



CWGC Headstone at Bournemouth East Cemetery

Wroughton Soldier's Death and Burial

Mons. Hero Buried Unique And Solemn Service A Military Funeral

The Bournemouth Echo" of Saturday contains a long account of the death and burial of a Wroughton soldier at Boscombe, Bournemouth. It reads:-

The grim realities of the war are daily being brought home to the people of Bournemouth, and a scene witnessed at Boscombe this morning, when a young soldier who had died from wounds was laid in a soldier's grave, gave a new and more solemn reminder of the stern meaning of war and of the many such burials happening beyond our ken.

The young hero over whom today the "Last Post" was sounded was Private William F. Stevens of the "C" Company, 1st Wiltshire Regiment, twenty-three years old, whose hip was badly shattered by a shrapnel wound at the Battle of Mons. He lay on the field of battle fifteen hours after being rendered helpless, and this fact, it is believed spoilt any chances he had of recovery, for since his admission to the Boscombe Military Hospital his case had been regarded as a critical, if not a hopeless one, and terminated fatally last Monday.

The bereaved parents, who were present at this morning's solemn ceremony, have two more soldier sons - one in the Wiltshire Regiment now in France, and the third in India.

The grief of the parents, great as it obviously was, must have been assuaged by the consoling note of a military funeral and the sympathy of the onlookers.

The deceased soldier hails from Wroughton, near Swindon, but it was his humble parents' wish that he should be buried where he died.

A pathetic interest was added by the presence of the long cortege of soldiers of between twenty and thirty of deceased's wounded comrades.

The little band of them - a strange mixture of all kinds of regiments - walked together, and with an emotion known only to themselves and unbetrayed by a firm upper lip, they paid their impressively silent tribute to their dead comrade.

One of the heroes peeped over a bandage which almost wholly concealed his face from view: another had the crown of his head swathed in white: while others were either nursing an injured arm or still obviously recovering from injuries to other parts of the body. All wore their khaki coats, most of them battle-stained from the strenuous days of the great retirement from Belgium.

Military honours in the midst of this striking and unique setting seemed but an incidental feature of a memorable ceremony.

The other soldiers who made up the procession commenced to assemble in the vicinity of the Hospital about eleven o'clock. The units which lined up outside the Hospital and extended in a long double line towards King's Park, included the "G" and "H" Companies of the 7th Hants Territorials under the command of Capt. Palmer, the 6th Hants Reserve Battery R.F.A., under the command of Capt. Langley Taylor with a firing party and bugle party, also of the 7th Hants.

The gun carriage and team which, drawn by six horses, waited outside the Hospital, belonged to the 1st Wessex Royal Engineers Field Company, and was in charge of Corpl. Pratt. The coffin, draped with the Union Jack, was borne from the Hospital to the gun carriage by some dozen of the 7th Hants Reserve Battalion, the bugle and firing party meanwhile standing at attention facing the entrance to the new front of the Hospital.

The procession to the Cemetery, via King's Park, through the main entrance was headed by the 7th Hants Reserve Band under Sergt. Dowding, and was followed by the units named. Behind the gun carriage were cabs containing the mourners, including, first Mr. and Mrs. W. F. Stevens (deceased's mother and father), who were accompanied by Sister Jones (of the "Empress Victoria" Ward in which the deceased died), and Mr. Gordon Saul, the Secretary to the Royal Victoria and West Hants Hospital. In succeeding cabs were: Surg-Gen Stevenson (officer-in-charge of the sick and wounded at the Hospital). Mr. D.H.W. Robson Burrows (Chairman of the Management Committee of the Royal Victoria and West Hants Hospital), Mr. Godwin Pratt (Hon. Secretary of the Sick and Wounded Committee), the Matron at the Boscombe Hospital (Mrs Samuel Smith), and other officials.

The rear of the procession was brought up by other members of the staff of the Hospital, including a considerable number of nurses(?) and lastly the R.A.M.C. ambulance section of the National Reserve, under Sergeant-Major Gurney.

Amongst others in the procession were Capt. Wingate, representing Col. Godfrey (National Reserve), Sergt-Major Jones (Royal Artillery, Woolwich), and other officers.

The journey to the Cemetery was made to the accompaniment of Chopin's Funeral March and other music. At the church in the burial ground the cortege was met by the Rev. John Hayes, chaplain to the Hospital, and senior curate at St. John's Boscombe. The scene inside the little church was one to be remembered. The wounded and other soldiers occupied the major portion of it, and the bereaved parents occupied a position next to Sister Jones and the Matron. After the usual service the cortege proceeded to the graveside, where, despite the rain which had fallen almost incessantly, a large crowd had collected. After the committal portions of the service, there followed the firing of the three volleys and the sounding of the "Last Post".

The coffin, of elm with brass fittings, was enclosed in a violet covering, and on a brass inscription plate was the inscription "William Frederick Stevens: died October 19th 1914 aged 23 years.

Attached to the floral tokens were the following:- "In loving memory from Father and Mother:" "In loving memory from his sweetheart Bessie:" "With much sympathy from the Royal Victoria and West Hants Hospital:" "From his friend, Mrs Samuel Smith:" "D. Crespigny, Bournemouth:" "For King and Country". The token from the parents consisted of a harp with a broken string: several bouquets of flowers bearing the military colours were also laid on the grave.

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