alfred Anthony Douglas Raeburn (The Alfred Raeburn Scholarship, currently held by Catriona Houston, was given in his memory)	Pier and Face 15 C
Edward Alexander Shepherd	Pier and Face 10 A
Harry Stuart Wilson	Pier and Face 16 C

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