

Ronald Grist

Lieutenant, 18th Battalion, Rifle Brigade



Courtesy of Anne Archer, Senior Archivist,
Lloyds Banking Group Archives & Museums.

Ronald Grist was born in 1868 in Stroud, Gloucestershire, to Richard and Lucy Grist (née Smith). Ronald's father was a manufacturer of shoddy and lived at Bourne House, Brimscombe. Ronald was educated in Cheltenham.

In the 1891 Census Ronald, aged 22 years, is recorded as a bank clerk and living in Finsbury, London with his brother Lawrence, a solicitor. As a young man he is said to have spent time in South Africa where he took part in the Boer War.¹ Ten years later he was Manager of the Capital & Counties Bank² in Amersham and living next to the Post Office in the High Street, Amersham. Although he styles himself 'Acting Bank Manager' the 1899 Kelly's *Directory* listed him simply as 'Manager'. During this time he gained the respect and confidence of an extensive circle of friends. Ronald was a keen sportsman and supported the local cricket, football and tennis clubs and was captain of the highly successful cricket club. *The Buckinghamshire Herald* elsewhere records that he tied for first place for the Ellesborough Golf Club's monthly gold medal and took part in a concert at The Lee to raise funds for the Royal Buckinghamshire Hospital.³

¹ This information comes from the *Buckinghamshire Herald* obituary published on 25 May 1918, but is difficult to substantiate. At the time of the first Boer War, fought in 1880-1, he would have been aged 12-13 while during the second (1899-1902) sources place him firmly in Amersham. Army Lists for the relevant dates do not include him and passenger lists are generally unavailable. He may well have spent some time in South Africa, but for the moment we have no way of proving it.

² We are indebted to Anne Archer, Senior Archivist of Lloyds Banking Group plc, for information about the Capital and Counties Bank. The Bank in Amersham was originally opened in 1889 by a firm called Wheeler & Co, who were taken over by Capital & Counties in 1896. They were in turn acquired by Lloyds in 1918 so that, had Ronald Grist returned from the war, he would have found considerable changes.

³ Editions of 20 April 1907 and 4 Jan 1908.

As the war continued his organising abilities came to the fore in arranging a recruiting drive in Amersham for the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry in 1915. "The meeting was arranged by Ronald Grist, a local bank manager, who later served and was killed. The meeting was led by a parade of the National Reserve, Special Constables and Boy Scouts, headed by a band of pipers, starting from the railway station, and with the fire brigade and engine joining in, they proceeded to Little Shardeloes to be met by the Amersham band who played marches and patriotic music. There were speeches and it was reported that 55 men had volunteered their services."⁴

On 16 July 1915, Ronald, then aged about 47, received a commission in the Territorial Force⁵ and became a Lieutenant of the 18th Battalion of the Rifle Brigade. He embarked for India with his battalion on 26 November 1915 en route to Burma. On 5 January 1916, after arriving in Rangoon, Ronald was appointed Assistant Adjutant to the Battalion and was stationed at Port Blair, Andaman Islands.

Later that year he attended a course in musketry at Satara, and was then appointed Adjutant of the Staff course at Battalion Headquarters, Rangoon. After being appointed musketry officer to the battalion he was sent on a further course in Kashmir.

Upon his return to Burma, Christmas 1917, he was appointed Station Staff Officer to the Rangoon Brigade under Major General Young, until he was suddenly taken ill. On 11 May 1918 Ronald was ordered to the Station Hospital in Rangoon. After being unconscious for 12 hours he died from ptomaine (food) poisoning.

In the *Buckinghamshire Examiner* of 12 July 1918, Lieutenant P W Heanly, a fellow officer and friend, wrote a letter to the editor stating the following:

"'Ronny', as he was known by all his brother officers, was most popular in the regiment. His geniality and willingness always to assist and help others was most striking and I should like to add that the papers promoting him to Captain were already in the Burma Divisional Office".



Horse Racing Committee 1890's including Ronald Grist.

From "Yesterday's Town – Amersham" Authors: Nicholas Salmon and Clive Birch

⁴ <http://amershamhistory.info/ww1/recruiting>.

⁵ See *The London Gazette* of 9 August 1915, p 7877, col B, which announced that he had been placed on the General List, effective 16 July.

His sporting prowess was recalled in the obituary which appeared in the *Gloucester Journal* on 25 May 1918 under the headline “**Old Gloucester Footballer and Sprinter**: The death is announced in hospital at Rangoon, Burma, of Lieut. Ronald Grist, Rifle Brigade, youngest son of the late Mr. Richard Grist, Bourne House, Brimscombe. The deceased officer, who prior to joining the Army was manager of the Amersham (Bucks) branch of the Capital and Counties Bank, will be well remembered in Gloucester as a brilliant Rugby footballer. He represented Gloucester City and County, and scored the try for Gloucestershire against the Maoris in the match at the Spa on February 2nd. 1889, when the tourists won by 1 goal, 1 try to 1 try. Ronald Grist was a three-quarter back with speed and rare dodging powers, and he scored some marvellous tries on the old Spa ground. The gallant officer also distinguished himself on the track, and won numerous sprint races at Gloucester, the R.A.C. (Cirencester), and other meetings.”

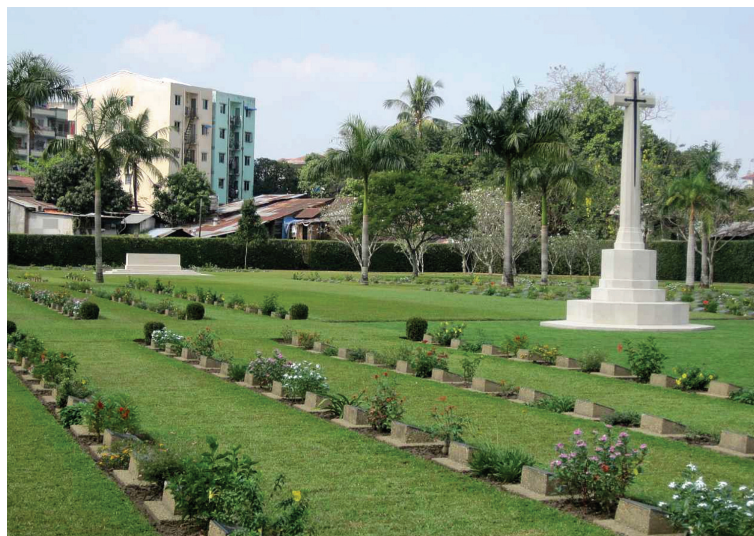
In contrast to many other Amersham casualties, he was buried with full military honours. His coffin was taken to the cemetery on a gun-carriage drawn by bullocks and was accompanied by 300 other ranks; a firing party of 40 was mustered and the last Post sounded. As seems only fitting for such a sociable man there were many handsome wreaths.

The *Bucks Herald* article ended with the sombre reflection that “the whole of the staff serving in the Amersham branch [of the Capital and Counties Bank] at the outbreak of hostilities have now died in the struggle for freedom.”⁶

Probate was granted to his brother Lawrence Grist and his effects were valued at £211 8s 5d. The *National Probate Calendar* gave his address as ‘Bank House, Amersham’.

He was awarded The British War Medal, 1914-18.

Lt. Ronald Grist is remembered with Honour in
Rangoon War Cemetery, Myanmar (Burma),
Grave No 4.F.10.



Rangoon War Cemetery: Commonwealth War Graves Commission

⁶ Sub-Lieutenant JF Bunce MC was one of Grist's subordinates who was killed in action.