

3. Making the homecoming arrangements:

'It is of course without precedent' (War Office minute, April 26 1919)

In early 1919 the Cavell family were intending a quiet return of her body to Norwich. The War Office initially offered a naval vessel to bring the coffin across the Channel to Harwich.

The media and an organising committee in London were soon pressing for there to be a service in London. They asked the War Office that the arrangements be *'military'* in nature, and *'as impressive as possible'*. The service in Westminster Abbey was only agreed in mid-April 1919, one month before the 'homecoming'.

The War Office file suggested that there was no precedent for such a commemoration though Queen Victoria's funeral in 1901 had several similarities. Her coffin was taken from the Isle of Wight for burial at St George's, Windsor via London, involving the first use of trains and a gun carriage for such an event.

The War Office certainly provided an *'impressive'* input. Men from the British Army in occupied Germany paraded in Brussels, the Royal Navy conveyed the coffin and family across the Channel. In Dover Naval Dockyard the Connaught Rangers guarded the coffin overnight (Edith had sheltered a dozen men from their Regiment). The Coldstream Guards and three military bands paraded across London. Her final journey in Norwich mirrored that in London, involving the Norfolk Regiment and bands.

No individual, military or civilian, other than Edith Cavell, had a national memorial service in either St Paul's Cathedral or Westminster Abbey from the end of World War I to the end of 1919.

Photos:

Edith Cavell's coffin arriving at Dover 14.5.1919 – Source Illustrated London News (ILN)– copyright held by Tom Gillmor, Head of Content, Mary Evans Picture Library tom.gillmor@maryevans.com ref 12517324

Orders of service: Westminster Abbey and Norwich Cathedral – both in Cavell Archive

Procession to Westminster Abbey – Source ILN - copyright Mary Evans Picture Library as above – ref 10218186



