

11. Three funerals and one converted railway truck

The railway luggage van in which Edith Cavell's coffin was carried from Dover to London on May 15 1919 had been hastily converted to be suitable for this use. It had only been commissioned in early 1919.

Two months later it was used again for a similar journey, this time carrying the coffin of a merchant marine captain who was another East Anglian hero from Dover to Charing Cross Station in London..

The burial of Captain Charles Fryatt, July 7 1919

Captain Fryatt was the only other individual, male or female, civilian or military, to be granted a national memorial service in 1918 or 1919 in Westminster Abbey or St Paul's Cathedral.

On 25 March 1915 Fryatt had attempted to ram a German U-boat in Dutch waters with his merchant marine vessel. He had been shadowed by the U-boat when heading out of a Dutch port to England. A year later on June 26 1916 his vessel was surrounded and he was taken prisoner. He was tried for 'piracy' and executed by the Germans on July 27 1916 in Bruges. (This centenary will be marked from July 4-15 2019 in Harwich, Fryatt's home town. See <https://www.harwichandmanningtrestandard.co.uk/news/17241995.captain-fryatts-funeral-carriage-to-go-on-display-for-centenary/>).

Fryatt's body was exhumed and returned to the United Kingdom for burial. His coffin was landed at Dover, and transported (in the same railway van as used for Edith Cavell) to London on 8 July 1919, for a memorial service at St Paul's Cathedral. Hundreds of merchant seamen and widows of merchant seamen and fishermen attended. Representing the Government were many members of the Admiralty, the Board of Trade, the Cabinet and the War Office.

As with Edith Cavell, the route from St Paul's to Liverpool Street station was lined with people. Fryatt was buried at All Saints' Church, Upper Dovercourt, to which station the coffin was conveyed by train and then on to the church on a gun carriage. His widow was presented with the insignia of the Belgian Order of Leopold that had been posthumously awarded to Fryatt, just as Edith Cavell had received the same order on May 15th.

The truck was in use sixteen months later for a similar purpose and over the same route as used for Edith Cavell.

The burial of the Unknown Warrior, November 11 1920

The Unknown Warrior's remains were laid to rest inside the West door of Westminster on the second anniversary of Armistice Day, November 11 1920.

The idea of such a burial seems first to have come to a chaplain at the Front, the Reverend David Railton (1884-1955), when he noticed in 1916 in a back garden at Armentières, a grave with a rough cross on which were pencilled the words "*An Unknown British Soldier*". In August 1920 he wrote to the Dean of Westminster through whose energies this memorial was carried into effect.

The body was chosen from among those of four unidentified British servicemen exhumed from of four different battle areas, the Aisne, the Somme, Arras and Ypres. The Abbey service followed on from the unveiling of the Cenotaph by King George V.

The van is owned by The Kent and East Sussex Railway and is usually on display in Tenterden, Kent (see <https://preservation.kesr.org.uk/wagons-vans/cavell>)

Photos:

Cavell Van – from K & ESR website <https://preservation.kesr.org.uk/wagons-vans/cavell>

Grave of the Unknown Warrior – © Westminster Abbey – see <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/unknown-warrior>

An alternative image is available: the coffin lying in state 11.11.1920.

