

Veterans, Victoria Crosses and Degrees of Separation

elsewhere Henry Allingham was notable for being the last surviving founder member of the RAF and the last survivor of the battle of Jutland in 1916.

In May 1916 he was serving in the Royal Naval Air Service as a mechanic and was told to report to HMT Kingfisher where a Sopwith Schneider, one of his favourite aeroplanes, was being loaded on board. They were to rendezvous with the Grand Fleet where the Sopwith would be lowered into the sea to take off for reconnaissance flights to locate the German fleet.

He said "I discovered later that John Travers Cornwell, who went to the same school as me, was awarded a Victoria Cross for bravery in the battle. He died in Grimsby Hospital on 2nd June aged just 16."

I wrote about Jack (as he was known) Cornwell [well known](#). He was moved from the public grave pit at Manor Park Cemetery and reburied with full naval honours in a more prominent grave with an impressive memorial. Always described by my father as 'the only thing in Manor Park cemetery that is well maintained'.

I have not been able to find a photograph of Jack that is genuinely of him. The portraits painted later and many, if not all, of the photographs published in newspapers at the time used one or other of his two younger brothers, who all bore a close resemblance to each other.

When I first read that Henry Allingham and Jack Cornwell VC attended the same school I immediately thought of Johnson Beharry VC who formed part of the escort of the veterans at the [here](#).

I like what he said: 'Some days you are the bug, some days you are the windshield'.

Some of the streets and institutions that Henry Allingham and Jack Cornwell knew are still there, others have gone, or changed. There is a Blue Plaque in Clyde Place, in Manor Park there is a Cornwell Street and a pub called the Victoria Cross which I must visit quickly as I hear that it has closed and been boarded up – the fate of too many pubs. Walton Road School was renamed John Cornwell School in 1925 and demolished in 1969. There is now the Jack Cornwell Community Centre nearby.

His medal is held by the Imperial War Museum and Newham Sea Scouts (since 1965 Manor Park is part of [here](#)). His family entrusted his medal to the school until 2006 when his nephew sold it to the [other well known](#), rapidly becoming notorious, former inhabitant of Walthamstow has blotted her copybook and is unlikely to be remembered with pride.

And I dearly hope that none of the young men and women from East London and Essex currently serving become posthumous holders of any gallantry medal. May they come home safely.

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Esmerelda Weatherwax is a regular contributor to the Iconoclast our community blog. To view her entries please click