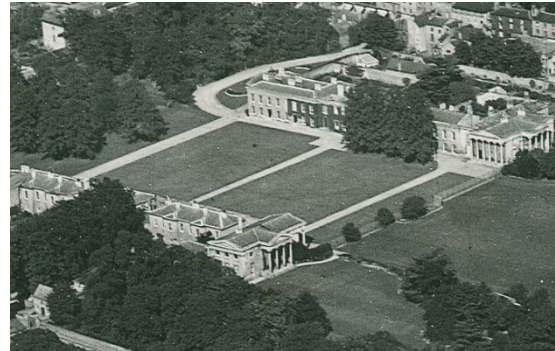


## From the Archives: Downing and the outbreak of war

### The outbreak of war, 1914

On July 28th 1914, Austria declared war on Serbia following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by a Serbian nationalist. As Russia mobilised, Germany declared war on Russia and France, invading neutral Belgium and Luxembourg on the way to France. This, in turn, caused Britain to declare war on Germany on August 4<sup>th</sup> and so began over four years of fighting which had a devastating effect on many people and changed the world forever.

Following the declaration of war, the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University had been empowered to place all grounds and buildings of the colleges at the disposal of the War Office and Downing College, along with King's, was chosen to house the influx of nurses to staff the newly established First Eastern General Hospital (on the current site of the UL). They started moving into College in the second week of war, staying until term began. The Michaelmas 1914 issue of the College magazine, *The Griffin*, referred to a "*Downing crammed with nurses*", commenting "*we hear many strange rumours of the College during the days of the Long, and our rooms bear traces of occupants other than ourselves. It must, indeed, have been an unusual sight!*"



However, the same editorial gave an indication of the subdued atmosphere in College at the start of the new academic year:

*Looking back to the end of last term, we remember that every prospect seemed good this year; there was no hint of the trouble to come. With four Blues and six May colours intending to be in residence, we looked forward with confidence to great happenings, whilst a fair crop of academic distinction seemed probable. But it was not to be. In August the call came, and the call was answered...One by one the rest came up; in little groups we foregathered, discussing the all-compelling topic, and watching to see who would be with us, and who would not. But those who came up were few; on every hand, we miss the wonted number of our friends. Daily we are reminded of them in untenanted room and silent stair, and the empty seats in Hall speak eloquently of their numbers. So many have gone, so many of those whom the College could ill spare; and still others go. Our thoughts are of them, and, whether on the field of battle, or bearing their part still near at home, our good wishes go with them.*

Throughout the war, *The Griffin* printed a "War List" which carried the names of all those members, past and present, involved in military service. The first List, in the Michaelmas 1914 issue, already contained 85 names. The number of undergraduates in residence in Downing fell dramatically as the numbers on the War List increased. By early 1915, undergraduates in College numbered just 48, down from 140 at the end of the previous year. By 1916 this number was only 25 and a year later just 16.

*The Griffin* continued to update the *War List* throughout the war, publishing reports of individuals, letters to College from the Front and obituaries for those who died in service and it is an invaluable source of information on the activities and sacrifices of current and former Downing men during the war.

## Downing College Freshmen 1914



This photograph, which was recently donated to the Archive, shows the new students or 'Freshmen' matriculating at Downing in October 1914. The full mounted photograph lists the names of all those shown and it is particularly poignant as we know that almost all of them went on to serve in the war (although, sadly, little is known about the two Indian students). The names of those who served, with details of what happened to each, are given here:

Back row: Noel Hurst, survived; Charles Jones, survived; Donald Goulden, wounded 1916

Middle row: Matthew Thomson, wounded 1918; Leonard Spero, wounded 1917; Richard Brook, wounded; Theodore Andrews, survived; Richard Burmester, survived

Front row: R Iliffe, survived; John Line, died of wounds 1916; Arthur Whitworth, died of wounds 1918; Visto Young, wounded three times, mentioned in despatches; Robert Parker, survived; Clarence Grant, survived; Gerald Harmer, killed in action 1916; Thomas Williams, survived; Clement Dunscombe, survived.

In total, 363 members of Downing College (students, Fellows, alumni and staff) served in the war. They served in the forces of fifteen countries and colonies and in most theatres of war across Europe, Africa and at sea. Thirty-five of these died and fifty-five were wounded.

In Lent 1919, the first term after the end of the war, Downing College and its returning members had to begin the task of picking up the pieces and attempting to return to some sort of normality. The editorial of *The Griffin* described the task: *"Our plain duty now is to smooth over the stony path, to forget the horrors, and remember only the incidents of promise"*.

All the Downing men who died during the First World War are commemorated on the College war memorial, situated on the West Portico of the North Range. An online Roll of Honour is now on the College website listing the names of all these men and a project is currently underway to produce short biographies for each, published to mark the centenary of their deaths (<http://www.dow.cam.ac.uk/index.php/about/archive/ww1-memorial>).

College Archivist, [archivist@dow.cam.ac.uk](mailto:archivist@dow.cam.ac.uk)