

Plaque will mark bravery of Great War soldier who Memorial at last

As the nation prepares to remember those who died on the battle field, the talk in Kings Langley has been of Private Christopher Cox, who brought pride to the community with his heroics in the First World War. Here, reporter PETE BENNETT looks at the story of the man who became one of the greatest war heroes.

A KINGS Langley war hero is to be honoured in his home village almost 90 years after his extreme valour under fire saved the lives of dozens of his comrades who had been wounded in battle.

Private Christopher Cox was awarded the Victoria Cross by King George V for his heroic actions during a battle at Achiet-le-Grand in Northern France in March 15 1917.

Kings Langley Parish Council have now made the decision to mark the 90th anniversary of Christopher Cox's brave act with a memorial plaque and the residents of the small French village of Achiet-le-Grand have decided to do the same.

Parish Councillor Gerry Angiolini said it was time Christopher Cox's story was told.

He said: "There's nothing in the village that actually says what he did and it's about time there was. This bloke was a hero and brought honour to Kings Langley."

The parish council were inspired to act after receiving an email from Phillippe Drouin, Vice President of the Somme Remembrance Association and a resident of Achiet-le-Grand who wished to honour Christopher Cox for his bravery and the role he played in liberating his village. He said: "I was able to place his

was seen to stumble, but carried on. It later emerged that a bullet had struck the injured man as he was being carried by Pte Cox, almost killing both of them.

Pte Cox was recommended for the Victoria Cross, the highest military honour a soldier can receive, presented only for "the most conspicuous bravery, or some daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice, or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy."

Within a month of the actions that earned him the VC, Pte Cox was himself badly injured and after an operation returned to England where on July 21 1917 he received his medal at Buckingham Palace.

At the time he said: "I was only doing what any British soldier

would have done."

The Gazette reported that more than 5,000 people attended a ceremony in Kings Langley the day Pte Cox received his medal with houses and streets adorned with flags and a large banner spelling out the words 'Well Done.'

He was not demobilised from the army until 1919. He was not the only member of his family to fight in the war with brothers James and Harry both serving



Private Cox's
Victoria Cross



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He said: "I was able to place his actions to a specific area near the village and everytime I passed that spot I thought of him."

Christopher Cox was born in Kings Langley on Christmas Day 1889 and married in the village in 1912. He worked as a farm labourer before heeding Lord Kitchener's call to arms and enlisting in the 7th Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment in September 1914. He left for France in July 1915 with his wife Maud awaiting the birth of their child.

Serving as a stretcher bearer Pte Cox was soon witnessing the horrors of the First World War and took part in the battle of the Somme in 1916, suffering injury on the first day.

Later that year he fought at the bloody battles around Thiepval and in early 1917 became part of the advance that pursued the retreating German army towards the Hindenburg Line.

Facing a fierce rearguard action from the Germans, Private Cox, and the other members of his battalion, were forced to fight for every inch of land and the Germans stood firm around Achiet-le-Grand.

On March 15 the advancing British took heavy casualties with many injured men forced to shelter in shell holes while the Germans defended their positions.

According to the Army transcript taken at the time Pte Christopher Cox, apparently oblivious to the exploding shells around him, continued to carry out his duties as stretcher bearer.

The transcript read: "Private Cox, with absolute disregard for his own personal safety went out into the open over absolutely fire swept ground and single handed rescued four men. Having collected all the wounded of his battalion he assisted in bringing in the wounded of the neighbouring battalion.

"He continued to rescue the wounded on March 16th and 17th with complete disregard for his own personal safety."

Second Lieutenant Dealler of the 7th Battalion Beds also witnessed the extraordinary acts of bravery.

He said: "Subsequently, after his own Company had withdrawn from the front line, I saw him go up again towards the front line through machine gun fire though I believe all the wounded from his Company were already back.

"He did not rejoin the Company till about 12 hours after and although a very powerful man, whom I have never seen tired before, he was thoroughly exhausted. The troops are unanimous in their enthusiasm on his behalf and in their desire to see him rewarded by an honourable decoration."

At one point during the battle Pte Cox was seen carrying a wounded man on his back and

James and Harry both serving, James sadly being killed in action in Belgium in 1916.

After the war Pte Cox returned to Kings Langley where he worked as a builder before working at the Ovaltine factory.

Christopher and Maud Cox had eight children, with son Ian and daughters Betty and Violet still living in the Kings Langley area.

Ian Cox, 78, of Abbots View said his father never spoke about the First World War.

He said: "When he came back to the village he gave a speech in the village hall and said he'd rather be back in the trenches than making a speech to people! He was a very, very unassuming fellow.

He was offered a commission by the army and they offered to buy him a house and he said 'I'm not accepting a penny for my fallen comrades'. He was quite happy to spend time in his garden."

During the Second World War Christopher served in the Home Guard but proved his valour when he braved the flames that had engulfed the Griffin Pub after it had been struck by a German bomb in an attempt to save publican Ted Carter. Sadly Mr Carter died, but once again, 25 years later Christopher Cox displayed his bravery.

In 1954 he fell from the Ovaltine factory roof and spent much of the next five years in hospital. He died on April 28 1959 and was buried in All Saints Church in Kings Langley.

Ian adds: "When Gerry told the family that the parish council were thinking of creating a memorial we were all thrilled to bits that at long last some recognition was going to take place in the village."

Christopher Cox's story was kept alive by historian Mary Hallett in her book Without Hesitation and since being contacted by Mr Drouin, council clerk Paul Dunham has worked to co-ordinate planning the memorials in Kings Langley and Achiet-le-Grand.

Cllr Angiolini said he hoped the new plaque would be installed at All Saints Church on March 17 next year.

He said: "Hopefully we can have quite a bit of a ceremony. And we have also arranged for Ian Cox and Mary Hallett to visit Achiet-le-Grand for the unveiling of its memorial as well."

Mr Drouin added that remembering Christopher Cox recognises the achievements of all who fought and fell during the First World War.

He said: "It is not only one man who will be honoured but all the soldiers who will lie in France forever. In commemorating Christopher Cox VC, I am sure that I will help to remember the sacrifice of all your men for our freedom."



brought
honour
to Kings
Langley

