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For Valour – Dennis Cowan

# FOR VALOUR

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The United Kingdom's highest award for gallantry in the face of the enemy is the Victoria Cross, first instituted in 1856 to award acts of valour during the Crimean War. The medal is a bronze cross pattée bearing the crown of Saint Edward, surmounted by a lion and includes the simple inscription FOR VALOUR.

Since its inception, 1,358 Victoria Crosses have been awarded, including only 15 since the end of the Second World War. Only three men have won the VC twice, two of whom were doctors in the Royal Army Medical Corps. The other was Charles Upham from New Zealand, an infantryman who won both his awards in the Second World War.

But what has this to do with sundials?

It all started a couple of years ago when I heard of a sundial at Moray Golf Club in Lossiemouth which was dedicated to

two soldiers of the Great War. My chance to see the sundial came in 2017 when I had a few days in Nairn, some 27 miles to the west of Lossiemouth.

The sundial (Fig. 1) is situated on the golf course overlooking the North Sea, between the 18th green and the clubhouse (Fig. 2) and can't be missed by anyone who plays golf on the course; it is also easily seen by anyone on the adjacent roadside. It is an octagonal bronze dial set on an octagonal table on a baluster pedestal, complete with a simple gnomon (Fig. 3). There are Roman numerals from 4 am to 8 pm read from the outside, with a 7½ minute time scale and a noon gap, with a motto of "Docet Umbra" meaning "the shadow teaches" (Fig. 4).

A plaque on the pedestal dedicates the sundial to Captain George Eric Edwards and Sergeant Alexander Edwards, both of the 1/6<sup>th</sup> Seaforth Highlanders, and who both 'carried' on the Moray Links when they were boys (Fig. 5).

So who were these two men and what was their story?

George Eric Edwards was born in Lossiemouth on 23 February 1889 and was a draper by trade. He joined the 1/6<sup>th</sup> Seaforth Highlanders as a private in September 1914 and was commissioned in the field in March 1916. Later that year he was awarded the DSO (Distinguished Service Order), before being 'Mentioned in Despatches' for his part in the Battle of Arras in 1917, but was killed during the



Fig. 1. The sundial overlooking the North Sea.



Fig. 2. The sundial near to the clubhouse.



Fig. 3. The sundial on its baluster column with some wooden memorial crosses at its base.



Fig. 4. Detail of the octagonal sundial.

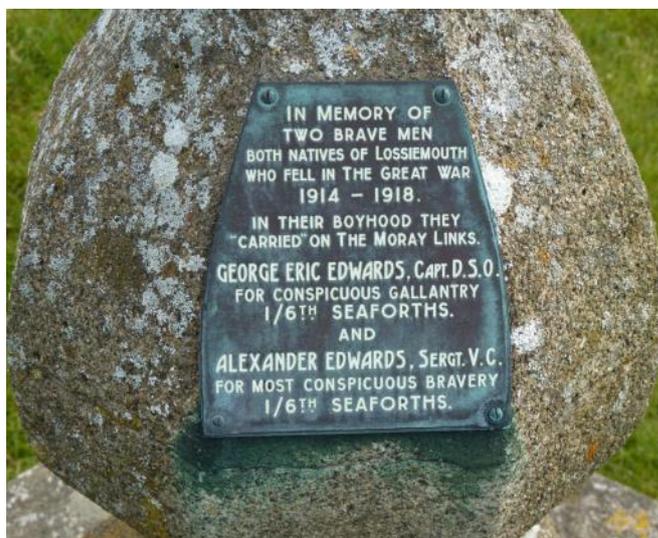


Fig. 5. The plaque on the sundial pedestal.

Battle of Cambrai at the end of that year. He is buried in the Orival Wood Cemetery in Flesquières in France.

He was recommended for the Victoria Cross for his actions in capturing a German battalion headquarters and a large group of prisoners, but received the lesser award of the DSO instead.

The other man commemorated on the dial is Alexander Edwards who by a great co-incidence was George Edwards' cousin. Alexander was born on 4 November 1885 near Lossiemouth and was educated at Lossiemouth School. After leaving school, he became a cooper working in the herring fishery industry. At the outbreak of the war in July 1914, he immediately volunteered and joined the 1/6<sup>th</sup> (Morayshire) Battalion of the Seaforth Highlanders, part of the 51<sup>st</sup> Highland Division.

He won his Victoria Cross during an action in July 1917 north of Ypres for conspicuous bravery despite being badly wounded.

Alexander received his Victoria Cross from King George on the forecourt of Buckingham Palace on 26 September 1917. He returned to his unit, but one



Fig. 6. Photograph from the video of Alexander Edwards receiving his VC from the King.

hundred years ago, on 24 March 1918 at Loupart Wood, east of Arras, Alexander Edwards was reported missing in action. His body was never found. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Arras Memorial in Faubourg-d'Amiens Cemetery.

Alexander Edwards' Victoria Cross is on display at the Highlanders Museum, Fort George, near Inverness. Interestingly when I visited the museum, a video was being played as an introduction to the museum and to the Highlanders, into which the Seaforths were eventually integrated.

A couple of minutes into the video, I couldn't believe it when I saw Edwards, who I recognised from a photo that I



Fig. 7. Alexander Edwards' Victoria Cross at the Highlanders Museum at Fort George.

had previously seen, being awarded with his Victoria Cross by the King. I just had to watch the video again, and when the relevant scene was being played, I took the photograph shown in Fig. 6. Both this and the photograph of Edwards' VC in Fig. 7 were taken with the knowledge of the Highlanders Museum and are reproduced with their permission.

The Moray Golf Club decided to honour these two brave soldiers by installing a sundial close to the 18th green, and eventually in August 1931 the sundial was unveiled in front of a large crowd including members of Alexander Edwards' family. It remains in the same position to this day.

Unfortunately, I have been unable to identify the maker of the sundial.

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