

## Abraham Acton VC



Abraham Acton was born in Whitehaven on December 17<sup>th</sup> 1892 and at a young age by the standards of today he initially became a miner in the village of Lowca a short distance up the Cumbrian coast from Whitehaven.

He enlisted in the equivalent of today's Territorial Army called the Territorial Force in 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Border Regiment and at some stage he also became a member of the Orange Institution as a member of Bentinck's LOL 171 in Whitehaven.

The military life obviously suited Abraham Acton more than mining because in January 1914 he became a regular soldier in 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Border Regiment in which he served as a Private.

At the outbreak of World War 1 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Border Regiment was sent to the Western Front in October 1914 as reinforcements near Lille and Ypres for the British Expeditionary Force already there defending the Channel ports from German attacks.

It was for his bravery on December 21<sup>st</sup> 1914 at Rouges-Bancs that Abraham Acton and a colleague from Workington were awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest award that can be given for gallantry in the United Kingdom.

The citation published in the London Gazette of February 16<sup>th</sup> 1916 said,

“For conspicuous bravery on the 21st December, at Rouges-Bancs, in voluntarily going from his trench and rescuing a wounded man who had been lying exposed against the enemy's trenches for 75 hours; and on the same day again leaving his trench voluntarily, under heavy fire to bring into cover another wounded man. He was under fire for 60 minutes whilst conveying the wounded men into safety.”

On March 25<sup>th</sup> 1915 the Whitehaven Orange District noted their pride in the award of the Victoria Cross to one of its members and the District's congratulations were to be sent to him, but we do not know whether they were received because unfortunately like most regular soldiers already in the Army at the beginning of World War 1 Abraham Acton did not survive it as he was killed in action at Festubert on May 16<sup>th</sup> 1915, and like many of the fallen there is no known grave for him. He is remembered today with over 13,400 other dead soldiers with no known grave at the Le Touret Memorial in French Flanders.

The minutes of the Grand Orange Lodge of England from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> July 1915 in Bristol, said,

“Many of our members have distinguished themselves on the field of battle. Bro Private Abraham Acton of Whitehaven has won the Victoria Cross, and Bro Sergeant J H Raynor of

Oldham has won the Distinguished Conduct Medal. All honour to them and those heroes who are fighting so valiantly at the front!”

His parents received his Victoria Cross on his behalf from King George V at Buckingham Palace on November 29<sup>th</sup> 1916 and today the VC of Abraham Acton is housed at The Beacon in Whitehaven.

Today in Whitehaven a commemorative plaque marks the place of Abraham Acton’s birth, but sadly there is no mention of his Orange Order membership and so there are probably few people in Whitehaven who are even aware of it. The fairly recent opening of a new Orange Lodge in Workington called “Abraham Action VC Memorial Lodge” will no doubt help to raise this profile with the general public, and it is of course one of the aims of this Lodge of Special Purpose the 55<sup>th</sup> West Lancashire Division LOL 1915 to promote the Orange Order within the military.

Bibliography; -

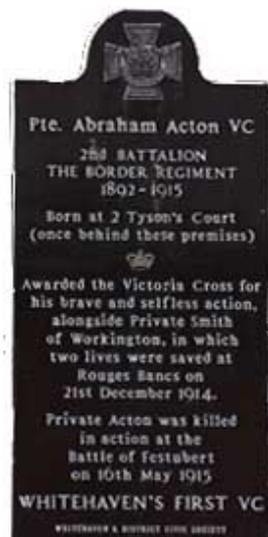
“Faith, Fraternity and Fighting: The Orange Order and Irish Migrants in Northern England, c. 1850-1920” by Donald M MacRaild

“Battles Beyond the Boyne” published by the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland

“Orange Order in World War 1” by Michael Phelan, Grand Lodge Historian

Memorials to Valour website

Cumbria’s Museum of Military Life website



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