Edwardian England had strong links throughout the Empire. Several Caians were born abroad, particularly in India. Duncan Collisson Willey Thomas was one of these, who was then educated in England and came to Caius to read Mechanical Engineering. He had always been a keen sportsman and became a career army officer.

At the start of the war, the retreat from Mons had resulted in the decimation of several battalions and so Duncan was attached to the Gordon Highlanders in order to reinforce the unit. In the developing trench system, there were reserve trenches behind the front lines and Duncan was in one of these. They were shelled on the 12th November and hit by a 60 lb high explosive shell. The trench caved in but the trapped men were dug out. Duncan had been hit in the head by a shell fragment. He was just under 24 years old.