

9 The story of Edith Cavell's dog Jack - Jack the war hero

From time to time you'll come across a stray dog – what do you do to find it a home? What sort of history does it have you wonder....?

Nurse Edith Cavell found a stray dog ... on the streets of Brussels in 1910. She named him Jack and took him to live in her home in the nursing Clinique she ran in Brussels. About a year later he was joined there by another stray dog she named Don – but after some months Don decided he was going to be better off elsewhere and was seen no more.

Jack was a Belgian Shepherd, grey on his back and with fawn colour legs and a foxy tail. He is said to have been very protective of his mistress. She would walk him morning and evening. To him the nurses living at the Clinique were sheep to be rounded up, and he was known to go for their ankles.

Jack remained at the Clinique through the arrival of the occupying German army in Brussels following the invasion in August 1914. From November that year when he accompanied his mistress on their walks, one or more men in civilian clothes might be following along behind them. Little did passers-by suspect that the men were in fact British or French soldiers who had been left behind enemy lines.

The men had been brought to the Clinique by Belgians who were part of an underground network. They stayed with Edith for some days or in homes nearby and were then taken by her on their way to link up with Belgians who would go with them towards the Dutch border and freedom. If they were lucky and were not arrested, and managed to avoid the electrified border fence and the many guards, they would cross into neutral Holland and get back to their units via England. Edith also helped Belgian men of military age along the same route.

As directed by Edith, the men would rendezvous with their guides in a variety of locations – at a table in a local cafe, on a street corner. German soldiers and spies would simply see a single woman taking her dog for its daily walk!

Eventually, in early August 1915, after nine nerve-wracking months helping men escape, Edith Cavell was arrested along with over 30 people in the underground network. She was put in prison awaiting trial and the nurses back at the Clinique had to look after Jack. Edith Cavell wrote to them: *Look after Jack and give him a stroke.*

On October 7th and 8th Edith Cavell was tried and then shot on the 12th. Jack remained, often tied up, at the Clinique pining for his mistress. Six months later, he was taken to a chateau in Southern Belgium where he lived out the War and died in 1923. The *princesse* who owned the chateau, and was a friend and admirer of Edith, felt it was right to conserve his body. She looked for a museum in England who would like to display him. She tried the British Museum, the Imperial War Museum and museums in Norwich.

Finally, a new home was found for him, only a short distance from where his mistress lay buried, in the Cavell Home for Nurses by the Maids Head hotel in Tombland, Norwich. When that closed in the early 1960s he was welcomed by the Imperial War Museum who displayed him in his fine glass case for many years. A fitting last place for a heroic dog who helped save the lives of many soldiers...

Photos – both from originals in Swardeston's Cavell Archive

Edith Cavell with Jack (on her right) and Don in the Clinique garden, 1911.

Jack in his display case at the Imperial War Museum – photo by Nick Miller

