

**White Feather to**



**Victoria Cross**

**Victoria Cross Online  
Issue 2 November 2022**

## EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Welcome to the November edition of the Victoria Cross Online magazine. Thanks to those who have kindly joined the mailing list and are receiving the first "proper" edition this month.

Special thanks need to go to Ned Malet de Carteret who has provided a very personal and emotive article about his great grandfather Harold Ackroyd VC MC RAMC. Ned has also provided all the images for the article from the family archives. Thanks Ned.

Also thanks to Steve Lee, who has kindly written about the longstanding work of Memorials to Valour in remembering the recipients of the VC.

Finally to Keith Lumley, Chairman of the Victoria Cross Trust also introduces the new VC plaques in Doncaster, Yorkshire.



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# Harold Ackroyd

## VC MC MD RAMC

BY NED MALET DE CARTERET

In the study/library in St Ouen's Manor, Jersey resides a "Red Album" which contains the story of my great-grandfather, Harold Ackroyd. The album consists of old photographs, articles, letters, modern photographs, but in particular the 23 letters written home from the Western Front from him to his first-born child and only daughter, Ursula, my grandmother (the only grandparent whom I ever knew). Sadly, no letters written to his wife Mabel are in existence.

My family had unexpectedly moved into the Manor in May 1978, when I was 17. It was after a very long and bitter dispute between my late father Philip (the eldest son) and his late younger brother Rex, who had inherited the Manor and had gone bankrupt, but that is another story. Once my father had completed the album, I became fascinated by his story.



Aerial Shot of St Ouen's Manor  
(Ned Malet de Carteret)

Harold Ackroyd was born in Southport, Lancashire on the 18th July, 1877. His father Edward married well and his mother Ellen Holden inherited a substantial fortune, which elevated the family considerably in society.

Harold was academic and after schooling at Shrewsbury, he went to read medicine at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge.

He never practiced formally as a doctor, his career was to be in biochemistry research and he returned to Cambridge to Prof W.E. Dixon's Laboratory, with a BMA Scholarship in 1908. His mentor, friend and colleague, Sir Frederick Gowland Hopkins, the First Professor of Biochemistry at Cambridge, continued Harold's pioneering work and Sir Frederick went on to win the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1929.

Harold married Mabel Smythe in 1908 in Southport and they moved from Great Shelford (their first marital home) to "Brooklands", Kneesworth Street, Royston in 1912. Harold and Mabel's three children were Ursula (1909), Stephen (1912) and Anthony (1914). Harold had a 3-wheeler Morgan car which he used to commute into Cambridge.

Harold and his eldest child Ursula pictured at "Brookland" in Royston. (Ned Malet de Carteret)



He joined the RAMC in early 1915, and after training at Codford St Mary near Salisbury Plain he was commissioned a Temp. Lieutenant and attached to the 6th Battalion, Royal Berkshire Regiment. He was promoted Temp. Captain in February, 1916.

As part of the 18th Division, the battalion made the most substantial of gains on the Somme on the first day of the battle, 1st July, 1916. At Delville Wood the battalion was sent in under a night march along the sunken road on the night of the 18th July to the wood to relieve the decimated South African Brigade.

For three days in that "hell" Harold and his battalion dug in and engaged the enemy. Harold saved the lives of Scottish, British, South African and German soldiers and for his deeds was to receive 11 recommendations for the Victoria Cross. His nomination was downgraded and a Military Cross was awarded on the 20th October.

I had the pleasure of walking the route and having the action explained to the group by the late great, Col. Graham Parker, with Flanders Tours together with his daughter Joanna. This was in the mid 1990's on my second trip to the battlefields.

He was wounded by I think shellfire and he took six weeks leave in England to recover. At home his family thought he had done enough and there was talk of a job with the Ministry of Food, but Harold was eager to return to the battalion and his men, telling his brother Edward that he was fit after a week and that the Medical Board was a "bunch of old fossils!".

He returned to Ypres in November, 1916. As one of his Dixon's Lab colleagues from Divisional Headquarters, Alfred J Clark wrote, "we were half sorry to see the doctor return, as he always took the most appalling risks to save lives."

For his actions on 31st July, 1917 on the Menin Road, Harold was to receive 23 recommendations for the Victoria Cross.

The London Gazette of the 6th September records his citation: "For most conspicuous bravery. During recent operations Captain Ackroyd displayed the greatest gallantry and devotion to duty. Utterly regardless of danger, he worked continuously for many hours up and down and in front of the line tending the wounded and saving the lives of officers and men. In doing so he had to move across the open under heavy machine-gun, rifle and shell fire. On another occasion he went some way in front of our advanced line and brought in a wounded man under continuous sniping and machine-gun fire. His heroism was the means of saving many lives, and provided a magnificent example of courage, cheerfulness and determination to the fighting men in whose midst he was carrying out his splendid work. This gallant officer has since been killed in action."

He was attending to the wounded 11 days later, just south of Glencorse Wood, when he was killed by a sniper. His leading stretcher bearer, Private Alfred Scriven, on hearing the news, immediately went to look for him and found him in a shell hole along with 6 other soldiers who had all suffered the same fate.



Harold's headstone at Birr Cross Roads Cemetery (Mark Green)

Harold is buried in Birr Cross Roads Cemetery with a headstone, "Believed to Be Buried".

I have been travelling to the Battlefields for the last 30 years and I must have visited Harold's "supposed" grave probably 10 times or so by now. Is it peculiar to be forever drawn to the places where such untold carnage took place over nearly five years?

My grandmother, Ursula, was very young when Harold died, only 8. The children's mother, Mabel took to wearing deep mourning for many years after his death. The family moved to Malvern in the early 1920's.

Ursula was naturally very proud of her father. She used to tell me what a lovely childhood they had in Royston, and that there were lots of rabbits in the garden!

In the late 1990's I discovered that the RAMC at Millbank in London had the "loan" of Harold's Victoria Cross and medal group which languished in a bank vault.. Alerting my cousin Christopher Ackroyd, he arranged for them to be returned to him.

Their subsequent sale to Lord Ashcroft in 2003 has enabled Harold's memory to live on. The proceeds have been endowed to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. The annual Harold Ackroyd Memorial Scholarship lecture in the Bateman auditorium and four concurrent annual scholarships for second-year medical undergraduate students at the college are the result of this.



Harold Ackroyd  
VC MC MD  
RAMC's medal  
group in the  
Ashcroft Gallery,  
Imperial War  
Museum, London  
(Ned Malet de  
Carteret)

Christopher Ackroyd kindly invited me to the 2<sup>nd</sup> lecture / scholarship and dinner at Caius in 2005, the scholar being Arpan Mehta. The lecture “passed me by” but was given by Professor Sir John Walker, a Nobel Prize winner.

This year in February, I, Charlie (my elder brother and Seigneur of St Ouen), my sister Liz (from Germany), Christopher and Alex Ackroyd, and Christopher’s brother Robert, attended the 18th annual lecture and scholarship at Caius. I did this time understand a little more the lecture given this time by Professor Helen McShane of Oxford University on vaccines.

I briefly resumed my contact with now Dr Arpan Mehta, late Rowling Scholar researching Motor Neuron disease in Edinburgh. He is now in a final year studying Neurology at Queen Square.

Harold Ackroyd would be so very proud of all his past; current and future scholars and I cannot describe how proud it makes me feel that Christopher’s actions have created such a magnificent way of perpetuating our illustrious ancestor’s memory.

Whilst in Cambridge, I visited the Parish of Ascension Burial Ground, and have had Sir Frederick Gowland Hopkins grave cleaned.

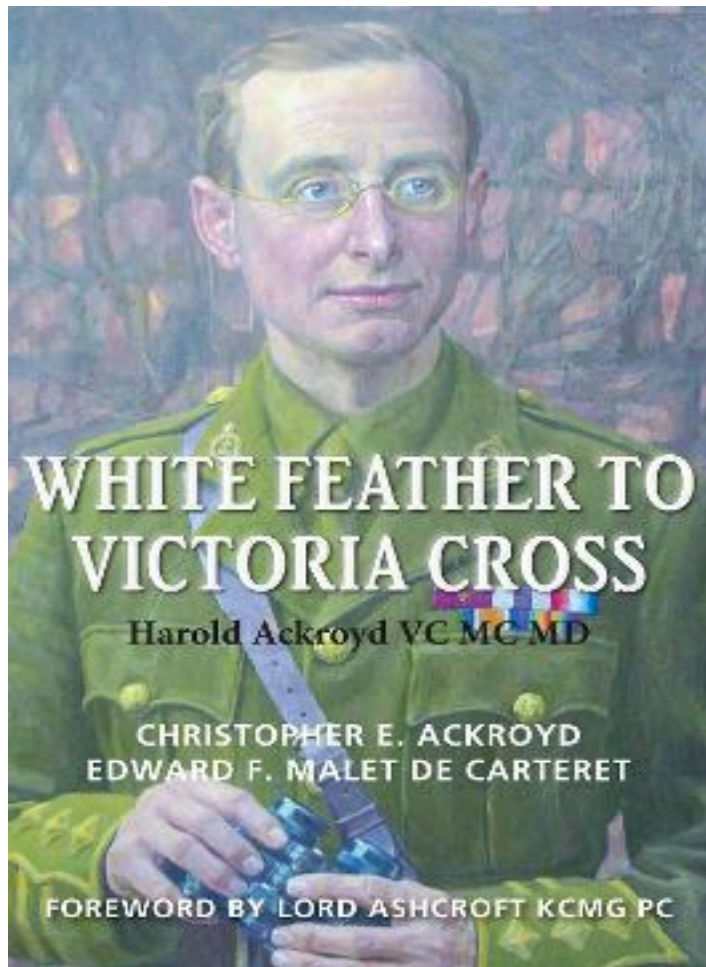
Ned Malet de Carteret  
St Helier, Jersey  
October, 2022.

The investiture of  
Harold’s posthumous  
VC to Mabel and  
Stephen Ackroyd on  
23<sup>rd</sup> September 1917  
by King George V.





For those of you who would like to read further about Harold, Christopher Ackroyd and my co-authored book "White Feather To Victoria Cross" is available at all the usual outlets. We are very proud of it and the extremely kind foreword by Lord Michael Ashcroft, KPMG, PC.



If you wish to order a copy of Ned's book please control click on the book cover and you will go to Foyle's website

To view Harold's page on Victoria Cross Online go to [https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/?page\\_id=851](https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/?page_id=851)

Ned was born in Jersey in 1961. Ned worked in the finance industry for many years. He is a keen amateur historian specialising in WWI. He has visited the Battlefields of the Western Front and Gallipoli and is a Life Friend of the Imperial War Museum. Ned has published two books "My Family in the Great War" and "White Feather to Victoria Cross".

# Best Dunkley VC Auction



Lt Col Best-Dunkley was born in York in 1890 and attended a military school in Germany before he was commissioned into the British army. He left the military to work as a school teacher in Ireland and then a school master in China. When war broke out he returned home to answer the call to arms and joined the Lancashire Fusiliers as an officer. Having survived the Somme which left him with severe shell shock, and also the first mustard gas attack, he found himself in the thick of the Third Battle of Ypres on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1917.

Bertram's actions that day are described clearly by a junior officer serving under him, Thomas Hope Floyd. When all the officers of "C" Company had become casualties, Best-Dunkley then moved forward. Floyd wrote "About a hundred yards on my right, I saw Colonel Best-Dunkley complacently advancing, with a walking stick in his hand, as calmly as if he were walking across a parade ground. 'I afterwards heard that when all 'C' Company officers were knocked out he took command in person.'

Shortly after this, Best-Dunkley was hit by machine gun fire from his own gunners and was killed. Of the 593 men of Lt Colonel Best-Dunkley's battalion that went into action, 473 of them became casualties – a staggering statistic. He was laid to rest in Mendinghem Military Cemetery.

Over a hundred years after the action, his medals were auctioned at Spink & Son on 24<sup>th</sup> November with an estimate of £250,000. His medals have been auctioned three times previously, the last in 1986 when Spink sold them for £12,500. When the Lancashire Fusiliers Museum made an appeal for the whereabouts of missing Regiment VCs for an exhibition, the only one that was not traced was Best-Dunkley's.

**STOP PRESS – The VC medal group sold for a hammer price of £300,000 to an unknown buyer at this time.**



# SCARF EXPORT BAN



Earlier this year, the WWII VC medal group awarded to Arthur Scarf was sold at auction for over £660,000. It has now been learned that the purchaser wishes to take the medals out of the UK.

The Arts Minister, Stuart Andrew MP has recognised the importance of the medal group and has put a temporary export ban on them. The decision on the export licence application has been deferred until 27 January 2023. A UK buyer is now being sought.



## 3 VCs purchased



On 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022 it was announced that the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa had acquired three First World War Victoria Cross groups. These were awarded to Edmund De Wind VC, Thomas Holmes VC and James Robertson VC.



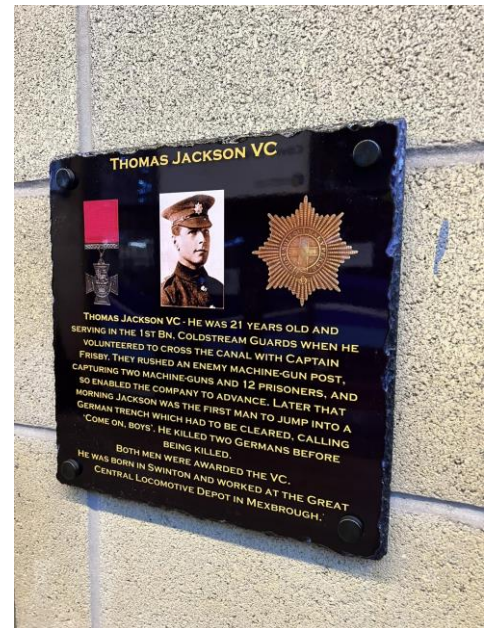
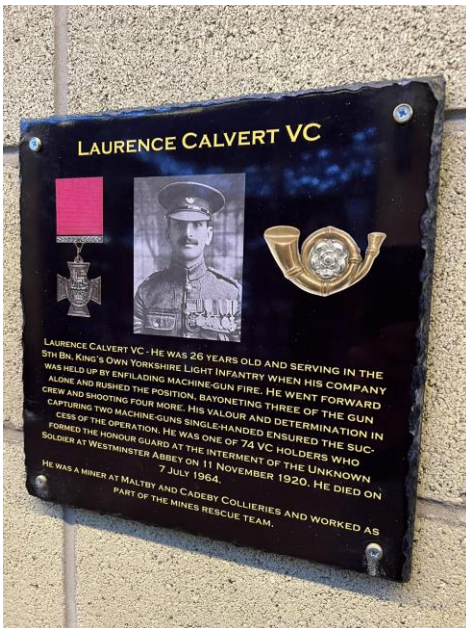
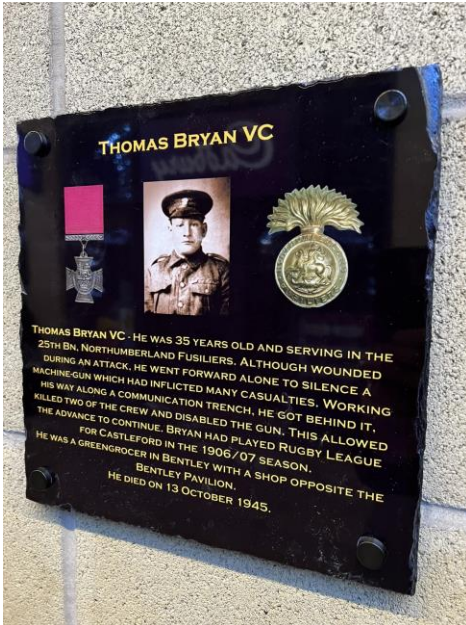
These acquisitions means the CWM is now home to 36 of the 73 VCs awarded to Canadians in the First World War.



The purchase of the medal groups was made possible with support from the National Collection Fund and from individual donors. The Canadian War Museum now owns 42 Victoria Crosses (36 WWI, 5 WWII, 1 19<sup>th</sup> Century). The Museum now owns 42 of the 99 VCs awarded to Canadians in all conflicts.

# VC Plaques placed

By Keith Lumley (Chairman of the VCT)



Doncaster has a close association with Victoria Cross recipients who spent parts of their lives and service working and living in the borough. Each were awarded the VC, six in World War 1 and one in World War 2. Those recipients were:

- George Harry Wyatt VC - Police Constable in Doncaster and buried in Cadeby Cemetery.
  - Gilbert Insall VC - One time squadron leader at RAF Finningley and lived in the local area.
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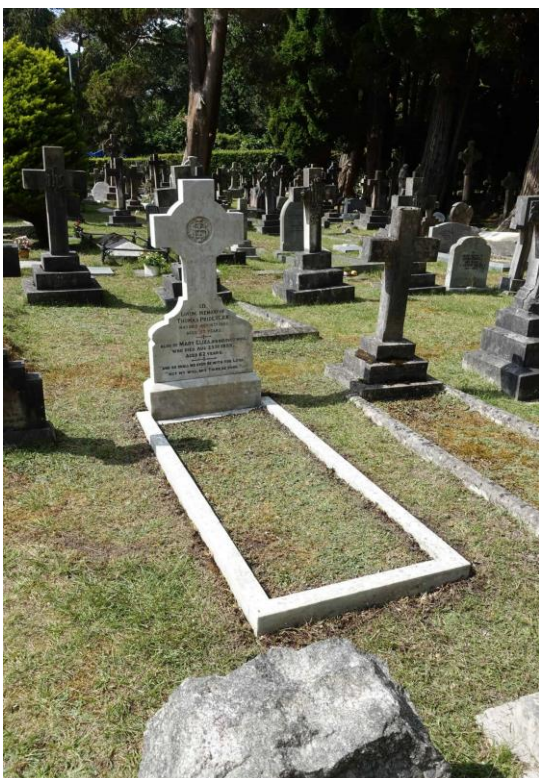
# VC Plaques placed

- William Hackett VC - Miner at Manvers Main and tunneller, killed in Givenchy refusing to leave a fellow tunneller trapped in a roof fall.
- Thomas Bryan VC - Greengrocer in Bentley Doncaster and buried in Arksey cemetery Doncaster
- Laurence Calvert VC - A miner at Maltby and Cadeby collieries (Doncaster) near to George Wyatt's home
- Thomas Jackson VC - Born in Swinton and worked at the Mexbrough Central Locomotive Depot near Doncaster
- John Harper VC - Lived in Thorne near Doncaster and was a recipient of the VC in World War 2.

Each man has had a commemorative plaque placed at Lakeside Doncaster by the Victoria Cross Trust to remember not only their VC action but also their contributions to Doncaster. Each plaque measuring 12 inches square has been designed and made by the VCT by veteran's who placed them in the precinct in the week leading up to Armistice Day. They contain details of their regiments, the citation, a photograph and the VC for passers-by to read and note their contribution. To mark the occasion veterans attended a short ceremony and observed the minutes silence at Lakeside on 11th November.



**VICTORIA  
CROSS  
TRUST**



The Victoria Cross Trust has two key objectives-

1. To provide and maintain memorials and grave markers to commemorate the lives of holders of the Victoria Cross for the benefit of the general public and for posterity to perpetuate the memory of these brave soldiers.
2. To advance the education of the public as to the lives, citation details and last resting places of Victoria Cross holders by such means as the directors may determine.

The editor is indebted to Keith Lumley, the Chairman of the Victoria Cross Trust for providing this article and images of their latest project.

To find out more about their great work or to make a donation please visit

<https://victoriacrosstrust.org/>

# Memorials to Valour

By Steve Lee

As a child I remember clearly watching the film Zulu for the very first time and many more times after that as I grew older.

Although we are all aware that is just a film based on the Defence of Rorke's Drift during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 the interest in those awarded the Victoria Cross was first born.

Well over twenty-five years ago now I found myself wondering what happened to all those Defenders and where were they all buried and so the search began. This happened pre-internet, so it was all down to reading books. The internet made researching much easier but the passion for books remains and still very much used to assist with research. In the early days I'd often end up in the wrong cemetery or at a cemetery with no real idea where a particular grave was located, those that have ever visited the Kensal Green cemeteries without a map will understand what I mean. A few years in and with my marriage not far off I decided to have a 'cultured', Stag weekend and a small group of us went in search of some of the Rorke's Drift VCs buried in the Brecon area and beyond.

Johnson Beharry VC at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas (Memorials to Valour)

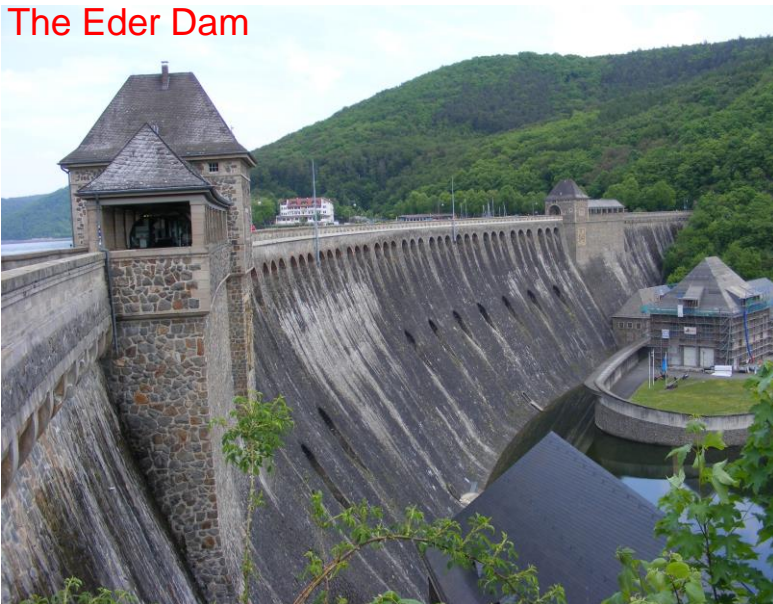
From this trip we decided to expand the search to include memorials as well as graves of all VCs worldwide. I'm pretty sure that at this time we really didn't fully comprehend how many there actually were. Around this time David Harvey published his two-volume book 'Monuments to Courage', which was a massive help with finding both VC graves and memorials. I unfortunately was able to attend but a few in the group were able to visit David at his home before his untimely death and I know they were greatly inspired and encouraged by David.



# Memorials to Valour

Thinking back, I don't think that in the very early days it was ever our intention to record the graves and memorials but some of us in our small group had an interest in photography so only naturally we started to record what we'd found. It wasn't long before we realised that firstly we'd started to build a large collection of photos and secondly that others may also be interested in seeing what we'd visited and the idea of setting up a website was born. The website is still very much 'a work in progress', our main efforts have been spending as much time as possible, whilst we still can, to get out in the field and visit as many graves and memorials as possible. At the time of writing, we still have thousands of photos to add to the site and much editing to do but hopefully we have created a memorial to all those awarded the VC and at the same time a useful tool for those wishing to learn a little more about a particular VC or group of VCs.

The Eder Dam



Geographically we have covered most of England, Scotland, Wales and parts of Northern Ireland and Ireland. Further afield we've visited Canada, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, the Channel Islands, Gibraltar and Malta. Along the way we've visited some iconic sites including the Somme, St. Nazaire U Boat Pens, Colditz, the Dams and so many more. The intention was always for us to visit every grave and memorial to ensure that the information we were showing was based on first-hand experience, but we soon realised that this would be almost impossible, we all work full-time and although we've been able to spend many hours over the years on field trips there just isn't enough time. With this in mind we started to ask others to help and I'm sure many reading this will have contributed.



# Memorials to Valour

Having done this the number of images and information we received was huge and for many years now work on the project is very much a daily one. Photos from Australia, New Zealand, North Africa, Canada, USA, India, Pakistan and many more countries and areas arrive almost on a weekly if not daily basis. And of course, new or not widely known about memorials and graves continue to be discovered nearer to home and we are most grateful for the many eyes we have both near and far. The project so far has been fascinating, it's taken us to places we may not ever have visited, and it has brought us in to contact we so many other people fascinated by the VC and those that have been awarded one. We've managed to meet up with many over the years and look forward to meeting many more in the coming years. We continue to attend as many unveilings as possible to record the unique moments and help ensure that the memory of each VC is not forgotten. We'd encourage you all to keep searching, keep sending us your photos either to myself directly at [stevelee@memorialstovalour.co.uk](mailto:stevelee@memorialstovalour.co.uk) or post on our hosts Facebook page Victoria Cross Online.

I personally was very fortunate to meet on a few occasions the late Eric Wilson VC, he was a wonderful man, generous with his time and the inspiration to learn about as many VCs as possible, record their memorials and keep their memories and deeds alive. The Memorials to Valour website can be found at [www.memorialstovalour.co.uk](http://www.memorialstovalour.co.uk)

Lerwick Cemetery, Shetland Islands



# Ashcroft snaps up Rorke's Drift VC

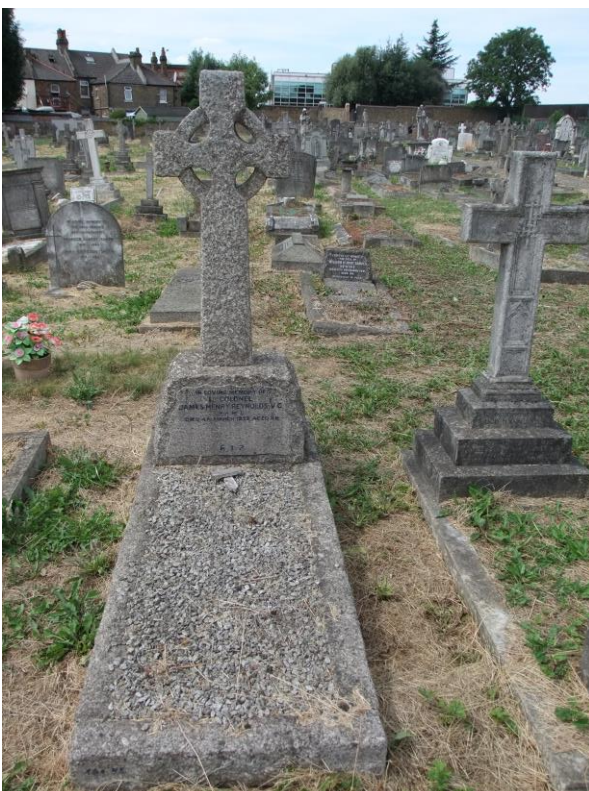


Photo by Maull & Fox.]

[Piccadilly,

LIEUT.-COL. REYNOLDS, V.C.  
Surgeon.

On November 8<sup>th</sup>, via his own personal Twitter page, Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC announced that he has acquired the medal group of Surgeon Major James Henry Reynolds VC, one of the eleven Victoria Crosses awarded for the defence of the Rorke's Drift Mission on 22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> January 1879. The medals which were on loan to the Museum of Military Medicine (see image below courtesy of Thomas Stewart) were purchased in a private sale and will join Lord Ashcroft's two other Rorke's Drift VCs (Lieutenant John Rouse Merriot Chard VC and Private Robert Jones VC) on display in the Ashcroft Gallery of the Imperial War Museum. This is the first public announcement from Lord Ashcroft of an acquisition of a Victoria Cross group since 2018. According to the Lord Ashcroft website this takes his personal collection to 214 in addition to the IWM's own 50 groups. Read more about James Reynolds VC at [https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/?page\\_id=13146](https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/?page_id=13146)



Surgeon Major JH Reynolds VC  
Rorke's Drift 22<sup>nd</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1879  
On loan from Mrs L Sutcliffe