

St John's Churchyard, Sutton Veny



CWGC
Commonwealth War Graves Commission

During the two world wars Britain became an island fortress and a base for equipping and training troops and launching land, sea and air operations. In both conflicts, the skies above the islands and the surrounding seas became the scene of fierce fighting involving aircraft, submarines and warships. Britain was also a major centre for military medical care with thousands of hospitals across the country treating service personnel who were wounded, fell victim to disease, or were injured in accidents at home or overseas.

Many of the servicemen buried in the United Kingdom were killed in action in the air while defending the home front, while others perished in British coastal waters. However the majority had been wounded or contracted disease on active service overseas, and were transported back to Britain for hospital treatment or convalescence in private homes before succumbing to their injuries or illness.

The families of those who died in the UK were able to lay their relative to rest where they wished, so today the graves of over 170,000 men and women who died while serving in the armed forces during the first and second world wars can be found in churchyards and cemeteries throughout the United Kingdom. Some burials form war graves plots, but most are scattered throughout cemetery grounds. In all, Commonwealth war dead are buried or commemorated in almost 13,000 different locations across the country.



St John's Churchyard

This is the final resting place of 169 men and women who served with Commonwealth forces during the First World War. The earliest war graves date from late 1915, and more than 140 of those buried here were Australian soldiers. Alongside them are several female nurses and one servicewoman of the Second World War.

Sutton Veny and the surrounding area housed several important military camps during the First World War. Tents and wooden huts were established on sites to the north and west of the

village, eventually accommodating several thousand men while they trained on Salisbury Plain and prepared for front line duty, and a hospital facility of around 1,200 beds treated the sick and wounded. The local community was transformed, with pubs and cinemas well-frequented by soldiers, while laundry services and tuck shops run by the villagers catered for the new arrivals.

In December 1916, Sutton Veny became the home of No. 1 Australian Command, which was established here until after the end of the war. Australians had been deployed to the Western Front earlier in the year, after seeing action in the Middle East

and Gallipoli in 1915, where 'Anzac' troops from Australia and New Zealand played a key role. The area around Sutton Veny and Codford soon became one of the most important Australian bases in the country. A YMCA centre was established in Greenhill House (now Sutton Veny House), where peaceful lawns and gardens helped men rest or convalesce, and soldiers cut the outline of their Australian Imperial Force cap badge into the hillside at nearby Lamb Down.

After the Armistice, thousands of Australians remained in the area to prepare for civilian life while awaiting discharge and passage home. In January 1919, No. 1 Australian General Hospital relocated here and remained for the rest of the year. Most of the Australians laid to rest in Sutton Veny, more than 100 men and women, were victims of the influenza pandemic which reached Britain in late 1918. 'Spanish flu' is estimated to have killed some 50 million people around the world between 1918 and 1920, and around 250,000 in Britain alone. Although the Australians had left Sutton Veny by early 1920, the connection between the village and Australia remained strong. Part of St John's church is dedicated as the Anzac Chapel, and a service is held every year to commemorate the servicemen and women laid to rest here.

Australian soldiers in a YMCA rose garden, Sutton Veny, early 1919

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Commission is responsible for the commemoration of almost 1,700,000 members of the Commonwealth forces who gave their lives in the two world wars. The graves and memorials of these men and women, who came from all parts of the Commonwealth and who were of many faiths and of none, are found around the globe in 153 countries. For more information about the Commission, our work and how to search our records online visit www.cwgc.org Enquiries are also welcome at our offices: **CWGC** Head Office Tel: + 44 (0) 1628 507200

E-mail: casualtyenq@cwgc.org **CWGC** United Kingdom Office Tel: +44 (0) 1926 330137 E-mail: ukaoffice@cwgc.org

For more information about this location and some of those commemorated here, scan the QR code (right).

