

The Unknown Warrior of Great Britain

On 7 November 1920, in strictest secrecy, four unidentified British bodies were exhumed from temporary battlefield cemeteries at Ypres, Arras, the Asine, and the Somme. None of the soldiers who did the digging were told why.

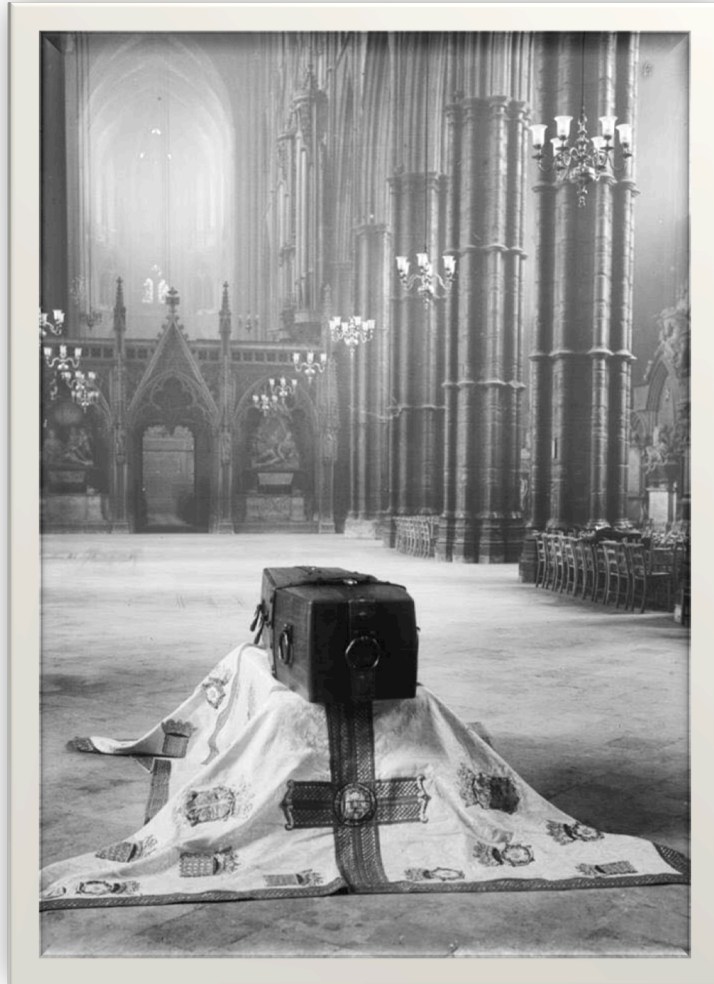
The bodies were taken by field ambulance to General Headquarters at St-Pol-Sur-Ter Noise. Once there, the bodies were draped with the union flag.

Sentries were posted and Brigadier General Wyatt and a Colonel Gell selected one body at random. The other three were reburied. A French Honor Guard was selected and stood overnight by the coffin of the chosen soldier.

On the morning of 8 November, a specially designed coffin made of oak from the grounds of Hampton Court arrived, and the Unknown Warrior was placed inside. On top was placed a crusaders sword and a shield on which was inscribed: "A British Warrior who fell in the GREAT WAR 1914–1918 for King and Country."

On 9 November, the Unknown Warrior was taken by horse-drawn carriage through Guards of Honor and the sound of tolling bells and bugle calls to the quayside. There, he was saluted by the French Marshall Foch and loaded onto HMS Vernon bound for Dover. The coffin stood on the deck covered in wreaths, surrounded by the French Honor Guard.

Upon arrival at Dover, the Unknown Warrior was met with a nineteen gun salute, something that was normally reserved only for Field Marshals. He was then conveyed by a special train to Victoria Station, London. He remained there overnight, and, on the morning of 11 November, he was taken to Westminster Abbey.



The idea of the unknown warrior was thought of by a Padre called David Railton who had served on the front line during the Great War. The union flag he had used as an altar cloth while at the front was the flag that had been draped over the unknown warrior's coffin.

It was Railton's intention that all of the relatives of the 517,773 combatants of Great Britain whose bodies had not been identified could believe that the Unknown Warrior could very well be their lost husband, father, brother, or son.

This is the reason we wear poppies. We do not glorify war. We remember—with humility—the great and the ultimate sacrifices that were made, not just in this war, but in every war and conflict where our service personnel have fought to ensure the liberty and freedoms that we now take for granted.

Every year, on 11 November, the Brits remember the Unknown Warrior. At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, they will remember them.