

We Will Remember Them: Commonwealth War Graves in St Paul's Churchyard

By Vincent Riley

In this centenary year of the ending of the First World War it is fitting that we should commemorate with honour our local servicemen who died in both World Wars and are buried in Commonwealth War Graves in the St Paul's Churchyard Extension.

There are 5 Commonwealth War Graves in the churchyard. Only 3 are marked by the characteristic Portland Stone headstone. These were introduced after the establishment of the Imperial War Graves Commission in 1917. Rudyard Kipling was appointed literary advisor for the language used on memorial inscriptions.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, is responsible for commemorating all Commonwealth war dead on identical memorials, irrespective of military or civil rank, race or religion. This organisation of six member states (Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom) is currently responsible for memorials to 1.7 million Commonwealth military service members in 153 countries.

Who were these men and why are they buried here?

Cecil Domville Wynter
Died of Wounds
Tuesday October 5th 1915
Aged 31 years

Cecil Domville Wynter was born in Stanton Harcourt, Witney, Oxfordshire, in 1883. Captain Wynter's father, Walter, had been an Army Colonel and the family moved to Woodhouse Eaves sometime between 1901 and 1911.

Cecil was educated at St. Ronan's School, Hawkhurst, Kent, and Eton College and in 1901 he was commissioned into the Army as a 2nd lieutenant in the 5th Battalion of the Oxfordshire Light Infantry. He was later transferred to the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment, attached to the Royal Army Medical Corps and sent to South Africa during the 2nd Boer War (1899-1902).

After the Boer War, Cecil moved to Argentina where he worked as a marine engineer. On 24th April 1913 he married Margaret Constance Gibson, daughter of Hope Gibson, a ranch owner, at the Iglesia Anglicana San Juan Bautista, Buenos Aires. The couple settled in Venado Tuerto in the south-west of the province of Santa Fe. When war broke out in 1914, he immediately returned to England, bringing his new wife with him.

His role in the army was as Captain of 2nd Battalion of the Irish Guards, which was formed at Warley Barracks, Essex on 18th July 1915. From 1st – 7th September the battalion was based at Acquin, exercising by route marches and practising digging trenches and putting up wire entanglements. On 22nd September the battalion moved to Dohem, on 23rd to Lingham, and on 25th to Haquin. On 26th September the battalion was ordered into the front line at Vermelles. Patrols were pushed out but reported being unable to reach the Hulluch-Loos road. Some advance was made on the following days amid some enemy shellfire. On 27th September Cecil received gunshot wounds to the head during the Battle of Loos, in which there were 60,000 casualties. Amongst fellow soldiers injured in this action were Rudyard Kipling's son 2nd Lieutenant John Kipling and 2nd Lieutenant Siegfried Sassoon, the celebrated war poet. Cecil was brought back to the Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital, Millbank, London but died on October 5th at 17 Park Lane, London aged 32. He had been promoted to the rank of Temporary Captain and was awarded the 15 Star, British War and Victory Medals.



Grave of Cecil Domville Wynter

As a token of respect for Captain Wynter and to local lads recently fallen in France, a peal of bells half muffled was rung at St Peter's Church in Mountsorrel. Cecil was buried in a family plot at St Paul's on 7th October 1915.

Cecil's widow returned to Argentina in December 1916 and remarried in 1923.

The Eton College Chronicle (No. 1544 Thursday October 14th 1915) contains the following memorial note:

CAPTAIN CECIL DOMVILLE WYNTER,
Irish Guards, was wounded in France September 27, and after great suffering died in London October 5. He came of a family of soldiers, and entering Eton at Luxmoore's as Wynter *mi.*, showed there from 1897 to 1901 the same brilliant activity and loyal attachment which took him from the School Field to the South African War, and afterwards led him to give up his work and married life in Argentina to fight and die for his country. Trusted and valued by his men, he was through great difficulties brave and faithful to the end, a constant lover of Eton and of his home.



Captain Cecil Domville Wynter in France

**Wilfred Harry Hollingshead
Died of Wounds
Wednesday May 31st 1916
Aged 22 years**

Wilfred was born in Leicester in 1893. Wilfred's father was a draper and in 1901 the family lived at 59 Highfield Street, Leicester. By 1911 they had moved to Victoria Road, Woodhouse Eaves and Wilfred was employed as an insurance clerk. Wilfred had one sister Alice. By 1916 the family had moved to 115 Maplewell Road, Woodhouse Eaves

He joined the 1/1st Leicestershire Yeomanry (Prince Albert's Own) (Corps of Hussars) as Private 1991 in late 1913 or early 1914. The regiment left Southampton with horses on 1st November 1914 and reached Le Havre on 2nd November. They saw action in the Ypres area and were sent to the trenches several times. In May 1915 the Yeomanry were sent to the front line on the second day of the Battle of Frezenberg Ridge - 281 men of the Leicestershire Yeomanry went into battle, 94 lost their lives, 93 were wounded and only 94 came through unscathed.

Wilfred's service papers have not survived, but at some point in 1915 or early 1916, he was sent back to England. It is likely that he was wounded in battle or was otherwise unfit for the front line. He was subsequently posted to the 3/1st Yeomanry which was formed in 1915 as a third-line training and draft-supplying reserve for the 1/1st and 2/1st Leicestershire Yeomanry.

Wilfred died on 31st May 1916 at the Connaught Military Hospital in Farnborough, aged only 22 – research in to the precise cause of his death is still ongoing. He was buried on 3rd June 1916 in a private plot at St Paul's. He was awarded the 14 Star, British War and Victory Medals.



Grave of Private Wilfred Hollingshead

Jesse Gibson
Died 7th March 1919
Aged 56 years.

Jesse was born in Walsall in 1863 and in 1871, aged 8, he entered Bloxwich National Boys School. He remained there after until 1879, when he joined his family, who had moved to Cannock sometime between 1874 and 1877.

On 23rd March 1884, Jesse married Mary Ann Augusta Waller (known as ‘Augusta’) at Christ Church, Ware, Hertfordshire. By 1891 Jesse was a certified schoolmaster and in 1896, the couple moved to Woodhouse Eaves so that Jesse could take up the post of Headmaster at St Paul’s Primary School, Church Hill.

During World War I Jesse joined the Royal Defence Corps and became Commandant of a Prisoner of War Camp at Glemsford in Suffolk. A village history reveals that Arnold and Gould’s Horsehair Factory was used as a prison camp. Jesse died on 7th March 1919 following an abdominal operation undertaken at the 5th Northern General Hospital, a ‘field unit’ which had beds in several locations in Leicester. He was buried on 11th March 1919 at St Paul’s. Although buried in a private plot, a Portland Stone headstone has been erected alongside the grave.



Jesse Gibson in military uniform



Commonwealth War Grave of Jesse Gibson at St Paul's (By David Morley)

Tom William Kempin
Died Sunday January 2nd 1944
Aged 30 years

Flying Officer Tom William Kempin was born in Leicester in 1913 and trained as a pilot with the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. He had been a police constable in Coventry prior to enlisting in the RAF and it was the devastating air raids of 1940 in Coventry that made him enlist.

After flight training in California, he was promoted to Flying Officer and continued his training in the UK, eventually gaining over 600 hours on single engine aircraft before converting to Mosquito twin engine bomber version aircraft. He married Edna C Hunt in 1941 and was transferred to 613 (City of Manchester) squadron at RAF Lasham.

On the 2nd January 1944, Tom took off from Lasham with his navigator, Flight Sergeant Dennis Russell, on an approved practice bombing sortie. However, not long after take-off, black smoke and flames were seen coming from the engine and the aircraft shortly began to lose height and eventually hit a tree. Tom and Dennis were thrown from the aircraft and were killed instantly. An official Rolls-Royce report stated that a fractured spring in the engine caused the crash.



Grave of Flying Officer Tom William Kempin (By David Morley)

Edmund Stanley Symes
Died Thursday July 25th 1946
Aged 27 years

Edmund was born in Chard, Somerset in 1918. He married Nancy Margaret Allen in 1942 and the couple lived at 87 Maplewell Road, Woodhouse Eaves. Edmund was a bombardier with the Royal Artillery and died in 1946 following the development of a degenerative muscular disorder.



Grave of Edmund Stanley Symes

Sources

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- Commonwealth War Graves Commission* [<https://www.cwgc.org/>]. The CWGC website provides information on the CWGC and what it does, as well as archive advice and a database recording the details and commemoration location of every casualty from the First and Second World Wars that the CWGC is responsible for.
- Woodhouse Eaves Village History Website* [<http://www.qwkz.uk/woodhouseeaves/index.html>].
- Death certificates of Jesse Gibson and Edmund Symes.
- Census data.

Acknowledgements

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