

Second Lieutenant Peter Francis Kent

Royal Flying Corps

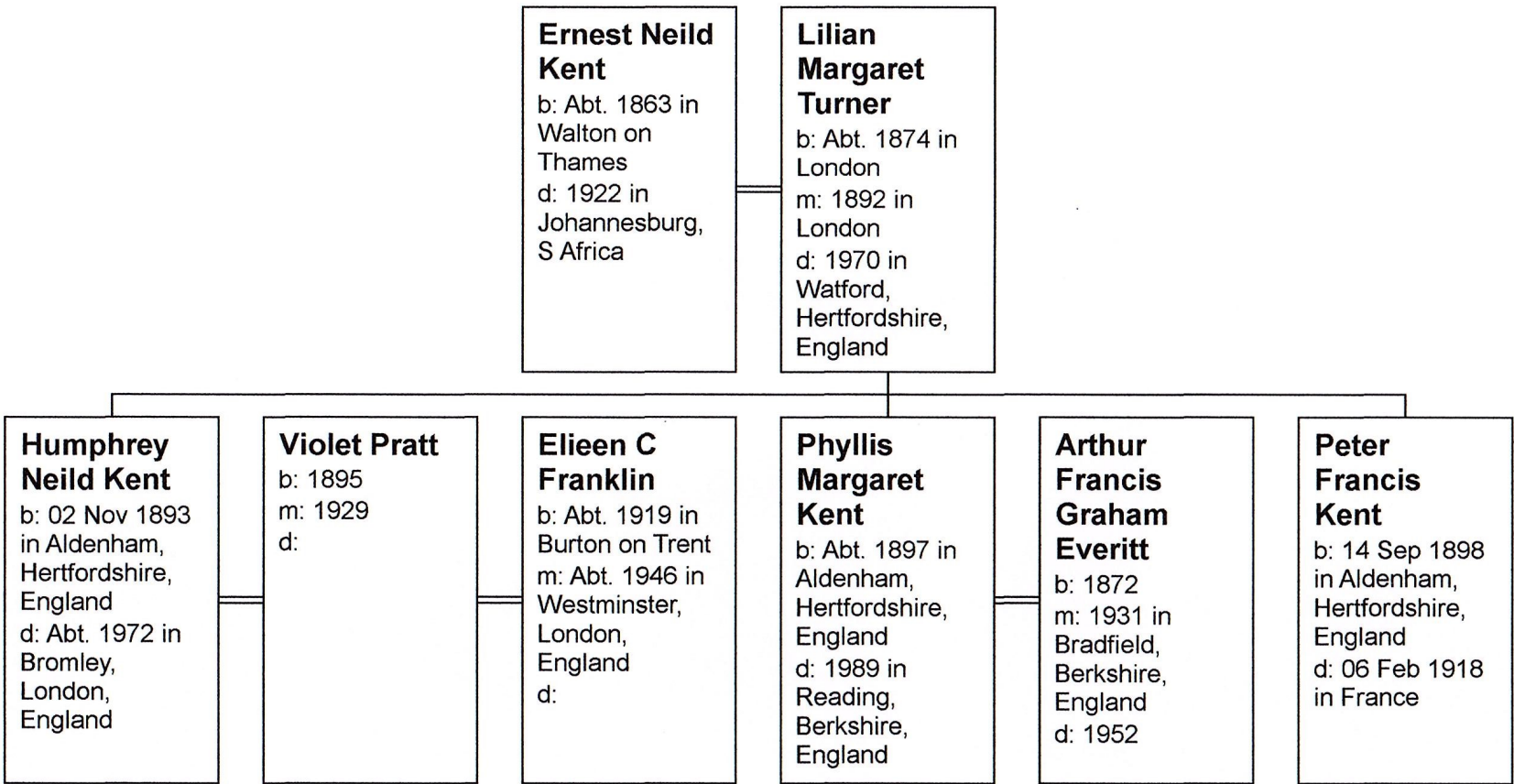


14 September 1898 – 6 February 1918

Peter Kent was a direct descendant of William Kent who, in 1777, founded the company of Kent Brushes. The company holds a pre-eminent place in the history of brush making, with an unbroken record of excellence in the quality of its products. This has been recognised by the granting of Royal Warrants for nine reigns.


The Kent family continued to run the company for six generations until 1932. Then Mr Eric L H Cosby, owner of Cosby Brushes Ltd, entered into an association with G B Kent & Sons. This started a new chapter in Kent's long history. Today, Mr Alan H L Cosby, grandson of Eric Cosby, is the Managing Director and Chairman, and the company remains a family business. The company moved from London to their existing factory in Apsley, Hertfordshire in 1984, and remain there to this day.

Peter was the youngest of the three children of Ernest and Lilian Kent. His elder brother, Humphrey, served with the 3rd Kent (East Buffs), an Infantry regiment, during WW1. Humphrey survived the war and subsequently married, divorced, and remarried, but it is not thought there were any children. Peter’s sister Phyllis did not marry until she was 33 and again no children have been found. Thus this branch of the Kent family came to an end.



Peter Kent's Birth Certificate, a copy of which is shown below, is very typical and does not reveal any surprises. It suggests that he was born at home at Letchmore Heath, and this is confirmed on the memorial plaque in Aldenham Church. The 'informant', the person who registered his birth, was his mother, just over a month after Peter was born.

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF BIRTH



GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE
Application Number 8803102-1

1898	REGISTRATION DISTRICT WATFORD BIRTH in the Sub-district of Bushey in the County of Hertford
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Columns:-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No.	When and where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name and surname of father	Name, surname and maiden surname of mother	Occupation of father	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration


107	<i>Fourteenth September 1898 Letchmore Heath Aldenham Herts</i>	<i>Peter Francis</i>	<i>Boy</i>	<i>Ernest Nicol Kent</i>	<i>Lily Margaret Kent formerly Turner</i>	<i>Brush Manufacture</i>	<i>Lily M Kent Mother Letchmore Heath Aldenham</i>	<i>Fourteenth October 1898</i>	<i>Agnes Beeson Registrar</i>	
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CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Births in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 15th day of December 2017

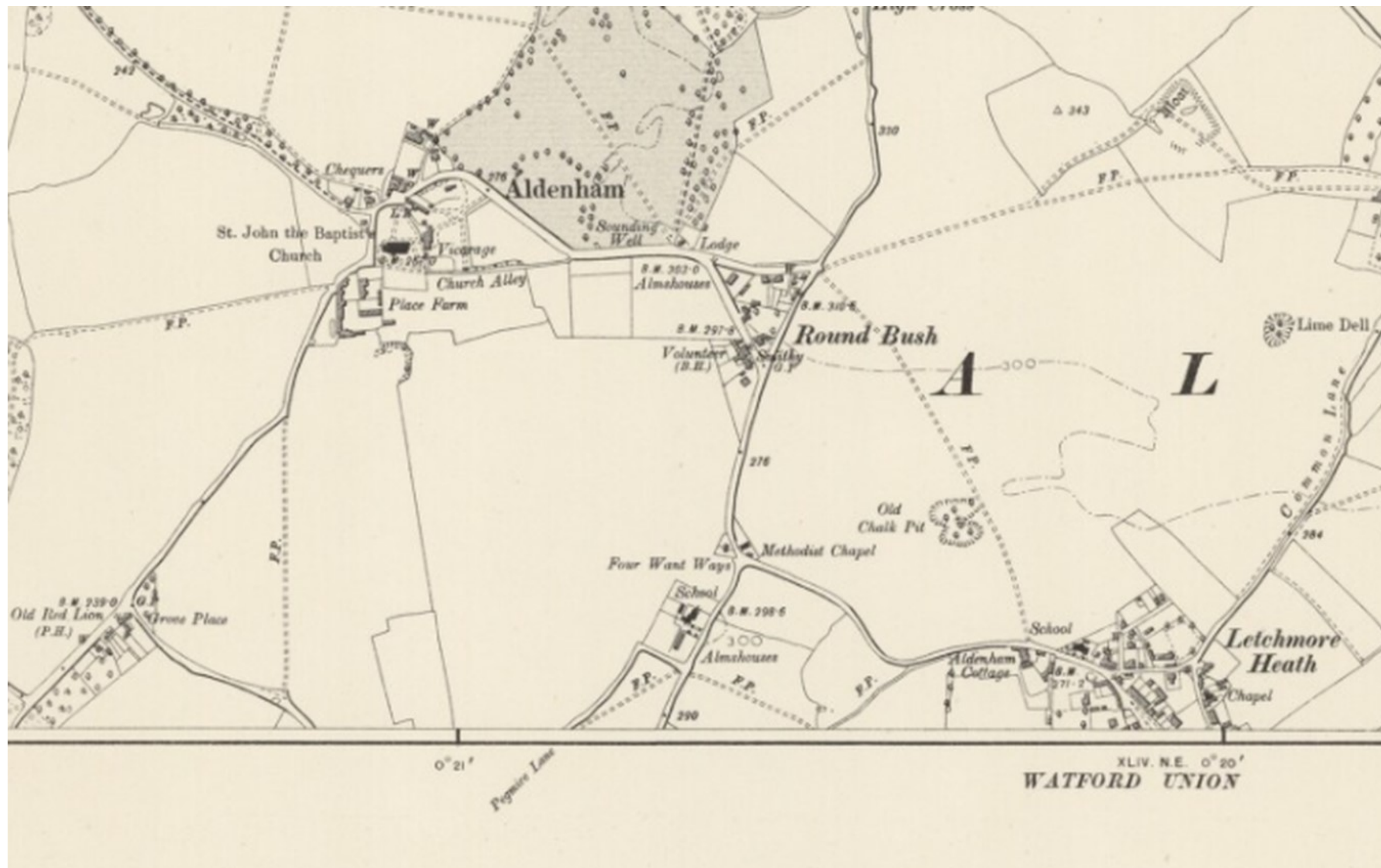
BXCH 404167

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WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.


 PMS

7409523 617903 04/17 WL/A1SP

A section of the 1896 revision of the Ordnance Survey map of Aldenham and Letchmore Heath showing St John the Baptist church in Aldenham, and Aldenham Cottage, the Kent family home, on the western edge of Letchmore Heath.



The 1901 Census for the parish of Aldenham recorded Humphrey, Phyllis and Peter living in Aldenham Cottage in the Parish of St John the Baptist. Also recorded at the same address were a Nurse, an Under Nurse, a Cook, a Housemaid, a Parlourmaid, and a Gardener. Ernest and Lily Kent were recorded staying in The Mariner hotel at Ventnor on the Isle of Wight. Evidently Kent Brushes were flourishing at that time.

Administrative County <i>Hertfordshire</i>		The undermentioned Houses are situate within the boundaries of the										Page 1				
Civil Parish <i>Aldenham</i>		Ecclesiastical Parish <i>St John the Baptist</i>		County Borough, Municipal Borough, or Urban District		Ward of Municipal Borough or of Urban District		Rural District <i>Hatfield</i>		Parliamentary Borough or Division of <i>Mid. & S. Herts</i>		Town or Village or Hamlet of				
Col. 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c. and No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES				Name and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	Condition as to Marriage	Age last Birthday of	PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION	Employer, Worker, or Own account	If Working at Home	WHERE BORN	(1) Deaf and Dumb (2) Blind (3) Lunatic (4) Imbecile, feeble-minded		
		Inhabited	Uninhabited	In Cottage	Not in Cottage											
1	<i>Aldenham Cott.</i>	1					<i>Humphrey William</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>7</i>					<i>Herts Aldenham</i>	
							<i>Phyllis Mary</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>1</i>					<i>do do</i>	
							<i>Peter Francis</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>1</i>					<i>do do</i>	
							<i>Katharine M. Russell</i>	<i>Servant</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>Nurse (Domestic)</i>				<i>Northumbria Thirsk</i>	
							<i>Naomi W. Self</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>Domestic (do)</i>				<i>Suffolk Wimbarton</i>	
							<i>Edg. H. M. D. Kent</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>Under nurse (do)</i>				<i>Isle of Wight (Isle)</i>	
							<i>Louisa J. Chapman</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>Cook (do)</i>				<i>Essex Withersand Hotel</i>	
							<i>Ada Mary Self</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>Parlourmaid (do)</i>				<i>Herts Bishop Stortford</i>	
2	<i>do</i>	1					<i>Albert E. Comst</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>Gardener (do)</i>				<i>Surrey Hertsford</i>	
							<i>Rosa E. do</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>29</i>					<i>Suffolk Beadon</i>	
							<i>Albert P. do</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>1</i>					<i>Herts Aldenham</i>	
							<i>Horace J. do</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>1</i>					<i>do do</i>	
							<i>Edith May do</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>30</i>					<i>Suffolk Beadon</i>	
3	<i>School House</i>	1					<i>Barthina Chambers</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>Head Teacher of B.E. Girls School</i>				<i>Suffolk Dissington</i>	
							<i>Emily Yates</i>	<i>Boarder</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>Nurse do</i>				<i>London St. Pancras</i>	
4	<i>Post Office</i>	1					<i>Harry J. Wright</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>Safer</i>	<i>Employer</i>	<i>Home</i>		<i>Herts Aldenham</i>	
							<i>Jennie do</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>34</i>					<i>Isle of Wight</i>	
							<i>Albie M. do</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>9</i>					<i>Herts Aldenham</i>	
							<i>Edith A. do</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>9</i>					<i>do do</i>	
							<i>Byrill J. do</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>16</i>					<i>do do</i>	
							<i>William J. do</i>	<i>Brother</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>Painter</i>	<i>Worker</i>			<i>do do</i>	
5	<i>Letchmore Heath</i>	1					<i>Harry E. Bunney</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>Printer & Paperhanger</i>	<i>Worker</i>			<i>London St. Pancras</i>	
							<i>James do</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>37</i>					<i>Herts Aldenham</i>	
							<i>E. A. G. Sanderson</i>	<i>Boarder</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>Labourer</i>				<i>West India</i>	
6	<i>do</i>	1					<i>John Chas. Russell</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>House Painter</i>	<i>Worker</i>			<i>Stafford Burton on Trent</i>	
							<i>Jessie do</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>25</i>					<i>Herts Letchmore Heath</i>	
							<i>Edith May do</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>1</i>					<i>do do</i>	
6	Total of Schedules of Houses and of Tenements with less than Five Rooms	6					Total of Males and of Females...			<i>115</i>	<i>17</i>					

NOTE—Draw your pen through such words of the headings as are inapplicable.

Eng.—Sheet II.

Peter's first school was Bengo College in Hertford. He then followed his father and brother as pupils of Clifton College in Bristol. Peter entered in September 1912; this 1913 photograph was probably taken at the end of his first year. Peter is on the left, seated on the ground. (Clifton College Archives)



Peter's last school photograph, taken in 1915. He is in the front row on the left, wearing a boater. In less than three years this youthful schoolboy was to die fighting for his country. (Clifton College Archives)



Peter left Clifton in July 1915 with a very average academic record. He started an engineering apprenticeship, possibly in the family firm. Perhaps Peter was seeking something more exciting but, for whatever reason, on 6 September 1916, a few days before his 18th birthday, Peter applied to join an Officer Cadet Unit with a view to obtaining a commission in the Royal Flying Corps. He had been in the Officer Training Corps at school, and the rapid development of military aviation had probably captured his imagination. Added to this, land at Shenley had been requisitioned for the Royal Flying Corps early in 1916 and it gradually expanded into a training aerodrome. 56 Squadron were based there from July 1916 to April 1917. Peter must have seen all the flying activity and very likely been attracted to it.

160810/1

Form ^{M.T.} 393 A

Application for Admission to an Officer Cadet Unit with a view to appointment to a Temporary Commission in the Regular Army for the period of the War, to a Commission in the Special Reserve of Officers or to a Commission in the Territorial Force.

The candidate will complete the following particulars and obtain certificates below as to character and educational qualification.

1. Name in full { Surname. Christian names.	Kent Peter Francis	
2. State whether desirous of appointment to— (i) A temporary commission in the Regular Army. (ii) A commission in the Special Reserve of Officers. (iii) A commission in the Territorial Force.	A commission in the Special Reserve of Officers.	
3. State in order of preference the branch of the Service in which desirous of serving e.g., Cavalry, Artillery, Engineers, Infantry, Army Service Corps, etc. NOTE.—Unless otherwise stated it will be assumed that a candidate is prepared to accept a commission in any branch of the Service.	Royal Flying Corps.	
4. Unit (if any) to which desirous of being appointed. (If for the Army Service Corps state whether for Motor Transport, Horse Transport, or Supply.) NOTE.—No guarantee can be given for appointment to a particular unit.	Royal Flying Corps.	
5. Date and place of birth.	Sept. 14 th 1898 Aldenham, Herts.	
6. Whether married.	No.	
7. Whether of pure European descent.	Yes.	
8. Whether a British subject by birth or naturalization. (State which, and if by naturalization attach a certificate from the Home Office.)	British by birth.	
9. Nationality by birth of father (if naturalized, state date.)	British	
10. Occupation of father.	Brush Manufacturer.	
11. Permanent address of candidate.	Aldenham, Watford, Herts.	
12. Present address for correspondence.	Aldenham, Watford, Herts.	
13. Schools or Colleges at which educated.	Bengeo, Hertford — Clifton College	
14. Occupation or employment in civil life.	1 year in Engineer's Shop	
15. Whether able to ride.	No.	
16. Whether now serving, or previously served, in any branch of His Majesty's Naval or Military Forces, or in the Officers Training Corps. If so, state:— (a) Regiment, Corps, or Contingent ... (b) Date of appointment ... (c) If serving in the ranks state whether on an ordinary peace engagement or for the period of the war only ... (d) Rank ... (e) Date of retirement, resignation or discharge ... (f) Circumstances of retirement, resignation or discharge ... (g) Whether in possession of Certificate A. ... (h) Whether in possession of Certificate B. ...	Clifton College R.E. O.T.C. January 1913	Acting Lieut. Col. August 1915 Left school. No.

(7 30 32) W 16076—7264 20,000 2/16 H W V(P 687/3 Q 16/218
1101—6585 40,000 5/16

This is the reverse of Peter's application to join the Army. He signs the application which then, because he is under the age of 21, has to be endorsed by his father. He then needs referees to attest to his good character during the previous four years, and because he was at school for part of the time one of the referees has to be his Head Master at Clifton. J E King was Head Master of Clifton from 1910 to 1923, and so would have known Peter well. Similarly the other referee, Edgar Stogdon, was the Vicar of Aldenham, an incumbency he held from 1914 to 1923, and he too would have known Peter well. The final evidence required was that Peter had 'attained a standard of education suitable for commissioned rank'. Not having any formal educational qualifications Peter needs a second endorsement from his former Headmaster, and King provides this on 9 September 1916.

2

17. Whether now serving, or previously served, in any other Government Department (Home, Indian, or Colonial). If so, give particulars, and attach official permission from the Head of the Department to make this application. No.

18. Whether an application for a commission has been previously made, if so, on what date and for what branch of the service. No.

(i.) I certify that the above particulars are correct and complete. I request that I may be admitted to an Officer Cadet Unit with a view to being appointed to a commission as stated in (2) above.
I understand that I shall be held liable for service in the ranks if I fail to qualify for final recommendation for a commission.

Date 6th Sept. 1916 Usual Signature of Candidate. Peter F. Kent

Signature of parent or guardian, if the candidate is under 21 years of age } Ernest J. Kent

(ii.) Certificate of moral character during the past four years. If the candidate has been at school, college, or other educational establishment during any portion of the period the certificate should be signed by the head of the establishment, otherwise it may be signed by a responsible person (not a near relative or connection), e.g., the minister of the parish or other local clergyman, a magistrate, a senior officer of the Army or Navy who has been well acquainted with the candidate in private life during the period.

If the above-mentioned person cannot certify for the whole period of four years, a second certificate for the period not covered by the first should be signed by a similar person.

I hereby certify to the good moral character of Peter Francis Kent
for the last from Sept 1912 to July 1915
Signature J. E. King
†Rank, office or occupation Headmaster
Date Sept 9. 1916 Address Clifton College Bristol

To be filled in when the above certificate does not cover four years.

I hereby certify to the good moral character of Peter Francis Kent
from September 1915 to September 1916
Signature Edgar Stogdon
†Rank, office or occupation Clerk in Holy Cross
Date 7.9.16. Address Aldenham Vicarage. Watford.

(iii.) Evidence that the candidate has attained a standard of education suitable for commissioned rank.
If the candidate has:—
(a) obtained a leaving or qualifying certificate as required of a candidate for admission to the Royal Military College under the regulations in force up to 1st April, 1912, the Certificate should be attached;
(b) qualified at an Army Entrance Examination, the date of examination should be stated;
(c) passed the matriculation examination of a University, or a test accepted in lieu thereof, the Certificate should be attached.
Failing one of the above, the following certificate must be signed by the Headmaster of a secondary school or other competent educational authority.

I certify from personal knowledge that Peter F. Kent has attained a standard of education suitable for commissioned rank.

State here educational position, e.g.,
Head of a College or School, etc. } Headmaster Clifton College

†Here state whether Tutor, Head of School or College, Minister of Parish or other local clergyman, or Magistrate, &c.

Peter's application was successful and, with some apparent minor inconsistencies in the dates, he had by 9 September sworn his allegiance to the King and been accepted into the Army with a view to joining the Royal Flying Corps. His service number would be 68219. Having completed his basic training he was commissioned in to the Royal Flying Corps as a Temporary 2nd Lt (on probation) on the 27th February 1917. The reference to Farnborough in March 1917 is probably an indication of where he started his flying training.

ARMY LET. NO. *160810* Form B. 203 1 ORIGINAL Army B. 203 2505

SHORT SERVICE
(For the Duration of the War, with the Colours and in the Reserve).

Card No. *11311*

ATTESTATION OF
No. *68219* Name *Peter Francis Kent* Corps *Royal Flying Corps*

Questions to be put to the Recruit before Enlistment.

1. What is your Name ?	1. <i>Peter Francis Kent</i>
2. What is your full Address ?	2. <i>Aldenham Cottage</i> <i>Aldenham : Herts</i>
3. Are you a British Subject ?	3. <i>Yes</i>
4. What is your Age ?	4. <i>17</i> Years <i>11</i> Months
5. What is your Trade or Calling ?	5. <i>Apprentice Engineer</i>
6. Are you Married ?	6. <i>No</i>
7. Have you ever served in any branch of His Majesty's Forces, naval or military, if so, which ?	7. <i>No</i>
8. Are you willing to be vaccinated or re-vaccinated ?	8. <i>Yes</i>
9. Are you willing to be enlisted for General Service ?	9. <i>Yes</i>
10. Did you receive a Notice, and do you understand its meaning, and who gave it to you ?	10. <i>Yes</i> { Name <i>B. S. Adams</i> Corps <i>R.F.C.</i>
11. Are you willing to serve upon the following conditions provided His Majesty should so long require your services? For the duration of the War, at the end of which you will be discharged with all convenient speed. You will be required to serve for one day with the Colours and the remainder of the period in the Army Reserve, in accordance with the provisions of the Royal Warrant dated 20th Oct., 1915, until such time as you may be called up by order of the Army Council. If employed with Hospitals, depots of Mounted Units, or as a Clerk, etc., you may be retained after the termination of hostilities until your services can be spared, but such retention shall in no case exceed six months.	11. <i>Yes</i>

I, *Peter Francis Kent* do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and that I am willing to fulfil the engagements made.

Peter Francis Kent SIGNATURE OF RECRUIT.
B. S. Adams P.P.R. Signature of Witness.

OATH TO BE TAKEN BY RECRUIT ON ATTESTATION.
I, *Peter Francis Kent* swear by Almighty God, that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs, and Successors, and that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs, and Successors, in Person, Crown, and Dignity against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and of the Generals and Officers set over me. So help me God.

CERTIFICATE OF MAGISTRATE OR ATTESTING OFFICER.
The Recruit above named was cautioned by me that if he made any false answer to any of the above questions he would be liable to be punished as provided in the Army Act.
The above questions were then read to the Recruit in my presence.
I have taken care that he understands each question, and that his answer to each question has been duly entered as replied to, and the said Recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the oath before me at *WATFORD* on this *5th* day of *Sept* 191*6*
Signature of the Justice *C. H. Chambers Esq.*

† Certificate of Approving Officer.
I certify that this Attestation of the above-named Recruit is correct, and properly filled up, and that the forms appear to have been complied with. I accordingly approve, and appoint him to the *12th Bn. R.F.C.*
If enlisted by special authority, Army Form B. 203 (or other authority for the enlistment) will be attached to the original attestation.
Date *9.2.1917*
Place *South Farnborough*
ROYAL FLYING CORPS.
Signature of Approving Officer *W. H. Adams*

† The signature of the Approving Officer is to be affixed in the presence of the Recruit.
‡ Here insert the "Corps" for which the Recruit has been enlisted.

* If so, the Recruit is to be asked the particulars of his former service, and to produce, if possible, his Certificate of Discharge and Certificate of Re-enlistment in the (Regiment) on the (Date).

Documentation of Peter’s progress through flying training has not been found, but obviously he survived the horrendous casualty rates of those times - 8000 prospective pilots were killed during flying training in World War One. The next evidence of Peter’s progress discovered so far shows that towards the end of 1917 he was serving with the School of Special Flying at Gosport in Hampshire. This school had been formed with the aim of reducing the casualty rate by creating a formal scheme of flying training, a syllabus and progressive flying exercises, to replace the haphazard and random methods that currently existed. It was established in August 1917 with Major Robert Smith Barry as its first Commanding Officer, a strong believer in a more structured approach to flying training. It would be reasonable to assume that Peter had shown that he was a talented pilot and been deliberately selected to serve with the School of Special Flying.

No 3 Squadron had been sent to France on the outbreak of the Great War. The squadron initially operated in the reconnaissance role using a variety of aircraft types. In October 1917, with the introduction of Sopwith Camels, a fighter/scout role was taken on. Towards the end of the year, when based at Warloy - Baillon airfield North East of Amiens, the squadron called for reinforcements and Peter, who as far as is known had not by then had any aerial combat experience, volunteered to go with the expectation that he would be ‘home for Christmas’. However, he must have enjoyed the experience because he wanted to remain in France into the New Year. It was to be a fatal decision. Shortly after the 6th February 1918 Peter’s father received the telegram that every parent dreaded.

12/18

POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS.

Prefix _____ Code _____ (Inland Official Telegrams only.) No. of Telegram 1254/1

Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words. Sent

O. H. M. S. CAS. At _____ M. To _____ By _____

I certify that this Telegram is sent on the service of the WO (Signature) Abblade

Attention is called to the Regulations printed at the back hereof Dated Stamp.

TO { E. N. Kent
Letchmore Heath, Watford

Regret to inform you 2nd Lt. P. F. Kent
R. F. C. 3 Squad. is reported missing February
sixth a/c. This does not necessarily mean
either killed or wounded a/c. Further news
sent immediately received

FROM { SECRETARY WAR OFFICE

The Name and Address of the Sender, IF NOT TO BE TELEGRAPHED, should be written in the space provided at the Back of the Form

The day after Peter went missing his Squadron Commander, Major Richard Raymond-Barker, wrote to Peter's father with a full account of what, as far as he knew, had happened. It had not been a good day for the Squadron. Although two German aircraft had been destroyed there were two pilots from 3 Squadron down behind German lines; it could not have been far back as the dog fight had been observed by allied artillery close to the front line. The pilot's fate was unknown although the one shot down in flames was unlikely to have survived.

7-2-18
H. 3 Squad:
R. F. C.
B. 2.7.

My dear Mr. Kent
It is with every regret I have to inform you that your son 2nd Lt R. F. Kent went out on a patrol yesterday afternoon and has not returned. Here is the story.
A patrol of 4 went out, one of whom later returned with engine trouble.
The remaining 3 ran into a formation of 6 Huns.
In the ensuing fight, our Leader was first sent down out of action with his fin so badly damaged he could hardly keep his machine in control. He eventually struggled home, though badly shot about.
Our remaining two stuck to their job & one of the Huns promptly went down in flames. A second Hun followed a minute later.
Then one of our 2 machines went down in flames & the last went down out of control, but recovered at about 2000 ft & was seen to land on the other side. The pilot of this machine was probably wounded, & recovered himself in time to get control of his machine.
Which of the two machines your brave son was flying it is impossible to say. We are dropping messages over & as soon as we get any more definite news I will of course let you have it at once.
There is still hope, though not of the best. It is the cruellest of fortune that we should lose your son especially now.
He was, as you know, attached to us from Gosport for 6 weeks & during that 6 weeks he did whatever jobs were going like everyone else.
He then applied to me to remain on, & until the question was settled I sent him off on various or flying jobs that did not necessitate war-flying.^{A1173}
Still there was a delay, & he begged to be able to do the ordinary jobs again. I got permission.
Be proud of him. Those two, even if the worst happened, died game to the last.
The Batteries down in the front line reported it was the finest show they had ever seen. They were my two BEST.
With every sympathy to you & yours in your present anxiety,
Richard Raymond-Barker
Major.

The mail service from the front line must have been working very well as Ernest Kent was able to write back to Raymond-Barker on 11th February. Naturally Kent was most anxious to find out as much as he could about what had happened to Peter and the other pilot, evidently wishing to get in touch with the latter's father, probably for mutual support in the circumstances. 9 days later Raymond-Barker writes back providing the name and address. He also emphasises the high regard in which Peter was held by his brother officers.

20-2-18

H^o 3 Squad^r
R.F.C.
B.S.F.

My dear Lieut Kent,

Thank you for your letter of the 11th. In answer to your enquiry the other pilot was Lieut. A. G. D. Alderson, whose father is The Rev. A. D. Alderson.

Tockwith Vicarage.
Cattal. York.

I fear I have no news yet, except to say we have already dropped messages on the other side asking for news.

I am sending you inventories of your son Peter's

Kit, for your information. It has already been forwarded.

We had another rather big show a few days ago, in which fortunately we lost none but managed to shoot down out of control a couple of Huns. The odds in this case were about even.

Again with every sympathy for you & yours in your present suspense, & yet with all congratulations in such a son,

Yours very sincerely,
Raymond-Barker.

I think it superfluous to dwell at length on whether your son was appreciated by his fellow-officers. He is not forgotten, and his example never.

Peter's Commanding Officer from the School of Special Flying, Major Smith Barry, also wrote to Ernest Kent to express his condolences. Coincidentally he provides the information that Peter was an instructor at the school, a very competent officer and that he had volunteered to go to France. While Raymond-Barker said that Peter had volunteered to stay on in France, Smith Barry indicates that 3 Squadron had wanted to retain him.



School of Special Flying,
Gosport, Hants.

(TELS: GOSPORT 205: BROCKHURST 16).

March 2. 1910.

Sir

I have just come
back here from the North
& learnt of your son's death.

I cannot tell you how
sorry I am to hear
of it - As you probably

know, he only went to
France temporarily - I

had wished that he would

have returned long since,
but unluckily he was
kept out here longer
than was originally intended

I assure you his death
his loss is very deeply
regretted by everyone here.
He was not only a most
efficient officer (he was as
a matter of fact one of the
very best instructors I have

here) but ~~was~~ a very
popular companion.

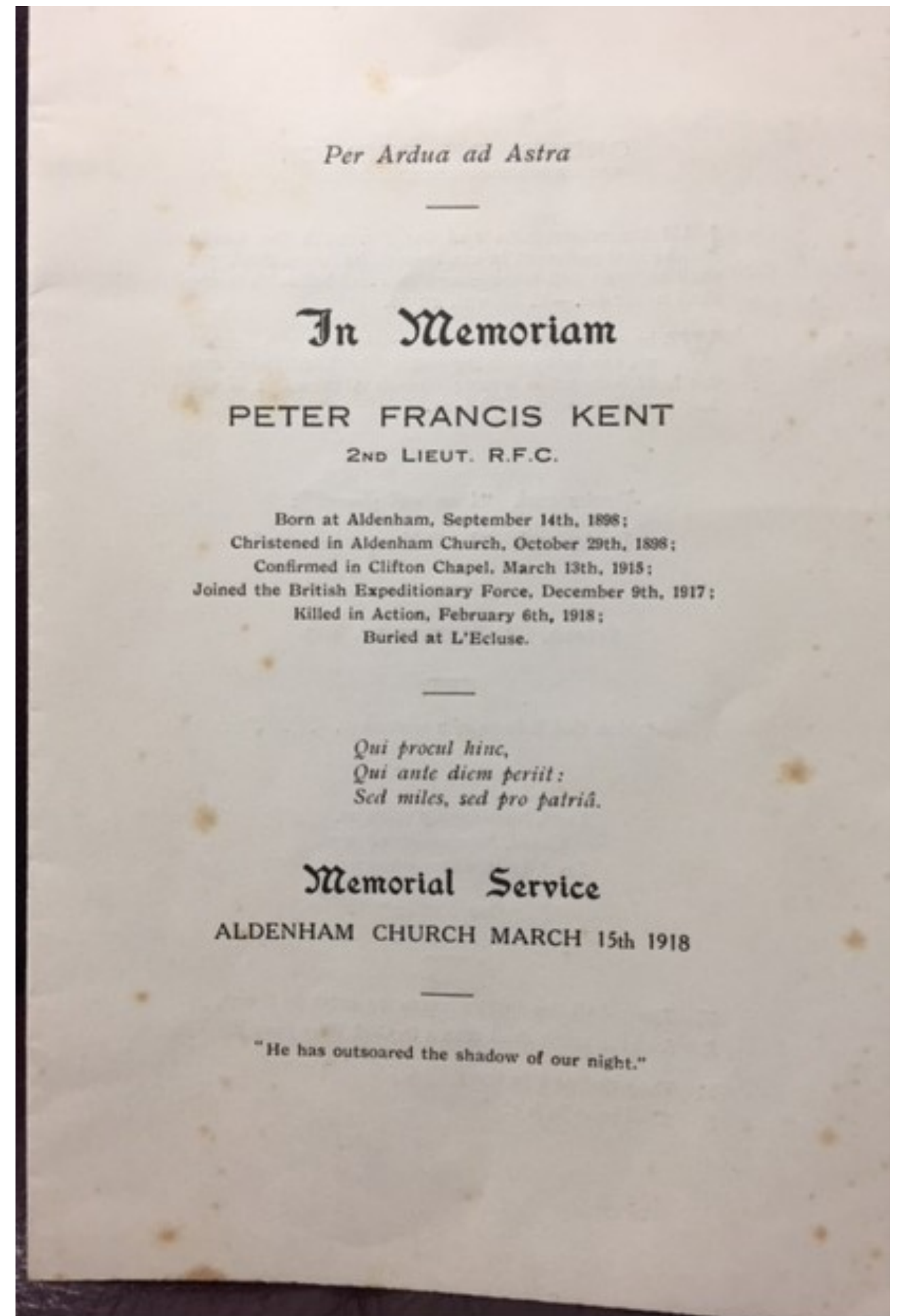
You are no doubt aware
that he was under no
obligation to go to France
when he did, as the of-
ficers at this headquarters
unit are allowed to
go at their discretion
as their work is of
a special kind.

Believe me to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant
R. Smith Barry

As we will see, Ernest Kent had accepted information he had received on 25 February from the Red Cross as evidence of Peter's death and, without waiting for official confirmation from the War Office, he arranged for a Memorial Service to be held for Peter in Aldenham Church on 15th March 1918. Ironically the formal notification from the War Office was to come a few days later.

The Latin quotation is taken from a poem called Clifton Chapel written by Sir Henry Newbolt in 1881. Newbolt had himself attended Clifton College, so the choice of author is as equally appropriate as the translation of Newbolt's Latin.

Who in a land far away
Who died before his time
But a soldier, but for his country



For Peter's parents the pain must have been draining, made worse by the absence of any further information from the War Office. It was not until the 18th March, three days after Peter's Memorial Service, that they were told the news officially.

C.2.Casualties. S/6676/8. 18 March, 1918.

Sir,

I am commanded by the Army Council to inform you with regret that a telegram concerning Second Lieutenant P.F.Kent, General List and Royal Flying Corps, reported Missing 6th February, 1918, has been received from the British Red Cross Society, Copenhagen, through the Central Prisoners of War Committee.

The telegram states that the Frankfurt Red Cross Society report that Lieutenant Peter F.Kent, is dead, and a further telegram received adds that he is buried at Leckase.

In view of these reports the Army Council are regretfully constrained to conclude that Second Lieutenant Kent was Killed in Action on 6th February, 1918.

I am to express their sympathy with you in your bereavement and to add that publication will be made in the official casualty list.

I am,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(Sgt) B. B.

E.M.Kent Esq.,
Letchmore Heath,
Watford.

Of course Ernest Kent already knew by then that his son was dead. And so, with admirable restraint and politeness he was able to reply immediately to the War Office pointing out that he already knew more about Peter's death than they were aware of, and gently suggesting that they could improve their casualty notification system. With the number of cases the War Office had to deal with, and the death occurring in German held territory, the delay is not surprising, but 6 weeks then must have seemed a very long time.

STATION, RADLETT MID. RX.
TELEGRAMS, LETCHMORE HEATH.
TELEPHONE, 84 RADLETT.

ALDENHAM COTTAGE,
ALDENHAM, WATFORD,
HERTS.

March 19. 1918

The Secretary War Office

re C. 2. Casualties
S/6676/8

Sir I beg to thank you for your letter concerning the death of my Son 2nd Lt P. F. Kent R.F.C. and also to the Army Council for their expression of sympathy.

I beg to say that I received on February 25th the same information which stated that my son

was buried at Lecluse, as you state.

You will therefore see that my suspense was considerably shortened through my having this earlier information.

In such matters & cases I humbly submit that it is important to receive the earliest reliable information, to relieve the relatives of their anxiety. I obtained mine by writing to M^{rs} George Bernays (Swiss) Goethestrasse 14, Zurich, who is attached to the Bureau for tracing the missing — Vermisstenbureau Zurich.

and I have now received the official German telegram, dated Feb 22nd sent to that Bureau from Frankfurt.

Should your department not be in touch already with this Bureau in Zurich, it might through them be able to get ~~and~~ earlier information.

I am your obedient servant

Ernest Kent

Number 3 Squadron's War Diary, their daily record of all the significant operational events that took place, describes in some detail what was then known about the air combat that took place on the afternoon of 6th February 1918. It is largely based on Captain Sutton's report, the only information available at the time from those involved. However the diary entry must have been completed sometime later as it records the imprisonment of 2nd Lt Alderson and the death and burial of 2nd Lt Kent. C.O.P. is an abbreviation of Close Offensive Patrol.

WAR DIARY or INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.			Army Form C.
Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs., Part II. and the Staff Manual respectively. Title pages will be prepared in manuscript.			
Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information
WARLOY	6/2/18.		12.20 pm. 4 machines C.O.P. N.E.A.S. The afternoon C.O.P. deserves more detailed description :- Capt.Sutton, Lt.Dennett, Lt.Alderson and Lt.Kent left at 3.5 pm on a C.O.P. Lt.Dennett returned at 3.35 pm with engine trouble. At 4.0 pm the remaining three engaged 6 enemy single seaters. Herewith part of Capt.Sutton's report :- 2 E.A.tacked on to my tail. I shook them off and got a burst of 50 rounds into one of them at 10 yards range, when my gun jambed. I then did a climb to the left, clearing the jamb, when one of the E.A.knocked into my fin with his wheel sending me down in a spin. I got out of this after 1,000 ft, and found I could not keep my machine flying level, and on a turn it got into a spin, so I had to return. I found my fin all buckled up. Lt.Kent (since reported killed) and buried at LECLUSE and Lt.Alderson (since reported seriously wounded and prisoner of war) never returned. From numerous eye witnesses at 3 different A.A.batteries, these two put up a magnificent fight against odds of 3 to 1, sending 1 E.A.down in flames and another down absolutely out of control, and a third which left the combat in a damaged condition. Soon after that our two machines were downed, one going down in flames. Lieut. C.P.Johnson - 18 M.G.C. - attached for three days course.
WARLOY	7/2/18.		No flying. Capt.J.S.Michie M.C. struck off strength on admission to hospital 4/2/18. 2/Lieut. N.E.Dalby - 16 M.G.C.- attached for three days course. Lt.J.K.V.Peden proceeded on leave 5/2/18.
WARLOY	8/2/18.		A little practice took place about 12 noon. Otherwise no flying.
WARLOY	9/2/18.		Capt.Lenan, Lt.Dennett, Lt.Smuts and Lt.Chamberlain left at 7.0 am on Low Work, the pilots doing very good work. 11.0 am. 4 machines C.O.P. N.E.A.S. Practice low bombing throughout the day. Lt.B.A.Cooke - Can.Inf.- proceeded to No.2 A.S.D. temp.duty. 2/Lt.H.A.Dunningham proceeded on leave 7/2/18.
WARLOY	10/2/18.		No war flying. 5½ practice work was done. 2/Lt.D.W.Paton - General List - Flying Officer - struck off strength on admission to hospital. 2/Lt.H.E.Stewart - General List - posted to Squadron 7/2/18. Issue of rum was discontinued from this date.
WARLOY	11/2/18.		No war flying. 3 hours practice work was done. The following Officers joined for 3 days course. Lt.Col.Winser D.S.O.- 7/S.Lances. Lt.Col.Smeethman D.S.O.- 9th.R.N.F.- Lt.Brutton M.C.- 195 M.G.C. and Lt.Laing - 7th.M.G.C. 2/Lt.C.E.Mayer returned from hospital.
WARLOY	12/2/18.		No war flying. 2½ hours practice work was done.Lt.H.T.Mainwaring posted to Squadron 9/2/18.

NO. 133

5 50 25) W6180-775 20,000 9/16 HWV(P1545/2) Form W. 3348/1 Army Form W. 3348

Combats in the Air. 155
~~154~~

Squadron: No. 3 Date: 6th February 1918

Type and No. of Aeroplane: Sopwith FI.B 5245 Time: 4.0pm.

Armament: 2 Vickers Duty: C.O.P.

Pilot: Capt. C. Sutton. Height: 10,000 feet

Observer:

Locality: REMY.

Remarks on Hostile machine:—Type, armament, speed, etc.

Single seater tractor scouts.

Narrative.

Whilst on C.O.P. my Patrol encountered 6 E.A. N. of REMY. The E.A. were about 1,500 feet above us, and dived down as we got into the sun. 2 E.A. tacked on to my tail. I shook them off and got a burst of 5 rounds into one of them at 10 yards range, when my gun jammed. I then did a climb to the left clearing the jamb, when one of the E.A. knocked into my fin with his wheel, sending me down into a spin. I got out of this after 1,000 feet, and found I could not keep my machine flying level, and on a turn it got into a spin, so had to return. I found my fin all buckled up.

The last I saw of my other two Pilots, they were fighting hard over REMY.

(Sd) CHAS. SUTTON, Captain,

1 Indecisive Combat.

NOTE. Previous to above Combat, the fourth machine of Patrol had fallen out owing to engine trouble.

Major,

Captain Sutton's Combat Report gives a full account of his part in the action for as long as he was involved. His "burst of five rounds into one of them at 10 yards" and the fact that an enemy aircraft collided with him graphically illustrates the close nature of aerial combat in those days.

When Major Raymond-Barker first wrote to Ernest Kent on the 7th February he gave a brief and anonymised account of what he knew had happened the day before. Since then much more information, summarised below, has emerged through a wide variety of sources, including the official records reproduced on the previous pages, German records, and an account in a book written after the war by Lieutenant Grey Alderson, the other pilot shot down by the Germans in that engagement.

On the afternoon of the 6th February Major Raymond-Barker was alerted by his HQ that the 'Circus', the term commonly used to describe formations of the Imperial German Air Service (IGAS), was airborne and the Squadron were to launch a Close Offensive Patrol. There were only four pilots available; the Flight Commander, Captain Sutton, Lieutenant Alderson, and Second Lieutenants Dennett and Kent. They ran to the hangar, donned flying suits but didn't bother about field boots, and were quickly airborne. Dennett was forced to turn back with engine trouble before they reached the front line. High above the Western Front the remaining pilots spotted six German Albatross aircraft "painted in vivid colours and designs to instill fear into their foe". A dogfight started but, as already described, Sutton was soon out of the battle but managed to limp back to Warloy. Alderson wrote that "Two of us were now left to cope with the six planes of the Circus". To their great credit Alderson and Kent between them managed to shoot down two Albatrosses, but the remaining four against two was still too much. Shortly afterwards Alderson was injured by enemy fire; his right leg shattered, he lost consciousness and tumbled earthwards out of control. Miraculously he survived the crash behind enemy lines and regained consciousness a week later as a prisoner of war. According to an allied anti-aircraft gunner on the front line Kent was the last to go, and was seen shot down in flames over Remy. The IGAS daily reports corroborate this account, although they do not acknowledge the loss of their own aircraft.

When Grey Alderson was repatriated after the war the first people he went to see were Peter Kent's parents. He evidently struck up a very close relationship with them. Grey later married and named his son Peter after Peter Kent. Peter Alderson remembers his father only ever having two photographs on his dresser, one of his parents and the other of Peter Kent.

Eventually the War Office was told through the Red Cross the information Ernest Kent had already found out for himself. They formally notified Ernest that Peter was Killed in Action on 6 February 1918. The administrative machine was then able to take all the necessary consequential action.

C.2.Casualties. S/6676/8.

18 March, 1918.

Sir,

I am commanded by the Army Council to inform you with regret that a telegram concerning Second Lieutenant P.F.Kent, General List and Royal Flying Corps, reported Missing 6th February, 1918, has been received from the British Red Cross Society, Copenhagen, through the Central Prisoners of War Committee.

The telegram states that the Frankfurt Red Cross Society report that Lieutenant Peter F.Kent, is dead, and a further telegram received adds that he is buried at Lechase.

In view of these reports the Army Council are regretfully constrained to conclude that Second Lieutenant Kent was Killed in Action on 6th February, 1918.

I am to express their sympathy with you in your bereavement and to add that publication will be made in the official casualty list. "Bender" is necessary.

I am,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(Sgt) B. Kent

E.N.Kent Esq.,
Letchmore Heath,
Watford.

On 25 April Ernest Kent, like millions of others during the war, received a telegram of condolence on behalf of the King and Queen from the Keeper of the Privy Purse, the person who manages the Monarch's finances.

This original telegram comes from a collection of Peter's memorabilia belonging to David Good in Washington DC, USA, who bought them from a dealer in this country in 2013. How and why and through what route this, and other items accredited to David Good, came to be on sale then remains a mystery.

Office Stamp: ESTCHMORE HEATH 25 APR 1918

If the Receiver of an Inland Telegram doubts its accuracy, he may have it repeated on payment of half the amount originally paid for its transmission, any fraction of 1d. less than 1d. being reckoned as 1d.; and if it be found that there was any inaccuracy, the amount paid for repetition will be refunded. Special conditions are applicable to the repetition of Foreign Telegrams.

Office of Origin and Service Instructions

Charges to pay

Handled in at

Received here at

TO {

At M. Buckingham Palace

of last night

S. Kent Esq. Aldersham Street

The King and Queen deeply regret the loss you and the Army have sustained by the death of your son in the service of his Country. Their Majesties truly sympathise.

POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS.

Office Stamp: ESTCHMORE HEATH 25 APR 1918

If the Receiver of an Inland Telegram doubts its accuracy, he may have it repeated on payment of half the amount originally paid for its transmission, any fraction of 1d. less than 1d. being reckoned as 1d.; and if it be found that there was any inaccuracy, the amount paid for repetition will be refunded. Special conditions are applicable to the repetition of Foreign Telegrams.

Office of Origin and Service Instructions

Charges to pay

Handled in at

Received here at

TO {

with you in your sorrow

Keeper of the Privy Purse

On 30 April Lieutenant Neil Smuts wrote to Ernest Kent. He tells of the loss of Major Raymond-Barker during an engagement with Richthofen's Circus on the day before Richthofen himself was shot down. Raymond-Barker was deeply missed; Smuts describes him as more "more of an elder brother than a CO". Smuts also thanks Ernest for a parcel he had received, possibly a food parcel as Smuts says it was appreciated by his room mates as well as himself. How this friendship developed is unclear; Smuts could have been Peter's room mate, or had previously met the Kent family at some stage, or maybe he was the officer made responsible for returning Peter's kit and possessions to his next of kin. It is known, however, that Smuts came from Johannesburg which is where Ernest Kent was when he died in 1922, so it is likely the friendship persisted after the war.

France
30 April 1918

Dear Mr Kent,
You will be very sorry to hear that about a week or more ago we lost our C.O. He was doing a C.O.P. with two flights, when the leading flight was surprised by 8 hunns who dived on them out of the clouds, & almost at once Major Raymond-Barker &

another four men went down in flames & another was wounded - the last mentioned got back to the aerodrome alright. By the time the second flight had come up most of the hunns had cleared off, after two of them had been downed. This hunn formation was led by Richthofen, whose bright red machine has always been unmistakable, & this was his last victory, for the next morning he was brought down on our side of the line, & at

the same time 4 more of his crack pilots were brought down - so that the morale of the german ought to be pretty bad now, as the Circus was the only lot of hunns that ever put up anything of a scrap, & there was no mistaking them when one met them.

We all feel the loss of the C.O. very much - he was most undauntedly one of the finest men I've ever met, & he was more of an elder

brother than a C.O. to all of us. I must thank you very much for the parcel which I received two days after I wrote to Mr Kent. It was very good of you indeed to think of me, & I appreciated your kindness very much - as did all my room mates incidentally.

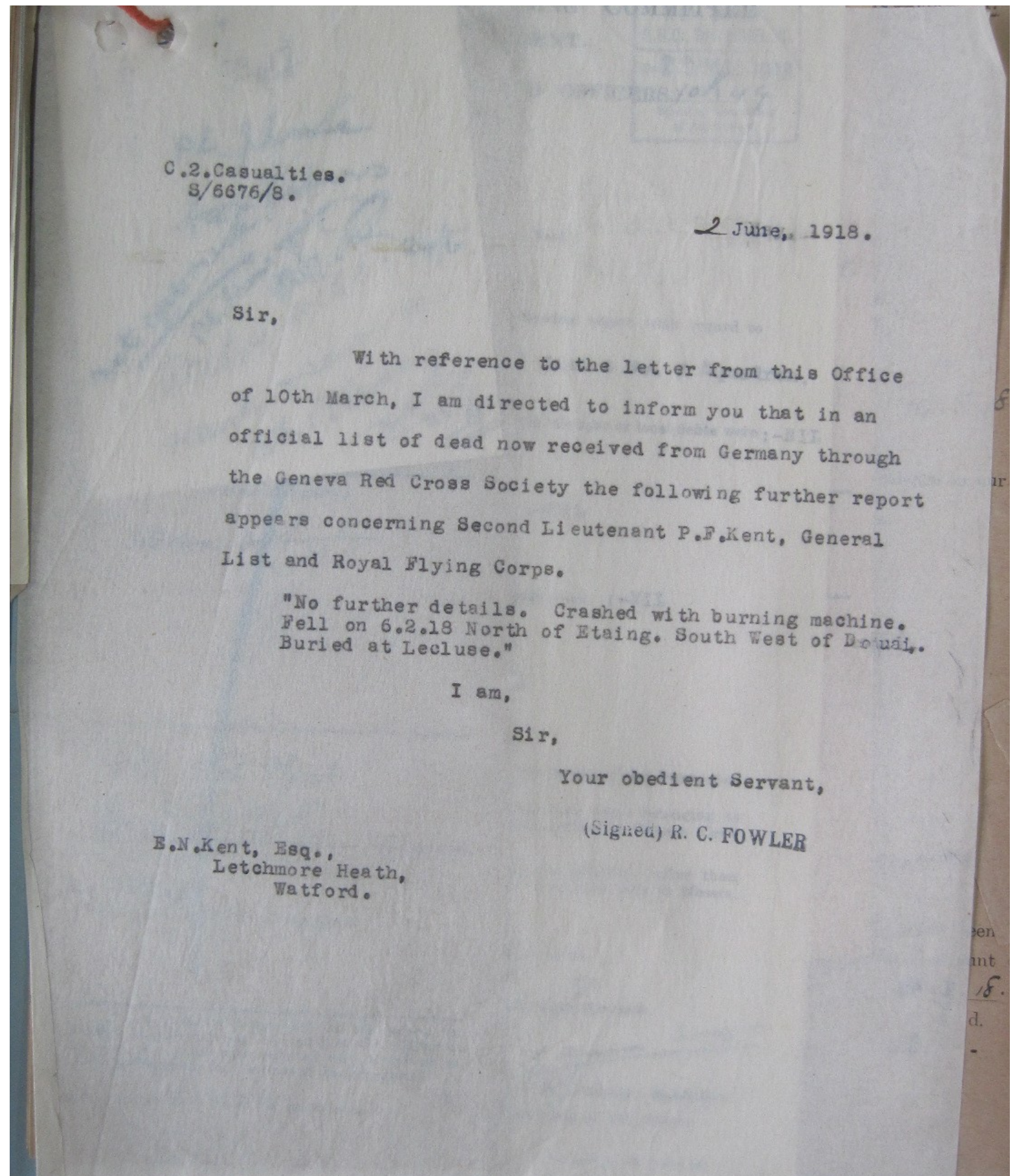
We are now under canvas at the same place, & of course as soon as we got into our tents a wet spell started. Still we are pretty comfortably off. My kindest regards to Mrs & Miss Kent & yourself. Very sincerely, Neil Smuts

Errors in casualty notification were inevitably made. Prior to Peter Kent's arrival there must have been another unrelated 2nd Lieutenant Kent on 3 Squadron who had been downed earlier and taken prisoner. Mrs Kent of Beckenham would have been most surprised to receive the telegram she refers to, and was quick to point out the mistake. Whether the loss of Peter Kent was partly to blame for the confusion is not clear from this letter, but it is included in the documentation on his file in the National Archives.

✓
**SUSSEX LODGE,
BECKENHAM,
KENT.**
Feb 16th 1918.
Dear Sir
I received the enclosed
telegram last night and
beg to inform you that my
Son 2nd Lieut T. J. Kent
3rd Squadron R. F. C. has
been a prisoner of War
since Nov 20th.
I have no other Son in the

R. F. C. So presume
the enclosed is an error.
Yours sincerely
M. P. Kent

In June 1918 Ernest Kent receives another letter from the War Office telling him, through information provided to the Red Cross from German sources, that Peter had “crashed with burning machine”. The location of the crash is given but, most importantly for Peter’s family, the comforting knowledge that the Germans had buried Peter, and the location of his grave.



This is Peter's Medal Index Card. These cards were created by the Army Medal Office in Droitwich. Each card details a soldier's medal entitlement. Other ranks were automatically sent their medals, but officers had to claim their medals, and Peter's mother makes an application for his.

17 Bwch Name. 12 10		Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
KENT		R.F.C. Genlist	2/Lieut	
Peter Francis				
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.	
VICTORY	Genlist / Gff 145	21 ^F	1.V.11246/W d/21-12-21 EF/6/6842	
BRITISH				
STAR				
Theatre of War first served in		France		
Date of entry therein		-12-14.		
EF/6/6872, K. 1380				

Correspondence

Mrs. L. M. Kent makes appⁿ for Medals on behalf of her son at 2^a.

Address

Letchmore Heath
 Watford
 Herts.

(991) W 701/R. P. 6930 1,000m. 24/5/21 N.H.&Co.Ltd. E. 7600

These two items come from David Good's collection. They are Peter's Royal Flying Corps wings badge from his uniform and the only two medals that Peter was entitled to, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

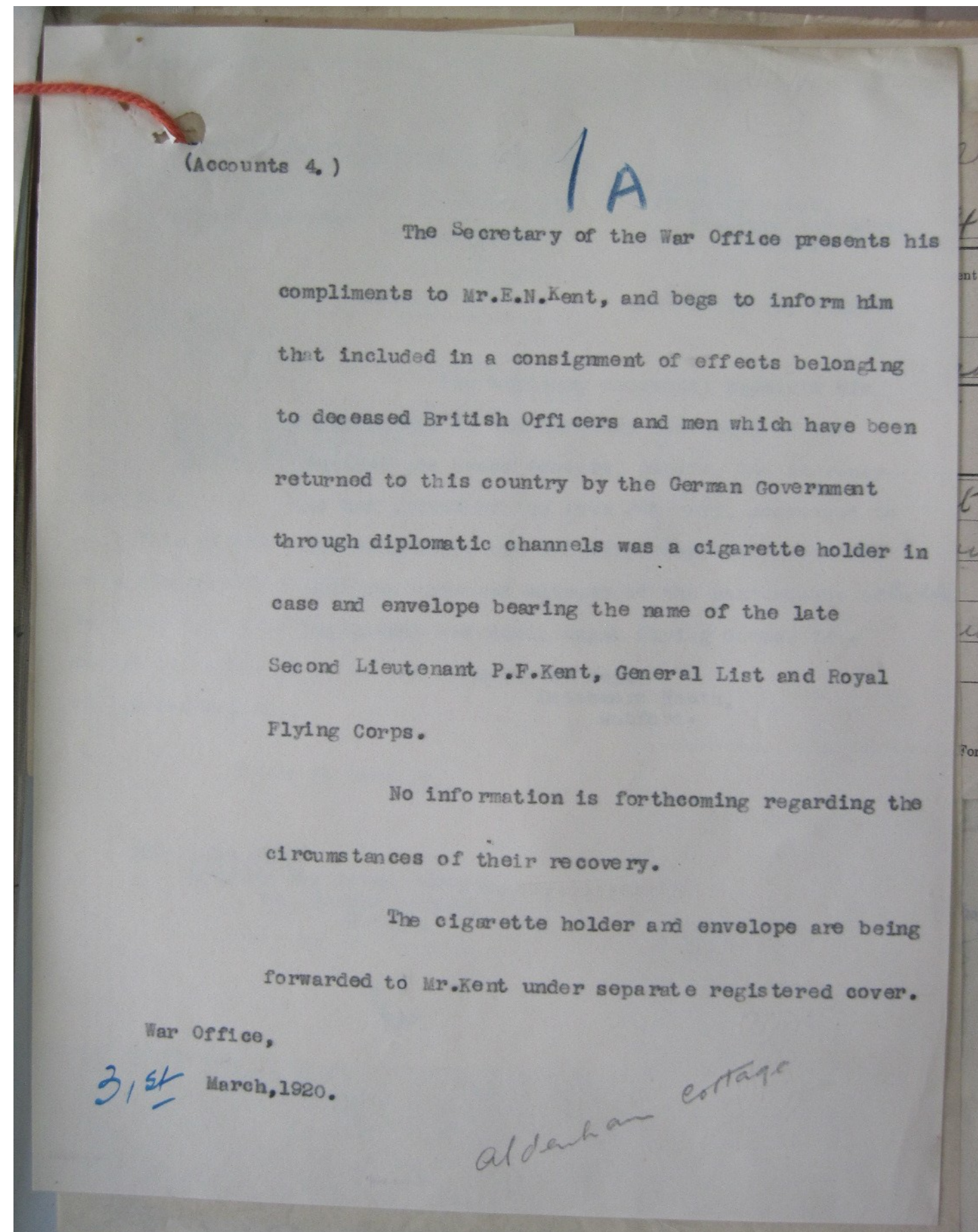


This is Peter Kent's Next of Kin Memorial Plaque, popularly known as the "Dead Man's Penny". It is a bronze plaque approximately 11 cms or 4½ inches in diameter incorporating the name of the person who died serving with the British and Empire forces in the First World War. They were issued to the Next of Kin of the casualty along with a scroll. They were posted out separately, typically in 1919 and 1920, and a 'King's message' was enclosed with both, containing a facsimile signature of the King. (David Good)



In 1920 Peter's father received what is the last letter on Peter's file in the National Archives. It tells how Peter's cigarette holder had been returned to Britain by the German Government through diplomatic channels, and would be sent on to Ernest Kent. Presumably the cigarette holder and case had been recovered from the site of Peter's crash and retained.

It is a poignant end to Peter Kent's story, but it is heartening to see that even bitter enemies were honest and respectful towards the personal possessions of those they had killed.



In 1925 Peter's body was moved from the grave at Lecluse and reburied in the Honorary Artillery Company Cemetery at Ecoust St-Mein, south of Arras. The cemetery is one of the thousands maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. There is no tribute on Peter's headstone; it was sufficient simply to record that he was age 19.



