

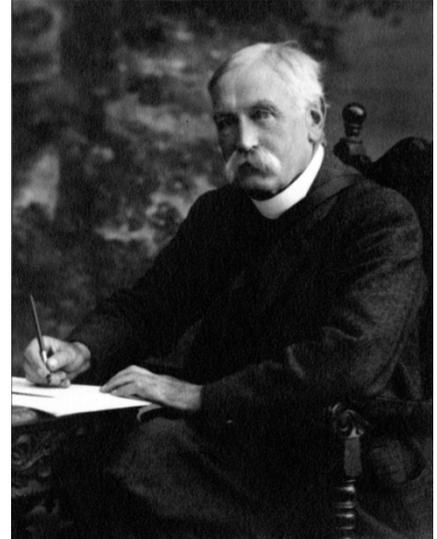
## Henry Robinson King (1855-1935)

*Nor love thy life nor hate; but what thou liv'st  
Live well – how long or short permit to Heaven.*

These lines from Milton's *Paradise Lost* appear on the plaque in the ante-chapel dedicated to the Old Shirburnians who died in the First World War. They were chosen by Henry Robinson King and the lines and their location combine two of the major passions of King's life: English literature and Sherborne School.

Known affectionately to all as 'Crusoe', King came to Sherborne School in 1883 to teach Classics and remained on the staff for over forty years until his retirement in 1925. King's impact on Sherborne during these years was not only in the classroom and as housemaster of Abbeylands, but he was also responsible for founding both the Duffers Society and the Old Shirburnian Society, and for introducing to the School the influential architect Sir Reginald Blomfield.

King kept a personal diary for most of his life, the majority of which survive and have recently been generously loaned to the School archives by his family. The diaries span 67 years of King's life, beginning in 1865 when he was aged nine and ending in 1931 when he was 76. They reveal an intellectual, humorous, self-critical and insightful man and include many wry observations about his work colleagues and the politics of school life.



The Rev. Henry Robinson King.

Born on 6 July 1855 at Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria, where his father was vicar, King attended Clifton College and then Exeter College, Oxford. It was while at Exeter College that King met fellow student Reginald Theodore Blomfield (1856-1942), the man whom A.B. Gourlay would later credit with being 'responsible above all others for the aspect of modern Sherborne'. King first introduced Blomfield to Sherborne in 1894



One of Blomfield's designs for the extension to the School chapel, April 1920.

when he was commissioned to design improvements to the interior of the Big School Room. Blomfield went on to design all the major new buildings at the School for the next 32 years, including the Carrington Buildings (1910), the classrooms in the north range of the Courts (1913), the Devitt Court workshops (1921), the war memorial staircase and ante-chapel (1922), the gate tower to the Courts (1923), the gymnasium (1923), and the Music School (1926). He also designed the main building of Sherborne Girls' School. While completing the war memorial staircase at Sherborne Blomfield was also working on his designs for the Menin Gate at Ypres in Belgium. Amongst the 57,000 names inscribed on the panels of the Menin Gate are those of fourteen Old Shirburnians whose names also appear on the war memorial staircase at Sherborne School. Blomfield was also responsible for designing the Cross of Sacrifice for the Imperial War Graves Commission and the electricity pylon for the Central Electricity Generating Board.

On 4 January 1898, King married Emily Constance 'Connie' Gray in Edinburgh, describing the event in his diary as 'a tolerable flutter of a wedding.' The couple spent the first years of their married life in a house at Greenhill and it was here that on 22 May 1898 the first meeting of a new School literary society was held. The Duffers, as the Society became known, was founded by King 'to keep its members alive to all that is

best in English literature, and to do this in as happy and congenial surroundings as possible.’ Members of the Duffers included Alec Waugh (a, 1911-1915), who would later describe King in rather unflattering terms in his semi-autobiographical novel *The Loom of Youth*. On reading the novel King wrote in his diary ‘Skimmed thro a dull quasi-vigorous story of Alec Waugh which has been widely sold. I am a feeble ass, lover of poetry, with a cribbing form, anaemic house, etc. .’



Alec Waugh in 1915.



Cecil Day-Lewis in 1921.

Another member of the Duffers was Cecil Day-Lewis (d 1917-1923). Day-Lewis would go on to become not only Poet Laureate but also, when he married Mary King in 1928, King’s son-in-law. Day-Lewis credited King with developing his interest in English poetry, stating in his autobiography *The Buried Day* that ‘if he [King] got bored with his pupils, he would whip out a volume of verse and, detaching himself from us, a dreamy look in his pale blue eyes, read aloud to himself till the end of the lesson.’ In 1908, King started to memorise some 10,000 lines of poetry which he would recite out loud as he cycled around the Dorset countryside when, according to Day-Lewis, he would ‘stop at a gate and recite chunks of Wordsworth or Tennyson to the vacant air or the still more vacant faces of the cows which presently congregated.’



The King family, c.1922.

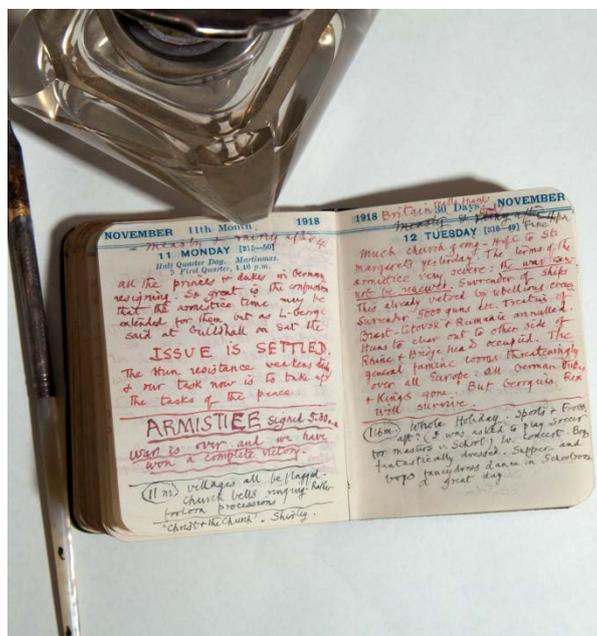
At a meeting held on 26 June 1896, King instigated the founding of the Old Shirburnian Society with the aim ‘to keep Old Shirburnians in touch with the School and with each other.’ King became the Society’s first Honorary Secretary, a post he held until his retirement in 1925, and it is largely because of his dedication that the Society attracted so many members. In his diary entry of 22 October 1898 he wrote, ‘I brought out

the 2<sup>nd</sup> Report of the Old Shirburnian Society. There appeared 340 names and so the Society must be pronounced a success. But I do not know that very much interest is really taken in it except by a few. The composition of it cost me much trouble when I could think of little except the wife [their first child had been still-born twelve days earlier].’ The affection that the OS felt for King was evident when in January 1928 he attended an OS dinner at the Park Lane Hotel and, according to the diary entry he wrote that evening, he was greeted by 125 OS and his speech was very well received with much laughter. When King died seven years later on 28 September 1935, aged 80, his funeral service was conducted in Sherborne by the Reverend Arthur Field who had succeeded him as Honorary Secretary of the OS Society.



The Old Shirburnian Society Dinner at the Park Lane Hotel, January 1928.

H.R. King lived his life very much according to the lines he chose from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: he lived them well and was much-loved and well-respected. But perhaps the final verdict on his life should be left to King himself, who on re-reading his diaries wrote, ‘Looked up some old diaries this week. On the whole feel glad to have turned out so respectable. There’s some poor stuff in them.’



H.R. King’s diary for 11-12 November 1918.  
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