



THE NEWSLETTER

of the London and Home Counties Branch – Remembrance 2020

Least we forget

For many of us November is the month of remembrance but 2020 has proved to be somewhat difficult and it marks a number of deeper moments – centenary of the tomb of the Unknown Warrior and of our National Cenotaph in Whitehall.

Proposed by the Dean of Westminster in October 1920 and finally approved by the Cabinet the selection of the remains from one of the numerous unknown who fell and were buried in France was covered by the simple *instruction* ‘every precaution must be taken to ensure that his identity shall never become known’. Interment of the Unknown Warrior would coincide with the unveiling of the ‘new’ Cenotaph in Whitehall.

The coffin, draped in the Union Flag, with close Naval honour guard was transported from Boulogne aboard the destroyer HMS VERDUN. On arrival in Dover there was a 19-gun salute and the ship was met by the band of the Royal Irish Fusiliers playing ‘Land of Hope and Glory’. It was then conveyed to the railway station with bearers from each of the Royal Navy, Royal Garrison Artillery, Royal Irish Fusiliers, Connaught Rangers, Royal Marines and Royal Air Force.

For its journey to London Victoria the coffin was placed in the same luggage van that had carried the bodies of the executed nurse Edith Cavell (1915) and Captain Charles A Fryatt, the Mercantile Marine Master (1916) who dared ram and sink a U-boat. On the journey to London the train had to slow down because of the number of people lining the track.

Interment at Westminster Abbey coincided with the unveiling of the Cenotaph in Whitehall – designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens at an estimated cost of £10,000 --

in order that the Nation should visibly express the great debt that it owed to those who, from all parts of the Empire irrespective of their religious creeds, had made the supreme sacrifice. HM The King agreed to perform the unveiling ceremony.

The funeral procession from Victoria Station took a route to the Cenotaph where The King who unveiled the Cenotaph as Big Ben was striking the hour at 1100 met it. After a two-minute silence the procession to the Abbey continued followed on foot by the King and his entourage. Interestingly he had expressed that this would take place (without the use of umbrellas) even if the weather was unfavourable.

Mourners lining the route consisted of all ranks from the Services with 400 representatives of various ex-Service organisations and 100 recipients of the Victoria Cross.

Do see the excellent Pathe ‘Homecoming of an Unknown Warrior’ – online at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060008261>



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