

The Fallen

*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. ****

A history is for all and for all times. This account of those from Chichester High School for Boys (The School) recorded on the School War Memorial attempts to set their brief lives in the context of the time and to pay tribute to their sacrifice. It has been prepared by a post-war generation that did not actively participate in World War II nor was it destined to live through any global conflict. The Fallen were, therefore, largely of our parents' generation. Our childhoods were laced with fireside stories of tragedy and triumph, humour and humiliation, fortune and fatalism. Some of our old boys even have memories of the school playing fields being strafed by German planes and frequent visits to the air raid shelters. My whole family joined the Royal Navy. The men served in the Home Fleet and the women were in the WRENS (Women's Royal Naval Service).

They joined before the war, as many Old Cicestrians had, because they saw the inevitability of war, not as a matter of political choice but of national independence. All my family survived. My father gave up a career in heavy engineering to fiddle with RADAR (RADio Detection And Ranging) and wireless at sea. My mother gave up a tailoring career to push model ships round a map table. It is difficult for us now to appreciate the scale of the national effort and the changes in the lives of individuals involved in a global war. The Old Cicestrians of the time would have been in similar positions. Many joined the services before the declaration of war; many must have given up promising careers.

The School was founded in 1928 and thus, even those who joined at its inception ("The Originals") would have barely had time to graduate before the outbreak of war in 1939. Seven "Originals" were lost as well as an English master who had been at the school at its foundation. It was a selective grammar school and after a 1932 Act of Parliament admitted boys based only on ability. About half were fee-paying, while the remainder obtained bursaries from the County Council. The bursaries were available from age eleven, but fee-paying boys could be admitted as young as nine years old. Eight of The Fallen had started at the School younger than the scholarship boys. The school leaving age was fourteen and the average age at leaving of **The Fallen** was just over sixteen. Their futures probably looked quite bright. They were among a privileged minority who had received a decent education and many of those who gained employment before the outbreak of war were either in middle-class professions or the armed services.

Chichester was an administrative centre for Sussex and many school leavers joined the local authority in various rôles. The expectation of a university education was extremely low. By 1950 only 3.4% of school leavers went on to University and this would have been even lower in the 1930s. There were fewer than twenty Universities in the UK at the time. Funding was through state or university scholarships covering both fees and maintenance but, nationally, only about half of university students were funded, the reminder requiring private means. Nevertheless, four of **The Fallen** had gained places in university and another in a School of Art.

The course of the war itself has been well recorded. As far as we are concerned it can be divided geographically into three parts, Europe, North Africa and the Far

East. Many (45%) of our old boys were lost in Europe but ten died away from the theatres of war, mainly during training. Whilst casualties occurred throughout the seven years of war about a third were lost in 1944 as the allied air forces bombed mainland Europe and the armies advanced through Italy and France to Germany.

Of the unknown number of Old Cicestrians who joined the forces during the war years, sixty-one are recorded on the School War Memorial. None reached high rank but several were involved in some of the iconic actions of the war, ranging from the sinking of the *Royal Oak* in Scapa Flow in 1939 (Ordinary Seaman Targett, aged only seventeen), the rear-guard action at Dunkirk in 1940 (Gunner Shield, aged twenty-one), through to the D-Day landings (Engine Room Artificer Boyce aged twenty-three who was lost with *HMS Lawford* which was the subject of one of the earliest known guided missile attacks). Their ages ranged from seventeen (Targett) to thirty-six (Pilot Officer Quick). Most of the other Old Cicestrians were in their twenties with an average age of just twenty-two when they died.

Of our sixty-one records, thirty-five were in the RAF (Royal Air Force): twenty-three were pilots; the remainder being listed as aircrew (gunners, navigation officers and engineers). In addition, there were four pilots in the Fleet Air Arm. Two individuals were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Sub-Lieutenant Bailey flew a Fairy Swordfish in the attack on the Italian Fleet at Taranto before being lost later in operations in the Indian Ocean. Bryan Meaker, a reporter on the Chichester Observer and our only Battle of Britain pilot to be lost, died when he was hit by the tailplane of his Hawker Hurricane whilst bailing out over Sussex. At only twenty-one, he had successfully attacked at least five enemy aircraft.

Some thirty-three airmen died in the air in twenty different types of aircraft, mostly as bomber crews over Europe. There are poignant reminders of the vicissitudes of war. Pilot Officer Seward left his base on Loch Erne in Northern Ireland (which is now a campsite with the old officers' mess redeveloped as the Pilot's Nook Pub), flew his Catalina along a then-secret corridor across the Republic of Ireland and was lost on U-boat patrol in the North Atlantic. Lieutenant Francis Gahan* took off from *HMS Trumpeter* in a Grumman Avenger to attack a German anchorage in Norway. This proved to be the last allied air-raid of the European war but one from which his Avenger was not to return. Pilot Officer Brooke was lost returning home after what proved to be the last allied air raid on Berlin.

Twelve of the sixty-one records are of men who served in the land forces. Seven were in the Royal Artillery and one in each of the Royal Armoured Corps, the Royal Signal Corps, the Royal Engineers and the Royal Army Medical Corps. A total of four died in North Africa, one in India and the remainder in Europe. Bombardier Payne was awarded the Military Medal. At twenty-three he was the oldest man in his unit when he died from shrapnel wounds at Monte Casino after having served through the campaign in North Africa. Gunner Shield and 2nd Lieutenant Ridings both fell during the early days of the war in the retreat to Dunkirk.

Eight of **The Fallen** joined the Royal Navy and one served in the Merchant Navy. Five went down with their ships after being torpedoed while the others were lost

during surface actions. Coming from a naval background, I well remember the fireside tales of the national shock caused by the sinkings of the *Royal Oak* and the *Hood* in the early years of the war in both of which Old Cicestrians were represented. My grandfather served in *HMS Cricket*, a river gunboat in China that successfully returned to home waters in the decade before the war. In 1942, however, *HMS Grasshopper* was lost in the retreat from Singapore, running aground after being bombed and strafed. Commandeering a series of small vessels, the survivors, including Old Boy Engine Room Artificer Stubbs, managed to sail through the straits of Malacca and up the Indragiri River in Indonesia. They then embarked on a 170-mile trek to safety. Just short of their goal, however, they were taken prisoner. After suffering for two years in Japanese POW (Prisoner of War) camps the survivors were being transported in the *Harugika Maru* (a so-called 'Hell ship') when it was torpedoed by *HMS Truculent*. All survivors of the *Grasshopper* were lost.

Old Cicestrians fell in all major theatres of World War II. Many (27) died during the air and ground war in Europe, both during the withdrawal to Dunkirk and the eventual liberation of Western Europe. Some were lost at sea (12), either as a result of a sinking or not returning from an air-raid. Others perished in North Africa (4). A surprising number (10) died in the UK, largely because of training accidents. Four old Cicestrians died as prisoners of war. Two died of disease and the fate of Stubbs has been detailed above. Flight Officer Lewis was shot down during an attack on the *Scharnhorst* in 1941 and was captured. Two years later he escaped from Stalag Luft III in Poland only to die from injuries sustained when he was hit by a train.

Perhaps the saddest tale is of Lance Bombardier Colbourne who died as a result of a shooting accident in Germany after the war had ended. He had left for France with the British Expeditionary Force and survived being evacuated from Dunkirk. He then joined the North Africa Campaign before fighting his way through France, Belgium and Germany with the Northumberland Hussars. Added to this are Lance Corporal Harris who died after the end of hostilities in North Africa while mine clearing and Leading Aircraftsman Saxby who died whilst on leave in Bognor as a result of an air-raid.

Of course, there are no happy stories here. We know the occupation of thirty-six of these Old Cicestrians. Ten had administrative roles largely in local councils and a further nine joined the armed services before 1939 (one in the Royal Army Medical Corps, two in the Royal Navy and the remaining six in the RAF). Of the others, five had gained places in Higher Education, a rarity at that time. Another was a dairyman and yet another a jockey. The careers of a journalist, a banker, a teacher and a librarian were all cut short. A special mention should be made of Pilot Officer Kenneth Quick who taught English at the School. He was posted to Basra in Iraq where he sadly contracted a fatal illness. At thirty-six he was the oldest Old Cicestriian to die in World War II. It is obvious from masters' comments at the time that he was a well-liked teacher by pupils and staff alike.

One civilian is honoured on the School War Memorial. Hotham is currently known only from enigmatic mentions in the school magazine ("The Martlet") in the 1930s. Any information concerning his fate would be welcome as would any further

information about others mentioned on the War Memorial and whose careers are briefly chronicled in the following accounts researched and written by Colin Snook (1947-1952).

Professor Anthony Cook MA, Ph.D., NTF** (at The School 1957-1965)
Scotland 2018

**Sidney "Giddy" Gahan taught Latin at the School from the mid-1930s until the late-1960s. When news of his brother's death came through it was read out by the Headmaster at assembly as usual and he added that Mr Gahan would not be attending school that day. ([Geoff Wills](#) (1943-1952) clearly remembers the occasion).*

*** The National Teaching Fellowship (NTF) celebrates and recognises individuals who have made an outstanding impact on student outcomes and the teaching profession in higher education.*

**** From Laurence Binyon's poem "For the Fallen", September 1914*