

Kitchener Memorial Oak of Victoria High School

On 20 April 1917 the Kitchener Memorial Oak was dedicated on the grounds of Victoria High School on Grant Street midway between Fernwood and Camosun, Victoria, British Columbia.

One of the great heritage trees of Canada and the Commonwealth, it was planted to commemorate the life of Field Marshal Earl Kitchener of Khartoum. He was a British Field Marshal well known for his Imperial campaigns. He had a significant role in the early years of the First World War.

On 5 June 1916 the British cruiser *Hampshire*, carrying Kitchener to Archangel, for military conferences with Russia, an ally, struck a mine off the Orkneys and sank, drowning him and most of the ship's company. At the time of his death Kitchener was Secretary of State for War, the supreme Imperial commander.

Kitchener had been widely popularized at home and abroad by his luxuriant moustache and commanding presence, and he was an indefatigable organizer who understood the necessity of consolidating resources before striking a decisive blow in the field. The recruiting drive poster featured Kitchener's portrait. It is familiar to many. "Your Country Needs You" remains an enduring image. It had a powerful impact in Victoria and throughout Canada.

Kitchener, one of the most famous soldiers of his age, and the most highly decorated, was born in Ireland and commissioned into the Royal Engineers. He took part in the Egyptian and Sudan campaigns. Appointed head of the Egyptian Army, he led a Nile expedition that overwhelmed Mahdist forces at Omdurman, 1898. He later served in South Africa and India in the most senior commands.

The death of the Empire's greatest soldier in 1916 was a stunning blow to the Allied cause in its desperate and not yet victorious struggle against Imperial Germany and the Central Powers.

Of the dedication of the tree, the *Victoria Daily Times* reported: "A little company of Old Campaigners, bearing two standards, gathered round while the Kitchener tree was planted, the band playing 'Rule Britannia.'" "I have the honor to plant this oak in memory of Lord Kitchener, under whom I served in the Egyptian campaign of 1882 and in the Soudan in 1885," said S.J. Pomeroy, 50th Royal West Kent Regiment, of the British Campaigners' Association, who planted the Kitchener Memorial Oak. The tree was grown and given by Walter Bernie Anderson, of Oak Bay."

As of the date of posting this story, the Kitchener Memorial Oak is a venerable giant. It has been designated a Heritage Tree by the Victoria Horticultural Society.

Its story and the nearby Vining Street Maples (planted immediately before the Kitchener Memorial Oak on the same day), are told in Peter Smith's *Come Give a Cheer! One Hundred Years of Victoria High School, 1876-1976* (1976) and "Trees in Honor of Heroes of Empire: Citizens and School Children Attend Impressive Memorial Ceremony at High School," *Victoria Daily Times*, 21 April 1917. See the related story **Trees of Remembrance, Avenue of Sacrifice: Victoria High School Commemoration 1917** on this website.

Written by Barry Gough, VHS 1956 and Staff 1964-1965. Posted June 2011.