

# The Revd David Railton MA, MC - originator of the idea of the Unknown Warrior by James Brazier



42 Gordon Road, Cliftonville - the Railton family home. The road was probably named after General Gordon who was killed at Khartoum in 1885. The new Blue Plaque is clearly visible



The Blue Plaque which Margate Civic Society has put up at 42 Gordon Road, Cliftonville



The Revd David Railton as a Chaplain to the Forces during the Great War. His brother, Nathaniel, also served as a Chaplain to the Forces and, later was Archdeacon of Lindsey (1941-1948). Members of the Railton family are shown living at 42 Gordon Road in both the 1901 and 1911 censuses. The Revd David Railton served as Vicar of Margate from 1920 to 1925 and lived with his wife and family at the Vicarage (since demolished) on St Peter's Road, close to its junction with College Road



This family photograph shows the Railton family - George Scott Railton (1849-1913) and his wife Marianne (1850-1928) together with their two sons David (1884-1955) and Nathaniel (1886-1948) and their daughter Esther (1887-1971). George Scott Railton was the First Commissioner of the Salvation Army and second in command to its founder General William Booth

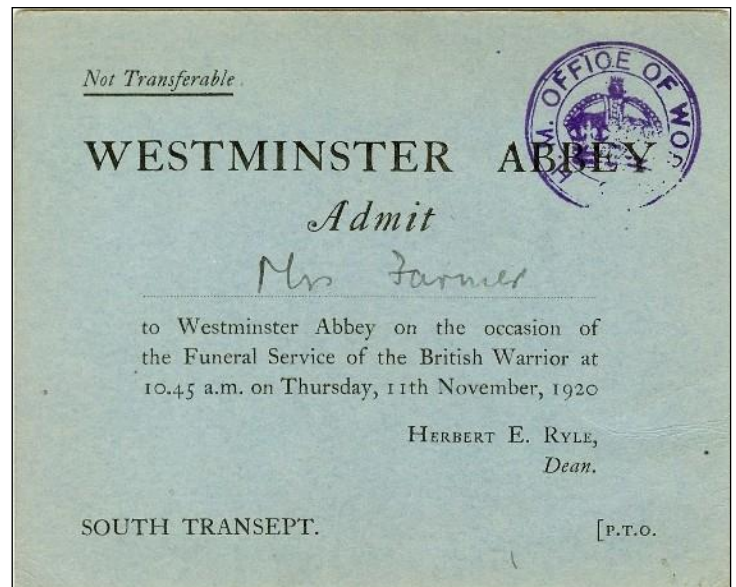
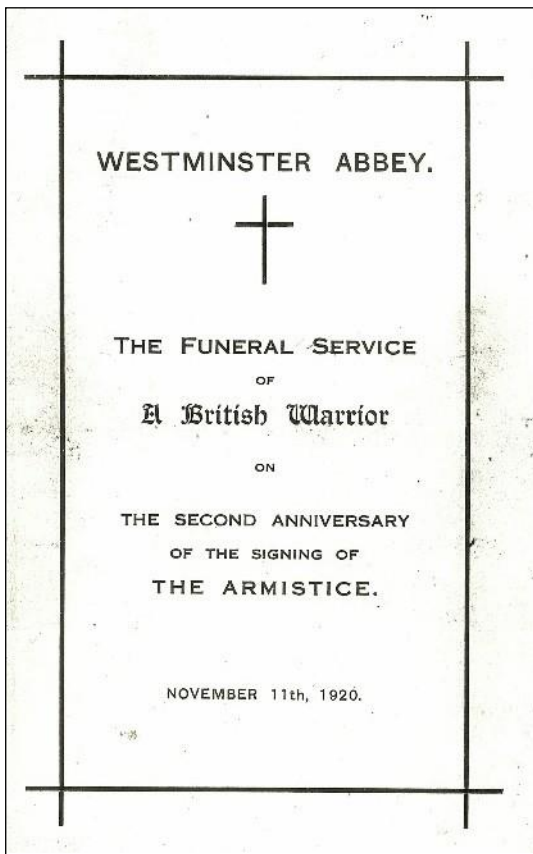


Stanley House School where David Railton was educated before going to Keble College, Oxford. The school was in Clarendon Road, Cliftonville. It is believed that this fine building was demolished in the 1930s or destroyed by enemy action in the Second World War

This article was written by Margate Civic Society Vice-President James Brazier for inclusion in the Westgate-on-Sea Heritage Centre's Newsletter, in response to a request by Dr Dawn Crouch. Dr Crouch was the founder of Westgate-on-Sea Heritage Centre and a noted local historian. In 2016, she was awarded the Freedom of Westgate-on-Sea in honour of her work on behalf of the town and local community. Sadly, Dr Crouch died on 7<sup>th</sup> November, and this article is dedicated to her memory.

To appreciate the hugely important role that David Railton played 100 years ago, we need first to provide some background to the story. The 11th November 1920 was not only the second anniversary of the Armistice but it was the planned date for the unveiling of the permanent Cenotaph in Whitehall. A temporary lathe-and-plaster Cenotaph had been erected in Whitehall as a saluting-point during the Peace Celebrations held on 19th July 1919. Originally, it had been intended that the temporary Cenotaph would be removed shortly after the Peace Celebrations but such was the outpouring of grief by





*This admission card to Westminster Abbey was almost certainly issued to a mother of a serviceman who had lost his life in the war. It is believed that this admission card was issued by ballot such would have been the demand from members of the public to attend the ceremony.*

*David Railton was invited to attend the service which he duly did. At the time of the service, he was Vicar of Margate (St John the Baptist Church). It would have been a great honour for him to be present at the service and to see his idea come to fruition*

*The front of the Order of Service for the Funeral Service of the Unknown Warrior*

members of the public, expressed by filing past the Cenotaph and laying wreaths and flowers at its base, that the Government decided to replace the temporary structure with a permanent Cenotaph made from Portland stone. The Cenotaph became, effectively, the National War Memorial and has remained so ever since. It was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens who also designed numerous other war memorials in both this country and overseas as well as countless other buildings: indeed, he is regarded by many as Britain's greatest architect of the 20th century.

The role David Railton played in this hugely important occasion was that it was he who is credited with the idea of burying an Unknown Warrior as a representative of all those who had died in service during the Great War and whose names are inscribed on the many Memorials to the Missing but for whom there are no known graves for their relatives to visit and pay their respects.



*This drawing by Fortunimo Matania shows the lowering of the coffin containing the body of the Unknown Warrior to the ground at the beginning of the Funeral Service held at Westminster Abbey on 11th November 1920*



*A sepia image of the oil-painting by Frank O. Salisbury showing the burial of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey on 11th November 1920. This large painting hangs in a Committee Room within the Houses of Parliament*



Abbey immediately after the permanent Cenotaph had been unveiled which the King agreed to do.

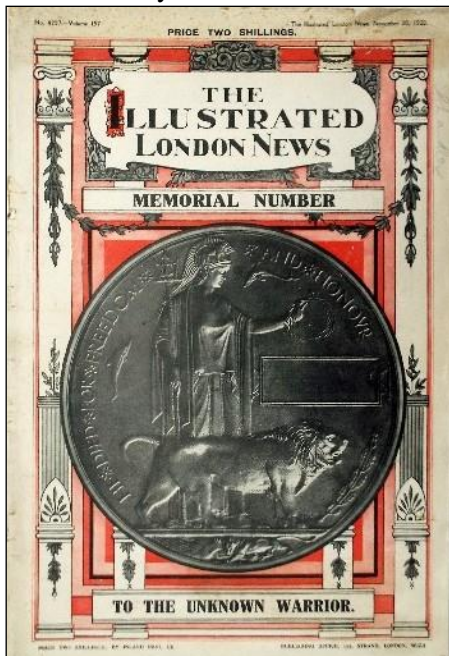
Instructions were given that a body of a British soldier whom it would be impossible to identify should be brought back from each of four identified battle areas - the Aisne, the Somme, Arras and Ypres. The four bodies were taken to St Pol and one was selected at midnight on 7th November by Brigadier-General L. J. Wyatt DSO to be conveyed to England. It is believed that the remaining three bodies were re-interred in St Pol Military Cemetery. No-one knew from which area the selected body had come from - nor will anyone ever know as very little information was given by the British authorities regarding the selection of the Unknown Warrior. It was not until 1939 that Brigadier-General Wyatt, in a letter to *The Daily Telegraph*, gave the facts about the matter.

Although reference has been made above to a British 'soldier', it is quite possible that the body selected was that of an unidentified sailor serving with the Royal Naval Division or even an airman. However, the probability is that the body is that of a soldier but, for that reason, he is

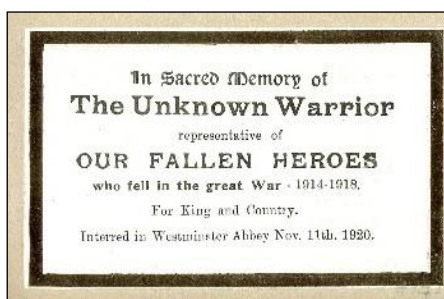
always referred to as the Unknown Warrior rather than as the Unknown Soldier.

There was a suggestion that the Unknown Warrior should be buried beneath the Cenotaph rather than in Westminster Abbey but that idea came to nothing. There was also a suggestion that an Unknown Sailor should be buried alongside the Unknown Warrior but the word 'warrior' was deemed to comprise all services.

It is difficult today to fully appreciate the significance of the unveiling of the Cenotaph and the burial of the Unknown Warrior on the second anniversary of the Armistice and the public's reaction to those momentous events. The French buried their Unknown Soldier beneath the Arc de Triomphe on the very same day but it would appear that it was coincidental. Since that date, virtually every country in the world has adopted the idea first put forward by David Railton. His war record was exemplary with him being awarded the Military Cross in 1916 and being Mentioned in Despatches. His name has deservedly gone down in the history of the Unknown Warrior and deserves to be remembered in this anniversary year.

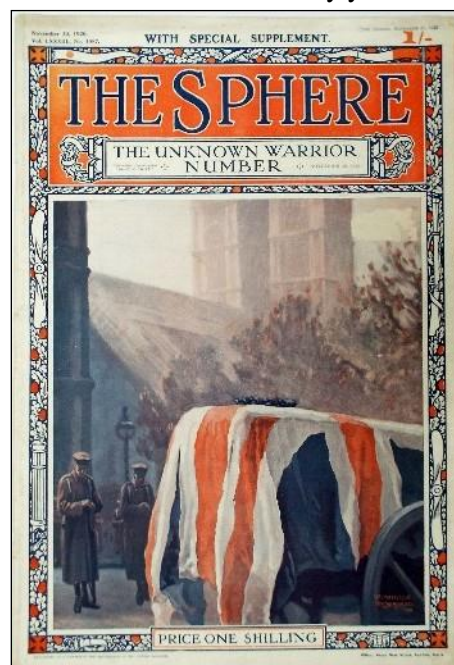


The front cover of *The Illustrated London News* dated 20th November 1920. The *Illustrated London News* was owned by Sir William Ingram who had a home at *Westgate-on-Sea*

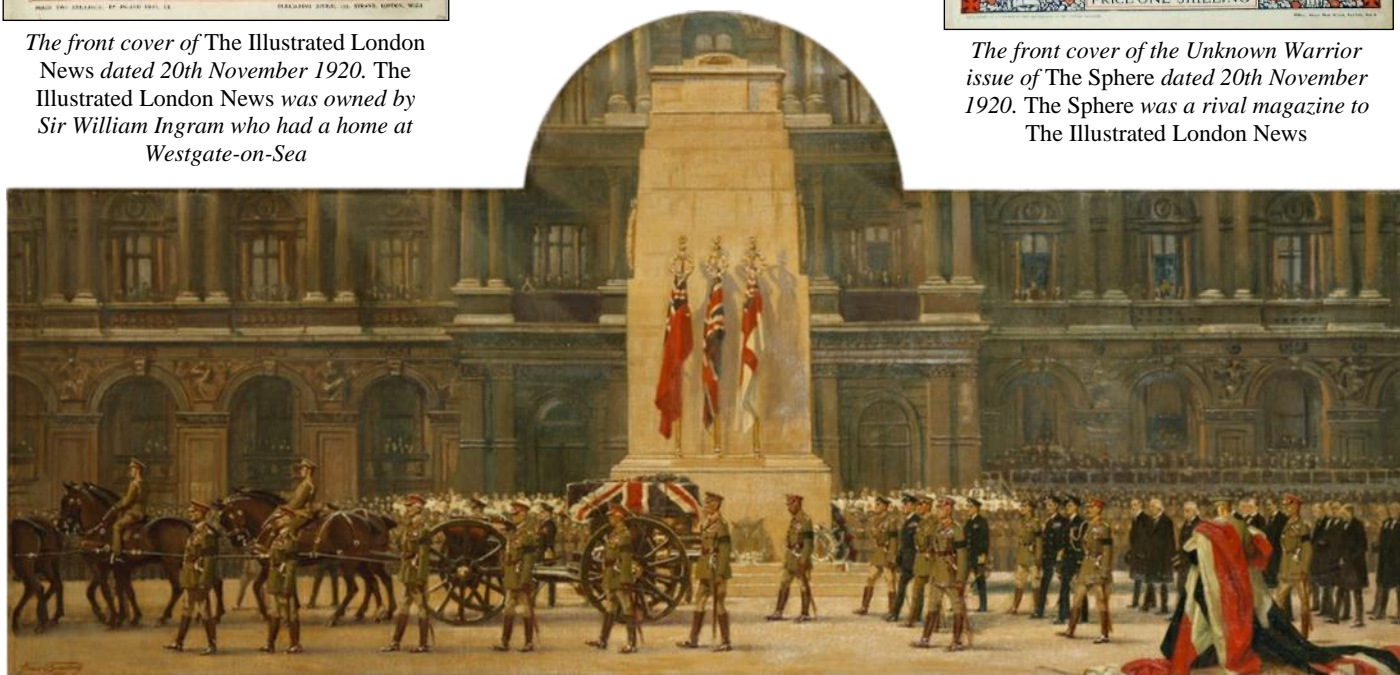


One of the many designs for 'In Memoriam' cards that were produced by numerous printers at the time as souvenirs of the Unknown Warrior

The Cenotaph and the Unknown Warrior are inextricably linked - as depicted in the painting below



The front cover of the Unknown Warrior issue of *The Sphere* dated 20th November 1920. *The Sphere* was a rival magazine to *The Illustrated London News*



This magnificent oil-painting by Frank O. Salisbury shows the gun-carriage carrying the coffin of the Unknown Warrior leaving the Cenotaph on its final stage of its journey to Westminster Abbey. The painting is in the Royal Collection



The reports reproduced below were published in *The Thanet Advertiser and Echo* dated 20th November 1920. It is believed that David Railton personally provided the reports to the Editor of that newspaper. The reports dispel the story that it was not known for several years who it was that had the original idea of the Unknown Warrior. Clearly, David Railton wanted his parishioners, at least, to know that it was him. Margate is still proud of him. □

A pair of wall-plaques as souvenirs of the Unknown Warrior and the Cenotaph:



## Men and Affairs.

### A CAUSERIE OF COMMENTS.

Not only was the Rev. David Railton, M.C., Vicar of Margate, responsible for the idea which has fired the imagination of the whole nation but the Union Jack that covered the coffin of the Unknown Warrior was also the one brought back by Mr. Railton from France where he served as a chaplain attached to one of the London Territorial Divisions. The flag has a great history. It was used at Vimy Ridge, Bully Grenay, Hill 60, in the Ypres salient, on the Somme, at Messines Ridge, at Cambrai, Bethune, and on the French front before Epernay. In the comparative quiet of rest billets behind the lines it was used for religious ceremonial and social events; at Church parades it took the place of an altar cloth at celebrations of Communion, before and after battle; and in the dead of night or early dawn it enshrined the bodies of the gallant dead, providing for them a hallowed shroud.

Both officers and men revered the flag in a remarkable way, as often, in the absence of blanket or other covering, it lay immediately next to the khaki-clad figure on the stretcher, and it is tinged with the blood of the men of London, of every part of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, and of every branch of the Service. The Vicar told me that he once had a fright concerning the flag. For six weeks not a trace of it could be found. It had last been placed in the bottom of a kit bag bearing the Vicar's name on the bottom and was left in the wagon. It transpired that the flag had been thrown out by mistake and left down the line. It was subsequently returned to Mr. Railton by an officer who had heard about its fame. The flag will now hang over the grave of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey.

*James Brazier has recently stepped down from being Margate Civic Society's Newsletter Editor - a post he held continuously from 2005. Previously, he served as The Western Front Association's Bulletin Editor for eight years*

### The Cavell Van at Bodiam Station

The original railway van that was used to convey the body of the Unknown Warrior from Dover to London Victoria Station on 10th November 1920 was restored in 2010 and is now on display at the Kent and East Sussex Railway Station at Bodiam. The van contains a replica of the oak coffin as well as replicas of the wooden casks that were used to transport earth from the Ypres Salient in which the coffin was buried in Westminster Abbey. The Cavell Van was also used, on separate occasions, to transport the coffins containing the bodies of Nurse Edith Cavell and Captain Fryatt of *SS Brussels* on their return to England. Both were executed by the Germans during the Great War.



*The historic Cavell Van on display at Bodiam Station. It is well worth a visit. Check the K&ESR website for times, etc*