The Hundred Parishes

An introductory article about the VICTORIA CROSS

Four men associated with the Hundred Parishes were awarded the Victoria Cross in WWI. The VC is the highest military honour and is awarded for gallantry in the face of the enemy.

Arthur Martin-Leake

In Thundridge, beside the old A10, a plaque on the wall of High Cross churchyard honours Arthur Martin-Leake, the first person to be awarded the Victoria Cross twice. Since then, there have been only two further instances of a double VC.
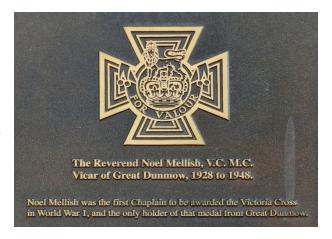

Lt-Colonel Arthur Martin-Leake (1874-1953) lived in High Cross. He was an army surgeon and earned each VC for attending or rescuing wounded soldiers whilst under enemy fire, firstly in the Boer War and then in WWI. He lived to the age of 79 and his ashes are buried in High Cross churchyard.

In the north east corner of the churchyard there are gravestones and information about the Martin-Leake family, including Arthur's older brother, Vice-Admiral Francis Martin-Leake (1869-1928).

Noel Mellish

Noel Mellish is commemorated in Great Dunmow by a small plaque opposite the war memorial. Although not originally a local man, he was educated at Saffron Walden Grammar School. He served as an army chaplain to the Royal Fusiliers during WWI. In 1916 he rescued many wounded soldiers from trenches, an act of selfless courage that was recognised by the award of the Victoria Cross.

Some time after the war, Noel Mellish served as vicar of Great Dunmow for 20 years.

George Henry Tatham Paton
The memorial at Little Hallingbury, on a little green near the church, gives the names of 33 men who died in WWI. Amongst them is GH Tatham Paton. Acting Captain George Henry Tatham Paton served with the Grenadier Guards and was killed in action in northern France in December 1917 at the age of 22. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for most conspicuous bravery and self-sacrifice.

His father was managing director of the Bryant and May match company and George's name was recorded on many memorials around the country where Bryant and May had factories or the family had connections. A link with Little Hallingbury has not been clearly established.

William Leefe Robinson
William Leefe Robinson was the first man to be awarded the VC whilst on active service in the UK. In September 1916, Robinson, a 21 year-old pilot flying from Hornchurch airfield in Essex, single-handedly shot down a German airship over Cuffley, Hertfordshire. This was the first airship to be shot down by an English plane. It happened at about 2am and thousands of Londoners saw the blazing airship fall to earth. The event was seen as a turning point in the war as German airships had previously met with little effective resistance, with growing numbers bombing England, almost at will. Leefe Robinson was an overnight hero, receiving not only the Victoria Cross but also significant cash awards from many sources.

In the following year, 1917, his plane was forced to land behind enemy lines and he spent the remainder of the war as a prisoner. When war ended, he returned to England but died at the end of 1918 at his home in Middlesex from Spanish Flu.

Leefe Robinson's connection with the Hundred Parishes is rather tenuous, but he is thought to have lived for a while in Sawbridgeworth with his parents.

Any comments or suggestions for improvement may be submitted by using the Feedback form on the website. The website has many short articles on various aspects of The Hundred Parishes, as well as introductions to individual parishes and to a number of local celebrities, and an extensive What's On section. More than a hundred walk route descriptions can be freely downloaded, with each of the hundred parishes featuring in at least one walk.