The Museum Collection

No.34 Volume One

The Victoria Cross

Stories and tributes to the members of the Order who were awarded the highest Military Medal for their bravery in the fight for Peace in the name of Crown and Country.

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THE VICTORIA CROSS

Introduction

I set out to write this book with the hope, if not the expectation, of discovering the history of many of our brave brothers who had fought for that elusive thing called Peace and Freedom. I had hoped, through my research, to meet in pictures and words many Brothers, who's brave deeds on the battlefields of the many wars being fought in the name of Crown and Country.

I sought evidence of such brave men engaged in fighting for the Empire in the air, land or sea on a grand scale in a period of time and various geographical locations.

For the most part, all I encountered was a blank canvas, with no records at Grand Lodge of those who had been awarded the highest military decoration of the Realm.

There were of course sporadic tales in old newspaper cuttings designed to titillate readers and build circulation rather than deliver real news of courage.

Most of the news regarding the award of the Victoria Cross is well catalogued in The *London Gazette*, but nowhere among its over 1350 recipients was a mention of those being members of the Royal

Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, in whatever Banner or Section they might have belonged to.

So, where does one begin to look for those members? Of course in today's world the use of computers and access to the internet is a valuable source of information, but when I started this research twenty odd years ago, this information was not as readily available as it is today, much legwork, going to Museums, Libraries and the suchlike (I was a lot fitter then) was undertaken and it laid to rest in my memory banks until I was jerked back into the real world when in 2011 during a conversation with the then R.A.O.B. G.L.E. Museum Curator who broached the subject on doing a piece for the Museum. As luck would have it, a few weeks later, I managed to lay my hands on the information I had accumulated in the intervening years (not an easy thing to do if you have seen my office).

Anyway, back to my information, I then realised that I had but only just touched on the enormity of the task, never the less, I had by this time amassed a good collection of R.A.O.B. Journals and associated documents to do with the history of the Order and I realised that the only way I could sort out the truth would be to scour these old Journals and documents for the information I required. I suppose I could have asked the membership or relatives through the Social Media sites for any information, but being pig headed I thought this was not an option, certainly not for me, it is much more comforting to be able to do the research yourself, which explains perhaps why it has taken so long to produce this particular book.

Nothing distinguishes this particular medal more from other awards than the Victoria Cross, its distinctive crimson ribbon and gun metal Maltese Cross makes it stand out from the many other decorations.

For those of us who are much more detached from direct research and who like a bit of interesting reading, it is necessary to give you a background into the history of the Victoria Cross.

The Victoria Cross (VC) is the highest military decoration awarded for valour "in the face of the enemy" to members of the armed forces of various Commonwealth countries, and previous British Empire Territories. It is first in the order of wear in the United Kingdom honours system, and takes precedence over all other Orders, Decorations, and Medals, including the Order of the Garter. It may be awarded to a person of any military rank in any service and to civilians under military command. The VC is usually presented to the recipient or to their next of kin by the British Monarch at an Investiture held at Buckingham Palace.

The VC was introduced on 29th January 1856 by Queen Victoria to honour acts of valour during the Crimean War. Since then, the medal has been awarded 1,358 times to 1,355 individual recipients. Only 15 medals, 11 to members of the British Army, and four to the Australian Army, have been awarded since the Second World War. The traditional explanation of the source of the gunmetal from which the medals are struck is that it derives from Russian cannon captured at the Siege of Sevastopol. Recent research has thrown doubt on this story, suggesting a variety of origins for the material actually making up the medals themselves. Research has established that the gunmetal for many of the medals came from Chinese cannons that may have been captured from the Russians in 1855.

Owing to its rarity, the VC is highly prized and the medal has fetched over £400,000 at auction. A number of public and private collections are devoted to the Victoria Cross. The private collection of Lord Ashcroft, amassed since 1986, contains over one-tenth of all VCs awarded. Following a 2008 donation to the Imperial War Museum, the Ashcroft collection went on public display alongside the museum's Victoria and George Cross collection in November 2010.

Beginning with the Centennial of Confederation in 1967, Canada, followed in 1975 by Australia and New Zealand developed their own national honours systems, separate and independent of the British or Imperial honours system. As each country's system evolved, operational gallantry awards were developed with the premier award of each system, the VC for Australia, the Canadian VC and the VC for New Zealand being created and named in honour of the Victoria Cross. These are unique awards of each honours system, recommended, assessed, gazetted and presented by each country.

In 1854, after 39 years of peace, Britain found itself fighting a major war against Russia. The Crimean War was one of the first wars with modern reporting, and the dispatches of William Howard Russell of "The Times" described many acts of bravery and valour by British servicemen that went unrewarded.

William Howard Russell

Russell's dispatches via telegraph from the Crimea remain as his legacy; for the first time in any campaigns he brought the realities of war home to readers. He reported on the bravery of the common soldier and pushed for a bravery award that could be given to the common soldier in recognition of his bravery. This helped diminish the distance between the home front and remote battle fields.

Before the Crimean War, there was no official standardised system for recognition of gallantry within the British armed forces. Officers were eligible for an award of one of the junior grades of the Order of the Bath and brevet promotions while a Mention in Despatches existed as an alternative award for acts of lesser gallantry. This structure was very limited; in practice awards of the Order of the Bath were confined to officers of field rank. Brevet promotions or Mentions in Despatches were largely confined to those who were under the immediate notice of the commanders in the field, generally members of the commander's own staff.

Other European countries had awards that did not discriminate against class or rank; France awarded the Légion d'honneur (Legion of Honour) and The Netherlands gave the Order of William, Russia and Austria had awards for gallantry, regardless of rank. It was time for Britain to follow suit.

In December of 1854, an ex Naval Officer and now a Liberal Member of Parliament, Captain Thomas Scobell, placed a motion before the House of Commons that:- "An Order of Merit should be awarded to persons serving in the Navy or Army for distinguished and prominent personal gallantry, and to which, every grade and individual from the highest and lowest, may be admissible". Having debated the matter in the Commons, and being assured the question was under consideration, he agreed to withdraw his motion.

The then Secretary of War, the Duke of Newcastle, wrote to Albert, the Prince Consort, on the 20th of January 1855. He suggested, "A new decoration open to all ranks," he said, "It does not seem to me right or politic that deeds of heroism as the war has produced should go unrewarded because they are done by privates or Officers below the rank of Major. The value attached by soldiers to a little bit of ribbon, is such as to render any danger insignificant and any privation light if it can be obtained".

On the 20th of January, he followed up his letter by announcing in a speech to the House of Lords, the New Award. At the same time an official memorandum was doing the rounds of the War Office, giving details of a Cross to be awarded for "A single act of valour in the face of the enemy". Events were moving along quite quickly, but within a few days of making his speech in the Lords, Lord Newcastle lost his job as Secretary of War, but he had lit the fire under this issue.

Lord Panmure now took over this function, and became the new Secretary of State for War, and he corresponded with Albert. The Queen was starting to put in her sixpenneth on this subject, and the draft warrant submitted by Panmure, had pencil alterations made to it by Albert, as a result of his discussions with Her Majesty.

It had already been decided that this new award would bear her name, in true Civil Service long winded style it was proposed that it be named: "The Military Order of Victoria". Albert crossed this out and suggested "Victoria Cross". and so it became known.

Panmure indicated that he intended to publish in the London Gazette, names of recipients of the Victoria Cross, and then place them before the Commons, the Queen who was taking a keen interest in her new award responded very stonily to that idea. "To make such a report to Parliament by laying it on the table of the House would look like an appeal to its decision in the matter which clearly belongs solely and entirely to the Crown". It has remained so to this day, at least nominally.

There was a growing feeling among the public and in the Royal Court that a new award was needed to recognise incidents of gallantry that were unconnected with a man's lengthy or meritorious service. Queen Victoria issued a Warrant under the Royal sign manual on 29th January 1856 (gazetted 5th February 1856) that officially constituted the VC. The order was backdated to 1854 to recognise acts of valour during the Crimean War.

Queen Victoria had instructed the War Office to strike a new medal that would not recognise birth or class. The medal was meant to be a simple decoration that would be highly prized and eagerly sought after by those in the military services. To maintain its simplicity, Queen Victoria, under the guidance of Prince Albert, vetoed the suggestion that the award be called *The Military Order of Victoria* and instead suggested the name *Victoria Cross*.

Queen Victoria continued to make her presence felt, when the first drawings of the design of the Cross were submitted, she selected one close to that of the Army Gold Cross that came from the Peninsula War, but added the VC should be smaller. The motto read: "For the Brave" Oh No! she declared, it might be thought that the only men in a battle were those who were awarded a Victoria Cross, and her Motto: "For Valour" carried the day.

The original warrant stated that the Victoria Cross would only be awarded to soldiers who have served in the presence of the enemy and had performed some signal act of valour or devotion. The first ceremony was held on 26th June 1857 where Queen Victoria invested 62 of the 111 Crimean recipients in a ceremony in Hyde Park, London. The Queen elected to stay on horseback throughout the ceremony. The event was

attended by large crowds who greeted the VC heroes with rapturous applause. Apparently, the Queen stabbed one of the heroes, Commander Raby, RN, through the chest as she pinned the cross to his uniform. The Commander stood unflinching while the Queen fastened the pin through his flesh!

In London, the jewellers, Hancock's of Bruton Street, were given the commission to produce the new medal, and it had been decided to use a base metal, but the first proof shown to Her Majesty, was not well received. "The Cross looks well in form, but the metal is ugly, it is copper and not bronze, and will look very heavy on a red coat with the Crimea Ribbon. Bronze is, properly speaking, gun metal; this has a very rich colour and is very hard, copper would wear very ill and would soon look like an old penny. Lord Panmure should have one prepared in bronze and the Queen is inclined to think that it ought to have a greenish varnish to protect it; the raised parts would then burnish up bright and show the design and inscription".

Taking the Queen's comments to heart, a bright idea emerged, Why not use bronze for the new medals taken from Russian Guns captured in the Crimea? An engineer was despatched to Woolwich Barracks, and two entire 18 pound cannons were given to him for this purpose, as he did not want to totally destroy the guns, he sawed off the knobs found at the breech end of these cannon, these are technically known as Cascabels, their purpose to secure restraining ropes when firing the guns.

It was originally intended that the VCs would be cast from the bronze cascabels of two cannon that were captured from the Russians at the siege of Sevastopol. The historian John Glanfield has since proven through the use of x-rays of older Victoria Crosses that the metal used for VCs is in fact from antique Chinese guns and not of Russian origin. One theory is that the guns were originally Chinese weapons but the Russians captured them and reused them at Sevastopol. It was also thought that some medals made during the First World War were composed of metal captured from different Chinese guns during the Boxer

Rebellion but the original metal was used after the war. It is also believed that another source of metal was used between 1942 and 1945 to create five Second World War VCs when the Sevastopol metal went missing.

The barrels of the cannon in question are on display at Firepower, The Royal Artillery Museum at Woolwich. The remaining portion of the only remaining cascabel, weighing 358 oz. (10 kg), is stored in a vault maintained by 15 Regiment Royal Logistic Corps at Ministry of Defence Donnington. It can only be removed under armed guard. It is estimated that approximately 80 to 85 more VCs could be cast from this source. A single company of jewellers, Hancocks, based in the Burlington Arcade in London, has been responsible for the production of every VC awarded since its inception.

The bronze has always been unstable to work with as it has already been worked on when the cannon was made. Hancock's have seven medals in storage but without the name and rank of the recipient and date on the back, they have no intrinsic value except their novelty. In World War Two, Hancock's charged the armed forces the equivalent of £1.50 for a medal that today can fetch £200,000 at auction.

Appearance

The decoration is a bronze cross pattée, 1 39/64" (41 mm) high, 1 27/64" (36 mm) wide, bearing the crown of Saint Edward surmounted by a lion, and the inscription FOR VALOUR. This was originally to have been FOR THE BRAVE, until it was changed on the recommendation of Queen Victoria, as it implied that not all men in battle were brave. The decoration, suspension bar and link weigh about 0.87 troy ounces (27gm).

The cross is suspended by a ring from a seriffed "V" to a bar ornamented with laurel leaves, through which the ribbon passes. The reverse of the suspension bar is engraved with the recipient's name, rank, number and unit. On the reverse of the medal is a circular panel on which the date of the act for which it was awarded is engraved in the centre.

The Original Warrant Clause 1 states that the Victoria Cross "shall consist of a Maltese cross of bronze". Nonetheless, it has always been a cross pattée; the discrepancy with the Warrant has never been corrected.

The ribbon is crimson, 1 ½ inches (38 mm) wide. The original (1856) specification for the award stated that the ribbon should be red for army recipients and dark blue for naval recipients. However the dark blue ribbon was abolished soon after the formation of the Royal Air Force on 1st April 1918. On 22nd May 1920 King George V signed a warrant that

stated all recipients would now receive a red ribbon and the living recipients of the naval version were required to exchange their ribbons for the new colour. Although the army warrants state the colour as being red it is defined by most commentators as being crimson or "wine-red".

Award

The Victoria Cross is awarded for most conspicuous bravery, or some daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice, or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy.

A recommendation for the VC is normally issued by an officer at regimental level, or equivalent, and has to be supported by three witnesses, although this has been waived on occasion. The recommendation is then passed up the military hierarchy until it reaches the Secretary of State for Defence. The recommendation is then laid before the monarch who approves the award with his or her signature. Victoria Cross awards are always promulgated in the *London Gazette* with the single exception of the award to the American Unknown Soldier in 1921. The Victoria Cross warrant makes no specific provision as to who should actually present the medals to the recipients. Queen Victoria indicated that she would like to present the medals in person and she presented 185 medals out of the 472 gazetted during her reign. Including the first 62 medals presented at a parade in Hyde Park on 26th June 1857 by Queen Victoria, nearly 900 awards have been personally presented to the recipient by the reigning British Monarch. Nearly 300 awards have been presented by a member of the royal family or by a civil or military dignitary. About 150 awards were either forwarded to the recipient or next of kin by registered post or no details of the presentations are known.

The original Royal Warrant did not contain a specific clause regarding posthumous awards, although official policy was not to award the VC posthumously. Between the Indian Mutiny in 1857 and the beginning of the Second Boer War the names of six officers and men were published in the *London Gazette* with a memorandum stating they would have been awarded the Victoria Cross had they survived. A further three notices were published in the *London Gazette* in September 1900 and April 1901 for gallantry in the Second Boer War. In an exception to policy for the South Africa War 1899–1902, six posthumous Victoria Crosses, three to the officers and men mentioned in the notices in 1900 and 1901 and a further three, the first official posthumous awards, were granted on 8th August 1902. Five years later in 1907, the posthumous policy was reversed and medals were sent to the next of kin of the six officers and

men. The awards were mentioned in notices in the *Gazette* dating back to the Indian Mutiny. The Victoria Cross warrant was not amended to explicitly allow posthumous awards until 1920, but one quarter of all awards for World War I were posthumous. Although the 1920 Royal Warrant made provision for awards to women serving in the Armed Forces, no women have been awarded a VC.

In the case of a gallant and daring act being performed by a squadron, ship's company or a detached body of men (such as marines) in which all men are deemed equally brave and deserving of the Victoria Cross then a ballot is drawn. The officers select one officer, the NCO's select one individual and the private soldiers or seamen select two individuals. In all 46 awards have been awarded by ballot with 29 of the awards during the Indian Mutiny. Four further awards were granted to Q Battery, Royal Horse Artillery at Korn Spruit on 31st March 1900 during the Second Boer War. The final ballot awards for the army were the six awards to the Lancashire Fusiliers at "W" Beach during the landing at Gallipoli on 25th April 1915 although three of the awards were not gazetted until 1917. The final seven ballot awards were the only naval ballot awards with three awards to two Q-Ships in 1917 and four awards for the Zeebrugge Raid in 1918. The provision for awards by ballot is still included in the Victoria Cross warrant but there have been no further such awards since 1918.

Between 1858 and 1881 the Victoria Cross could be awarded for actions taken "under circumstances of extreme danger" not in the face of the enemy. Six such awards were made during this period, five of them for a single incident during an Expedition to the Andaman Islands in 1867. In 1881, the criteria were changed again and the VC was only awarded for acts of valour "in the face of the enemy". Due to this it has been suggested by many historians including Lord Ashcroft that the changing nature of warfare will result in fewer VCs being awarded. The prevalence of remote fighting techniques has meant that opportunities to carry out acts of bravery *in the face of the enemy* are diminishing. Since 1940, military personnel who have distinguished themselves for gallantry *not in the face of the enemy* have been awarded the George Cross, which is immediately after the VC in the Order of Wear

First Award Order of Wear

As the highest award for valour of the United Kingdom, the Victoria Cross is always the first award to be presented at an investiture, even before knighthoods, as was shown at the investiture of Private Johnson Beharry, who received his medal before General Sir Mike Jackson received his knighthood. Owing to its status, the VC is always

the first decoration worn in a row of medals and it is the first set of post-nominal letters used to indicate any Decoration or Order. Similar acts of extreme valour that do not take place in the face of the enemy are honoured with the George Cross, which has equal precedence but is awarded second because the George Cross is newer.

There is a widespread though erroneous belief that it is statutory for "all ranks to salute a bearer of the Victoria Cross". There is no official requirement that appears in the official Warrant of the VC, nor in Queen's Regulations and Orders, but tradition dictates that this occurs and as such the Chiefs of Staff will salute a Private awarded a VC or GC.

The Victoria Cross was at first worn as the recipient fancied. It was popular to pin it on the left side of the chest over the heart, with other decorations grouped around the VC. The Queen's Regulations for the Army of 1881 gave clear instructions on how to wear it; the VC had to follow the badge of the Order of the Indian Empire. In 1900 it was ordained in Dress Regulations for the Army that it should be worn after the cross of a Member of the Royal Victorian Order. It was only in 1902 that King Edward VII gave the cross its present position on a bar brooch. The cross is also worn as a miniature decoration on a brooch or a chain with mess jacket, white tie or black tie. As a bearer of the VC is not a Companion in an Order of Chivalry, the VC has no place in a coat of arms.

Annuity

The original warrant stated that Non Commissioned Officers and private soldiers or seamen on the Victoria Cross Register were entitled to a £10 per annum annuity. In 1898, Queen Victoria raised the pension to £50 for those that could not earn a livelihood, be it from old age or infirmity.

Today holders of the Victoria Cross or George Cross are entitled to an annuity, the amount of which is determined by the awarding government. Since 2002, the annuity paid by the British Government is £1,495 per year. This is exempted from tax for British taxpayers by Section 638 Income Tax (Earnings and Pensions) Act 2003, along with pensions or annuities from other awards for bravery. In Canada under the *Gallantry Awards Order*, members of the Canadian Forces or people who joined the British forces before 31st March 1949 while domiciled in Canada or Newfoundland receive Can$3,000 per year. Under Subsection 103.4 of the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986, the Australian Government provides a Victoria Cross Allowance. Until November 2005 the amount was A$3,230 per year. Since then this amount has been increased annually in line with the Australian Consumer Price Index.

Forfeited awards

The original Royal Warrant involved an expulsion clause that allowed for a recipient's name to be erased from the official register in certain wholly discreditable circumstances and his pension cancelled.

Lieutenant Edward St. John Daniel was the first man, only officer, and only Royal Navy man to forfeit the Victoria Cross.

There have been several suggestions as to what Daniel's "disgraceful offence" may have been. One suggestion is that Daniel attempted to drown a fellow officer. Another is that his offence was drunkenness, although it seems unlikely that, on its own, this would have been considered sufficiently disgraceful. The clearest evidence, however, is contained in a letter from Captain William Clifford of *HMS Victor Emanuel* to Rear Admiral Dacres, which states that Daniel was arrested for *"taking indecent liberties with four of the Subordinate Officers of the Victor Emanuel"*.

Whatever the full truth of Daniel's offence, at Balmoral on 4th September 1861, Queen Victoria signed the Royal Warrant that made Edward St John Daniel the first man to forfeit the Victoria Cross:

"Whereas it hath been reported unto us that EDWARD ST. JOHN DANIEL late a Lieutenant in Our Navy, upon whom we have conferred the decoration of the Victoria Cross, has been accused of a disgraceful offence, and having evaded enquiry by desertion from Our Service, his name has been removed from the list of officers of Our Navy ... Know ye therefore, that we are pleased to command and declare that the said Edward St. John Daniel shall no longer be entitled to have his name enrolled in the Registry of persons on whom we have conferred the said decoration, but shall be and he is hereby judged and declared to be henceforth removed and degraded from all and singular rights, privileges and advantages appertaining thereunto".

Of the 1357 Victoria Crosses that have been awarded to date, only eight have been forfeited, for offences ranging from theft of a cow to bigamy.

King George V felt very strongly that the decoration should never be forfeited and in a letter from his Private Secretary, Lord Stamfordham, on 26th July 1920, his views are forcibly expressed: "The King feels so strongly that, no matter the crime committed by anyone on whom the VC has been conferred, the decoration should not be forfeited. Even were a VC to be sentenced to be hanged for murder, he should be allowed to wear his VC on the scaffold".

The power to cancel and restore awards is still included in the Victoria Cross warrant but none has been forfeited since 1908.

Since its inception, 1,357 Victoria Crosses have been awarded for outstanding acts of heroism. Sixteen VC winners are alive today. Three fathers and sons have won the medal.

In World War One, 634 VC's were awarded. In World War Two, 182 were won. Since the end of World War Two, 11 Victoria Crosses have been awarded.

The First Victoria Cross awarded to the Navy

Charles Lucas was a 20 year old Irishman, serving in HMS Hecla as a Mate, when his ship was bombarding forts in the Baltic, a live shell from shore guns landed on the upper deck, showing courage, coolness, and presence of mind. Lucas grabbed this shell in his bare hands and flung it over the side of his ship. It promptly exploded with a tremendous roar. Some unkind souls suggested that Lucas was not really worrying about saving his immediate ship mates' lives, but merely wanted to place the maximum distance between this live shell and himself.

Multiple VC's

Charles Upham in 1993

Three men have won a bar to the Victoria Cross, all of them Army Officers, the only man to win the award twice in WW2, was a Second Lieutenant, Charles Upham, from New Zealand.

As with any book, the author is only the tip of the iceberg in taking a huge amount of words and transferring them into something both readable and, I hope, worth reading.

The following stories are based on fact and written as I have researched them. Although the body of this book is based on fact, the way I have constructed it will, I hope, make the reading of it that much more pleasing. The stories appear in alphabetical order beginning with the surname first, this is for ease of reference.

It must be remembered that this list of Victoria Cross recipients who were members of the R.A.O.B. is not exhaustive, there is on-going research and further information may be added as and when it is received and verified.

My grateful thanks go to Bro. Stan Stirman R.O.H., Grand Chamberlain G.L.E. 2010, Past R.A.O.B., G.L.E. Museum Curator for his invaluable help in producing this book, without his assistance, and the extensive legwork he undertook, the book would never have made it to the bookshelves of the Order. Stan has, in the Museum, a copy of the Victoria Cross medal for display purposes.

My thanks also go to the Grand Lodge Management Committee for their assistance in providing me the opportunity to go to Grove House Headquarters for a couple of days to go through the members card index and other documentation to help with the research and to all those other people, the list of which is too long to produce, including the contributors to the various sites on the World Wide Web, their valuable articles have proved outstanding.

The time spent at Grove House in July 2016 provided me with access to the files necessary to either confirm or refute the details I had previously researched, unfortunately some of my worst fears came true, inasmuch as I did not find anything new, only confirmation of what I already had and can only assume that in preparing these stories many of our members who were awarded the Victoria Cross were members of other banners which no longer exist, records now being non existent.

I sifted through the enormous amount of card files which are housed in the records building, until my eyes were oblong like the many thousands of files in there. Unfortunately not much of our card file database has been transferred to computer especially the older files, to my mind it is something that needs to be sorted at the earliest opportunity as the system needs to reflect the need to have accurate information for the office staff to fulfil their many tasks. Some of the card files go back to membership dating 1902, which means that some of our members were initiated 114 years ago when the age to join the Order was 21 years thus giving their age of at least 135 years, this just cannot be right and that is only in the files that I looked at. Biggest drawback to having everything digitised and putting on computer is the cost of course.

Access to R.A.O.B. Quarterly Journals that I previously had not seen were provided and perused but still no further information was gleaned from this source so I had to run with the subject matter which was already in proof form and ready to print.

There are occasions when research has to stop as you have reached the end of the subject material and what you have has to be printed for the benefit of the membership. This book has now reached that stage and is the end as far as I am concerned, this date being July 2016. As I have stated on many occasions in previous books, any further information that comes my way, once verified, will gladly be included in any future updates.

The decision to split this particular Museum Collection into two volumes is based on the fact that because it contains so many pages it is not practical to publish it in the present format of saddle stitching, the stapling machine that is available to me and Grand Lodge Office will only take up to a certain size of staple, the largest size being unable to penetrate the many folded pages. Three options were available to me, Saddle stitch, comb binding and perfect binding. Perfect binding would entail sending the finished article to a print finishers which would inevitably cost more to produce and eliminate the possibility of producing in house copies of small quantities, comb binding would take extra time and would cost slightly more due to materials and time taken, saddle stitch which only involves folding and stapling and would keep the book in line with the other Museum Collections and therefore making short run copies possible, so the choice was not too hard to make.

Another possibility regarding the number of pages was to change the font entirely or reduce it in size, I tried various font arrangements without the success of reducing the pages significantly. The font size was also tried, the only success for this came in a size that was not entirely legible so I had to keep it to the size it is now.

Apologies for the poor quality of some of the photographs but please remember that the majority of them are nearly 100 years old, some of the images have been taken from old documents, Journals and newspaper cuttings which themselves are not of the highest quality and they are the only ones available to me at the time of printing.

My pleasure in producing this particular book has been heightened by finding out the more intimate details of the characters involved and if you enjoy reading this book as much as I have had in researching and keying in the stories I would be most satisfied.

Read and enjoy

Mick Walker

December 2015

REVEREND WILLIAM ROBERT FOUNTAINE ADDISON

It is sometimes very difficult to understand the role played by service Chaplains in the midst of war for the Bible tells us to love thy enemy, but the part these special people played in the front line, giving hope and administering much needed spiritual advice to those brave soldiers who were facing the enemy entrenched in the battlefields in the front lines of war was outstanding.

These special ministers were non combatants, armed only with a Bible, sweets and cigarettes, no guns or grenades to fight the enemy, they were among the bravest of our soldiers who saw action in the wars involving British servicemen.

The Army Chaplains Department had been in existence for some 120 years when the Great War started in the summer of 1914.

Initially comprising only Church of England men, over the years it had evolved to encompass Roman Catholic, Wesleyan, Jewish and other smaller denominations by the beginning of the 20th century.

In August of 1914 when the British Expeditionary Force sailed for France the department was still only small comprising just over 100 commissioned Chaplains so there was no difficulty in providing the 65 required by the original expeditionary force. Incredibly by the war's end

just over four years later close on 3500 had served in all the theatres of war ministering to the needs of the men and women serving their country overseas.

Figures vary but it is generally accepted that between 170 and 180 of these men paid the ultimate sacrifice and died or were killed in action serving God and their country whilst in the front line with the troops, which is where many preferred to be.

A quote from an unknown padre sums up the attitude of many, "If the men can't go to church then the church must go to the men".

It must be remembered that in their pockets would only be a Bible, Prayer Book and probably sweets and cigarettes "for the boys". They only had their faith to protect them, not rifle or revolver.

The "Padres" or "Sky Pilots" as they were affectionately known by the Tommies, were however respected and appreciated for the role that they played in the grim realities of life on the Western Front and in other theatres.

This quote from a soldier of the 1st Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters; "The Padres, what decent fellows they were, as we knelt in the fields or farmyards on a Sunday to listen to them speak. They were good fellows, many of them fell in France while telling Tommy a few lines from the good book. In my experience some of the best were the Padres". Indeed some were the best and many men of the Chaplains Department were decorated during the Great War with Distinguished Service Order and Military Cross awards amongst their number.

One of the Chaplains, considered by many to be the most famous was the Reverend Geoffrey Stoddert Kennedy, more commonly known as "Woodbine Willie", taking God to the front, and for his habit of distributing cigarettes to soldiers, he was loved and respected by the men for his bravery under fire. He wrote a number of poems about his experiences during the war.

Pictured right is a signed photograph of Reverend Kennedy (Woodbine Willie).

The Victoria Cross was awarded to three men of the Army Chaplains Department during the First World War and this is my attempt to briefly tell the story of one of these three exceptional people, Men of God, more concerned with the care and well being of others than with their own needs, the Chaplain VC.

Among these special men was Robert William Fountaine Addison, he was born on 16th September 1883 in North Warnborough, Hampshire, the son of Mr. W. G. and Mrs Alice Addison.

He was educated at Robert Mays School, Odiham, Hants and in his younger years must have had a wanderlust to his character as it was reported that he had worked in a Canadian lumber camp, an experience that stood him in good stead for his forthcoming role with the army Chaplaincy in his ministry with the desert troops.

After studying at Salisbury Theological College, he was ordained in 1913 at the age of 30 and became the Curate of St. Edmunds in Salisbury. Upon the outbreak of World War One, he volunteered for the Army Chaplain's Department and through this he came to be posted to Mesopotamia with the 13th Division in February of 1916.

The 13th (Western) Division was a New Army formation which included the 6th (Service) Battalions of the East Lancashire, South Lancashire and Loyal North Lancashire Regiments, brigaded as part of the 38th (Lancashire) Infantry Brigade. He was with them when they landed at Basra, Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) in March 1916.

The Division was sent to this area to provide reinforcements for the force at the time attempting to relieve the troops besieged and cut off at Kut-al-Amara.

To achieve this relief, strong Turkish positions along the eastern bank of the river Tigris would need to be overcome and in April the Division was thrown into a disastrously muddled and failed attempt to relieve a besieged British garrison at Kut, contributing over 700 casualties in five days of unsuccessful fighting to the relief force's 22,000 – man butcher's bill.

So it was as part of these larger operations that the 13th Division found themselves facing three well equipped Turkish trench lines in the blackness of the early hours of April 9th.

Suddenly the troops found themselves illuminated by the light of Turkish flares but it was too late now and the attack went ahead. Rifle and machine gun fire ploughed into the attacking waves and very few men reached the Turkish lines.

It was all over very quickly and as the troops had advanced to their fate the Reverend Addison had been following up encouraging and assisting the medical teams and stretcher bearers.

A digest of his Victoria Cross citation reads, "On April 9th 1916 at Sanna-i-Yat Mesopotamia, the Reverend William Addison carried a wounded man to the cover of a trench and helped several others to the same cover after binding up their wounds under heavy rifle and machine gun fire.

In addition to these unaided efforts his splendid example and utter disregard of personal danger encouraged the stretcher bearers to go forward under heavy fire and collect the wounded".

His Victoria Cross was gazetted on September 26th 1916 and yet it was almost a year later before the presentation by the King took place at Buckingham Palace on 3rd August 1917. William Addison would later also be awarded the Order of St George IV Class (Russia).

He married Miss Marjorie Helen Katrine Wallis of Caterham at Christ Church Brighton and after the war decided to remain with the Army Chaplains Department rather than resume parochial duties. His wife died on 31st December 1959.

He attended the garden party given by the King for VC winners on June 26th 1920 and on November 11th of that year was privileged to be part of the VC Guard of Honour for the internment of the Unknown Soldier at Westminster Abbey. He was also present at the VC reunion dinner held in the House of Lords in November of 1929.

Following the end of the First World War William Addison remained in the Army Chaplain's Department, serving in several posts in England, in Khartoum, Malta, and with the Shanghai Defence Force. In August 1938 Addison retired from Army service as a chaplain, after serving for more than twenty years, and having lived in twenty one different houses.

During the Second World War Addison was reappointed chaplain to the forces in 1939 and Deputy Assistant Chaplain General in South Wales.

When he left the army he became a parish priest taking the position of Rector of Coltishall with Great Hautbois in Norfolk from 1938 to 1958.

Medal entitlement of The Reverend William Addison - Army Chaplain's Department

Victoria Cross
1914-15 Star
British War Medal (1914-20)
Victory Medal (1914-19) + Mentioned in Despatches Oakleaf
War Medal (1939-45)
King George VI Coronation Medal (1937)
Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal (1953)
Order of St George (4th Class) (Russia)

His Victoria Cross is held by the National Army Museum, Chelsea, London.

Reverend William Addison spent his final years on the South Coast where he died on 7th January 1962 at St. Leonards on Sea aged 79. His funeral took place on 11th January at St Barnabas's Church, Bexhill-on-Sea, and he was buried in Brookwood Cemetery.

The Brookwood Cemetery Society's restoration project for 2007 was to refurbish the grave and headstone to the Reverend William Addison VC after it was discovered it was badly weathered, the foundation exposed and in danger of collapse.

In the Autumn of 2007, Pankhurst Graphic Masonry of Woking, carried out the complete cleaning and repair to the stonework, the inscription panels were cleaned and made completely legible, and the grave space and foundations to the cross were made sound.

William Addison joined the Order (date unknown) and became a member of the Sir Arthur Holbrook Lodge 2596 and it is reported in the Autumn 1923 Quarterly Journal that "we are sorry to announce that we have lost Bro. Rev. Addison, V.C. who has been transferred to Aldershot".

Also reported in the Quarterly Journal August 1924 "S.W. Surrey, We congratulate the Rev. Brother Addison, V.C. upon receiving his Second Degree. Our only Reverend Victoria Cross recipient, this is a record our Reverend Brother will hold for many years. One of the 40 solid Sergeants performed the ceremony".

WILLIAM BEESLEY

William Beesley was born in Gresley, a sub district of Burton on Trent on 5th October 1895. He went to school at Ansley village school near Nuneaton and later moved to Galley Common. He worked in the mines, at Haunchwood and Tunnel Collieries.

Beesley enlisted at Nuneaton Police Station and at first his application was rejected but he queued up a second time and gave his age as twenty instead of nineteen, as it actually was. His first action in the war was with the 9th King's Royal Rifle Corps on the infamous Menin Road, near Helfire Corner, Ypres sector in June 1915. It was the start of 3 years in and out of the trenches. In July he was wounded in the shoulder by a piece of shrapnel while counter attacking the Germans again at Hooge where terrified British soldiers, totally unaware and unprepared, faced a totally new weapon.

German troops launched an attack on the British line 03.15 on 30th July with portable Flammenwerfer. The effect of this horrific attack proved terrifying to the British

defenders, although their line, initially pushed back, was stabilised later the same night.

In two days of severe fighting the 7th and 8th Battalions of the Kings Royal Rifle Corps lost 31 officers and 751 other ranks, however, the wound did not prevent him bringing out a wounded comrade.

In November he was wounded a second time, this time in the legs when he was taking some of the first supplies of Mills Bombs up to the St. Julian Road. After a time in hospital in Blighty he was back on the Western Front in time for the Somme offensive of 1916. By this time he was in a machine gun section with the 13th Rifle Brigade.

He was promoted to Corporal on 28th June 1918, the same day as his VC appeared in the *London Gazette*. In France after he won his VC but before he received it from the King, Beesley was pulled out of the trenches and was on one occasion invited to tea with his Commanding Officer; on another he lunched with the Divisional General who gave him a box of chocolates. His colleagues in the ranks also clubbed together and gave him gifts. He served with Sergeant Gregg, also of the 13th Rifle Brigade, and won the VC on the same day. They were presented with the award at the chateau at Frohen le Grand on 9th August at the same ceremony, along with the Reverend Theodore Hardy. After he won his VC Beesley returned to Nuneaton on leave and during this time was presented with £700 in War Bonds by the local townspeople. He was also given the Freedom of the Borough on the same day as Cecil Knox, who had won his VC on 22nd March 1918. Beesley was, therefore, Nuneaton's second VC of the war.

His Citation in London Gazette, 28th June 1918 reads: "For most conspicuous bravery. The enemy's outpost position was attacked by two companies of his unit without artillery preparation. Rifleman Beesley was in the leading wave of the left company which came under heavy fire as it approached the enemy's front line. His Platoon Sergeant and all the Section Commanders were killed. This young soldier, realising the situation, at once took command and led the assault. Single handed he rushed the post and with his revolver killed two of the enemy at a machine gun. He then shot dead an officer who ran across from a dug out to take their place at the machine gun. Three more officers appeared from the dug out and these he called on to surrender. Seeing one of them trying to get rid of a map, he shot him and obtained the map. He took four more prisoners from a dug out and two others from a shelter close by, disarmed them and sent them back to our lines. At this moment his Lewis gun was brought up by a comrade who was acting as carrier".

Rifleman Beesley at once brought it into action and used it with great effect against the enemy as they bolted towards their support line, inflicting many casualties. For four hours Rifleman Beesley and

his comrade held on to the position under very heavy machine gun and rifle fire.

The enemy then advanced to counter attack, and the other soldier was wounded. Rifleman Beesley carried on by himself and actually maintained his position until 10 p.m. Some of the posts on his right and left had been practically wiped out and the survivors had fallen back. It was mainly due to this action that the enemy were prevented from rushing the position, and that the remnants of his Company when compelled to withdraw were able to do so, without further loss. When darkness set in Rifleman Beesley made his way back to the original line from which the attack had started, bringing with him the wounded carrier and the Lewis gun. He at once mounted the Lewis gun in the trench and remained in action until things had quietened down.

The indomitable pluck, skilful shooting and good judgement in economising ammunition displayed by Rifleman Beesley stamped the incident as one of the most brilliant actions in recent operations".

In the *Sunday Mercury* of 2nd August 1964 Beesley tells the story of his exploits in the following way:

"It was half-past two in the afternoon, I remember, a boiling hot day. Three trench mortars were the signal to go over and it was every man for himself. We had no artillery barrage; the Germans loosed everything they had got.

I suppose it was about 400 to 500 yards to the top of that ridge, without a bit of cover. By the time we'd rushed to halfway, two out of every three men had been hit. I anchored down in a shell hole to see what was happening and found I was the only man left out of my section of nine.

The platoon sergeant lay dead, all the section commanders had been killed; it looked as though the attack was a failure.

But Rifleman Beesley leapt from his shell hole, took command and rallied the remnants. Single handed he rushed an enemy post and with his revolver killed two Germans manning a machine gun. An officer ran from a dug out to take their place. Beesley killed him too. Three more officers tumbled out and one tried to destroy a map. Beesley's bullet got him before he could tear the sheet to pieces. Six more Germans emerged with cries of 'Kamerad'! and were taken prisoner.

Just at that moment a young soldier got through with a Lewis machine gun. He was a lad called Douglas, and he had dropped his shovel in the support trenches when he saw the way things were going and dashed up the ridge.

With the Lewis machine gun, Private Beesley cut the retreating enemy to pieces. For four hours the two men held the position under

heavy machine gun and rifle fire. 'We stuck it out, me and this kid. I don't know whether we were scared or not'.

Then the Germans counter attacked and Douglas was wounded. Beesley held the position alone against all comers until 10.00 p.m., long after the posts on his right and left had been wiped out.

'It was mainly due to his action that the enemy were prevented from rushing the position and that the remnants of his company when compelled to withdraw, were able to do so without further loss', said the official report later.

Under cover of darkness, Beesley got back to his own lines, bringing the Lewis gun and his wounded mate with him. Then he set up the gun again and gave the Germans some more.

On 15th July 1919 he was awarded the French Medaille Militaire for an earlier undocumented action during the war.

Beesley was demobilized in 1919 and returned to coalmining for a time. In 1920 he married Mary Ada Wilson at Stockingford Church, Nuneaton and the four bridesmaids wore miniature VCs. The wedding reception was held at the Royal Oak pub in Harrshill. The couple later had a daughter and settled in Coventry.

In the Second World War Beesley served in the Royal Artillery and left the Army with the rank of Sergeant in 1941 because of his age. His duties had been to do with 'instructing youngsters', probably cadets.

In 1947 he moved to 24 Brooklyn Road, Foleshill, Coventry and joined the Coventry Gauge and Tool Company as a commissionaire and later as a progress chaser, retiring in 1960.

During his life Beesley attended several of the VC functions, including the 1956 Centenary in Hyde Park.

In 1966 he went on holiday with his wife to Abergavenny in South Wales, where he was taken ill and died in hospital on 23rd September. His funeral was at Holy Trinity Church, Coventry on 29th September and was attended by a large congregation including the Lady Mayoress of Coventry, the Mayor of Nuneaton and members of his former regiment.

Henry Tandey, another winner of the VC in 1918 who lived in the area, also attended the service. The Rifle Brigade provided two buglers and their playing of the 'Last Post' and 'Rouse' sounded particularly fine, echoing round and round the vaulted roof of the great church. Beesley was buried at St Pauls Cemetery, Coventry. At his service the vicar described him as 'a brave and kindly man' and he was much loved for his quiet kindness and great personal charm. At a Nuneaton

Borough Council meeting members stood in silence for a few moments in Beesley's memory.

He used to keep his medals in a brown paper bag in a drawer, and in addition to his VC he also earned eight other medals including the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal, Defence Medal, War Medal, George VI Coronation, Queen Elizabeth Coronation Medal and Medaille Militaire. All these are with the Royal Green Jackets Museum at Winchester. To commemorate his name there is a William Beesley Crescent at Bramcote Barracks, in Nuneaton, he is also commemorated on the Rifle Brigade's Roll of Fame on the North Wall of the Nave, close to the West Door, of Winchester Cathedral.

At some point Beesley must have remarried, as he is buried with Elizabeth May Beesley, who was born in 1896 and died in 1975, nine years after her husband.

William Beesley was initiated into the Order in the Ye Olde Wharf Lodge, Gresley, Staffs.

SPENCER JOHN BENT

Spencer John Bent was born on 18th March 1891, at the Pickerel Inn, Station Road, Stowupland in Stowmarket, Suffolk, a market town that sits beside the River Gipping. By the age of 10, he was an orphan: his father, who had served with the Royal Horse Artillery, was killed during the Boer War and his mother had died, too. He was largely brought up by his uncle and aunt, William and Mrs Baker of Verendah Cottage, Whitnesham near Ipswich. He was just 14 when he joined the Army in 1905 as a drummer in the 1st Battalion, the East Lancashire Regiment. When he boxed at lightweight in Army championships, he was soon christened "Joe" a corruption of "Chow" Bent, a well known professional boxer at the time. The nickname stayed with him until his death, with only his closest family continuing to call him by his second Christian name of John.

After the outbreak of the Great War, Bent accompanied his regiment to France and saw action at the Battle of Le Cateau. However, it was for gallantry in the first Battle of Ypres, which started on October 19th that he was awarded his VC. His platoon was holding one of the front line trenches near Le Gheer, Belgium, after a ferocious day's fighting. On the night of November 1/2, an exhausted Bent was trying to get some sleep but awoke to find his comrades abandoning their positions. There was no officer in the trench to give the order to withdraw, nor even a non commissioned officer, because the platoon's sergeant was visiting

an advance post. Yet someone had passed word down the line that the battalion had been ordered to retire. Bent started following the others but then decided he could not bear to leave his treasured French trumpet, so he made his way back.

When Bent reached the trench, he spotted a soldier, raised his rifle and demanded that the man, whom he assumed to be a German, identify himself. It turned out to be the platoon's recently returned sergeant, who told him that no orders to retire had been given. Bent immediately ran after some of his comrades to call them back and encountered an officer who helped him round up the rest of the platoon.

Early the next morning, German infantry advanced confidently towards the trench, clearly believing it had been abandoned. When they were within 400 yards, the British machine gun and rifles opened fire, causing the advancing infantrymen to run for cover. Before long the German artillery launched a heavy, bombardment and the officer, platoon sergeant and a number of the men were killed or injured. Bent took command and repelled several more infantry attacks until, later in the day, he was relieved.

This was just one of several courageous actions by Drummer Bent in late 1914. On October 22nd he carried ammunition to a patrol that had been cut off by the Germans. Two days later he brought ammunition and food to a front line trench under heavy shell and rifle fire. On November 3rd, he repeatedly risked his life by venturing into no man's land to rescue several wounded men. One of these, Private McNulty,

was 25 to 30 yards from the British trench and, when Bent attempted to lift him, the two men came under a hail of enemy bullets. To get him to safety, Bent hooked his feet under McNulty's armpits and edged backwards, dragging the injured man behind him.

In an interview with his local paper, the *Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury*, shortly after the war, Bent recalled the incident: "After we had had breakfast, Private McNulty went out of the trench, and on returning was hit in the pit of the stomach. He fell, and the Germans were trying to hit him again; you could see the earth flying up all around him. I said, 'Why doesn't someone go and help him?' and got the reply, 'Why not go yourself?' I went, and to make it difficult for the Germans to hit me, I

zigzagged to him. They did not snipe at me whilst I was advancing, but as soon as I got hold of McNulty's shoulder something seemed to take my feet from under me, and I slipped under McNulty. This took place close to the walls of a ruined convent, and just as I fell, several bullets struck the wall, sending a piece of plaster against my left eye. I thought I was wounded and started to rub the blood away, as I thought, but fortunately the skin was only grazed. I felt it was time to get out of it, and knowing it was impossible to stand up, I hooked my feet under McNulty's arms, and using my elbows I managed to drag myself and him back to the trenches about 25 yards away. When I got him there safely, I went for a doctor and stretcher bearers. As far as I know he is still alive. At any rate, that was the last time I heard of him".

Days later, Bent was seriously injured, sustaining a gunshot wound to his leg. By then, he also had shrapnel injuries to both arms and hands, on top of his head wound. He was sent back to England, where he received several months of medical care, and only learnt he had been awarded the Victoria Cross when he read about it in a local paper.

His decoration was announced in the *London Gazette* on December 9th 1914, where his citation highlighted his "conspicuous gallantry" and identified four separate acts of bravery. He also received £50, then a considerable sum, from an Ipswich resident who had offered it to the first local man to be awarded the VC. Bent was the first man from his regiment to be awarded the VC in the Great War, receiving his decoration from King George V at Buckingham Palace on 13th January 1915.

Bent was promoted to corporal and helped with the recruitment campaign for six months before being promoted again, to sergeant. On 25th August 1915, the *London Gazette* announced that Bent had been awarded the Cross of St George by Russia for gallantry and distinguished service.

It was during his period that, in Plymouth, he met the girl he would later marry: Alice Powell, daughter of the chief boilermaker at the Royal Naval Dockyard, Devonport.

By now engaged, Bent returned to France in the summer of 1916 and re-joined his old battalion on the Somme, remaining there until November when he again returned to England to convalesce, this time from rheumatic fever.

Bent and Alice Powell were married in St. Andrews Church, Plymouth on 16th January 1917, when he was 26 and she was 22.

The following article appeared in the Spring 1917 Journal.

MARRIAGE OF A BUFF V.C. HERO.

INTERESTING CEREMONY AT PLYMOUTH.

In St. Andrew's Church, Plymouth, on Tuesday, Rev. A. W. T. Perowne, Vicar and Rural Dean, officiated at the marriage of V.C. hero, whose name is widely known throughout the West.

This was Spencer John Bent, V.C. of the East Lancashires, who has now been for some time stationed at Plymouth. At his wedding on Tuesday Sergeant Bent wore the V.C. decoration, also that of the Order of St. George, both of which were won early in the war, during the advance from the Marne to the Aisne. He has been three times wounded, and has also suffered from trench feet. At the ceremony on Tuesday were present a number of N.C.O.'s, including Regimental Sergeant Major Watkins, Quarter Master Sergeant Gallagher, Quarter Master Sergeant Vaughan, Sergeant Kenny, Sergeant Gavin, and Sergeant Withington.

The bridegroom's best man was Mr. Lionel Jacobs, Past Grand Primo (Eng.), R.A.O.B., the bridegroom being a member of the Order. Mr. Jacobs wore Egyptian and Sudan war medals, he having served in those countries.

The bride was Miss Alice H. Powell, eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Powell, of Federation Road, Laira. She was given away by her father, and wore a gown of white satin charmeuse, and a tulle veil over a coronet of orange blossom. Streamers of regimental colours floated from her bouquet of lilies and chrysanthemums. Her two sisters, the Misses Maud and Gertrude Powell, attended her, wearing dresses of blue merv silk and black Napoleon hats. The bridal bouquet was of Harrissii lilies,

chrysanthemums, rose, etc., tied with regimental coloured ribbons, the bridesmaids' flowers were pink roses and white chrysanthemums, tied with pink ribbon.

Bent was back in France, later in 1917, this time as a volunteer with the 7th Battalion of his Regiment. He took part in the assault on Messines Ridge, later describing his own involvement as "as good a work as ever I did during the war". This, coming from a recipient of the VC, suggested he had been courageous in the thick of the action yet again.

After being promoted to Company Sergeant Major, Bent fought at the third Battle of Ypres, also known as Passchendaele, and then re-joined the 1st Battalion in time for the German Spring Offensive and the subsequent battles of Summer and Autumn 1918.

During fighting around the village of Sepmeries, this formidable soldier showed outstanding bravery for which he was awarded the Military Medal, notably for leading two patrols that attacked the enemy on October 29th, days before war's end.

Following the end of hostilities, Bent returned home in May 1919, having served with distinction throughout the war. He remained in the Army until 1926, serving in the West Indies and Malta. Leaving with the rank of Regimental Sergeant Major after 21 years' service, Bent was still only 35 years old.

Bent was one of three V.C. heroes awarded an inscribed gold watch by the Musicians' Company, and he received an award of £50 offered by Mr. T. Curtis, an Ipswich resident, to the first man from that city who should obtain the V.C.

After his military career, the father of three went on to be employed by the Inner London Education Authority as a school caretaker and Janitor at Paragon School, New Kent Road and when he retired from that position he became a commissionaire at Mond Nickel Company and Courage Brewery, Tower Bridge, continuing part time work until he was 85

He died peacefully in his sleep at home in Hackney, London, on 3rd May 1977, aged 86. He was cremated at West Norwood Cemetery and Crematorium, London, and his ashes were laid at Rosebud 41 where there is a plaque in his memory.

To mark the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War, a commemorative clock has been launched. The impressive structure, which stands at around 18ft, greets shoppers as they enter the Market Place in Stowmarket. The Town Council devised the project, which had a construction cost of £10,000.

Reverend Michael Eden with Bents' Grand Children Caroline Little and Stephen Barker

On Remembrance Sunday 2014 Spencer John Bent was honoured by his home town of Stowmarket when a commemorative stone was unveiled at the foot of the new memorial clock in the Market Place, Bents grand children were invite to take part.

The Medal entitlement of Regimental Sergeant Major Spencer Bent, 1st Battalion, East Lancashire Regiment is as follows:

Victoria Cross
Military Medal (MM)
1914 Star + clasp: "5th Aug-22nd Nov 1914"
British War Medal (1914-20)
Victory Medal (1914-19)
Defence Medal (1939-45)
King George VI Coronation Medal (1937)
Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal (1953)
Army Long Service & Good Conduct Medal
Cross of the Order of St George 3rd Class (Russia)

During his life, Bent had a fondness for using the phrase: "We had our money's worth". So after his death, Captain R. W. Thorne M.B.E. wrote an obituary of Bent which ended: Perhaps it can be said of the man who illuminated those dark and desperate days back in 1914, who illuminated the history of his Regiment and the British Army, and illuminated the lives of those who knew him, especially those privileged to be counted among his friends, that he gave his Sovereign, his Country, his Regiment and his fellow men 'their money's worth'.

A thanksgiving service for the life of "Joe" Bent VC MM took place at the Chapel of the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, on June 15, 1977. His widow, to whom he was married for more than 60 years, survived him and eventually died on 7th December 1984, aged 90.

Bent's VC, along with his Military Medal and Russian Cross of St. George was sold at auction in June 2000 for £80,000. His VC is on display in the Lord Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum, London.

Spencer John Bent was initiated into the Order in the Sir Lionel Jacobs Lodge, Devonport.

CHARLES GEORGE BONNER

Charles George Bonner, known from childhood as Gus, was born at Shuttington, near Tamworth on 29th December 1884. He was the youngest son of Samuel and Jane (nee Hellaby) Bonner. While Charles was still an infant, his father, a farmer and JP uprooted the family and moved to Aldridge, near Walsall in 1885. He was educated at Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, Sutton Coldfield and Coleshill Grammar School.

Bonner completed his education on the training ship HMS Conway, moored in the Mersey, joining in 1899 as a first step towards a career in the Merchant Navy.

He left in 1901 and joined the firm of George Milne & Co. and served his apprenticeship aboard the Aberdeen based sailing ship the 'Invermark', his rise was swift, after spells as Second Mate and then Chief Mate, he passed all the examination and at 21 years of age he became one of the youngest apprentices, when he was awarded a Master Mariner's Certificate.

Joining the Johnston Line, Bonner exchanged sail for steam, he served on the company's Black Sea routes. He visited almost every part of the world and was aboard the *Incemore* when she collided with the *Kaiser Wilhelm* off the Isle of Wight just before the outbreak of World War One.

At the outbreak of the war Bonner was in a tramp steamer at Antwerp and being anxious for a scrap he took the shortest path and joined the Belgian Army. He was removed from that as a suspected person and he didn't see the fun in being interned with the remainder, so, making his way down to the Scheldt, he secured a boat and rowed himself down and in due course returning to England. He entered the Royal Navy Division as an able bodied seaman in September 1914. In December of 1914 he was commissioned and transferred to the Royal Naval Reserve with the rank of Sub-Lieutenant, Royal Navy Reserve. He served in the war with great distinction in actions with enemy submarines and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross in June 1916.

Promoted to Lieutenant in December 1916, he then joined what became known as the 'Q' ships, being posted first to HMS Pargust and then to HMS Dunraven. These ships were converted and disguised merchant vessels, posing as easy targets for the U-boats. 'Q' ships were in fact, heavily loaded with concealed weapons and carried highly trained crews. They would entice enemy ships to come closer before opening fire at close range to destroy them.

Bonner was awarded the V.C. in November 1917 for "conspicuous gallantry and consummate skill and coolness in action with an enemy submarine". He had the honour of having an audience with the King prior to any public announcement being made of his V.C., and is one of the few to have the announcement in a Court Circular on October prior to the official report in the London Gazette on November 2nd. Unexpectedly summoned to the Admiralty from his digs in Saltash, Bonner soon found himself on a train bound for Wolferton on the Royal Sandringham estate, with nothing more than a small bag and his sword. Met off the train by 'two huge men in green liveries', he was taken, on the evening of 7th October, to York Cottage, and then into the study, where the King waited to present him with his hard won honour. Having been entertained to dinner, Bonner joined the Royal party for the following morning's church service, and, following a courtesy call to Queen Alexandra, he headed back to London.

Details of the actual action leading to the V.C. award were not made public at the time. It is believed however, that the Victoria Cross awarded to Bonner had a dark blue ribbon in keeping with the original warrant.

The mystery of these men who received the V.C. in this way was that they served in 'Q' or mystery ships and it was essential that their details were not revealed to the enemy. The 'Q' ships were converted tramps, sailing ships and the like apparently harmless. Once the U-boat had been lured within their range they revealed that they were in fact heavily armed with concealed guns, torpedoes and depth charges with highly trained crews.

It later transpired that Bonner was awarded his V.C. for action on the *Dunraven* on 8th August 1917 under Commander Gordon Campbell, V.C.

On the morning of 8th August Commander Campbell and his crew were in the Bay of Biscay about one hundred miles west of Ushant in the *Dunraven*. At eleven o'clock a submarine was sighted well down on the horizon, and to starboard. It was U.C. 71 under Lieutenant Commander Saltzwedel.

Commander Campbell kept on his course in order to entice the enemy to come in closer. At a quarter to twelve the submarine broke surface about two and a half miles away, on the starboard quarter and opened fire. The *Dunraven* crew manned the concealed guns, and a detachment kept up an intermittent and deliberately inaccurate fire with the small after gun. About an hour after the action began two shells went in rapid succession through the *Dunraven's* poop and did serious havoc, due to the large amounts of explosives on board. A depth charge exploded which blew Lieutenant Bonner out of his control station and a serious fire was started all round the magazines. The concealed guns' crews were mostly stationed above the burning portions of the poop and it seemed only a matter of time before they would be suffocated by the fumes and smoke or blown into the air by the explosion which must soon shatter the after part of the vessel. But Lieutenant Bonner and the guns' crews had no thought except to conceal themselves until their captain gave the signal, and to bear their sufferings as calmly as they could. One of the men tore up his shirt and gave it to his companions to wrap round their mouths in order that the fumes should not choke them, the others kept moving the cordite from place to place on the deck, which was getting red hot. Meanwhile, Commander Gordon Campbell ordered the engine room to send up clouds of steam to simulate boiler trouble, and stopped his ship. For a short time it seemed as though the unbreakable endurance of the *Dunraven's* crew would deceive their enemy; for the submarine came

steadily nearer and passed at a short distance under the 'Q' boat's stern. In a few moments she would have come within the line of fire of three concealed guns at a range at which there could have been no missing, but before she did so the fire which was raging inside the poop blew up two depth charges and the explosion hurled one of the four inch guns into the air. Simultaneously the gun crew round the concealed gun on the after bridge opened fire. The submarine immediately submerged.

Dunraven's gallant fight, painting by artist Charles Pears

The wounded men were carried below and a desperate effort was made to quench the fire under the poop. Commander Campbell waited for the enemy's torpedoes and at twenty minutes past one his ship was hit abaft the engine room. He now gave orders to abandon the vessel without further attempting to keep up her disguise in the hope that the submarine would again approach and fall victim to the small nucleus that would remain behind in the last ring of concealed positions. Nothing further could be done to master the fire under the poop and from now onwards the cordite and shells exploded every few minutes; the splinters flew all over the ship and penetrated the cabins where Lieutenant Bonner and his men lay wounded.

The submarine came to the surface again right astern of the *Dunraven* and shelled her steadily for another twenty minutes. Her wary commander submerged again and Commander Campbell fired a torpedo at the periscope as it moved along the *Dunraven's* port side. The torpedo missed by a grievously small margin. A few minutes later Commander Campbell fired another torpedo. The U-boat commander saw it and at once submerged completely. There was no longer the slightest hope that he would be caught.

Commander Campbell made an urgent signal for assistance. The U.S.S. *Noma* and the destroyers *Christopher* and *Attack* arrived soon after. Every effort was made to bring the *Dunraven* back to harbour, but at one thirty a.m. on August 10th she had to be abandoned as the seas were then breaking right over her and she was sinking fast.

Charles Bonner survived the nerves of steel game of this type of warfare especially after the Germans rumbled the ruse and the U-boats were known to torpedo the 'Q' ships and depart with no more ado.

Following this battle, Bonner captained his own Q-ship HMS Eilian.

On 17th June 1917, Bonner married Alice Mabel (Cissy) Partridge, daughter of Solicitor, Mr. Thomas Partridge, at St Matthew's Church, Walsall. They had one son, whom they named in memory of Bonner's former Captain and the ship in which he survived almost certain death, Gordon Dunraven Bonner who followed his father into the Navy, serving as Surgeon Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. After the war, they settled in Edinburgh.

Bonner died at his home at 12 Netherly Road, Edinburgh at the age of 67 on 7th February, 1951. After a funeral at Warriston Crematorium, Edinburgh his ashes were buried at Aldridge, his childhood home. A headstone was later raised in his memory and that of his wife, who died twenty two years later. The inscription reads: "Love alone is eternal".

On 20th March 2015 a commemorative paving stone was unveiled in honour of Charles George 'Gus' Bonner V.C. D.S.C. R.N.R. as part of the national programme to honour all Victoria Cross holders in their home towns. The stone was laid in a garden designed and created by Aldridge Volunteer Gardeners. The garden is situated on The Green, opposite the site where Manor Farm, the Bonner family home once stood.

Bonner's medals are not publicly held and no pictures are available.

Charles George 'Gus' Bonner was initiated in the E. R. T. Croxall Lodge, Aldridge.

THOMAS BRYAN

Thomas Bryan was born in Bott Lane, Lye, near Stourbridge, Worcestershire, on 21st January 1882. At some time in his early infancy he moved to Castleford with his parents, living at 29 Hunt Street, Whitwood Mere.

He was educated in his early life at the Potteries Council School, and was also a scholar of the United Methodist Church Sunday School.

On 26th December 1903 Thomas Bryan married Sarah Smart of Castleford at Whitwood Mere Parish Church. Sarah was 19 and Thomas was 21.

They had five children, the first a son, Thomas Alfred Bryan born 3rd October 1904.

Fanny the first girl was born 3rd January 1906 but unfortunately died on 13th of December 1907 aged only 23 months. Albert the second son was born 19th May 1908, the second daughter Sarah arrived on 3rd April 1911. The last child, another girl, Evelyn was born on 28th September 1913.

Previous to the war Thomas Bryan was a well known Rugby player, having played for Castleford Northern Rugby Union Team in the 1906-07 season, at the end of which the club withdrew from the Northern Union for financial reasons.

Before joining the Army, he followed his father and worked for Henry Briggs and Company, Whitwood Colliery, as a miner.

On 11th April 1915, Mr. Bryan enlisted into the Army at Castleford and eight months later was drafted to a service Battalion in France, the Northumberland Fusiliers 25th Service Battalion, (2nd Tyneside Irish). This Battalion was formed by the Lord Mayor and the City of Newcastle on 9th November 1914.

Whitwood Mere Parish Church

The battalion was attached to the 103rd Brigade (34th Division) in June of 1915. This Brigade in turn was attached to the 37th Division, between 6th July and 22nd August 1916.

In April of 1916 Bryan fractured his ankle and had to be sent home for rest and recuperation. He was drafted to France to another service battalion in December 1916. On 26th of March 1917 he was promoted to Lance Corporal.

Thomas Bryan was awarded the Victoria Cross for his gallantry at Vimy Ridge near Arras, France, on 9th April 1917, the first day of the Arras offensive.

The Battle of Arras was a British offensive during the First World War, lasting from 9th April to 16th May 1917. A strategic success, it involved troops from Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Newfoundland. Casualties numbered 158,000 on the allied side, while German casualties totalled 120,000 to 130,000.

Citation of Deed reads: "For most conspicuous bravery during an attack. Although wounded, this Non Commissioned Officer went forward alone, with a view to silencing a machine gun which was inflicting much damage. He worked up most skilfully along a communication trench, approached the gun from behind, disabled it and killed two of the team as they were abandoning the gun.

As this machine gun had been a serious obstacle in the advance of the second objective, the results obtained by Lance Corporal Bryan's gallant action were very far reaching".

His Majesty King George V presented his medal to him at St. James's Park, Newcastle on Sunday the 17th June 1917 in front of a crowd of more than 40,000. His wife and four children spent a week with him in Newcastle. He was Castleford's only Victoria Cross Recipient.

During the investiture Major General Montgomery read out Bryan's citation to thunderous applause.

In the latter half of June of 1917 he was admitted to Alnwick Hospital due the seriousness of his wounds, one of which was a bullet wound in his right arm, incurred during his V.C. actions

While Thomas Bryan was in hospital he told of his deed. *"On that glorious day, our lads were held up by a machine gun, which was so well hidden we couldn't check its deadly work. I therefore made up my mind to put a stop to its activities, so creeping over the top; I went from shell hole to shell hole in "No Man's Land". I crept into a communications trench, which was held by the enemy, where I came across three Germans. This was at six o'clock in the morning. These men were so surprised that they surrendered without showing any fight, and two of them presented me with their watches. I thereupon sent them down to the base with some of my men. I then went forward again, along with Sergeant Major Foster, of the Fifth and ran across a German officer, who was also delighted. Not many minutes afterwards I surprised another Hun, who gave up his arms as meekly as a lamb. An hour later I was still prowling round, trying to fix the German machine gun team, but was unable to spot it. Whilst working my way along, I was spotted by one of the enemy, who, letting drive, caught me in the right arm. Following this bit of hard luck, I decided to try rapid fire on the place where I thought the machine gun was placed, and on this being carried out, we found to our glee that the gun which had been spitting forth its fire of death, barked no more. Two of the gun team tried to get away under our rapid fire, but I shot both of them.*

I stayed with my comrades until half past one mid day, after which I left to have my wound dressed. With the machine gun and its gunners destroyed, it was now an easy matter for our boys to advance".

A reception was held in Castleford and Whitwood on Saturday 23rd June 1917, with Whitwood Colliery Band playing, "See the conquering hero comes".

Decorated landaus went in procession along Carlton Street, Aire Street and Bank Street then on toward Hightown Cricket Ground, where Mr. T. R. Dawes organised the reception.

On 27th July 1917 he was given a Civic Reception in the City of Newcastle. Together with Private Ernest Sykes, another Yorkshireman, they were met by the Lord Mayor and presented with war loans, a clock and a wallet of treasury notes. This reception took place at the Empire Theatre.

Thomas Bryan was discharged from the Army on 16th September 1918. In 1920 he attended a garden party at Buckingham Palace, for recipients of the VC, and also attended the dedication ceremony at the Cenotaph in Whitehall, and the burial of the Unknown Soldier at Westminster Abbey.

Medal entitlement of Lance Corporal Thomas Bryan, 25th Battalion (Tyneside Irish) Northumberland Fusiliers:

Victoria Cross
1914 - 15 Star
British War Medal (1914-20)
Victory Medal (1914-19)
King George VI Coronation Medal (1937)

After the war Bryan returned to the pits in Castleford and later a fund was set up for him to buy him a horse and cart to set him up in his own business.

He moved to Norton in 1926 and on 9th November 1929 he attended the Victoria Cross Dinner in the Royal Gallery at the House of Lords.

Until 1934 Thomas Bryan lived at 11 Fairfield Villas. In the same year he moved again to Doncaster and worked at Askern Colliery. Some time after he had to give up his job in the mining industry, due to his war wounds, as well as the effect from being gassed in the trenches. He unfortunately spent some six weeks in a sanatorium.

He did however take up another job as a greengrocer, in his own shop at Bentley, Doncaster.

Bryan died at 44 Askern Road, Bentley, Doncaster, on the 13th of October 1945 and was buried on 17th of October 1945 at Arksey Cemetery with full military honours. The service was held at St Peters Church, Bentley. The grave of Thomas Bryan can be found in section J of Arksey Cemetery, number 237. The grave has a Commonwealth Graves Commission headstone, engraved with a Victoria Cross. His grave is maintained by the Victoria Cross Trust.

There are Three Memorials to Bryan in Castleford. A memorial plaque at the Castleford Civic Centre in the foyer. Bryan Close at Whitwood Mere, a street on the site where Bryan lived and a memorial to 150 Castleford men erected in their honour for being distinguished during the Great War. Bryan's name is in the top centre of the memorial. This memorial is in the entrance (between the two set of double doors) to the Castleford Library, Carlton Street, Castleford.

Bryan's Victoria Cross and his other medals were first sold by auction at Christies for £9,800 on the 25th of July 1989. Dix Noonan Webb, Auctioneers, then sold his medals privately on 26th June 2000, for the sum of £60,000 and is now on display in the Lord Ashcroft Gallery of the Imperial War Museum, London.

Lance Corporal Bryan can be considered the impetus for the formation of the Victoria Cross Trust, the charity responsible for the current wave of grave restorations being undertaken around the UK.

Trust founder Gary Stapleton said the idea for the charity came after he visited Lance Corporal Bryan's burial site in Arksey Cemetery in Doncaster two years ago. "My son was just about to leave for his second tour of Afghanistan and we had been discussing the Victoria Cross", he explained. "I found out that Lance Corporal Bryan, who was a true hero, was buried close to where I live and I decided to go and visit his grave", he said. "But when I got there I was shocked by what I saw. The grave looked like no one had tended to it in years. It was a complete mess. There was even a footpath across the top of his grave with tyre tread

marks going through it". I was also annoyed because it was in such a poor condition. It was on a corner plot and cyclists had used it as a bit of a shortcut, so not only was the grave dirty and overgrown, but the grass surrounding it was badly churned up. I was determined to give someone a piece of my mind".

After contacting the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the local council Mr Stapleton found out no one was responsible for the grave. "I couldn't stand to see the grave in such a state so I decided to pay for it to be restored myself", he added.

In 2013, with the burial site now a fitting tribute to Lance Corporal Bryan's memory, a rededication ceremony was held at the cemetery, which was attended by troops from the Northumberland Fusiliers and local dignitaries. Mr. Stapleton continued: "After that I started looking into other graves and I was absolutely gob smacked. It struck me as not right that these people gave everything for their country and yet their resting places weren't being looked after. So I decided to form the charity to try and do something about it".

And so the trust was born, a charity dedicated to funding work required to bring the graves of VC medal recipients back to their former glory.

Since then the charity has funded the restorations of around 25 graves – and the campaign is ongoing, with the Government recently announcing a £100,000 donation to assist the charity with its work.

Not much is known of his service in the Order but he has been mentioned in the R.A.O.B. Quarterly Journal.

ALFRED ALEXANDER BURT

Alfred Alexander Burt was born on the 3rd March 1895 and was a resident of Port Vale in Hertford, Hertfordshire. He was only 5 months old when, in the summer of 1895 the family moved to 19 Nelson Street.

He was educated at Cowbridge Road School, and after leaving school he found employment as a gas fitter for the Hertford Gas Company. He joined the Hertfordshire Regiment as a part time Territorial Force soldier in 1911. He trained at Romford, Stowlangtoft & Rougham Park near Bury St. Edmonds.

Private Burt was mobilised with the battalion on the 4th August 1914 and, went to the Western Front with the battalion on the 6th November 1914. He served with them throughout the first uncomfortable winter in the trenches, surviving the constant patrolling and raiding as well as their involvement in the Battle of Festubert in May 1915. It was during the Battle of Loos in September 1915 that Alfred Burt, by then a Corporal, won the Victoria Cross, he was only 20 years old at the time.

On the 27th September 1915 the battalion were lined up in their trenches waiting to go 'over the top' near Cuinchy. Their section of the line came under heavy machine gun fire, forcing even more men into

their already crowded trenches. Just at that time, a German Trench Mortar barrage hit them and an incredibly powerful 'minenwerfer' shell landed in their midst. It did not explode immediately so, without thought, Alfred ran to it, held it firm with one foot, pulled the fuse out and threw it over the parapet before it could explode in amongst them. It was estimated that his selfless actions saved the lives of 20 or more of his comrades.

Artists impression of the heroic act of Corporal Burt

The citation for the medal reads: "For most conspicuous bravery at Cuinchy on 27th September, 1915. His company had lined the front trench preparatory to an attack when a large minenwerfer bomb fell into the trench. Corporal Burt, who well knew the destructive power of this class of bomb, might easily have got under cover behind a traverse, but he immediately went forward, put his foot on the fuse, wrenched it out of the bomb and threw it over the parapet, thus rendering the bomb innocuous. His presence of mind and great pluck saved the lives of others in the traverse".

Corporal Burt was presented with his Victoria Cross by King George V at Buckingham Palace on 4th March 1916 and continued to serve on the Western Front, rising to the rank of Sergeant, until his battalion were disembodied in 1919.

Unlike many other recipients of the VC, Burt lived long enough to enjoy the adulation of the British public, none more so than in his native Hertford when he returned to visit. Pupils of his old school, Cowbridge County Council School, made a collection and presented Burt with an inscribed silver cigarette case. They then gave three cheers and sang 'For he's a jolly good fellow'. On Easter Monday 1916 some 3000 people gathered in the grounds of Hertford Castle to witness the presentation of an illuminated address, a gold watch and chain and a voucher for £100, gifts from the townspeople of Hertford. Burt graciously accepted the gifts and told the audience, 'I only did what many other British soldiers have done, but I was very fortunate to be recognised'.

On Thursday 11th November 1920 he was among the 100 strong honour guard of Victoria Cross holders in the interment of the Unknown Warrior at Westminster Abbey.

Between the wars, in 1925 Burt moved to Chesham, Bucks and became the Licensee of the New Inn Public House, Waterside. He moved to 175 Chartridge Lane, Chesham in 1939 but poor health stopped any thoughts of him serving during the Second World War. He was also one of the Victoria Cross holders who attended the end of Second World War Victory Day Celebration Reception held at the Dorchester Hotel in London on the 8th June 1946.

Burt in his later days

On the occasion of the VC centenary review on 27th June 1956 it was noted that Burt was in a wheelchair, it was reported that he had been invalid from the early 1950's and in a letter to Cannon Lummis in April 1957, he wrote that he was recovering from a serious illness.

Alfred Burts Medal entitlement are as follows:

Victoria Cross

1914 Star - clasp "5th Aug-22nd Nov 1914"

British War Medal (1914-20)

Victory Medal (1914-19)

King George VI Coronation Medal (1937)

Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal (1953)

Alfred Burt was admitted to Tindal General Hospital, Chesham, Buckinghamshire, and died on the 9th June 1962 at aged 67, his health having suffered from complications caused by his exposure to a gas attack during the war.

He was Cremated in West Hertfordshire Crematorium, High Elms Lane, Garston, Watford, Hertfordshire and a small plate to his memory was below a cherry tree until it was disposed of in 1982.

Burt left a wife, Son and Daughter, His medals were presented to the Hertfordshire Regiment Museum in Hertford by Burt's daughter Mrs. Jenny Newton in 1979 and are now on display in the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment Museum at Wardown Park in Luton, Bedfordshire.

A Memorial Stone is to be laid at a new housing development being built in Chesham, it will be laid at the entrance to the Road called Alfred Burt VC Close.

Alfred Burt was initiated along with Major W. H. Prescott and several other gentlemen in the Empire Lodge 2052, reported in the Summer 1919 Journal in the following way:

EMPIRE LODGE, No. 2052

On Tuesday, March 9th, a large muster of brethren attended the Empire Lodge, when Major W. H. Prescott, the local M.P., Corporal A. A. Burt, V.C., and several other gentlemen were initiated as members of the Order of Buffaloes under the Grand Lodge of England.

Bro. H. C. Ebbutt, K.O.M. (the Grand Primo of the District), gave an excellent rendering of the initiation ceremony, being assisted by Bro. A. Tanons, K.O.M. (G.Reg.), who acted as the City Marshal

After the ceremony Bro. Ebbutt gave the newly initiated brethren an account of the work of the Order, particularly pointing to the Orphanage and the War Annuities Scheme.

Bro. Major Prescott, in responding, said he had been very much impressed with the ceremony, and by the beautiful manner in which it had been rendered. He was also impressed with the account of the work done by the R.A.O.B. throughout the Empire. He felt, he had joined an Order that one could be proud of and work for, and hoped he would be able to attend on many occasions to help with the good work.

ROBERT EDWARD CRUICKSHANK

Robert Edward Cruickshank was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada on 17th June 1888, his parents being Robert and Mary Cruickshank, he was the first born of 5 children, two younger brothers, and two sisters, all born in England. In 1913, his youngest brother, John, died at the age of 10, tripping as he alighted from a moving tram and fracturing his skull. He had been out shopping with a friend to buy a Scout's cape. His middle brother, Percy, also volunteered for the Army, and was killed while serving in the Royal Fusiliers on the Western Front in 1917, aged 19. He is buried in France.

Cruickshank moved to England at the age of 3; his father also called Robert originated from Aberdeen. His father had apparently been working with the Canadian Pacific Railway as an accountant. After the family arrived in England they initially lived in Islington according to the 1891 Census but by the 1901 Census had moved to Woodford. He was educated at Central Foundation School, Cowper Street, EC and then Bancroft School, Woodford Wells, Essex. After leaving school, he worked as a travelling salesman, joining first Lipton (Grocers), then the Lever Company. He was very interested in military matters and joined The City of London Yeomanry (Rough Riders), a volunteer unit 1908 to 1911.

At some stage his family moved to Harringay, North London, and he became involved in the Scouting movement shortly after it was established. He became an Assistant Scoutmaster, 53rd North London Scout Group. He was also involved in local politics and was noted as a good speaker. He supported Percy Alden M.P. in several election campaigns.

When the First World War broke out, Cruickshank volunteered for the Royal Flying Corps but transferred to the London Scottish Regiment. He was wounded in the Battle of the Somme in France before being sent to serve in the Middle East.

On 1st May 1918, Private Cruickshank's platoon came under heavy fire east of the Jordan River in Palestine and sought cover in a 'wadi' (valley or dry river). With the men desperately needing assistance, he volunteered to deliver a message to company headquarters.

Victoria Cross Citation, The London Gazette, June 21, 1916 "The platoon to which Private Cruickshank belonged came under very heavy rifle and machine gun fire at short range and was led down a steep bank into a wadi, most of the men being hit before they reached the bottom. Immediately after reaching the bottom of the wadi the officer in command was shot dead, and the sergeant who then took over command sent a runner back to Company Headquarters asking for support, but was mortally wounded almost immediately after; the corporal having in the meantime been killed, the only remaining N.C.O. (a Lance Corporal), believing the first messenger to have been killed, called for a volunteer to take a second message back.

Private Cruickshank immediately responded and rushed up the slope, but was hit and rolled back into the wadi bottom. He again rose and rushed up the slope, but, being again wounded, rolled back into the wadi. After his wounds had been dressed he rushed a third time up the slope and again fell badly wounded. Being now unable to stand he rolled himself back amid a hail of bullets. His wounds were now of such a nature as to preclude him making any further attempt and he lay all day in a dangerous position, being sniped at and again wounded where he lay. He displayed the utmost valour and endurance, and was cheerful and uncomplaining throughout".

At a hospital in Egypt it was discovered that Cruickshank had eight different wounds; three explosive bullets in his left leg, one in his left wrist, one in his left arm below the muscle, one in his right arm, one bullet in his right leg and another in his right thigh.

Following the action he was evacuated back to England where he recovered from his wounds, and was feted as a hero. He received his VC from King George V in the Ballroom at Buckingham Palace on 24th

October 1918, his mother and fiancée attending. He was presented with a Gold Watch, £50 cash and £200 War Bonds by Liptons and £100 War Bonds by Lever Bros.

Following the First World War he married Gwendoline Mansell of Bush Hill Park, London and moved to Southend. He had re-joined Lever Brothers, and worked for them for the next 34 years, involved with the sales of margarine. In Southend and Essex he became very involved with the British Legion, serving on several committees and acted as Chairman.

In the mid 1930s work took him and Gwendoline to Glen Parva, Leicester, where they settled for the remainder of their lives. When the Second World War was declared Cruickshank volunteered for the Home Guard and he achieved the rank of Major.

Following the war, he then served for many years on various local organisations, particularly the Glen Parva Parish Council where he served as their Chairman for 14 years, retiring only shortly before his death. He was also an active attendee at Regimental reunions, and kept close ties with former comrades. His wife, Gwendoline, survived until the age of 103. They had no children.

Cruickshank died at home, 13 Cork Lane, Glen Hills, Blaby on 30th August 1961 aged 73. He was cremated at Gilroes Crematorium, Leicester and his ashes were interred at Glen Parva Parish Church, his name was inscribed in the Book of Remembrance.

On 1st October 1961 at the Drill Hall, Buckingham Gate London his wife Gwendoline Cruickshank, presented his VC and medals to the London Scottish, where it is now held in the Regimental Museum, 95 Horseferry Road, London, UK.

In 2006, the 150th Anniversary of the Victoria Cross, Bancroft's School, unveiled plaques to both his memory and that of Lieutenant Colonel Newman VC.

Medal entitlement of Robert Edward Cruickshank, The London Regiment (London Scottish):

Victoria Cross

British War Medal (1914-20)

Victory Medal (1914-19)

Defence Medal (1939-45)

War Medal (1939-45)

King George VI Coronation Medal (1937)

Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal (1953).

In November 2013 Premier Greg Selinger of Manitoba Province, Canada announced that a lake in Manitoba Province was now to be named Cruickshank Lake in his honour.

Robert Edward Cruickshank was initiated into the Order in the Ye Mitre Lodge, Blaby, Leicestershire, he was also a member of the Ancient Order of Druids.

THOMAS DRESSER

Tom Dresser's Grandfather, also called Tom Dresser was born in Whenby in 1825. He was a local farmer having 506 acres, employing 6 men and 3 boys.

Tom's father, Thomas was also born in Whenby in 1863. He was a groom by occupation, living in Little Langton, North Yorkshire. His Mother Clara (nee Ward) was a farmers daughter. Tom Dresser V.C. was born at Lawnd House Farm, Huby, near Easingwold on 9th April 1891. This is listed on his birth certificate, copy at Beck Isle Museum.

The family moved around a lot, he also had a sister born in Pontefract in 1887. Sometime between 1902 and 1917 they moved to Middlesbrough. His parents Thomas and Clara (nee Ward) were originally farmers at Westgate, Pickering, who sold up and purchased a news agent business in Middlesborough. He was educated at St. John's and Hugh Bell High School in Middlesbrough and got his first job at Dorman Long's Dock Street Foundry.

Prior to joining the Colours, Private Dresser displayed considerable ability as an artist. He was a member of the Cleveland Sketching Club and had contributed sketches to the "Sports Gazette".

On 8th February 1916 aged 22, he enlisted into the 6th Yorkshires, then transferred to the 5th Yorkshires. After 13 weeks at Rugeley training camp he sailed for France and arrived on the Somme with the 7th Yorkshires in early September 1916.

Private Tom Dresser won his VC near Roeux on 12th May 1917. It was gazetted on 27th June 1917 in the following manner: "On 12th May 1917 near Roeux, France, Private Dresser, in spite of having been twice wounded on the way and suffering great pain, succeeded in conveying an important message from battalion headquarters to the front line trenches, which he eventually reached in an exhausted condition. His fearlessness and determination to deliver this message at all costs proved of the greatest value to his battalion at a critical period".

The following is an extraordinary story of First World War hero Tom Dresser, who ran a newsagents on Marton Road, and kept his VC in a tobacco tin behind the counter.

During the First World War, one of Teesside's VC heroes was Tom Dresser, from Middlesbrough. People who knew Tom always said how modest and unassuming he was. But this was no ordinary soldier. Mike Morgan tells Tom's extraordinary story.

The dramatic incident which won Tom Dresser the VC was on the morning of 12th May, 1917 during the fierce Battle of Arras, shortly after 7th Yorkshire's had captured Cupid trench near Roeux.

It's miraculous that this Private, Tom Dresser, shot several times by enemy marksmen, survived at all.

An attack had stalled and Dresser played a key role in its eventual success.

The element of surprise had been lost because of two observers, one in a German balloon and the other in an enemy aeroplane which flew low over the British position in the bright dawn just after the attack, as a result, Tom's Battalion had suffered heavy casualties from enemy machine gun fire on its left flank during the attack across No Man's Land.

'D' Company were attempting to consolidate before advancing north up Cupid trench using hand thrown Mills bombs. Ammunition was running low, so Captain Groom, the Company Commander, asked for a volunteer to go back to Battalion headquarters to get more bombs.

Communications had broken down and he was reduced to using one exhausted soldier, risking sniper fire and flogging across No Man's Land to deliver a piece of paper.

The Captain hastily wrote a message and gave it to Private Tom Dresser who saluted, walked down the trench, clambered up the parapet and ran back across the open ground.

Tom explained in a 1975 taped interview his near suicidal task: "To get to the HQ, you had to go over the top, then down another trench and then into a side trench. Once there, I went into where the officers were and they said Take this important message with these two men and go back to where you came from".

His Battalion Commanding Officer had detailed two men, loaded with Mills bombs, to accompany Tom. The message was to order Captain Groom to hold on to the position, as reinforcements were being sent across to support the attack.

Tom said: "We hadn't got far, when the Germans opened up all his guns on this one trench. It was totally demolished, but we escaped by being in a side trench. We were then in No Man's Land under fire. Then I began running straight for where the German line joined our line".

As they approached, they could see the battle continuing with bombs being thrown by both sides. Tom added: "About 50 yards from where we wanted to be, I was shot through the right shoulder. We all dropped into a shell hole and I slipped off my coat and bound up the wound with a field dressing. Then it struck me about the message. It was in my coat pocket, so I got it out and tied it to my identity disc hanging around my neck".

With his wound dressed, Tom set off once more for the front line trench. The three men picked their way across the broken ground, with the noise of shells whining and exploding around them. Then German snipers and machine gunners saw them and opened fire. Undeterred, Tom crawled forward to where he could see his Company fighting and throwing bombs.

As he neared the trench, he was hit another glancing blow by a bullet to the chin and was knocked over once more. Tom said: "But I followed right to where the German lines joined ours. I sent the two bombers on with the bombs and they got through as the trench was clear".

Here Lieutenant Hill saw Tom half running and half crawling towards the trench. He then fell injured again. For a while nothing could be seen but clouds of dust raised by bullets close to the spot where Tom fell. After a few minutes, Tom doubled forward another 40 yards and then fell again. He then started crawling forward again and got to his feet, half staggered and appeared to be hit again and fell in a heap. Again, he rose and with a last effort threw himself over the parapet. Too weak to speak, he collapsed in the trench and pointed at the message hanging around his neck. Someone took it and eventually it reached Company Headquarters and was given to Captain Groom.

The last thing Tom remembered, before he blacked out, was Sergeant Major Elliot giving him a drink from his water bottle.

Tom always joked afterwards that he knew he had done well as Sergeant Majors seldom performed such acts of kindness for mere Private soldiers!

Reinforcements arrived and 7th Yorkshire's (Green Howards) were able to establish a post at the junction of Cupid and Curly trenches that evening.

Tom was later evacuated to Wrexham hospital to recover from his wounds, having no idea he had been awarded the VC until a nurse brought him the Daily Mail for Saturday June 30th, with his photo on the back page.

On 21st July 1917, his 25th Birthday, with his right arm in a sling, he was presented with the VC on the forecourt of Buckingham Palace by King George V.

When he eventually returned to Middlesbrough on 17th September 1917; Dresser received a hero's welcome with the town mayor and a huge crowd awaiting his arrival.

Once he got off the train, Dresser had to meet and greet with the civic officials before he had the chance to embrace his mother.

Dresser joined the mayor in a procession to the Town Hall where he appeared on the steps to face an ovation from several thousand people. The evening ended on a high with a 'Three Cheers!' for Dresser and his parents.

When he came out of hospital he was posted to the 74th Machine Gun Corps with a new number 138867 until he was demobilised on 27th April 1919.

Private Tom Dresser was the first native of Middlesborough to be awarded the Victoria Cross, the townspeople presented him with 100 Guineas and a gold watch and chain, he was also presented with a silver watch and chain by the committee of the Hull Soldiers Club. On 13th May 1944 he received the freedom of Middlesborough.

He returned to work at Dorman Long's Steel Works until he took over his father's news agency at 65 Marton Road, Middlesbrough. He lived above the shop with his wife, Theresa (nee Landers), whom he had married in 1924. They had four sons before Britain was again at war

with Germany in 1939. His wife Theresa died on 27th December 1965 aged 62.

During World War Two, he served with 'G' Company, 8th North Riding (Middlesbrough) Battalion, Home Guard. He retired in June 1979 and moved to 63 Errol Street, Middlesborough.

He died peacefully at home on Good Friday, 9th April, 1982, three days after his 90th birthday and was buried in Thorntree Cemetery, Middlesbrough. His VC and medals are on loan from his son, Tom, and are displayed in the Green Howards Regimental Museum in Richmond.

Tom Dresser's Medal entitlement:

Victoria Cross

British War Medal (1914-20)

Victory Medal (1914-19)

King George VI Coronation Medal (1937)

Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal (1953)

Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee Medal (1977).

Tom Dresser was initiated into the Order on 8th December 1920 in the Duke of Wellington Lodge No.81, Middlesborough.

EDWARD FOSTER

Edward Foster was born in Tooting Grove, Streatham, London, on 4th February 1886 he was a South Londoner, born and bred. Sometime in his earlier years he grew to just over six feet tall and weighed twenty odd stone, this earned him the nickname of 'Tiny'. After a rudimentary local education at Tooting Graveny School, the local elementary school. He left school at age 14 and was employed as a dustman by Wandsworth Borough Council. Following the outbreak of the Great War he responded to the call and volunteered for the 13th Service Battalion, The East Surrey Regiment composed almost entirely of local men. The Battalion soon became known as the 'Wandsworth Regulars', and 'Tiny' Foster, quickly became a familiar and, no doubt respected, member of the battalion. After training in Southern England, the 13th East Surreys arrived in France on 3rd June 1916, and went into the trenches opposite Lens, north of Albert. Later, the battalion moved to the Somme Valley and was in the front line near Bouchavesnes, when the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line commenced in the Spring of 1917.

Foster was 31 years old, and a corporal in the 13th Battalion, The East Surrey Regiment when on 24th April 1917, during the capture of

Villers Plouich, in front of the Hindenburg Line, 'Tiny' won his Victoria Cross. It was gazetted in the London Gazette on 27th June 1917, his Citation reads:- "For most conspicuous bravery and initiative. During an attack the advance was held up in a portion of a village by two enemy machine guns which were entrenched and strongly covered by wire entanglements. Corporal Foster, who was in charge of two Lewis guns, succeeded in entering the trench and engaging the enemy guns. One of the Lewis guns was lost, but Corporal Foster with reckless courage, rushed forward and bombed the enemy, thereby recovering the gun. Then getting his two guns into action, he killed the enemy gun team and captured their guns, thereby enabling the advance to continue successfully".

The following is the account printed in the Army Orders issued by General Sir H. S. Rawlinson, Bart., K.C.B., K.C.V.O., Commanding Fourth Army, July 24th 1917:- His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of the Victoria Cross to No. 13290 Corporal Edward Foster, East Surrey Regt. For most conspicuous bravery and initiative.

His gallantry was also recognised by the French who awarded him the Medaille Militaire. On 21st July, he was decorated in the forecourt at Buckingham Palace by King George V. Owing to the King's relative lack of height most soldiers appear to be taller than he; however 'Tiny' Foster towers over his Sovereign in the published pictures of the two men.

'Tiny's' battalion went on to see a good deal more fighting and was later heavily engaged in the Battle of Cambrai, where it was involved in the action at Bourlon Village. In 1918, the 'Wandsworth Regulars' suffered devastating losses in the Battle of Lys and were surrounded at Fleurbaix.

Fosters medal entitlement are:

Victoria Cross

British War Medal (1914-20)

Victory Medal (1914-19)

King George VI Coronation Medal (1937)

Medaille Militaire (France)

When asked about his Victoria Cross by a Daily Express newshound in 1937, 'Tiny' Foster, ex-corporal of the 13th East Surreys, exclaimed 'My VC. I want to forget it. But it did me a bit of good all the same. I was made a dustman before the war and the VC made me an Inspector, so I'm glad I got it.' Ever contented with his lot in life, the big man continued, 'I'm quite happy in my job, with bit o'gardening, bit o'pictures and bit o'football'.

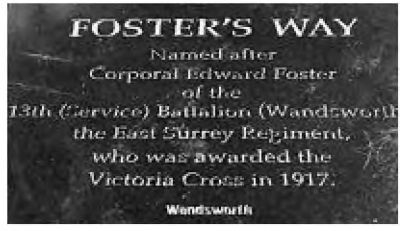
After the war, 'Tiny' was elevated by a grateful Council to the post of Dusting Inspector, in which capacity he continued working for twenty six years, he became a familiar figure on his rounds of Wandsworth, Putney and Roehampton.

On Armistice Day 1920, he was one of the VC's present at the burial of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey. Over the years he attended various reunions and other events, including the VC Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in 1920, the opening of Southfields Park (later King George's Park) on 8 July 1923, and the VC Dinner at the House of Lords in 1929. It is interesting to note that as an active member of the British Legion, he was one of the three VC's who turned out to support the County Rally of the Legion at Guildford in 1932.

Corporal Foster about to be addressed by King George V

Foster lived until the end of the Second World War at 92 Fountain Road near Tooting Broadway. Modest and unassuming, Edward 'Tiny' Foster, 'a big man with a big heart' died suddenly from Bronchial Pneumonia on 22nd January 1946 a few days short of his 60th birthday in St James's Hospital, Tooting, London. Fosters coffin was draped with a Union Jack and was taken to the Streatham Cemetery Chapel, where the service was conducted. He was buried at Streatham Cemetery, Garratt Lane, Tooting, Section F15, Grave 357 on 5th February 1946. Many local dignitaries attended the funeral, together with his immediate family.

He was married to Alice Jane who, 26 years later, died on 11th October 1972 aged 88, she is buried with her husband in the same grave, their son Dennis was later to become a Petty Officer in the Royal Navy.



On 8th May 1995 a new path alongside the river Wandle in King George's Park, Wandsworth, was named Foster's Way by the Mayor of Wandsworth Beryl Jeffrey, in honour of the former council employee.

In June 1997, at a special ceremony, a new headstone to replace the one put in place fifty years before, was unveiled in honour of Corporal Edward Foster VC. The grave had previously had a freestanding kerb around it and permission had been granted to erect a permanent headstone. However, this had never been carried out and the cemetery authorities indicated that they would be happy to accept a copy of the standard Commonwealth War Graves Commission stone. The site was in danger of being 'tidied up' if the kerb stones were not removed. Obviously this spurred the Foster family and friends into action as the necessary funds for the new stone were duly collected.

At the ceremony a guard of honour was supplied by a company of the Regiment that is a successor of the 13th East Surreys, namely A (Anzio) Company of the 5th Battalion, The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment. Once again, Councillor Jeffrey laid a wreath and addresses were given including one by Dennis Foster. Later a reception was held for the families of men who had formerly in the 13th East Surreys. Each year the junior NCOs of the current Battalion hold a Villiers-Plouich dinner to commemorate Foster winning the VC.

Memorials to Edward Foster include:- Headstone, Streatham Cemetery, Garratt Lane, Tooting, London, England; Foster's Way, King George's Park, off Garratt Lane, Wandsworth, South London; Named on Victoria Cross & George Cross Memorial, Town Hall, Wandsworth, South

London; Named on Oak Panel, All Saints Church, Kingston upon Thames, South West London.

His Victoria Cross and other medals were sold by Sothebys on 30th June 1988 for £12,100.

Edward Foster was initiated in the Sir M. Wardhough Lodge, No. 593, his initiation is recorded in the Winter 1919 R.A.O.B. Quarterly Journal in the following manner:- On August 20th this Lodge was greatly honoured, by having the opportunity of initiating as a brother of the Order, Corporal Edward Foster, V.C., M.M., East Surrey Regiment who has been staying in Hanley with relatives.

Bro. Corporal Foster is a fine specimen of manhood, and one can readily imagine the zest with which he would carry out the splendid action which gained him the Victoria Cross and the French Médaille Militaire.

After the initiation the members assembled showed their very hearty appreciation of his gallant deed, and in response to many eulogies Bro. Foster made a very modest (though typical soldier's) reply.

During his stay he visited several Lodges in the district and became affiliated to each one. I am quite sure that Bro. Foster will make as good a Buff as a soldier, I hope some of the London members will look him up and get him into harness; his home is at 92 Fountain Road, Tooting.

WILLIAM GOSLING

William Gosling was born 15th August 1892 in Wanborough, a village near Swindon, Wiltshire, England. However he was to spend most of his life in the small town of Wroughton, a few miles to the South West of his birth place.

He was the son of Albert and Elizabeth Gosling his mother being widowed by 1911. After a basic education in local schools, William worked for a short time on the farm that his mother ran in Swindon Road, Wroughton. Like many of his generation, at the age of 18 he emigrated and left England as a young man and found work in Canada where he remained, staying with an Aunt and Uncle in Winnipeg. He worked as a grain silo worker, a fireman on the Canadian Pacific Railway, and a lumberjack. He returned to England at the outbreak of the First World War, having given up a good job and paid for his return ticket. His reason for returning to England was that 'he was eager to be in the thick of it'.

On his return home in December 1914, he enlisted in the 3rd Wessex Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery, Swindon detachment.

He was soon on his travels again, this time going to France with his unit in May 1915. From that time till the end of the war, he was in the thick of the fighting. His experiences including the early operations

around Arras, the first battle of Vimy Ridge, the Somme offensive, with the brilliant engagement at High Wood, the Ancre Offensive and the fighting at Beaumont Hamal and Coureolette. It was in the second battle of Vimy Ridge on 5th April 1915 that he gained his Victoria Cross when he was serving in a trench mortar battery attached to the 51st (Highland) Division near Arras. Acting as Battery Sergeant, he was in charge of a heavy trench mortar. When a faulty cartridge fell only 10 yards from the mortar Sergeant Gosling leapt out of his trench and lifted the nose of the bomb, which had already sunk into the ground. He quickly unscrewed the fuse and threw it to the ground, where it exploded. This prompt action saved the lives of the detachment.

His Citation reads:- "For most conspicuous bravery when in charge of a heavy trench mortar. Owing to a faulty cartridge, the bomb, after discharge, fell 10 yards from the Mortar. Sergeant Gosling sprang out, lifted the nose of the bomb which had sunk into the ground, unscrewed the fuse and threw it on the ground where it immediately exploded. This very gallant action undoubtedly saved the lives of the whole detachment".

He returned to England and was presented with his Victoria Cross by King George V at Buckingham Palace on 21st July 1917. After Gosling's VC was gazetted, a special meeting of Wroughton Parish Council took place in order to discuss appointing a committee to arrange a welcome home and presentation.

On his return home that night he was accorded a most enthusiastic reception, he was conveyed through the village and afterwards carried shoulder high to the door of his house. The demonstration was spontaneous and the welcome most sincere. The people of Wroughton gave unmistakeable evidence of the pride they felt in possessing one in their midst who has so boldly won the coveted prize. Gosling was thus presented with a cheque for £130 5s 6d and a silver salver by the Mayor

of Swindon in the Oddfellows Hall. Long before the time announced for the meeting, eight o'clock, the Oddfellows Hall was crowded and hundreds of persons were unable to gain admission.

Prior to the meeting a procession was formed at the Swindon entrance to the village, near the Three Tunns Inn and marched to the Oddfellows Hall headed by the band of the 96th Wiltshire National Reserve Band from Chiseldon Camp under Bandmaster A. E. Bishop.

Mrs. Gosling, mother of the hero, and his brother both occupied a seat in the body of the hall and followed with the closest attention the speeches in which glowing tributes were paid to the brave hero, the band struck up "For he's a jolly good fellow" which was heartily sung and ringing cheers were given. Later in the year he was also presented with an illuminated address.

Sergeant Gosling was discharged from the Army in 1919 with the acting rank of Battery Sergeant Major, he returned home and took a job as a tractor driver in Essex. In 1920 he attended the garden party at Buckingham Palace for holders of the VC. He was also invited to the unveiling of the Cenotaph on 11th November 1920 and the service of the burial of the Unknown Soldier at Westminster Abbey.

While working in Essex he met Martha, his wife to be, and after their marriage were to have two children: a boy and a girl. Gosling was given a tip off from his brother Bert about the tenancy of Wharf Farm in Wroughton; he applied for the tenancy and was successful. He began farming at Summerhouse Farm in 1920, where he remained until his death. His Son was still living in Wroughton up till 1997.

On 28 September 1924 Sergeant Major W. Gosling was a member of the Guard of Honour at the unveiling of the 51st (Highland) Division monument in Newfoundland Memorial Park, Beaumont Hamel by Marshal Foch.

William Gosling was vice-president of the Wroughton branch of the British Legion until 1933 and between the First and Second World Wars he also ran a shop in the town. During the Second World War he served as a Major in the Home Guard; he was also a parish councillor and a Freemason for

the last few years of his life. He died on 12th February 1945 at home as a result of Kidney Disease and very high blood pressure, nearly three months before the Second World War ended. He was fifty two and had been ill for about a year and was confined to bed for the last six weeks of his life. The farm now no longer exists and the land was sold. A home for the elderly now occupies the position that was formerly Gosling's home.

William Gosling is buried in the west side of Wroughton Cemetery which is adjacent to the Parish Church of St. John the Baptist and St. Helen at the top of a hill with spectacular views of Wiltshire. When visited in 1997, the grave had no flowers on it and the lettering had weathered badly. Rather surprisingly, there was no plaque to his memory in the church. Gosling's name is included on a memorial in the Royal Artillery Chapel at Woolwich, South East London.

* * * * *

Rewind back to the past, to the barbed wire strewn trenches of the Western Front in 1917 where Wanborough born Sergeant William Gosling, 24, of the 3rd Wessex Brigade, Royal Field Artillery had become a fully paid up member of The Suicide Club.

These were the guys who lobbed 60 lb shells, "flying pigs", into enemy positions 300 yards from front line British trenches, and took similar unforgiving punishment in return.

Instead of landing where it was supposed to, one British shell on 5th April 1917, flopped out of its Stokes Mortar into a pile of mud just 30 feet away. The pig, it was deduced, had a faulty cartridge and could blow up any minute, obliterating The Suicide Club. Gosling's pal Charles Fowler in 1964 recalled Bill's exact words to a fellow sergeant. "Come on, let's toss for it". Bill lost and so "coolly and calmly" he ventured over the top into no man's land. Tentatively lifting the nose of the half sunken bomb, he unscrewed the fuse and chucked it as far as possible, whereupon it instantly exploded.

According to another article by Charles Fowler, published in 1964, with the heading 'A VC is won on the toss of a coin', Fowler claimed to remember it as if it had happened the day before: "It was then that I learned that the heroism for which men win medals is not always the act of a split second impulse which galvanises the spirit and the body into some frenzy of daring.

There were six of us, forming what the men called 'The Suicide Club'. Our job in that particular sector of the front line near Arras was to set up our heavy mortar in front of our trench some ten yards out into 'no man's land'. Now and then Jerry fired off a brilliant white flare or two. Then you ducked, for at the slightest hint of movement Jerry would open up with heavy machine guns, and Jerry was only 300 yards away.

Our task was to remind him with our sixty pound 'Flying Pigs' from our mortar that we were uncomfortably close too. But it was fair game for both sides. The flash of our mortar in the night pinpointed our firing position. That's how we collected our tag 'The Suicide Club'.

That night we had fired off four 'pigs'. Tip 'em from the shoulder and scatter that was the drill. Boom! And off went 60lb of best bacon for Fritz.

Then it happened, the fifth 'pig' was faulty. It landed no more than ten yards from where we had flung ourselves down. We waited to be blasted by our own hand, but the shell just stuck there, big, black, menacing in the churned up mud. We were saved, for the moment, by a faulty fuse. But there could be no more firing from our position while the shell sat there, liable to go up in a blinding blast at the smallest vibration. So we had to dismantle the gun, camouflage it and get it back to the trench.

Tomorrow would be another night. And that was to be when Sergeant Bill Gosling, 3rd Wessex Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, Territorial Force, came up with his 'ammo' carrying lads. 'No use bringing that up said my sergeant as they arrived. 'We've dropped a "short" there'. 'Then you'll have to do something about it mate answered Sergeant Gosling. 'Not me mate said my sergeant. 'It can stay there as far as I'm concerned. And then, as if it were just a matter of who should stand the drinks at the local back in Blighty, I remember Gosling's words: 'Come on, let's toss for it'. He tossed the coin. And he lost. Coolly and calmly Gosling went over the top. Gone, into the night. Into the no man's land of mud and the dead. And that night, only yards from where the rest of us huddled, Sergeant Gosling won his dice with death.

In the meantime an officer appeared, wanting to know why the mortar hadn't been firing any rounds, and when Gosling's face reappeared from the no man's land side of the parapet, the officer demanded, rather pompously, "Where have YOU been?" 'Sir!' said Gosling, he gave an account of himself".

Medal entitlement of Major William Gosling, 3rd Wessex Brigade, Royal Field Artillery:-

Victoria Cross

British War Medal (1914-20)

Victory Medal (1914-19)

King George VI Coronation Medal (1937).

His medals are not publicly held, it is believed the Gosling family hold them.

William Gosling was initiated into the Royal Great Western Lodge 1550 on 3rd November 1919, unfortunately the Lodge closed on 30th June 1976.

RUPERT PRICE HALLOWES

Rupert Price Hallowes was born on 5th May 1881 at Checkley House, Station Road, Redhill, Surrey, the youngest son of Doctor Frederic Blackburn Hallowes FRCS and Mary Ann Taylor, daughter of the Reverend W. Hutchinson, the rector of Checkly, Staffordshire. Hallowes was educated at Conyngham House School, Ramsgate, and at Haileybury College. He was a keen shot and took part in the Ashburton Shield at Bisley in 1896 and 1897, representing his College. Before the war he was an Instructor for the Boy Scouts at St Peter's, Port Talbot Troop, was Assistant Secretary for the Boy Scouts Association for many years and later worked for Harold Flower of Gracechurch Street in the City of London.

In 1900 Hallowes joined the 20th Middlesex (Artists) Volunteer Rifle Corps. He was commissioned in this unit, re-named the 28th (County of London) Battalion The London Regiment (Artists Rifles) in 1908. He received his commission on 26th October 1909.

Hallowes resigned his commission in April the following year when he moved to Wales to work for Robert Byass and Co. He was appointed assistant manager of the Mansel Tinplate Works in Aberavon, Port Talbot, where his elder brother William Brabazon Hallowes was the manager.

Before the war he was an Instructor for the Boy Scouts at St Peter's, Port Talbot Troop.

As well as a Buffalo, he was a Freemason, and Assistant Secretary of the St Peter's Troop of the Boy Scouts Association in Port Talbot, he is one of 32 Scouting related persons to win the Victoria Cross. Rupert lived with his brother William and his family, and his two sisters at Craigafon in the Dan-y-Ffynnon area of the town. He was a Sidesman (A sidesperson, archaically known as a sidesman or usher, in the Anglican Church is responsible for greeting members of the congregation, overseeing seating arrangements in church, and for taking the collection), and Secretary of the Parish's Men's Society.

He re-joined the Artists Rifles in August 1914 and, by the end of September, had been promoted in quick succession Corporal, Lance Sergeant and Sergeant. Hallowes arrived in France on 29th December 1914, and in February 1915 he reverted to the rank of private at his own request. This was probably so that he could be commissioned, as the Army was then selecting suitable candidates from the Artists Rifles to replace officer losses in other units.

On 5th April 1915, following training at the Cadet School at Blendecques, St Omer, he was commissioned and joined 4th Battalion The Duke of Cambridge's Own (Middlesex Regiment) a week later.

The 4th Battalion, Middlesex Regiment (8th Brigade, 3rd Division) was involved in one of the subsidiary operations that took place simultaneously with the opening of the Battle of Loos on 25th September. The battalion was moved forward into Sanctuary Wood on 18th September. The plan was for the 8th Brigade to attack the German positions north of Sanctuary Wood from the Ypres-Menin road at a point opposite 'Stirling Castle' a single company of the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers (9th Brigade) was to attack on their right to straighten their part of the line, and two battalions from the 7th Brigade (3rd Division) were to attack the area around Hooge Chateau these attacks were an extension of the 14th Division's attack on Bellewaarde Farm. The frontage of attack allotted to 8th Brigade was 1,500 yards, and the assault was to be made by the 2nd Royal Scots and the 1st and 4th Gordon Highlanders, with the 2nd Suffolks and 4th Middlesex being held in reserve.

The 8th Brigade moved into the trenches in preparation for the assault on the night of 23rd September. Shortages of material caused serious problems, especially the lack of wire cutters. The British bombardment began at 03.30 hours, and was followed at 04.19 hours by the exploding of two mines under the German trenches opposite the 2nd Royal Scots. Two further mines were fired thirty seconds later in the same location. At 04.20 hours the attacking troops went forward. The 4th Middlesex War Diary states that at about 10.30 hours they were informed 'that the

front line was giving way, partly on account of artillery fire and partly from lack of bombs'. The battalion bombers were in the process of assisting in the detonation of the brigade's supply of bombs when orders came to send a party of bombers, with two supporting platoons, to bomb up the communication trenches and relieve the 4th Gordon Highlanders who had been driven out of their earlier gains at Fort 13 in the German lines. Throughout the day successive companies of the 4th Middlesex were sent forward to reinforce or relieve other regiments. All night long the Middlesex men were engaged in repairing and rebuilding trenches in order to maintain a continuous and defensible position just north of Sanctuary Wood.

On 19th-20th July 1915, during the Battle of Hooge, his unit was serving with the 3rd Division when he was awarded the Military Cross (MC): 'For conspicuous gallantry, when owing to shortage of bombs the enemy was advancing down the communication trench. He got out of his trench, exposed himself fearlessly, and firing at the enemy in the open, hitting several. He also assisted in constructing a block, dug out a communication trench under heavy shell fire, and rebuilt a parapet that had been blown in. Throughout the night he assisted in keeping touch and supplying bombs'. *(The London Gazette, 6 September 1915).*

Failure at Loos

On 25th September 1915 the Allies launched a new joint attack on the Western Front. The French went on the offensive in Champagne and Artois, while the British fought at Loos. It was here that they used chlorine gas against the Germans for the first time.

By the end of the first day, despite heavy casualties resulting from uncut wire, the British troops had succeeded in breaking into the enemy positions near Loos and Hulluch. Supply and communications problems, along with the late arrival of reinforcements, meant that the breakthrough could not then be exploited. The attacks ground to a halt and the Germans eventually pushed the British back to their starting points.

At the same time, the British 3rd Division had attacked near Hooge and Bellewaarde Lake. The aim was to divert enemy attention away from the Loos offensive to the south, and draw off any reserves that could be sent there. It was also intended to recover ground lost around Hooge in July that year.

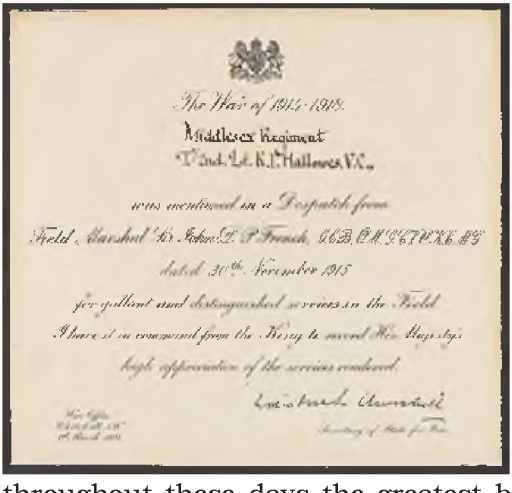
The operation failed to achieve either of its aims. Like their comrades at Loos, most of 3rd Division's soldiers were held up by uncut wire and

intact defences. The attack soon degenerated into several days of attritional fighting.

On the night of 26th/27th September Second Lieutenant Hallowes noticed two wounded men lying out in the open. Regardless of the danger he left the trench and, despite coming under fierce rifle fire, coolly superintended the removal of the two wounded Royal Scots men to a place of safely. He had just returned to the trenches when the Germans began to shell the area heavily; it was one of four severe bombardments the 4th Middlesex were to endure in the six days before 1st October. The enemy had gauged the range very accurately and Hallowes, fearing that some of his men might falter, climbed onto the parapet to shout encouragement and put fresh heart into them. He did this on more than one occasion, as Private W. Corner of B Company reported later, saying: 'Lieutenant Hallowes seemed to be everywhere, giving encouragement'. More than once Hallowes also made a daring reconnaissance of the German positions, and when his men's supply of bombs was running short he made his way back under very heavy shell fire and brought up a fresh supply.

For six days Lieutenant Hallowes set a magnificent example to his men, showing an almost total disregard of danger, but on 1st October he was mortally wounded. The Battalion War Diary ends its entry for this period with: The conduct of Lieutenant R. P. Hallowes was an example to all. He showed great coolness and resolution on this and previous occasions. When mortally wounded he still went on encouraging his men, his last remark being, "Men, we can only die once, if we have to die let us die like men, like diehards" His death was the more tragic for the fact that he did not die from enemy action but was killed

accidentally by a bomb dropped in the trench by one of a carrying party of another regiment. He died from shrapnel wounds to the head and leg on 30th September 1915, aged 34, and was buried just behind the front line near Sanctuary Wood. His remains were later re-interred at the Bedford House Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery near Zillebeke, Ypres. Hallowes was awarded the VC posthumously, for deeds carried out on the 25th September. He is also Mentioned in Dispatches dated 30th November 1915, which is quite strange as it is dated one month after his death.



The War of 1914-1918.

Middlesex Regiment

2nd Lieut. K.P. Hallowes V.C.

was mentioned in a Despatch from

Field Marshal Sir John D.P. French, G.C.B. O.M. G.C.V.O. &c

dated 30th November 1915

for gallant and distinguished services in the Field

I have it in command from the King to record His Majesty's

high appreciation of the services rendered.

Lieut. Col. Secretary of State for War

Hallowes won his Victoria Cross medal for actions at Sanctuary Wood in the Ypres Salient, Hooge, Belgium, between 25th-30th September 1915. His citation from The London Gazette (issue 29371 of 16 November 1915) reads: "For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty during the fighting at Hooge between 25th September and 1st October, 1915. Second Lieutenant Hallowes displayed throughout these days the greatest bravery and untiring energy, and set a magnificent example to his men during four heavy and prolonged bombardments. On more than one occasion he climbed up on the parapet, utterly regardless of danger, in order to put fresh heart into his men. He made daring reconnaissance's of the German positions in our lines. When the supply of bombs was running short he went back under very heavy shell fire and brought up a fresh supply. Even after he was mortally wounded he continued to cheer

those around him and to inspire them with fresh courage".

Hallowes' mother and brother received the VC from King George V at Buckingham Palace on 29th November 1916. He is commemorated in Port Talbot by a memorial window at St Theodore's Church and a dedication on the gates of the Talbot Memorial Park.

Rupert Hallowes is also commemorated on the family grave in plot 84 at Brookwood Cemetery, Glades House, Cemetery Pales, Brookwood, Woking.

Brookwood Cemetery, also known as the London Necropolis, is a burial ground in Brookwood, Surrey, England. It is the largest cemetery in the United Kingdom and one of the largest in Europe.

A special commemorative paving stone to honour Redhill born First World War hero Second Lieutenant Rupert Price Hallowes VC was unveiled in Memorial Park on Friday 25th September 2015.

The ceremony marks the centenary of the battle for which he was awarded the prestigious Victoria Cross medal, the highest military decoration awarded for valour in the face of the enemy, for his heroic actions during World War 1.

Before the memorial stone was unveiled, a service of commemoration was held at 12 noon in Memorial Park. The ceremony was attended by the Mayor of Reigate & Banstead, Councillor Mrs. Joan Spiers who was

joined by senior members of the Armed Forces, the Royal British Legion, civic guests and pupils from The Warwick and St Joseph's schools. Members of 2nd Lieutenant Hallowes surviving family were invited to attend.

The Mayor said about the ceremony: "Our Borough is proud to commemorate 2nd Lieutenant Hallowes heroic actions and remember all those who served during the First World War, especially those who

made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom. It is important that such acts of courage and bravery are not forgotten by following generations and are acknowledged by the communities that these soldiers were fighting for. It is fitting that the stone is laid in Memorial Park as the park was created with funds raised by the borough's residents after World War1 to commemorate the fallen".

The VC memorial stone is part of a Government campaign that will see the stones laid in the birth places of First World War VC holders, to provide a lasting legacy to these local heroes and to give residents and future generations a greater understanding of their towns' role in the First World War.

Memorial Park was also dedicated a Centenary Field at the same event. The national scheme was set up to keep green spaces in perpetuity to honour the memory of the millions of people who have lost their lives in war or conflict.

Hallowes medals including his Military Cross are held in the National Army Museum, Royal Hospital Road, Chelsea, London, England.

Not much is known of Bro. Rupert Price Hallowes as a Buffalo but he is mentioned in old journals and he had a lodge named after him in the Port Talbot Province.

FREDERICK WILLIAM HOLMES

Frederick William Holmes was born at 23 Abbey Street in Bermondsey on 27th September 1889, he was the son of T. G. Holmes and one of seven siblings, he was baptised at the nearby St. Mary Magdelen Church.

After completing his education at Bermondsey London Board School he joined the British Army in 1907 aged 18. He served for seven years and was then placed on the reserve, but two weeks later was called up for active service. Holmes was 24 years old, and a Lance Corporal in the 2nd Battalion, The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry on the outbreak of World War Two in August 1914.

He was married in Dublin in May 1914 and had two children - Son Victor Clarance Holmes who was born in January 1915 and Daughter Leola Holmes. Later it would appear that the family consisted of 6 children who were born in quite quick succession.

Soon after arriving in France with the British Expeditionary Force, Holmes was involved in fighting at Le Cateau. After extremely hazardous fighting in the morning and afternoon of the 26th August 1914 in France, the order to retire was given by General Smith-Dorien. Not all the units received this order but A Company did. To carry out the retirement, however, was a very dangerous business as each man had to run across

the zone of land to safety under close fire of the enemy. When it came for Holmes' turn to escape, he noticed Bugler Norman Woodcock lying close to the path with both of his legs broken at the knees. Without considering his own safety, Holmes picked up the injured Woodcock and giving him a fireman's lift made off as quickly as he could.

Holmes carried the 12 stone man on his back until he finally came across some stretcher bearers in a small village about two miles from the trenches and handed over Woodcock to them.

Frederick Holmes then ran back towards his previous lines, dodging German shells the whole time. When he arrived back he came across a scene of carnage where an unattended British 18 pounder gun with six horses was standing idle, surrounded by dead and dying artillerymen. However, on seeing him one of the wounded men, a young Trumpeter, asked Holmes whether he could ride a horse as the gun had to be got away and all the drivers were dead. Holmes placed the young Trumpeter on one of the horses and mounted the leading horse himself. He then desperately urged his horses on to the gallop and in his own words "It is impossible to describe exactly what took place; all that I can picture is flying along the roads and making terrible patterns when turning corners, bumping over hedges and ditches, and hearing the noise the gun made every time it flopped down on to the road from the hedge sides. I have no idea how long this was after we had started, but it was nearly dark when I looked back. Unfortunately the man fell off and was lost in the dark".

After travelling about three miles, Holmes and the gun found themselves finally out of the range of German shelling, and stopped at a stream to allow the horses to drink. By this time Holmes had no idea

where he was and it was not until the following evening that the horses finally brought him into the rearguard of a retiring artillery column. At first an artillery Major was suspicious but after a while Holmes' story was verified and he became an honoured guest of the battery. On the 30th August he was directed to a certain crossroads where he was told that his battalion would soon be passing, which they did, and Holmes met up with some of his old friends once more. After his escapade, Holmes finally re-joined 'A' Company of the 2nd Battalion, King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry

Six days later Holmes' unit reached Coulomniers. The next day, 7th September, they received orders that the retreat was over and that they were now to press forward and advance against the enemy. Holmes recorded that their position was south of the River Aisne for thirteen days, where they were exposed to German artillery. Then on the 28th they finally moved across the river and reached the village of Missy where they were to remain for four days. Here they were not safe either, for there were German snipers just outside the village.

On 2nd October the Battalion re-crossed the Aisne and by a devious route eventually ended up in St. Pol close to Arras on 8th October. The British Expeditionary Force was in the process of transferring to the left of the line. 11 Corps marched to the area of Compiegne where it entrained for Abbeville and from there advanced towards Bethune.

At about 17.45 hours on 14th October the King's Own Light Infantry heard the sounds of rapid firing on the left in the positions of the The King's Own Scottish Borderers. Corporal Holmes was ordered to investigate. He returned quickly having seen a party of Germans charge in their direction. The King's Own Light Infantry Maxims were brought into action quickly which slowed the Germans down and they promptly fell to the ground. The King's Own Light Infantry decided to rush the enemy in a bayonet charge. In the first moments of this scrap Holmes was hit in the left ankle preventing him from walking. He crawled away and after taking a rifle from a dead colleague began to fire in the dark in the direction of the German rifle flashes. After a while he became unconscious.

He was picked up and taken to a dressing station where the doctors wanted to amputate his left leg. But Holmes refused. He was sent back to England to hospital at Weybridge in Surrey and was then taken to

Aldershot where he began to recover from His wounds, although he was unable to walk properly for a long time. It was during this period that he was to receive the French Medaille Militaire by the French Republic for a second and separate act of bravery for taking a Machine Gun to a Platoon of struggling French soldiers.

On 25th November he was brought news of his Victoria Cross which had just been gazetted. He then went to convalesce at Millbank in London where he could be visited by his wife. On 13th January 1915, three months after being wounded, he went to Buckingham Palace to receive his VC from the King.

His Citation reads:- 25th November 1914. Le Cateau, France, 26th August 1914, No 9376 Lance Corporal Frederick Holmes, 2nd Battalion, King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. "Carried a wounded man out of the trenches under heavy fire, and later assisted to drive a gun out of action by taking the place of a driver who had been wounded". Holmes was to become one of the earliest recipients of the Victoria Cross in the First World War.

In January 1915, after receiving his VC medal from the King, he was given a hero's welcome in the streets of Bermondsey with a procession from New Kent Road to Tower Bridge Road, Abbey Street, Jamaica Road, Southwark Park Road, Grange Road and Spa Road. At Bermondsey Town Hall he was given an illuminated address and a purse of gold on behalf of the citizens of Bermondsey. In addition, a sum of money, which had been raised by public subscription, was held on his behalf by the Town Hall for his future use - perhaps to start up a business.

In his acceptance to these presentations, Holmes made a short speech: 'Ladies, gentlemen and comrades. I only did my duty at the best. If Bermondsey is proud of me, I am proud of Bermondsey. He was wearing his new VC and the French Medaille Militaire with its yellow, green edged ribbon.

In the VC files at the Imperial War Museum there is a short note about Holmes' VC written by a Major H.E. Trevor of D Company 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, who wrote in a letter to his wife dated 4th April 1915: I regret recommending the VC as Holmes had been inaccurate in his account and had "caused a nuisance in Bermondsey and others did equal work". It is not entirely clear just what he meant. Maybe Holmes had been a bit of a line shooter and Trevor did not approve of the account of the deed being written up in such a journal as Tit-Bits. We shall never know, nor shall we ever know what the trouble in Bermondsey was.

Holmes was promoted to Sergeant when he transferred to the 1st Garrison Battalion Green Howards and returned to the Western Front in October 1915. In December he was transferred to India and in March

1917 he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant attached to the 9th Worcesters and sent to Mesopotamia, where he had a serious accident in which he fractured his skull. No longer fit enough for active service, Holmes was sent home to England in January 1918. He was promoted to full Lieutenant on 14th September 1918 and was employed in the Infantry Record Office in London from October 1918.

Holmes served in Ireland during the rebellion before being discharged on 20th August 1921. He started his own business in London which unfortunately failed.

Medal entitlement of Lance Corporal Frederick Holmes, 2nd Battalion, King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry:-

Victoria Cross

1914 Star + clasp "5th Aug-22nd Nov 1914"

British War Medal (1914-20)

Victory Medal (1914-19) + Mentioned in Despatches Oakleaf

King George VI Coronation Medal (1937)

Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal (1953)

Medaille Militaire (France).

At a celebration, a century later the Mayor of Southwark unveiled a commemorative paving stone in the street where Holmes was born. The Mayor of Southwark Councillor Sunil Chopra said: "Marking the centenary of the First World War is an important milestone for the whole nation and Southwark will be showing its support in many ways, including by remembering local war heroes in any way we can. "Captain Holmes' story of courage and bravery should never be forgotten and I hope this paving stone honouring him today, will act as a moment of reflection of his sacrifices for all who pass it". The ceremony was attended by representatives of the Army including Colonel Hugh Bodington, chief of staff of London District. Civic orator Michael Cleere read the full citation for Holmes's

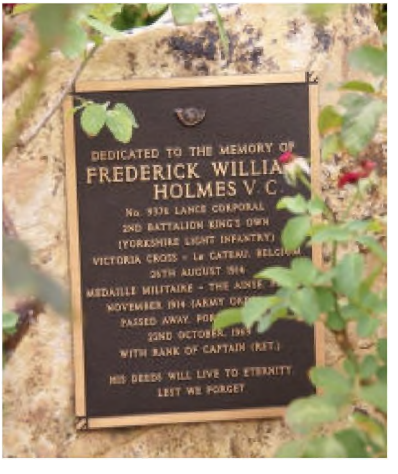
Victoria Cross. The paving stone was blessed by Army chaplain Reverend Kevin Bell. Lance Corporal Johnson Beharry, who was awarded the VC for bravery in Iraq and received the honorary freedom of Southwark in 2011, was also present.

Amy Enever, Holmes's great great granddaughter, said: "It's a family story that we've all grown up with. My grandma has always told us about it. "It's completely overwhelming and to meet the gentlemen who has also received the Victoria Cross Johnson Beharry just makes it so real".

Her mother Tracey Enever said: "It's such an honour to be associated with him and to see everyone else recognising what he did." She said that the family had always been aware of Holmes's humble roots in Bermondsey. "When he came back from the war he and his wife had six children in quite quick succession. They were very very poor and he couldn't find work and they were facing going into the workhouse.

"He sold his Victoria Cross to prevent them going into the workhouse. His Victoria Cross is now with a private collector but the family in Australia have got the replica he had made".

Captain Holmes finally left the army in 1921 and fell on hard times before emigrating with one of his daughters to Port Augusta, Australia, where he died on 22nd October 1969 at the age of 78, one year after his wife. He was cremated at the Stirling District Crematorium, Adelaide.



The London auction house of Morton & Eden sold the Victoria Cross awarded to Lance Corporal Frederick Holmes for a hammer price of £80,000. Holmes' VC was one of the earliest awards of the First World War, and the second to the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, the first being awarded to Major Charles Yate.

The VC, on its own, forms part of the collection of medals formed by the late Dr. Arthur King.

Frederick Holmes' other medals are held privately but in an article in the Howards Gazette 2nd May 1970 we are given to understand that his VC is in the hands of W. J. Dear.

Frederick Holmes was initiated into the Order in the Trinity Lodge 1047 while stationed in Hull.

THOMAS ALFRED JONES

Thomas Alfred Jones was born into humble origins in the Cheshire town of Runcorn on Christmas Day 25th December 1880 to Elizabeth and Edward Jones of 39 Princess Street, Runcorn, Cheshire, United Kingdom. He had basic education in local schools, he left school at 14 and worked as a fitter at the Weston Point Salt Works. He spent his whole life living in the town.

He was affectionally locally known as 'Todger' Jones, a nickname he acquired as a boy and school footballer, he was good at football and a bit tricky with the ball thus he was nicknamed 'Dodger' and because his first name was Tom, this soon became 'Todger'.

"Todger" Jones was regarded as a quiet and unassuming man by those who knew him.

As a young man, he joined the Earl of Chesters Rifles in 1900 and in 1912 he was awarded the Territorial Efficiency Medal.

At the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 he was mobilised with the Territorials in August and was amongst the first Runcornians to transfer to Kitcheners Army. He was the fourth man to be attested at Runcorn.

Jones served in the British army during the Somme offensive, the single greatest loss of British life in the history of the Empire. On September 25th, 1916, the British had captured the French village of Morval and were in the process of building trenches. Jones and the rest of his unit were digging in, still recovering from the battle they had only just finished fighting, when a sniper opened fire on them. Several men were wounded, one of the younger soldiers was shot through the head and killed. This incident led to one of the most remarkable feats of daring ever recorded during the First World War, it was that of Private Thomas Alfred Jones, of Runcorn, an infantryman with the 1st Cheshire Regiment. 'Todger', as he was known, was thirty five and had survived most of his immediate comrades by the time that the Cheshires captured the village of Morval during the dreadful battle of the Somme. Todger, it seems, was one of the many disgruntled soldiers who, in equal measure, cursed their fate and the new influx of young officers drafted from other units and who knew nothing of the traditions of the Cheshires.

When cogitating all this, Todger was hailed by Runner Kenworthy, a young friend of his who had recently come up to the position. 'It's a great day today, Todger,' he said. 'It's my eighteenth birthday.' These were the last words uttered by Runner Kenworthy for in that instance he was struck by a German bullet and fell dead.

Jones waited until his commanding officer wasn't looking, picked up his rifle and sprinted off across the muddy, open ground toward the enemy position. He was in full view of the sniper, who put at least one bullet through Jones' jacket while another passed through his helmet, slid down the back of his shirt and burned him all the way down to the waistband. During his mad dash he stopped and shot the sniper as well as two members of the Kaiser's Elite 32nd Douche Brigade who fired on him despite simultaneously displaying a white flag. Jones remained unharmed on his journey across the field, still completely alone, until he eventually reached the other side. You know, the side with all the German trenches. Full of Germans.

Undeterred, Jones leaped down and, firing from the hip with his bolt action rifle, killed several of the enemy soldiers. When he came to a dugout, he picked up a discarded stick grenade and flung it in. Three German soldiers came tumbling out and surrendered. Jones took one prisoner who could speak English and used him, along with a few more stick grenades, to

get the rest of the Germans to surrender. All told, around 100 (officially 102) Germans came out, unarmed, with their hands in the air and their urine on their pants. One prisoner saw the disadvantage that Jones had and tried to make a run for it. Jones turned and casually shot him dead. Luckily for Jones, a rescue party had come to retrieve his body. They wound up helping him round up his many, many prisoners instead.

For this act of bravery Jones was awarded the Victoria Cross. It was gazetted in the London Gazette on 26th October 1916, his Citation reads:- The Victoria Cross has been conferred upon Private Thomas Alfred Jones (11000), Cheshire Regiment for most conspicuous bravery. He was with his company consolidating the defences in front of a village, and, noticing an enemy sniper at 200 yards distance he went out and, though one bullet went through his helmet and another through his coat, he returned the snipers fire and killed him. He then saw two more of the enemy firing at him, although displaying the white flag, both of these he also shot. On reaching the enemy trench he found four occupied dug outs and, single handed disarmed 102 of the enemy, including three or four officers and marched them back to our lines through a heavy barrage. He had been warned of the misuse of the white flag by the enemy, but insisted on going out after them.

Jones was invested with his Victoria Cross at an investiture by the King at Buckingham Palace on 18th November 1916 where he was one of about 200 naval and military recipients of war decorations. At the investiture His Majesty wore the undress uniform of a Field Marshal. Those to be decorated were marshalled in one of the small state rooms and were then introduced separately to the King's presence. With so many to decorate it was obviously impossible for his Majesty to spend much time with each individual, but he made a point of shaking hands with each and saying a few words of warm commendation.

"How the dickens did you do it, Jones?" asked King George when he invested Private Jones with the well earned Victoria Cross.

Here is the answer - "Todger's" own modest account of his amazing feat. It is a story that will live. A record of dauntless pluck and unfailing cheerfulness in the face of death worthy of the glorious annals of the Victoria Cross.

"If I've got to be killed, I'll die fighting, not digging". It was with these words on his lips that Private "Todger" Jones leaped from the British trenches. "Surely" said he, when approached afterwards, "there has been 'nuff said, more than enough of a thing that was done on the spur of the moment by a man who kept his head and knew how to use his gun. But if you want to know what I did, let the official account speak for me". "If that won't fill the bill" observed Jones, "I will tell you the story".

It was on September 25th that we took a village and were just beginning to dig ourselves in near the wood when bullets commenced to whiz past us, wounding one of our men in the head and making things decidedly uncomfortable. I felt the bullets ping pinging by me and I said to the officer, "they're going to make it hot for us, Sir, if we don't get after 'em. Can I get out and have a packet at them?" "My orders are to consolidate this position" replied the officer. "You must not go an inch farther, and you had better get on with your digging".

And dig I did, but as I got up again I saw a chap hit through the head and another through the thigh. Looking ahead, I saw what appeared to be a white flag, and that fairly riled me. My "dander" was up and I shouted to the officer, "what do you think of that Sir?" "You must get on with your digging, Jones" said he; but up I jumped and called out "If I've got to be killed, I'll die fighting, not digging".

I waited no longer, but dragged out my rifle, flung down my entrenching tool, jumped out of the trench and went across. The Huns were a couple of hundred yards away and they could see me coming. One bullet went "sss" through my steel helmet and four more through my jacket. There was a sniper in a tree but I soon counted him out. On I went and reached a "bay", or traverse, leading to the German trench. There were three men in it, but jumping in at the end of the trench, I had only one at a time to deal with. I got my back to the wall, and they whipped round on me. I always believe in firing from the hip and very quickly number one dropped dead.

Before the next man could recover his senses I had shot him as well, slipped another cartridge in the breech and got the old magazine going on the third at a yard range. The other man fired at me from the entrance to the dug outs, but I managed to "get there" first every time, which is a great thing in jobs of that kind. In the second traverse there were five

chaps standing behind one another. One of them made for me with his bayonet, but I bowled him over like the others by the old trick of shooting from the hip.

I got the five of them. I stalked through the trench, storming and shouting and hearing the firing and the commotion, the rest of the crowd bolted in the dug outs. Soon they had all gone to earth and I was there alone. When they got into their dug outs I had them. They were shouting and screeching, and every time I saw a movement I let fly.

Eventually they quieted down and seeing some of their bombs, a pile of them, on the floor of the trench, I picked up a couple and sent them flying down the first dug out and they went off all right. I think they felt that the game was up when the bombs began to drop amongst them, for out rushed three fine specimens with their hands up and the usual cry "Mercy, Kamarad!" They had left equipment behind them to show there was no "monkeying" and though I felt like laughing at being there all on my own, I demanded in a stern voice if any one of them could speak English.

One of them called out "I can". "Well", said I, "what is it to be? Do you want to be killed or taken prisoners? You can have it either way you like, for I am not particular. In fact, I would rather kill you".

And all with one consent actually cried out that they wanted to become prisoners and with Private Jones as their jailer, too! I looked round and saw a hollow, so I told the English speaking German to order his two mates to get in there. They had to climb up to do it, and I knew our chaps would see them from our trench as they got on top.

"How many more are there down the dug out?" I asked, and the Boche answered "about fifteen". "What about it?" I said, and he replied "what do you mean?" "Do they want killing or what?" said I, and he gasped, "I don't know". "Well then", said I, "go and tell them what I have told you, that they can either be killed or taken prisoners and they can bloomin' well please themselves about it". And by gum! He went and told them and came back to say they would all be taken prisoners.

"Well then", said I, "tell them they can come out when you call, but only one at a time, remember, and any one of 'em that has as much as a penknife on him, or any equipment, will be shot dead straight away. Fetch 'em up one at a time and tell them that my mates are coming across in thousands in a couple of minutes and if they find anything wrong with me, they'll cut you to bits".

I heard him yowling down the dug outs what I had told him and meanwhile I got round the cover. Presently he came back and said "are you ready?" "Yes", I replied "call them up, and only one at a time and no rushing". He shouted the message and ordered them out without

equipment. There were eight or nine dug outs in all and they kept tumbling out and as they came I sent them out of the trench into the hollow I've told you of. Lord! I'd expected fifteen and out they came in scores and went in my "compound". When they were all out, I threw some of their own bombs into the dug outs to make sure that there was no sniper left behind to "do me in". And then I said to myself "Great Scot! What am I going to do with this little lot?" I knew I could eventually rely upon somebody coming from our trenches, but it was necessary to gain time.

It's not that I want to brag, but I didn't turn a hair; I just kept my head piece going. I told them it would be a very cold night at the place where they were going to, and suggested they had better get their great coats. I graciously permitted them to fetch them "two at a time, and no rushing". They ran and came in and out, and each time they passed me they saluted me, Private Jones! and I sent them to their places. I didn't like the look of one "bloke" and kept half an eye on him. "I think I'll shoot that chap", I said to the interpreter.

"Don't", he exclaimed, "he very good man". But presently the "very good man" went for his great coat and when he had got a short distance he made a dash for liberty. I swung round, clicked my rifle and got him fair and square. He rolled over and over just like a rabbit. Then I turned to the German by me. "Ask them if any more would like to try to escape", I said. He did so, and they all jumped up, they were seated on the ground flinging up their arms and shouted "Kamarad!" It fairly tickled me to death that did and I couldn't stop laughing. Here was I playing a lone hand, for it looked so comical to see them all with their hands up, over a hundred of 'em, hoping against hope that Private Jones, Kamarad, wouldn't shoot.

I wondered what was going to happen next, for it was out of the question that one chap could keep them there for any length of time. But the bowling over of the chap who tried to escape was the best thing that could have happened to me and it fairly put the fear of God into the rest. The official report speaks of me bringing in a hundred and two, but though I didn't check their numbers, there must have been nearly and hundred and fifty of them when I got them into the open including four or five officers and any number of "non-coms" or whatever the Germans call them. But before they got into our lines, over forty of them were killed by our shells, which were sweeping the ground and clearing things up.

I then saw somebody start from our lines. It was my chum coming to look for me. He had been asking where I was and when they told him, he said: "If Todger's across there, I'm going to fetch him, dead or alive!" They all though I was a "goner", but, when they saw my chum start,

three more chaps - a Sergeant Major, a Corporal and stretcher bearer, came across with him. Seeing I was alive, my chum gave me a smack on the face and couldn't stop larking.

They helped me to "round up the bag" and we marched them back to our lines. All the time our guns were knocking the position to bits and as I've said, some of the shells dropped amongst the prisoners and killed them. I got a shrapnel wound in the neck from our barrage.

Looking back and thinking over the incident, I feel that I must have had what the poets call "a charmed life", for, after jumping out of the trench and before I had accounted for the sniper in the tree, a bullet went through my helmet and was buzzing round my head piece like a marble in a basin, finally galloping down my back and burning me during the journey. Four or five other bullets passed through my tunic, but I wasn't aware of it until afterwards. It never entered my mind that I should be killed and I didn't think my time had come.

Asked if he could explain how he was led into the exploit "Todger" said, with a grin, "when I saw the first three men in the bay I knew I was up against something, but I had been in more than one tight corner before and I had learned that the art of warfare, for the individual, at any rate, was to size up a situation quickly, to fire without hesitation.

My motto is never to lose this (significantly touching his head). The man who loses his "nob" is done for. I knew if I had to go I should, for everybody has his time, that's what I believe and I meant to sell myself at a good price. But when I got the first men in the traverse and drove the others back into the dug outs, I felt that the game was in my hands. I had them at my mercy; they didn't know I was unsupported, cowed them into submission to my orders. I pictured the end that awaited them if a hair of my sacred head was singed and my trump card was played in making them come out one by one".

This was not the only occasion on which Jones displayed remarkable bravery. On 5th December 1918, it was also announced that he had been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. The citation explained Jones' action, which occurred on 28th September 1918 at Bapaume, thus: "This man went forward five times with messages through an intense barrage. He also led forward stragglers and placed them in positions. His fine example and utter fearlessness of danger were a great incentive to the men".

After the war he returned home to his native Runcorn to resume work as a fitter at the I.C.I. Ltd. Salt Division Works, Weston Point. He continued there until his retirement many years later.

After his V.C. award he was given a tremendous ovation on his return to Runcorn and was showered with gifts, presentations and honours. He was photographed, filmed, given a civic reception at Chester, entertained to dinner by the Cheshire Regiment and chaired round the Castle Square.

1954 saw his memories of those celebrations stirred when, at that same Castle Square, "Todger" saw the presentation of new band instruments to his old regiment, the Cheshires, met old comrades of the 14-18 war, was introduced to Chester's Civic dignitaries and to high ranking army officers, and attended luncheon at the Drill Hall to celebrate the regiment's home coming after three years in the Middle East. Later the same day, he proudly took a position on the saluting base at Chester Town Hall with Viscount Leverhulme, Lord Lieutenant of the County, and other high ranking officers, for the march past of the 1st Battalion, the Cheshire Regiment.

In 1928 a Film Company in Wardour Street, London, proposed producing a film to be entitled "FOR VALOUR" depicting Victoria Cross incidents. They wrote to all surviving holders of the V.C. and most of them replied. The film was not produced as there was public outcry that money would be made out of recipients of the Victoria Cross. "Todger Jones, wrote a description of how he won the decoration. The following is a copy of his letter.

38 Princess Street

Runcorn
Cheshire
11/1/28
Mr. T. R. Lestoeq,
Dear Sir,

Yours of the 5th to hand. I think a few details as to what happened may prove interesting & helpful to you. While consolidating my chum an Orderly came, to my officer and spotting me called glad you have pulled through. He then told me it was his birthday. I wished him many happy returns he was killed a few minutes after. Also Jerry seeing that we were not going any further started shooting. I asked my Officer twice to let us shift them out, he said he dare not go further as this was our objective and we must consolidate. The bullets came thicker and several boys were hit. I turned to my Officer & said if I've got to go west I go scrapping. It was then I set out.

I heard of this after the action from some of my Company. Another chum a stretcher bearer came along and asked for me and they told him I had gone out and thought I was killed and they told me he said if that lads killed he will have a grave if he had to carry me five miles, three more chums heard as well and set out with him, one was a Company Sergeant Major, a Sergeant and a Lance Corporal, the four are still alive.

The position when I reached it had a constructed strong point and when I got near rushed and got in one end. The Jerry nearest turned to me but was too late, the next when he saw what was coming screamed out and the others being behind one another had no chance. I belted in the dug-out. They kept down for a good time and at last one popped his head up and I let drive and this happened two or three times. I spotted a Jerry bomb on top of the nearest dug-out and I flung it down, a Jerry Officer came shouting Mercy Comrade, in English. He said they wanted to be prisoners. I told him to go and tell them also to come up one at a time when he called and if one carried a knife even I would blow their brains out. On the end of the position was a depression like a Marl Pit and as they came up I made them go to it, when they had all as 1 thought come out I did not know what to do with them but I told them our troops were coming on shortly. One chap asked for his coat and I allowed him to go and he tried to bolt. I got him though. I asked if anyone else wanted to run, they all flung up their hands and shouted Camerad. It was then I saw my chums coming, they reached us and went through the dug-outs and found about 30 had not come up. It was very easy then to handle them and get them over.

I have written this thinking it will give an idea how things were.

I Remain, Yours truly, T. A. Jones.

A very large turnout in Runcorn was seen when His Majesty King George V and many distinguished dignitaries visited the town on 8th July 1925. Thomas Jones was in the forefront of those presented to his Majesty. The picture below shows Private A. T. Jones VC shaking hands with the King.

At the outbreak of WW2, Todger Jones attempted to enlist into the infantry for frontline action. Much to his dismay he was told that at 65 years of age he was too old. He had to make do with the Home Guard and patrolled around Runcorn. His route included walking passed the old Post Office on Highlands Road, next to the Cenotaph and Memorial Gardens where later, he would be be immortalised in bronze!

Jones Home Guard

Todger Jones remained a bachelor and continued to live in the house where he was born at 39 Princess Street, with his sister Mrs. Lightfoot, until his death on Monday 30th January 1956 in the Victoria Memorial Hospital, Runcorn, at the age of 75. He had been admitted to hospital on January 4th with cardiac problems. He passed into a coma on Sunday night and did not recover from the coma despite repeated attempts to revive him.

One of the townspeople who knew Todger very well said "Todger was a very quiet man, never spoke about the war or how he got his VC; when he did talk about it, it was just something he had done. He kept his medals, including his VC, in a kitchen drawer. If anyone wanted to look at them, he'd get them out and afterwards just 'throw' them back in the drawer".

Todger Jones Funeral Service was held in St. Michaels Church at 2.00 p.m. and he was laid to rest in Runcorn Cemetery, Greenaway Road on Friday 3rd February 1956 where he was afforded full military honours with Legion Standards on display.

To show their sense of bereavement the townspeople, young and old, lined the whole route as the cortege moved from the home In Princess Street where 'Todger" had lived, to St. Michael's Church where there was a full congregation to take part in the service.

The coffin, draped in the Union Jack, was surmounted by a cushion upon which lay the military medals of this 75 year old soldier, including his Victoria Cross and Distinguished Conduct Medal.

In the sad parade were civic leaders, including the Chairman of the Council (Councillor T. B. Shallcross) and the Town Clerk (Mr. T. J. Lewis), colleagues

of the British Legion, representatives of the town's pre service youth organisations, and detachments from the Depot and from every battalion of the Cheshire Regiment in which 'Todger" served with such distinction in the First World War. Also in the parade were the British Legion standard bearers, bearers from the Depot of the Cheshire Regiment and two drummers.

In St. Michael's Church, the Cross of St. George fluttered gently at half mast in the cold breeze. The coffin was set before the altar, flanked by the Legion Standards, the short service was conducted, by the Rev. W. F. Good (the Chaplain of the Runcorn branch of the British Legion and a former Vicar), assisted by the Vicar of Runcorn, the Rev. G. M. Davidson.

From the Church the coffin, again borne by sis men from the Cheshire Regiment was reverently carried on the short journey across the road to Runcorn Cemetery were upon the final solemn words of the burial service, the clear plaintive bugle notes of the "Last Post" were sounded. Todger had come to his last resting place. The grave is a family plot and is adorned by the monument below.

The Grave and headstone were restored in 1986 after a successful campaign by Mr. Stan Ellison who had called the hero's grave a disgrace. He tried to enlist the help of many organisations without success, including the The Commonwealth War Graves Commission who sent someone to clean up their VC stone memorial, but they could not do anything to the grave as it was a private one. The local T.A. branch of the Cheshire Regiment came to the rescue, a Warrant Officer and a Sergeant, together with a regular army Warrant Officer went to work to restore the grave with the help of a local stonemason and what a fine job they done of it.

3rd August 2014 saw the unveiling of a statue of Jones in the Memorial Garden, Runcorn. Following a ceremony in front of the War Memorial

opposite to the garden, the statue was unveiled by four veterans and active servicemen. It is in bronze, and was created by the Scottish sculptor David Annand.

Thomas Alfred Jones Medal entitlement are as follows:-
Victoria Cross
Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM)
1914 - 15 Star
British War Medal (1914-20)
Victory Medal (1914-19)
Defence Medal (1939-45)
King George VI Coronation Medal (1937)
Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal (1953)
Territorial Force Efficiency Medal (1908).

His medals were presented by the family to the Cheshire Regiment Museum and are on public display there.

It is not known at this time when Todger Jones was initiated into the Order but a reference in the Spring 1917 edition of the Buffalo Quarterly Journal refers to him as a brother.

As I have explained earlier in this volume it is not possible to contain all the stories in one volume, therefore this book is Volume One of Two.
The stories continue with Conwyn Mansel-Jones in Volume Two which will draw to a conclusion this particular Museum Collecton.

The realities of war

The Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing is a war memorial in Ypres, Belgium, dedicated to the British and Commonwealth soldiers who were killed in the Ypres Salient of World War I and whose graves are unknown. The memorial is located at the eastern exit of the town and marks the starting point for one of the main roads out of the town that led Allied soldiers to the front line. Designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield and built and maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the Menin Gate Memorial was unveiled on 24 July 1927.

The daily act of homage

The Last Post, the traditional final salute to the fallen, is played by the buglers in honour of the memory of the soldiers of the former British Empire and its allies, who died in the Ypres Salient during the First World War. This daily act of homage is played every evening at 8.00 p.m. The Last Post Ceremony is carried out by the Last Post Association, the Buglers being part of the local Fire Brigade.

Below is the RAOB contingent who took part in the last Post Association Ceremony on 23rd March 2016. The Wreath Bearers are Bro. Stan Hope, R.O.H., Grand Alderman of Benevolence 2016, Bro. Ray Attwood, R.O.H., Grand Primo 2016 and Bro. Tony Allen, R.O.H., Grand Primo 2013. It was described as a humbling and poignant time of reflection that they gave their lives for our freedom.

Also available in the Museum Collection series

No.1 General Laws of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes.
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Copies of these and other publications by the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes Grand Lodge of England can be obtained from the Grand Secretary, Grove House, Skipton Road, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG1 4LA