

Ravenhill VC



Victoria Cross Online
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EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Welcome to the 20th edition of Victoria Cross Online Magazine. The feature article this month is by Anthony Staunton who talks about the life of George Ravenhill VC and the story of a cancelled DCM as well as his VC.

There is also the next three instalments in the Medical VCs series with the stories of Campbell Douglas VC, James Henry Reynolds VC and Joseph Farmer VC.

There is a short article on the recent renovation work carried out on the grave of the only VC awarded on D-Day – Stan Hollis VC. The work was completed by the Victoria Cross Trust in time for the 80th anniversary. In connection to this, there is the announcement of my first book on Stan which is due for publication this month.

There is also an update on the missing medals from Chelmsford Museum.



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Ravenhill VC

By Anthony Staunton FMHSA

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/george-albert-ravenhill-vc/>

The eight names officially erased have not been officially restore but I endorse the sentiments of M J Crook, in *The Evolution of the Victoria Cross*, (1975), 'So far as the eight men in question are concerned time has practically annulled their expulsion'.

Cancellation of the VC

The first VC warrant, as amended, existed from 1856 to 1920, and included a provision that the monarch had both the power to cancel and restore awards. The power to cancel and restore awards in the 1920 warrant were identical to the 1856 warrant with the addition that cancellations and restorations be published in the *London Gazette*. The wording of the cancellation and restoration power was simplified in the 1931 warrant and remains unchanged in the current 1961 warrant. No VC has been cancelled since 1908 and no cancellation has ever been restored.

All lists of VC recipients including both the War Office 1920 and 1953 lists include the names of the eight since it would have been foolish to do a list without the names, particularly for the War Office lists which were in alphabetical order. If they had been left out, just imagine how many letters to the editor would have been generated. The elegant War Office solution in 1920 (repeated in 1953) was to list all VCs, including the three Indian Mutiny memoranda awards never previously confirmed that medals had gone to next of kin. At the end of the list was the names of the eight whose awards were erased from the Victoria Cross Register and the date of the Royal Warrant for each cancellation.

Ravenhill VC

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<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/george-albert-ravenhill-vc/>

Gazettal of the VC to C Ravenhill

The gazette of 4 June 1901 that announced the VC to Ravenhill published his name as Private C Ravenhill. O'Moore and Humphris in *The VC and DSO* reproduced the *London Gazette* citation with the name Private C Ravenhill but the biography commenced 'RAVENHILL, GEORGE, Private (at first gazetted as Charles).' I have yet to find any gazette with Ravenhill named Charles but there are references that repeat the claim that that the award was 'first gazetted as Charles'.

The website of the National Army Museum states Ravenhill joined the Army using the Christian name 'Charles'. Volume I of the VC and GC three volume history states 'Private Ravenhill's initial is given incorrectly in the Citation.'

Upgrade of DSO to VC after gazettal

There were seven VCs for the battle of Colenso on 15 December 1899, the first four awards gazetted on 2 February 1900, 49 days after the battle. The three further awards were to Sir William Babbie (20 April 1900), George Ravenhill (4 June 1901) and Harry Norton Schofield (30 Aug 1901). The last award for Colenso to Harry Norton Schofield (30 Aug 1901) was the first of five upgrades, two DSO and three DCMs upgraded to VCs. Schofield and Carter (Somaliland 1904) were originally awarded DSOs and House (South Africa), Grimshaw (WW1) and Wright (WW2) were originally awarded DCMs. The five notices of the cancellation of the DSO or DCM appeared in the same gazettes as the VC awards.

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DCM for Battle of Frederickstad or Fredrickstad

Eighty-five days after the VC was gazetted, the *London Gazette* announced that Private G Ravenhill was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. The award, as was common in this period, was published without any citation. Ravenhill had been wounded at Colenso but continued to serve with his unit. A number of references state the DCM to Ravenhill was for the Battle of Frederickstad or Fredrickstad which may have related to the period 17 to 25 October 1900. I have not found primary sources to confirm or deny the claim.

The DCM cancellation notice 'Private G. Ravenhill, the Royal Scots Fusiliers, having been granted the Victoria Cross for gallantry at the Battle of Colenso, the notification which appeared in the Gazette of 27th September, 1901, awarding him the Medal for Distinguished Conduct in the Field, is cancelled' does not suggest that the DCM was for a separate unrelated action.

The DCMs to Ravenhill and William Jackson (Australian Army, France, 1916) were gazetted three months and two weeks respectively after their VCs were promulgated. The DCM to Ravenhill was cancelled about three months later while the DCM to Jackson was cancelled exactly four weeks later.

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VC presentation

A number of references including O'Moore and Humphris state Ravenhill received the VC from HRH the Duke of York at Pietermaritzburg, Natal on 4 June 1901, which is the date the award was gazetted. Both the date of the investiture and the title of the duke are incorrect.

Queen Victoria died on 22 January 1901, the Prince of Wales ascended the throne as King Edward VII and the Duke of York, the future King George V, would for the next ten months be known as the Duke of Cornwall and York which some newspapers shortened to Duke of Cornwall. Although the royal tour was planned before the death of Queen Victoria, the Duke and Duchess of York and Cornwall still undertook what was the longest British royal tour in history, thanking the British Empire for their contributions to the South Africa War.

The six Australian colonies had federated on 1 January 1901, the first day of the twentieth century and on 9 May 1901, on the Australian leg of the tour, the duke opened the first Commonwealth Parliament in Melbourne. On the South African leg of the tour, the duke presented eight VCs, including the VC to George Ravenhill, at Pietermaritzburg, Natal on 14 August 1901. The last leg was Canada where three of the four Canadian VCs for South Africa received their medals from the duke. Shortly after returning to England, the Duke was created [Prince of Wales](#) and [Earl of Chester](#).

Ravenhill VC

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Charles

The gazette of 4 June 1901 that announced the VC to Ravenhill published his name as Private C Ravenhill. O'Moore and Humphris quoted the *London Gazette* citation with the name Private C Ravenhill but their first line was 'RAVENHILL, GEORGE, Private (at first gazetted as Charles).' A number of references repeat the claim that that the award was 'first gazetted as Charles'.

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Forfeiture of the Victoria Cross

In the first seven cancellations, the question whether recipients were legally required to surrender their medals does not seem to have been considered. The medals were surrendered in some cases, but it is not until Ravenhill that the question was raised and then almost at the last moment just before the medal was auctioned.

The Evolution of the Victoria Cross stated the War Office was not aware of the 'particulars' of Ravenhill's conviction until after he had been discharged from prison.

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The Treasury Solicitor's advice was obtained within 24 hours and on 9 December 1908, six days before the sale, the Treasury opinion stated 'There is no provision for the forfeiture of this decoration which therefore remains the property of the man, or of any purchaser from him. I do not therefore think you can stop the sale.'

No action was taken to return earlier medals that had been surrendered but the question of whether the demand would be made in the future seems to be settled in the negative. *The Times* on 16 December 1908, reported that the Victoria Cross and two medals to Private George Ravenhill were sold for £42 to Messrs Spink.

SALE OF VICTORIA CROSSES.—Messrs. Sotheby's sale yesterday included two Victoria Crosses, one of which was awarded to Lieutenant George Symons, June 6, 1855, for "unmasking the embrasures of a five-guns battery"—£31; and a group of three medals awarded to Private George Ravenhill, the Victoria Cross, December 15, 1899, and two African medals—£42. Private Ravenhill was one of the band who went out to save the guns at Colenso under the concentrated fire of the Boers, and he was one of the few who returned. Both lots were purchased by Messrs. Spink.

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Conclusion

I hope this paper helps clear up the misunderstanding that the War Office 1920 and 1953 List of recipients were in no way suggesting that cancellations had been restored. Issues such as the date of the presentation and the title of Duke or Cornwall should not cause controversy, but I hope there is further research on how the suggestion the DCM was for an unrelated action surfaced. I repeat the words of M J Crook 'So far as the eight men in question are concerned time has practically annulled their expulsion'.



Ravenhill's humble unmarked grave in Witton Cemetery, Birmingham (Mark Green)

Medical VCs

11. Campbell Mellis Douglas VC



Campbell Mellis Douglas (1840-1909) was born on 5th August 1840 on Grosse Island, Quebec, Canada, the son of Dr. George Mellis Douglas and his wife Charlotte Saxton Campbell, (1820-1852). He was educated at St. John's Canada, and Laval's University, Edinburgh. Following his education, he joined the 24th Regiment of Foot (later South Wales Borderers) and became an Assistant Surgeon in the 2nd Battalion.

The majority of his early Army career was spent serving in India, and in May 1867, he and his regiment were in the Bay of Bengal when the incident occurred which would lead to Douglas and four of his comrades being awarded the Victoria Cross.

Shortly before the 7th May 1867, at the island of Little Andaman, in the Bay of Bengal, a ship called the "Assam Valley" had anchored, and some of the crew went ashore. Shortly afterwards, news came that the crew had been set upon and murdered by some of the natives, as none of them had returned. In order to ascertain the crew's fate, a second steamer was sent from Rangoon and landed near the island on the 7th. Some of their crew was attacked by the natives and with a huge storm raging, a rescue mission was organised to try and reach them. With the soldiers in peril on shore, Dr Douglas and four fellow members of the 24th, manned a gig and attempted to reach them.

Medical VCs

11. Campbell Mellis Douglas VC

They very nearly succeeded in their endeavours, but, the boat beginning to fill rapidly, they were forced to retire. They then made a second attempt and were successful in reaching the shore, taking off five men. On these being placed safely on board, the doctor and his four brave men turned once more to the rescue of the rest of the soldiers, and by their strenuous efforts the entire party was eventually taken off the island. All five men including Douglas were awarded the Victoria Cross (London Gazette, 17th December 1867) and he was presented with his medal on 16th April 1868 by the GOC Pegu, Major-General A Faunce in Rangoon, Burma.

Shortly after his award of the VC, Douglas married the young widow of Surgeon Valentine Munbee McMaster, 78th Highlanders, also a V.C., earned at Lucknow in the Sepoy Mutiny, who died leaving a one-year old son Bryce McMaster. Douglas and his new wife would have two children of their own, George Mellis, who would become an explorer of the Canadian Northwest by canoe, and Lionel, who became a ship's captain.



Medical VCs

11. Campbell Mellis Douglas VC



Grave Photo courtesy of Kevin Brazier

Dr. Douglas retired in 1882. Early in 1883, Brigade Surgeon Douglas gave the very first First Aid training course of St. John Ambulance in Canada. The course was given in Quebec City. His class raised £3 3s 0d for the charity. He was also Medical Officer in charge of Field Hospital during the 2nd Riel Expedition 1885.

Douglas died aged 69 on New Year's Eve, 1909 at the home of one of his children, "Birdwood", at Horrington, near Wells, Somerset. He was laid to rest on 4th January 1910 in Wells Cemetery. His medals including his VC and the Silver Medal from the Royal Humane Society (also awarded for his VC action) are held by the Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.



Medical VCs

11. Campbell Mellis Douglas VC



VC image courtesy of Canadian War Museum

Medical VCs

12. James Henry Reynolds VC



James Henry Reynolds (1844-1932) was born on 3rd February 1844 at Kingstown, Dublin, Ireland, the son of Mr L Reynolds JP, of Dalyston House, Granard, Ireland. Educated at Castle Knock School, Dublin, he obtained his Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery from Trinity College, Dublin in 1867, before joining the Army Medical Department on 31st March 1868, as an Assistant Surgeon.

In 1869, he transferred to the 36th Regiment of Foot as their Medical Officer. He then received the thanks of his Commander-in-Chief, Lord Sandhurst, for his services during a severe outbreak of cholera in the 36th Regiment in India between 1869-1870, after which he was invalided home.

He became a Surgeon on 1st March 1873. He arrived in South Africa in August 1874 and later accompanied the 1/24th on the minor expedition to the Diamond Fields in 1875. He served alongside both the 1/24th and 88th Regiments during the Eastern Frontier Campaigns of 1877-1878, and was present at the action around Mpetu in January 1878.

By the 22nd January 1879, he found himself in charge of the field hospital at Rorke's Drift Mission. Throughout the night, he exhibited constant attention to the wounded under heavy Zulu fire.

Medical VCs

12. James Henry Reynolds VC



Photo by Mauld & Fox, [Piccadilly.]
LIEUT.-COL. REYNOLDS, V.C.,
Surgeon.

He also volunteered to convey ammunition from the store to the defenders of the hospital, whereby he exposed himself to a cross-fire from the enemy both in going and returning. His Victoria Cross was gazetted on 17th June 1879, and just under a month later, on 16th July 1879, he was presented with his medal by General Sir Garnet Wolseley at St Paul's Mission Station, KwaZulu Natal.

The British Medical Association gave him their Gold Medal for his services at Rorke's Drift. He remained at Rorke's Drift for a few weeks after the action, looking after the wounded. After the action, he was promoted to Surgeon-Major and was present in the British camp at Fort Nolela for the final battle at Ulundi in July 1879.

Upon his return to Ireland he was appointed S.M.O. for the expedition to aid Captain Charles Boycott, during the so called Irish Land War of 1880. Later that year, he married Elizabeth, daughter of a Dr McCormick.

He was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel in April 1887, and obtained a brevet Brigade Surgeon Lieutenant-Colonel in 1892. He retired from the army after 27 years' service with the rank of Brigade Surgeon Lieutenant Colonel in 1896. He was later Medical Officer of the Royal Army Clothing Factory in London. He attended a special dinner to honour holders of the V.C. at the House of Lords in November 1929.

Medical VCs

12. James Henry Reynolds VC

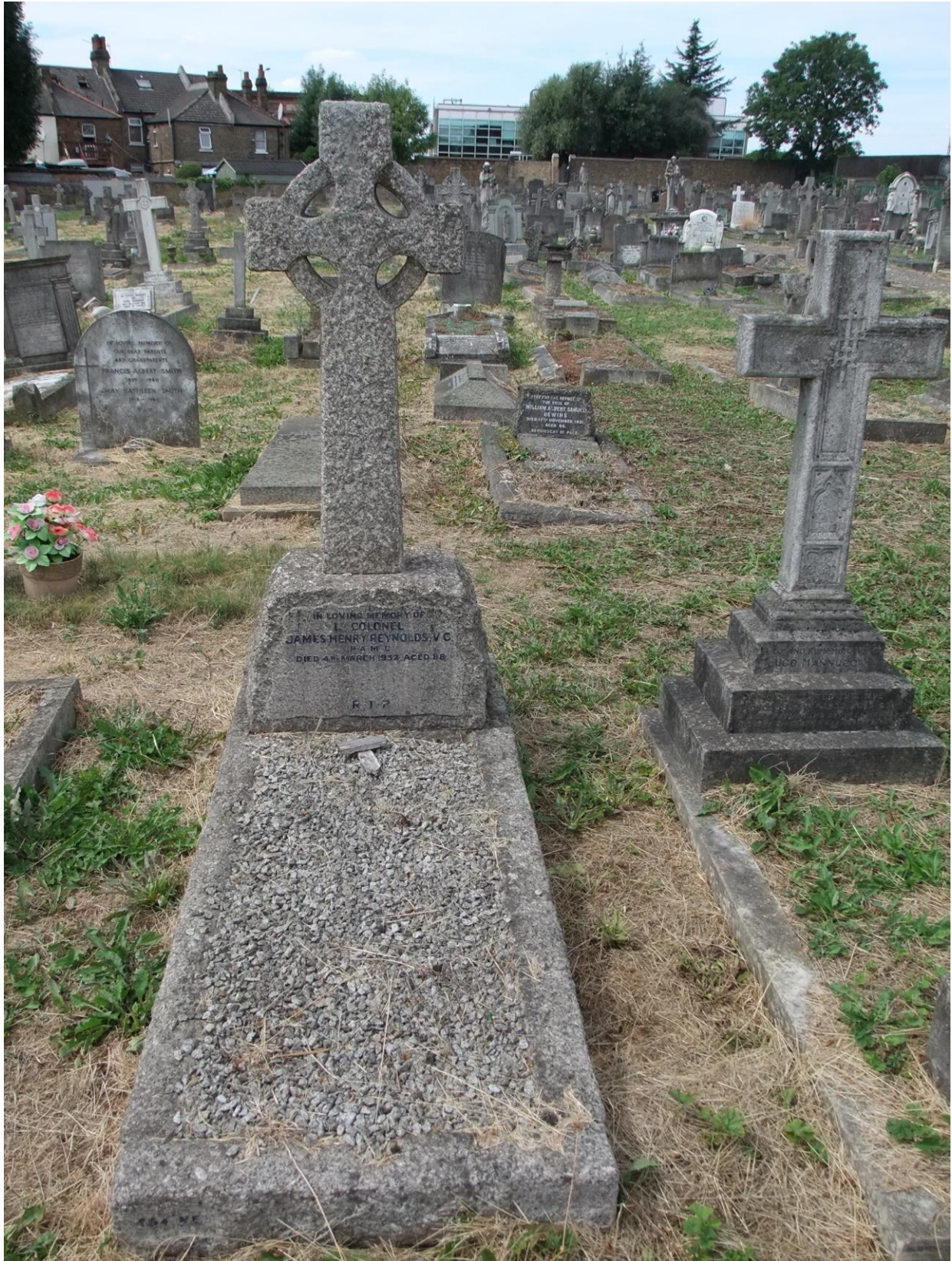
He died, aged 88 years, at the Empire Nursing Home, London and is buried in St. Marys Roman Catholic Cemetery, Grave no 504 R/C Section. His medals are displayed at the Museum of Military Medicine, Keogh Barracks, Mytchett, Surrey having been on loan. In November 2022 they were acquired by Lord Ashcroft and will be displayed in the Ashcroft Gallery.



Picture courtesy of Thomas Stewart

Medical VCs

12. James Henry Reynolds VC



Medical VCs

12. James Henry Reynolds VC



Army Medical Department

Surgeon - Major James Henry Reynolds

For the conspicuous bravery, during the attack at Rorke's Drift on the 22nd and 23rd January, 1879, which he exhibited in his constant attention to the wounded under fire, and in his voluntarily conveying ammunition from the store to the defenders of the Hospital, whereby he exposed himself to a cross-fire from the enemy both in going and returning.

Medical VCs

13. Joseph John Farmer VC



Joseph John Farmer (1855-1930) was born on 5th May 1855 in Clerkenwell, London. Little is known of life in London prior to his enlistment with the Army Hospital Corps with whom he served extensively in South Africa, firstly in the Zulu Wars of 1879, then in the First Boer War of 1881.

In the Zulu War, was first utilised treating the wounded from the Battle of Ulundi, before being promoted to Provisional Lance-Corporal just before the outbreak of the First Boer War.

| GEORGE CROSS | |
|---|-----------|
| LIEUTENANT H. E. M. DOUGLAS | 1899 |
| LIEUTENANT E. T. INKSON | 1900 |
| LIEUTENANT W. H. S. NICKERSON | 1900 |
| SURGEON-CAPTAIN T. J. CREAN | 1901 |
| SURGEON-CAPTAIN A. MARTIN-LEAKE | 1902 1914 |
| CAPTAIN H. S. RANKEN | 1914 |
| LIEUTENANT G. A. MALING | 1915 |
| CAPTAIN J. L. GREEN | 1916 |
| CAPTAIN W. B. ALLEN, M.C. | 1916 |
| CAPTAIN N. G. CHAVASSE, M.C. | 1916 1917 |
| CAPTAIN H. ACKROYD, M.C. | 1917 |
| CAPTAIN J. FOX-RUSSELL, M.C. | 1917 |
| CAPTAIN J. R. O. THOMPSON, (GEORGE CROSS) | 1944 |
| LANCE-CORPORAL H. E. HARDEN | 1945 |



Medical VCs

13. Joseph John Farmer VC

On 27th February 1881, there was a heavy engagement between the British and the Boers on the Majuba Hill which led to many casualties. Coolly, Provisional Lance-Corporal Farmer attempted to move between the wounded, treating as many as he could. At a crucial point in the engagement the Boers were closing in on a British position near the wells. As they approached, Farmer held a white flag over the wounded men, trying to protect them from further harm. At this point, a bullet went through the arm Farmer was holding the flag up with. It is said that Farmer's response to the Boers was that he had "another", and held up the flag with his other hand. Shortly afterwards, the flag was pierced by a bullet.

| | | |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Army Hospital Corps | Provisional Lance-Corporal Joseph John Farmer | For conspicuous bravery during the engagement with the Boers at the Majuba Mountain, on the 27th February, 1881, when he showed a spirit of self-abnegation and an example of cool courage which cannot be too highly commended. While the Boers closed with the British troops near the wells, Corporal Farmer held a white flag over the wounded, and when the arm holding the flag was shot through, he called out that he had "another." He then raised the flag with the other arm, and continued to do so until that also was pierced with a bullet. |
|---------------------|--|---|

Medical VCs

13. Joseph John Farmer VC

Farmer's actions were duly noted and he was awarded the Victoria Cross on 16th May 1881. He would receive his medal later that year when he was back in England recuperating from his wounds. He was invested by Queen Victoria at Osborne House, on the Isle of Wight, on 14th August 1881.

Farmer left the Army Hospital Corps with the rank of Corporal, and little is known of his life following the service, except that in later life he lived in Northwood, Middlesex. He died on 30th June 1930 aged 76 and was laid to rest in Brompton Cemetery. His medals are held and displayed by the Museum of Military Medicine, Keogh Barracks, Mytchett, Surrey.



Medal group image courtesy of Thomas Stewart

Hollis VC Grave



Before



After

On 10th May 2024, a team from the Victoria Cross Trust travelled to Acklam Cemetery in Middlesbrough on a special mission. In time for the upcoming 80th anniversary of D-Day on 6th June, they had decided to clean the grave using their DOFF machine. When contact was made with the Hollis family via Acklam Cemetery it was also discovered that there were three small cracks in the headstone which also needed attention as well as a clean.

The work was duly carried out, and you can see the before and after photos above courtesy of Keith Lumley (Chairman of the VCT). I will be featuring the story of Stan Hollis VC in next month's D-Day special edition of the magazine. Please click the links below to see the work of the VCT and donate to support their work, or read about the story of Stan Hollis VC on the website, or alternatively purchase my new book "Stan Hollis VC: The Man They Couldn't Kill" – see next page for details.

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/stanley-elton-hollis-vc/>
<https://victoriacrosstrust.org/>

Book Announcement



STAN HOLLIS VC: THE MAN THEY COULDN'T KILL

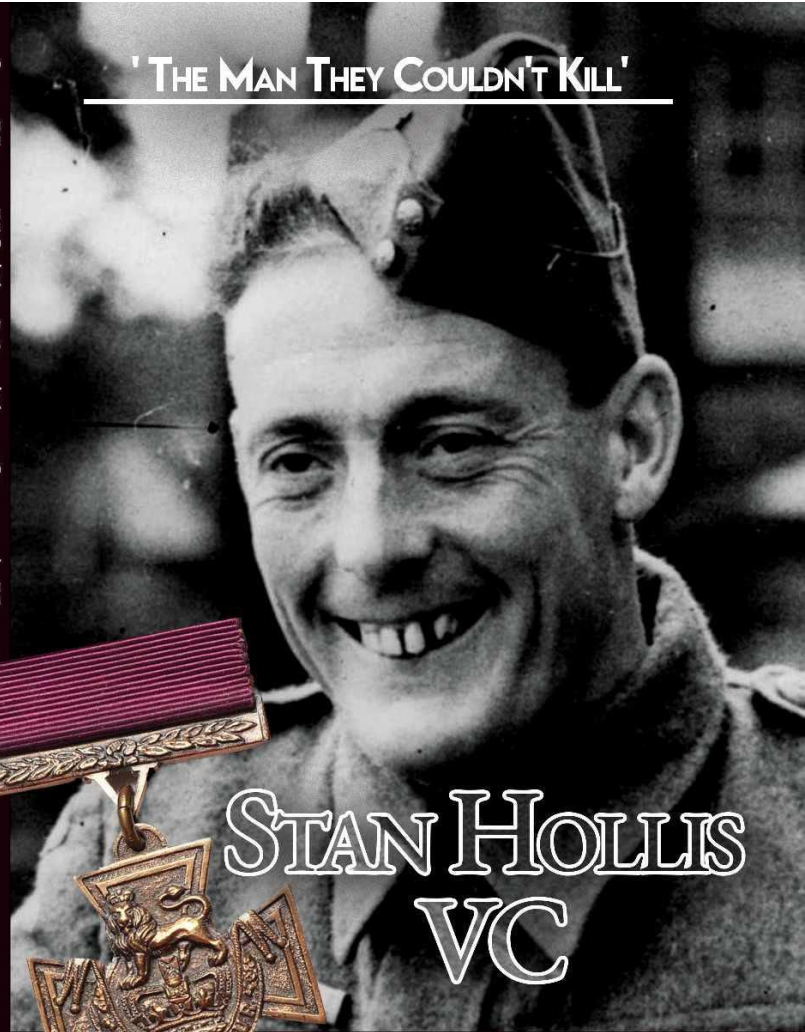
Well known for being the only recipient of the Victoria Cross for actions on 6th June 1944 (D-Day), **Company Sergeant Major Stan Hollis**, was a true leader of men and a superb soldier. However, that only just scratches the surface of a man who was recommended for not just the Victoria Cross twice, but also the Military Medal and Distinguished Conduct Medal.

Mark Green tells the story of a son of Middlesbrough, who fought in many of the key conflicts of WWII with distinction, being wounded five times, only to shun publicity and state 'anyone would have done what I did'.

He truly was '**The Man They Couldn't Kill**'

'Mark Green's new book on **Stan Hollis VC** covers his life from his early career in the merchant navy, through his wartime service and beyond, ending as a pub landlord.'

Kevin Brazier (author of *VCs of Queen Victoria's Little Wars 1851-1901*)



STAN HOLLIS
VC

MARK GREEN



MARK GREEN
FOREWORD BY KEITH PAYNE VC AM



In a special announcement, at the time of this edition going to press, my first book, "Stan Hollis VC: The Man They Couldn't Kill" will be released by Barnthorn Publishing. It has been a dream of mine for several years to write a book and now it's a reality. The book will be available to buy on Amazon or through the Barnthorn Publishing website. If you would like a signed copy, then you can contact me directly and I will arrange that for you.

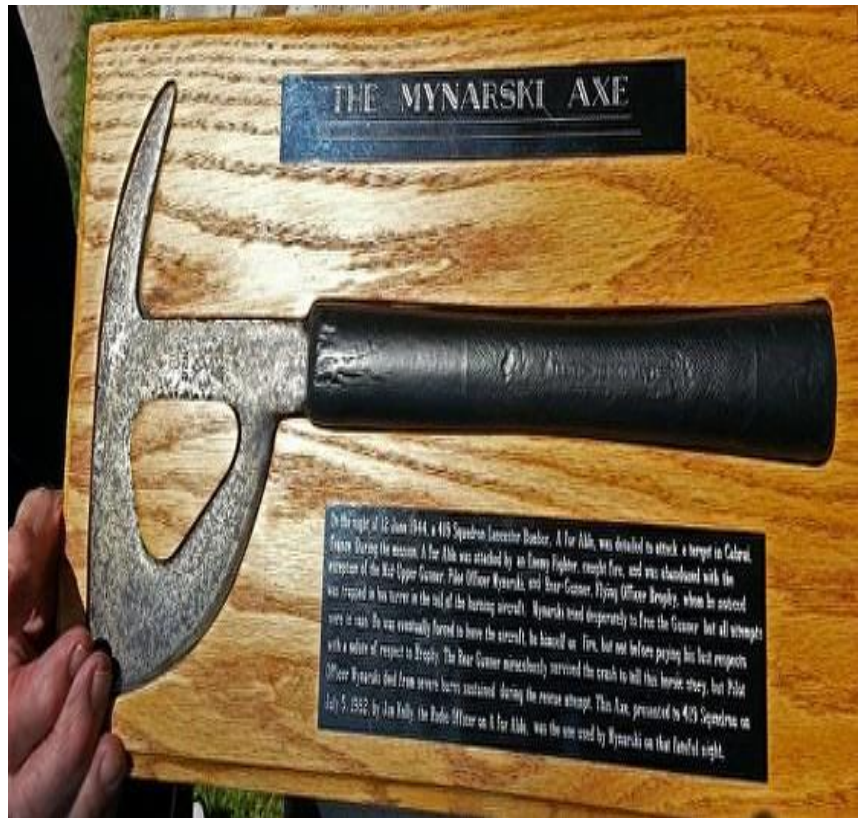
The book tells Stan's story from his early life in Middlesbrough, to a brief service in the Merchant Navy, to a five year Army career which saw two recommendations for the Victoria Cross, and one each for a Distinguished Conduct Medal and Military Medal. Stan is well known as the only recipient of the Victoria Cross on D-Day, and I am proud to tell his story. I am also indebted to Keith Payne VC AM for kindly writing the foreword to the book, facilitated by Rick Meehan.

Chance Meeting

Steve Lee

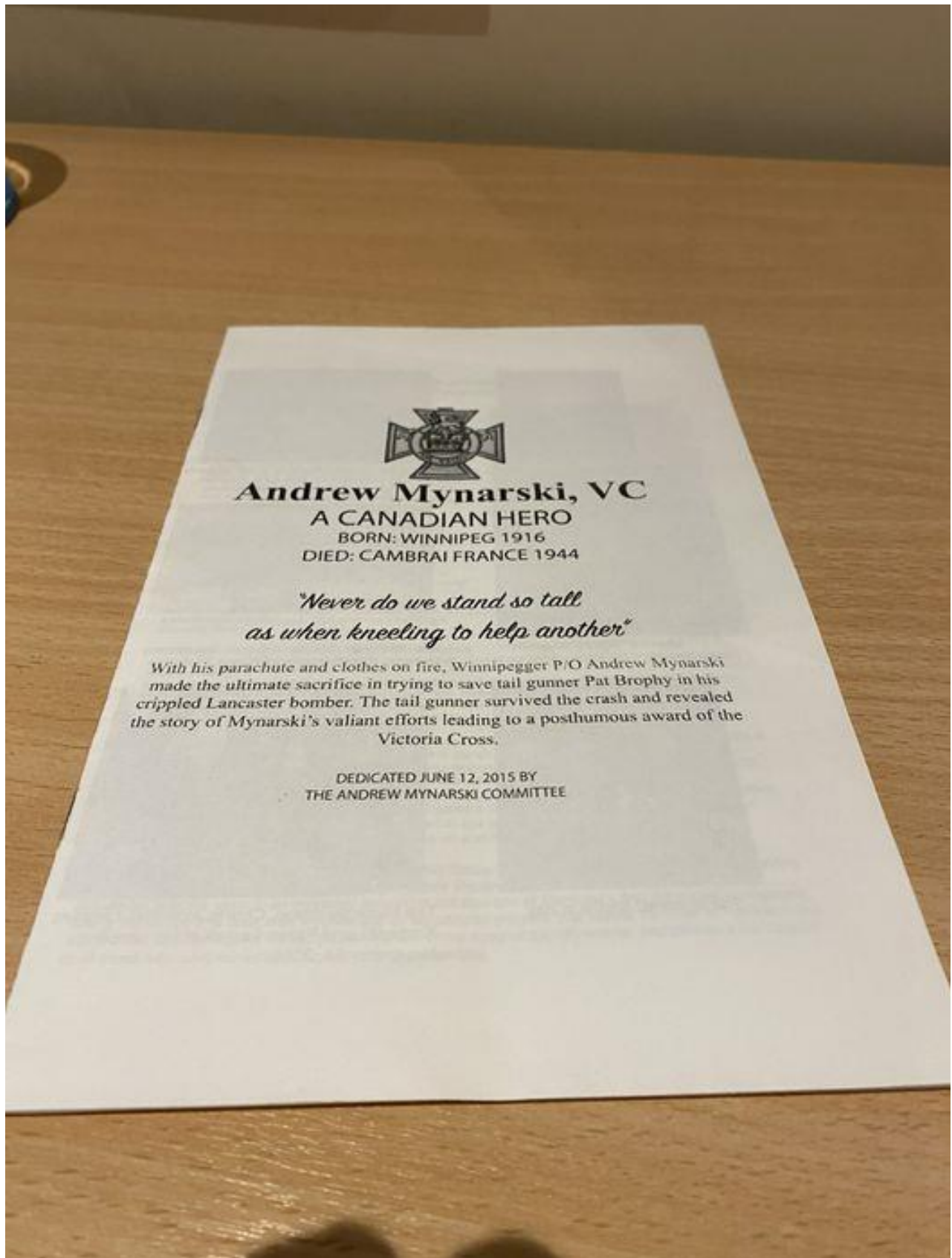
www.memorialstovalour.co.uk

Just a few weeks ago at the Menin Gate, waiting for the 8pm ceremony we got chatting to a small group that it turned out lived just down the road here in England. They were heading into France to visit the grave of WWII Canadian VC Andrew Mynarski, as the son (who was in the group), of one of the crew which resulted in Mynarski's VC wanted to re-visit with friends to pay respects. It was a delight today to welcome them over for the swapping of notes and photos. A completely random meeting in Belgium resulted in a wonderful exchange. Two memorials identified that we weren't aware of and an Order of Service form the unveiling ceremony of Andrew's statue in Winnipeg were a huge help in trying to record all VC memorials and graves worldwide.



Chance Meeting

Steve Lee



<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/andrew-charles-mynarski-vc/>

Missing Medals Found

On May 13th it was announced by Essex Police that two Victoria Cross medals worth £600,000 were returned anonymously to Chelmsford City Museum. The medals had been discovered as missing in February 2024 after a routine inspection at the Museum. The Victoria Crosses which have now been recovered are attributed to Sergeant William McWheeney awarded the VC in 1857 for actions in the Crimean War, and Lieutenant Francis Parsons awarded the VC in 1900 for actions in the Second Boer War.

The medals were returned to the Museum in April and were independently verified as the originals. It has led Essex Police to now believe the medals were taken from the Museum and an investigation has been launched into their reappearance. The descendants of both recipients have been informed of the events.

The Museum has now reviewed its security procedures and the management of their collections. It is not known the plans for the future of the medals in terms of display in the Museum, or to be stored in a secure location with replicas on display.



William McWheeney VC

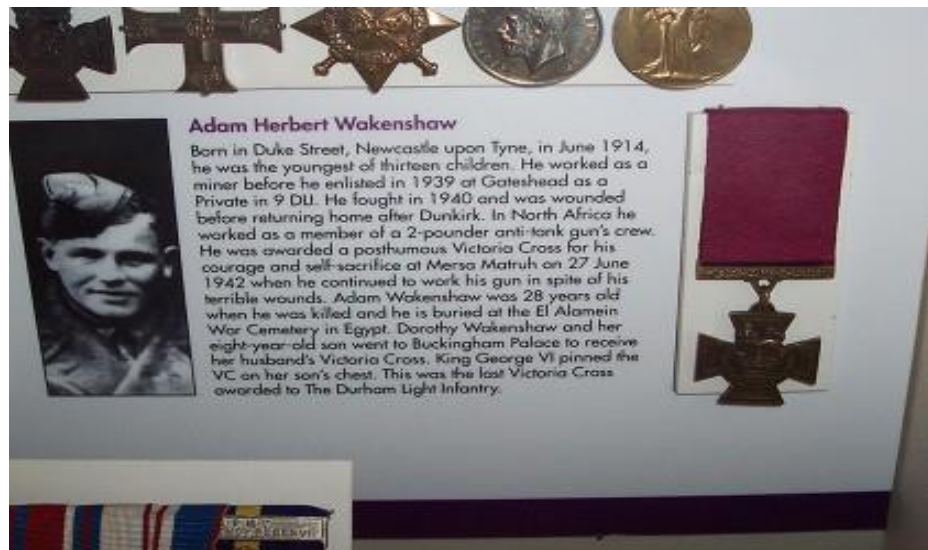
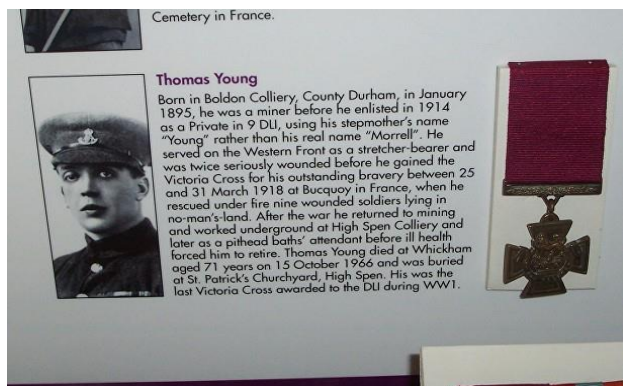


Francis Parsons VC

“The Story” to Open



On Friday June 14th 2024, the Grade II listed Mount Oswald Manor House will open to the public housing “The Story”. “The Story” will explore the whole history of County Durham housing some of the county’s most important collections of its heritage. It will include over 6 miles of archives charting 900 years of local history, and allow visitors free access to a wealth of historical documents, objects and photographs. “The Story” will also provide a new permanent home for the whole collection of the Durham Light Infantry Regiment. This then reunites the collection with the archives of the DLI for the first time since 1998. The DLI has been without a Regimental Museum since the closure of the previous Museum in 2016.



Three of the six VC groups which will feature at the new DLI Museum (Roland Bradford VC MC, Adam Wakenshaw VC and Thomas Young VC).