

Name, Rank & Regiment of Soldier:

**Ronald Andrew Colquhoun Aitchison**

Lieutenant 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion King's Own  
Royal Lancaster Regiment



Image reproduced by permission of Johan Moors

Date of birth	Date died of wounds	Age
27 <sup>th</sup> December 1894	14 <sup>th</sup> December 1914	19

### **Background: Ronald Andrew Colquhoun Aitchison**

Ronald Andrew Colquhoun Aitchison was born in Burbage, Derbyshire<sup>1</sup> on 27<sup>th</sup> Dec 1894 and baptised in S. Coll Feb 1895<sup>2</sup>, the second child of Gowrie Colquhoun Aitchison (c1863-1928), a civil engineer and Rose Mabel Smith-Woolley<sup>3</sup> of Collingham (1865-1926). Ronald and his older sister, Annie Catherine (1892-1980) lived on Duke St, Burbage, Derbys until 1896 when their father was appointed General Manager and Engineer of the 'soon to be opened' Snowdonia Mountain Railway. In the 1901 census the family are in 'Dolafon' Llanberis, Carnarvon. They lived here until 1910 when the family moved back to Rose's native Collingham. They initially lived in Langford (1911 census) and then settled in the Burnt House<sup>4</sup>. Judging by his education, it is unlikely that Ronald spent much time in Collingham, apart from family visits and holidays. He attended Hillside Prep School<sup>5</sup>, Godalming, Surrey, as a young boy then nearby Charterhouse School from 1909 to 1911 & finally RMC Sandhurst from where he graduated in 1913 and went straight into the KORL regiment.

<sup>1</sup> Ancestry.com

<sup>2</sup> East Trent Genealogy database

<sup>3</sup> Daughter of Thomas Smith-Woolley Jr of Smith – Woolley & Wigram, Land Agents, S Collingham

<sup>4</sup> Smith-Woolley Family Tree Box EF/MM Collingham History Society Archives Also 1912 Trade Directory

<sup>5</sup> Hillside School sent many boys to Charterhouse. Ronald was possibly a contemporary of Val Gielgud (1900-1981), Sir John Gielgud the actor's brother. John Gielgud attended in 1912, just after Ronald's time.

[http://www.andrewsgen.com/photo/godalming/frithhill\\_hillside01.htm#inf](http://www.andrewsgen.com/photo/godalming/frithhill_hillside01.htm#inf)

*'At Charterhouse he played for the Bodeites cricket and football teams and was also a member of the school's Rifle Corps. He went to R.M.C Sandhurst and was gazetted 2nd Lieutenant to the King's Own on 17th September 1913.'*<sup>6</sup>



*Above: Ronald at Charterhouse. Image taken from a Bodeites sports' team photograph c 1911 when he was 15/16yrs old. Source: Image used with kind permission of Catherine Smith, Archivist, Charterhouse.*

Worth mentioning is that during the war, Ronald's father, Gowrie Aitchison, the son of a professional soldier, was a Lt-Col of the 2/5<sup>th</sup> Sherwood Foresters 1914-1917 before being transferred to another battalion. He was mentioned in dispatches.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Aitchisons Post-War**

The Aitchisons lived in the 'Burnt House' until the 1920s. Gowrie became a partner for Smith-Woolley & Co, Land Agents, alongside his brothers-in-law Thomas Cecil Woolley and Reginald Woolley<sup>8</sup>. However, he appears to have retained connections to the railway companies he managed in North Wales and was Secretary of the North Wales Narrow Gauge Company in 1915<sup>9</sup>. Rose Aitchison died in 1926 and Gowrie in 1928.

Ronald's sister, Annie Catherine b 1892, married Dr Sydney Oliphant Bingham (1873 -1951) of Alfreton c 1918. They lived in Alfreton and had 3 children<sup>10</sup>. Bingham had been the Medical Officer for the 2/5<sup>th</sup> Sherwood Foresters during the war<sup>11</sup> and this is perhaps how the introductions were made.

<sup>6</sup> Extracted from the Charterhouse Roll of Honour.

<sup>7</sup> Source: <http://www.ww1infantrycos.co.uk/sherwoods.html>

<sup>8</sup> See death of Thomas Hugh Corbett Woolley in 1916, Reginald's son and Ronald's cousin.

<sup>9</sup> In an email to Helena Pielichaty from E Jones 2016

<sup>10</sup> Ancestry. com

<sup>11</sup> See Lt Co Gowrie Aitchison's War Diary held by National Archives Office WO 952352

## Military History: Lt. Ronald Andrew Colquhoun Aitchison

Ronald joined the King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment (KORL) straight from Royal Military College Sandhurst, in September 1913.

August 1914: The 1st Battalion was mobilised on 4th August 1914 in Dover, where it was stationed. On the 23rd August the Battalion arrived in France on board the SS Saturnia and spent the rest of war on the Western Front. Ronald was plunged straight into action at Cambrai and then the Battle of the Marne.

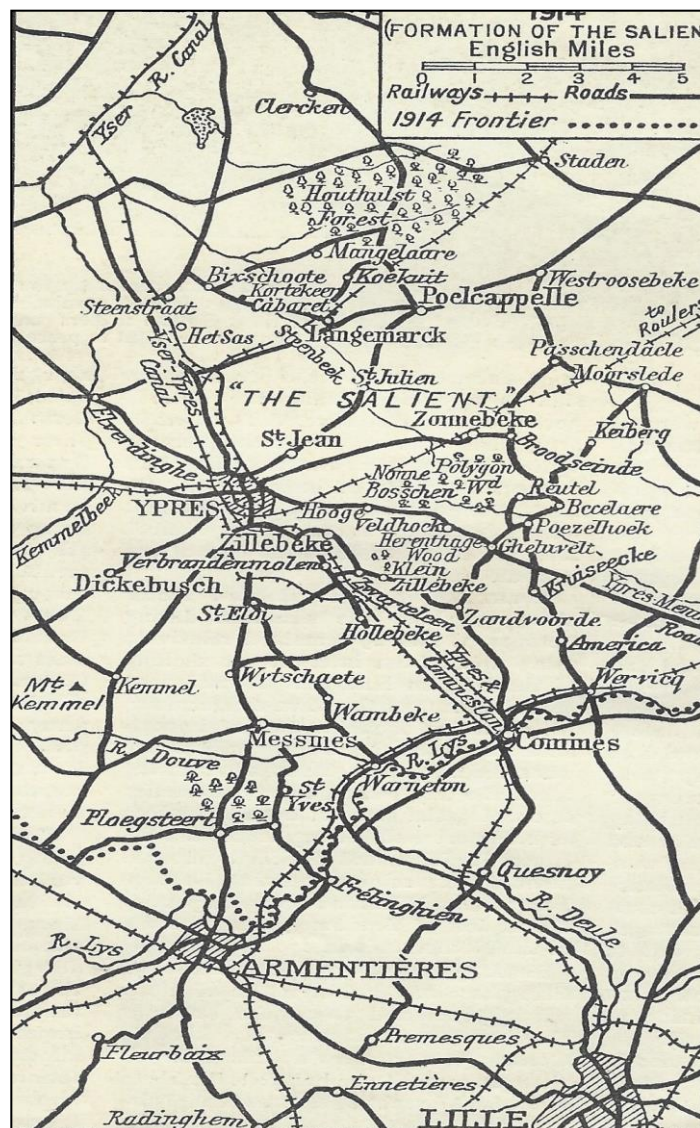
On 9<sup>th</sup> December 1914, Ronald was promoted to lieutenant.

*'He had been recommended for accelerated promotion to Captain, about a month before his death, and a Staff Officer wrote: "Ever since the beginning of the war your son has done splendidly, his bravery was well known. The men I know were devoted to him. He was recommended on two separate occasions for gallantry on August 26th, and since then was again mentioned.'*

The 1<sup>st</sup> battalion's heaviest losses were on August 26<sup>th</sup> at Haucourt in the Battle of Le Cateau when 65 men were killed (and Ronald was twice recommended for gallantry). Deaths included their commanding officer, Lt-Col Alfred MacNair Dykes (1874-1914).

### The Battle of Armentières

Although the official Battle of Armentières (near Lille) ended in November, there were still ongoing skirmishes on the Ypres-Salient throughout December. Lt. Aitchison was wounded in battle and died a few hours later.



Right: Map of the Armentières region in Ypres from Part 10 'World War A Picture History' published in 1935 (author's own copy)



Lieutenant Ronald Aitchison was initially buried in LE BIZET CONVENT MILITARY CEMETERY, PLOEGSTEERT, which was in the grounds of the Assumptionist Convent between Le Bizet and 'Motor Car Corner'. It contained the graves of 88 soldiers from the United Kingdom and one from Canada. After the Armistice the soldiers were transferred to the Strand Cemetery, Hainaut, Belgium<sup>12</sup>.

Grave ref: X.J.9.

*Above: Lt Ronald A C Aitchison's grave c/o Charterhouse Roll of Honour website with permissions*

Ronald is also remembered on the Llanberis War Memorial and South Collingham War Memorials.



*Above: Plaque in Ronald Aitchison's memory in St John Baptist's Church, South Collingham  
Photo: 2014*

<sup>12</sup> See CWCG Website for details.

Extract from South Collingham Parish Magazine – a tribute to R A C Aitchison by Rev Maxwell - Jan 1915:

*'Our deepest sympathy goes out at this time to Major and Mrs Aitchison in their terrible bereavement caused by the death of their only son on the field of battle in Western Flanders. We all felt so proud of Lieutenant Aitchison when he came home for a few days on furlough in the middle of December, looking so well and strong; knowing as we did that he had been in the fighting line from almost the beginning of the campaign. He worshipped with us in our church, and received the Blessed Sacrament on what proved to be his last Sunday on earth<sup>13</sup>. His clean courageous life and noble death will always be a source of inspiration to those who knew him. May the consolation of our Divine Redeemer help his sorrowing parents to sustain their irreparable loss.'<sup>14</sup>*

Research: 2014 Updated: Feb. 2018



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<sup>13</sup> Ronald died on the 14<sup>th</sup>, a Monday, so this must refer to Sunday the 6<sup>th</sup> December when he worshipped in St John the Baptist.

<sup>14</sup> Box EC/B, Collingham and District Local History Society archives