

# Lest We Forget: Midshipman David Dickson, 1897-1914

David Dickson was one of the first casualties of the First World War from Marlow. Aged just 17, he was drowned in October 1914 when the ship on which he was serving was sunk by a German submarine.

## Early life

David Angus Dickson, born in 1897, lived with his family in relative comfort at the Gables, Institute Road, Marlow. His father, John Dickson was a surgeon, JP and local councillor. David had three older brothers, Desmond, Brian and Ian and the family had five servants.

David joined Sir William Borlase school in 1906 aged 9, as a boarder. He was a keen boxer and a member of Marlow's Rowing and Hockey Clubs.

## Becoming a naval cadet

In 1910 David became a Naval Cadet at the Royal Naval College, Osborne on the Isle of Wight, moving to Dartmouth to finish his training in 1912. Here he won the light and middle weight boxing championships and the senior sculls race. In June 1914 David joined HMS Cumberland and, on the outbreak of war, HMS Hawke as a Midshipman. Before him lay a career as a commissioned officer in the Royal Navy.

## The Sinking of HMS Hawke

HMS Hawke, an old cruiser which was used primarily for patrols around the British coast, was an easy target for the new and fast-moving German submarines. On 15 October 1914, whilst patrolling the North Sea, she was torpedoed amidships. This caused a tremendous explosion, ripping the ship apart. Hawke sank in a few minutes with the loss of her commander, 26 officers and 497 men, including David Dickson. Only 74 crew survived.

This catastrophe caused some controversy, particularly following similar recent incidents. Another Marlow man had been killed the previous month: Petty Officer William Rance who was serving on HMS Cressy. The Telegraph ran an article questioning the Navy's policy of deploying cadets on patrol. The ageing cruiser ships were subsequently withdrawn but cadets continued to be deployed.

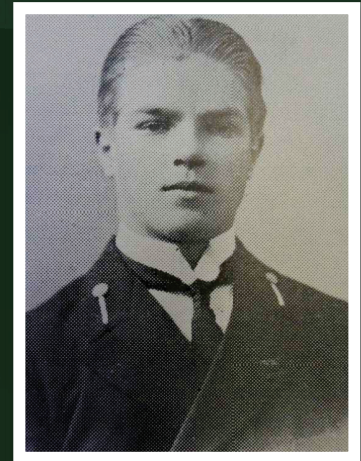
## "We are prepared to give still more"

As evidence of the standing of the family in Marlow, David's death was covered by the South Bucks Free Press and Dr Dickson received a telegram from the King. The King said that he and the Queen 'deeply regret the loss you and the Navy have suffered by the death of your son in the service of his country'. The local paper talked of 'a gloom... cast over the town' and called David 'One of the most promising boys in Marlow... [who] was liked by everyone... a bright, upright and fearless young Briton, good at work and play alike, he will be long remembered'.

Dr Dickson wrote to the paper, stating:

'the loss of our brave boy has roused... no feelings of a desire for revenge... but we... are prepared to give still more and... to do all in our power to help to wipe this cursed German militarism, with its ruthless atrocities, off the face of the earth once for all. If perchance any parents who read this are holding back their sons, we appeal to them over our son's watery grave for their King and country's honour, and for their children yet unborn, not to hesitate to send their boys forward into the battle line.'

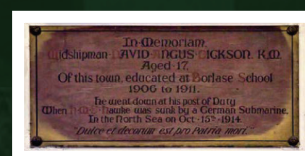
Dr Dickson, a governor at Sir William Borlase's school also gave a speech to the pupils. He was clearly very proud of David and said of him he was not 'a bookworm', or 'clever'; he was in fact 'low in his term at Osborne'. It was only by 'pegging away' that David was elevated to Cadet Captain, receiving the King's Medal for 'the cadet who... exhibited the most gentlemanlike bearing and the best influence amongst the cadets'. He was 'a boy with no special ability who made his mark simply by doing his duty'.



DAVID DICKSON, 1897 - 1914  
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The Gables, Institute Road, Marlow as it looks today  
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