

# flatiron copse cemetery

## overview

Flatiron Copse cemetery contains the graves of Commonwealth soldiers killed during the Battle of the Somme. Mametz Wood, scene of some of the heaviest fighting, lied directly behind it.

Rather unusually, there are three sets of brothers buried in the cemetery:

- Henry and Thomas Hardwidge, Graves VIII F 5 and VIII F 6
- Ernest and Herbert Philby, Graves I D 35 and I D 36
- Arthur and Leonard Tregaskis, Graves VI G 1 and VI G 2

## corporal edward dwyer

Corporal Edward Dwyer was the youngest recipient of the Victoria Cross. This was awarded to him in 1915 at the age of just 19 for conspicuous bravery whilst fighting at Hill 60 near Ypres. According to the official record, "When his trench was heavily attacked by German grenade throwers he climbed on to the parapet, and, although subjected to a hail of bombs at close quarters, succeeded in dispersing the enemy by the effective use of his hand grenades. Private Dwyer displayed great gallantry earlier on this day in leaving his trench, under heavy shell fire, to bandage his wounded comrades".



Whilst receiving treatment for his wounds he fell in love with his Red Cross nurse, Maude "Billie" Barrett-Freeman, whom he married later the same year. He was filmed receiving a hero's welcome when he returned home to London on leave in July 1915, and a unique sound recording also survives in which he talks about his war experiences. Dwyer's recording appears to be the only one made by a serving British soldier during the Great War, and as such is unique.

Sadly, Dwyer was killed in action in September 1916 when he was hit by a stray shell whilst guarding a prisoner (who was also killed). Hopefully we will have the chance to listen to his words when we visit his grave (III J 3).

## edward dwyer's recording - transcript

“ They tell me you would like to hear something of what our boys are doing at the front and although I am only a youngster and a soldier still I've seen about as much fighting as is good for any man and I think there's still a bit of fight left in me yet if I get the chance to go out again.

I was already in the army when the war broke out and went to France on August 13th 1914, nine days after the declaration of war. The first big scrap we had was at **Mons**, at twelve o'clock Sunday noon, and the Germans don't take any account of Sundays!

You people over here don't realise what our boys went through in those days. That march from Mons was a nightmare. Unless you've been through it you can't imagine what an agonising time it was. We used to do from 20 to 25 miles a day. We filled our haversacks with biscuits and had them as we were marching along.

The longest march we had was from the **Aisne** to **La Bassee**. That was after we had advanced on the Mons and started to push the Germans back to the Aisnes. We had set off to relieve the French at La Bassee. It might have been 40 miles. At any rate we started off on the forced march early in September. It was a Saturday morning and people at La Bassee's Sunday dinner time to relieve the French. We had a four-hour sit-down and then we went straight into action in open formation. That was when we pushed them back 15 miles in three weeks. I remember September 30<sup>th</sup> too. The day we drew the first pay since we'd been out there. Five francs. It had to last as long as we could make it. No more pay until November. Five francs more in November...

There was only one thing you could cheer us up on the march. That was singing. We used to sing Tipper...Gippy choruses invented by some of the chaps. **Tipperary** wasn't in full swing then. And they'd all go on to something they'd invented themselves. It used to buck us up and we would march all the better for it. Sometimes we'd sing some of G.H.Elliott's songs. You know, 'The Chocolate Coloured Coon'. But we'd always go onto something we'd invented. I don't think I've got much of a voice to sing, but I'll try and sing one or two of the choruses we used to sing:

*We're here because we're here, because we're here, because we're here. We're here, because we're here, because we're here, because we're here. We'd be far better off, far better off, far better off in a home...Here we are, here we are, here we are again.*

*Hello! Hello! Hello, hello, hello. Here we are, here we are again, here we are again. Hello! Hello! Hello, Hello, Hello, Hello, Hello. Oh!*



Dwyer receiving a hero's welcome in July 1916 in London