

In Memory of
Surgeon ALFRED EDWARD TURNBULL M.B. Ch.B.
H.M.S. Cressy, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve
Who resided in Faringdon and died,
age 33, on 22 September 1914
Remembered with honour
Faringdon War Memorial and
CHATHAM NAVAL MEMORIAL



Commemorated in perpetuity by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

After the First World War, an appropriate way had to be found of commemorating those members of the Royal Navy who had no known grave, the majority of deaths having occurred at sea where no permanent memorial could be provided. An Admiralty committee recommended that the three manning ports in Great Britain - Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth - should each have an identical memorial of unmistakable naval form, an obelisk, which would serve as a leading mark for shipping. The memorials were designed by Sir Robert Lorimer, who had already carried out a considerable amount of work for the Commission, with sculpture by Henry Poole. It was unveiled on 26 April 1924. Chatham Naval Memorial commemorates 8,517 sailors of the First World War and 10,098 of the Second World War.

Background

Mr Herbert Coutts MBE of Dunbar has provided the following information about Alfred as part of a submission to have his name added to the Dunbar War Memorial.

Alfred was born on 10 March 1882, Pinkerton, Dunbar. (1) to Phipps and Isabella Ann (born Kirkwood) Turnbull who were married 9 December 1875 at Dunbar. Age 44, Phipps was a farmer at Pinkerton, an occupation in which he followed his father, also named Phipps, who was deceased by the time of the wedding. Age 21, Isabella Ann resided in Dunbar in the household of her father, Thomas Kirkwood, a wood merchant. (2) Isabella bore her husband three sons, Phipps Oswald, Thomas Archibald and Alfred Edward, and a daughter, Isabella Catherine. Isabella died on 22 December 1883, age 29, from medical complications arising from her daughter's birth earlier in the month. (3) as a result, he was brought up by his

father's second wife, Jessie Isabella Smith. In the 1891 Census, he is recorded, age nine, along with his siblings, at his father's farm at West Pinkerton. (4) Ten years later, and now a medical student, the Census notes him lodging at 26 Nelson Street, Edinburgh. His brother Thomas was also living at that address, and is described as being employed in the Grain Trade. (5)

Alfred studied medicine at Edinburgh University, and after graduating (M.B. Ch.B.) in 1907 served as a residential gynaecologist, as a clinical assistant in the university surgical wards, and as a resident house-surgeon in the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. A Fellow of the Edinburgh Obstetrical Society, he contributed papers on obstetrics to the British Medical Journal. (6) Perhaps his decision to study gynaecology, and research papers on obstetrics, was influenced by his mother's early death following childbirth. He married Sarah Challinor in 1912, and about that time moved to Faringdon where he was in practice when war broke out.

Alfred enlisted in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve as a surgeon in 1912. It was in that capacity that he was serving on the cruiser HMS "Cressy" when, along with the cruisers HMS "Aboukir" and HMS "Hogue", it was torpedoed by a lone German submarine (U-9) off Ostend on 22nd September 1914. This major disaster involving the sinking of three Royal Navy ships resulted in the deaths of 62 officers and 1,397 enlisted men (560 from HMS "Cressy", including Turnbull), with only 837 being rescued. (7) His daughter, Isabella Alfreda Myrtle, was born at 8 Rutland Square, Edinburgh on 13th December 1914. (8)

There is plentiful evidence of the Turnbells being a close-knit family, with long-standing Dunbar and Parish connections. As a student, and subsequently when in practice as a surgeon in Edinburgh, Alfred would have visited his father regularly and kept in contact with his siblings. His maternal grandfather, Thomas Kirkwood, was born in Dunbar, as were all of his five children. (9) The Turnbull connection with the area continued after Alfred's death, his elder brother, Phipps Oswald, serving as Dunbar's Provost from 1937 to 1947. (10)

Sources: Except where otherwise indicated, the information in this document has been drawn from the records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

(1) National Records of Scotland, Statutory registers Births 706/ 49

(2) National Records of Scotland, Statutory registers Marriages 706/ 29

(3) National Records of Scotland, Statutory registers Deaths 706/ 79

(4) National Records of Scotland, 1891 Census 706/ 12/ 14, Page 14 of 24

(5) National Records of Scotland, 1901 Census 685/ 2 96/ 14, Page 14 of 21

(6) The British Medical Journal, 3rd October 1914, p603

Among the list of the missing in connexion with the sinking of H.M.S. *Cressy* is the name of Alfred Edward Turnbull, son of Mr. Phipps Turnbull of Edinburgh. He graduated M.B., Ch.B. at Edinburgh University in 1907, and was surgeon in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. Mr. Turnbull served as residential gynaecologist, as clinical assistant in the university surgical wards, and as resident house-surgeon in the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. He was also a Fellow of the Edinburgh Obstetrical Society, and made three contributions to the literature of obstetrics which were published in this JOURNAL in 1909, 1911, and 1912, as well as one to the society's annual volume of *Transactions* for 1911. Mr. Turnbull was in practice at

(7) HMS "Cressy" (1899) – Wikipedia

(8) National Records of Scotland, Statutory registers Births 685/6 1120

(9) National Records of Scotland, 1871 Census 706/ 2/ 6, Page 6 of 27

(10) RJM Pugh "Swords, Loaves & Fishes – A History of Dunbar", p 243