

MAY 1919; EDITH CAVELL'S MORTAL REMAINS WERE TAKEN FROM BRUSSELS TO NORWICH AFTER WW1

Edith Cavell was a British nurse who opened Belgium's first nursing school in Brussels in 1907. When WW1 broke out in 1914, she stayed and, in secret, nursed wounded Belgian, British and French soldiers. She then helped them to escape to neutral Netherlands through an escape network which she and others established. She was arrested in August 1915, tried and executed by a German firing squad at the Brussels' "National Firing Range" on 12th October 1915.

After the end of WW1, on 17th March 1919, Edith Cavell's body was exhumed from her grave at the "National Firing Range".

On 13th May 1919 her coffin was escorted to the North Station in Brussels on a gun carriage accompanied by a detachment of British troops sent from Cologne. (The idea for sending the troops came from Major B L Montgomery, later to become Field-Marshal Montgomery of Alamein). The streets of Brussels were lined by crowds of people. At the North Station the Reverend Stirling Gahan conducted a service before the coffin was conveyed by train to the port of Ostend. On 14th May the Royal Navy destroyer, HMS Rowena, carried her coffin across the English Channel to Dover. During the voyage she had a naval guard in full colours.

At Dover her coffin was escorted to the Marine Station through huge silent crowds and placed in a special funeral coach until the next morning. St Mary's Society of Change Ringers rang a peal of three hours and three minutes in honour of Edith Cavell.

On 15th May 1919 the 07h35 train, bearing family members and with the funeral coach attached, travelled to London. The country stations through which the train passed were thronged with children and the men in the fields stood bareheaded to offer their respects as the train passed by.

The train arrived at Victoria Station at 11h00. In the procession to Westminster Abbey nurses accompanied the gun carriage, there was an escort of a hundred soldiers of all ranks as well as military bands. The streets were congested with people paying silent homage.

The New York Times wrote the next day: "No triumphant warrior and no potentate could have received a more impressive tribute than was paid today to the mortal remains of Miss Edith Cavell as they were borne through London".

The memorial service in a crowded Westminster Abbey was attended by royalty and senior politicians. Her coffin was then conveyed by train to Norwich where her remains still rest in an area called "Life's Green" outside the south transept of Norwich Cathedral.

