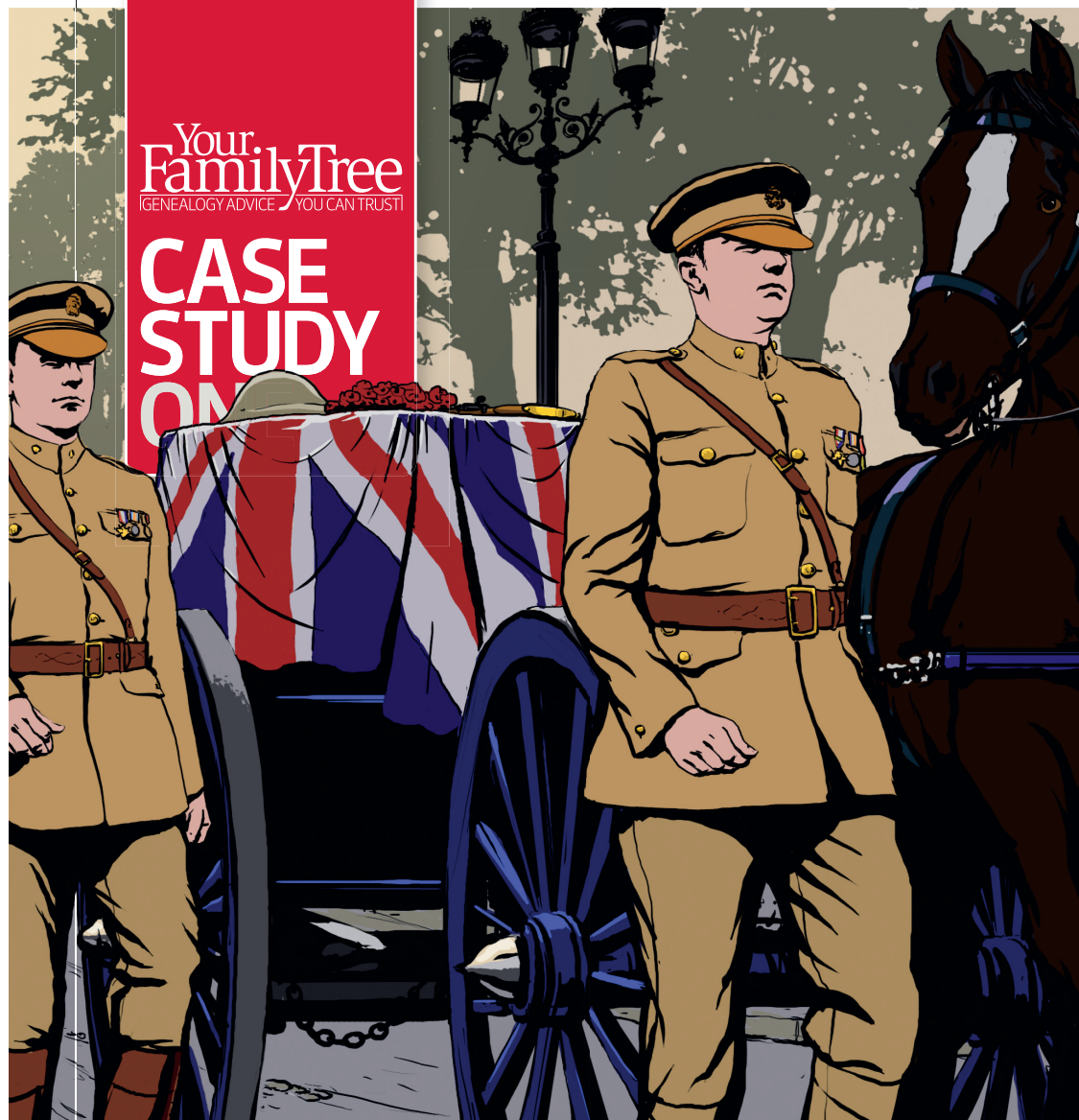


CASE STUDY ON



Mounted gunners

The role of the Royal Horse Artillery

The Royal Horse Artillery was responsible for the light, mobile guns that provided firepower in support of cavalry units, and is still in the senior arm of the artillery. In 1914, there was one battery to each brigade of cavalry. A battery had six 13-pounder field guns, and included five officers and 200 men, as well as 228 horses.

The original British Expeditionary Force that fought in the early months of WWI included only one division of cavalry, with four brigades, and thus it had four batteries of RHA organised into two brigades. When on parade with its guns, the RHA takes precedence over every other regiment and corps in the British Army.

obviously known that his uncle had taken part in the ceremony but knew nothing of his service in the RHA.

Gunning times

'52591 Gunner Frank Strudwick' was born in Eastbourne in 1888, the third son of Frank Snr and Emily (née Longhurst). I was keen to find out more about Frank's military life leading up to this day, so I applied to the Ministry of Defence for his service record. I knew that a number of these hadn't survived the Blitz but fortunately for me his record was one of the lucky ones. His details showed that he served in India, France and after the War he even re-enlisted and was stationed in Egypt.

I have no idea why Frank decided to join up. As far as I've out, no other close family members had links with the Army, but maybe he wanted some adventure and to see the world. Over the next 22 years, he was to get his wish.

Within two years of enlisting he was posted to O Battery in Bangalore, India. I found his entry in the 1911 Census: aged 22, Harris Barracks, Bangalore.

Walking with the Unknown Warrior

Ninety years ago our reader's great-uncle took part in an event that touched the nation's soul

By **Mike Strudwick**



Mike has been researching all branches of his family tree for over 15 years.

When 20-year-old Frank Francis Strudwick enlisted at Woolwich in the Royal Horse Artillery in September 1908, he couldn't have imagined that 12 years later he'd be slowly walking through the crowded streets of the capital, beside a gun carriage, bearing the body of a soldier who would

symbolise the fall of nearly one million men.

This, however, was exactly where my Great Uncle Frank found himself on Thursday 11 November 1920. As a gunner in N Battery of the Royal Horse Artillery, he played a small part in the ceremony of the burial of the Unknown Warrior.

When I first started my family history research, the pictures my father showed me of his uncle in uniform took my eye. They were supplied by the *Daily Mail* and were proudly held by the family. My father had

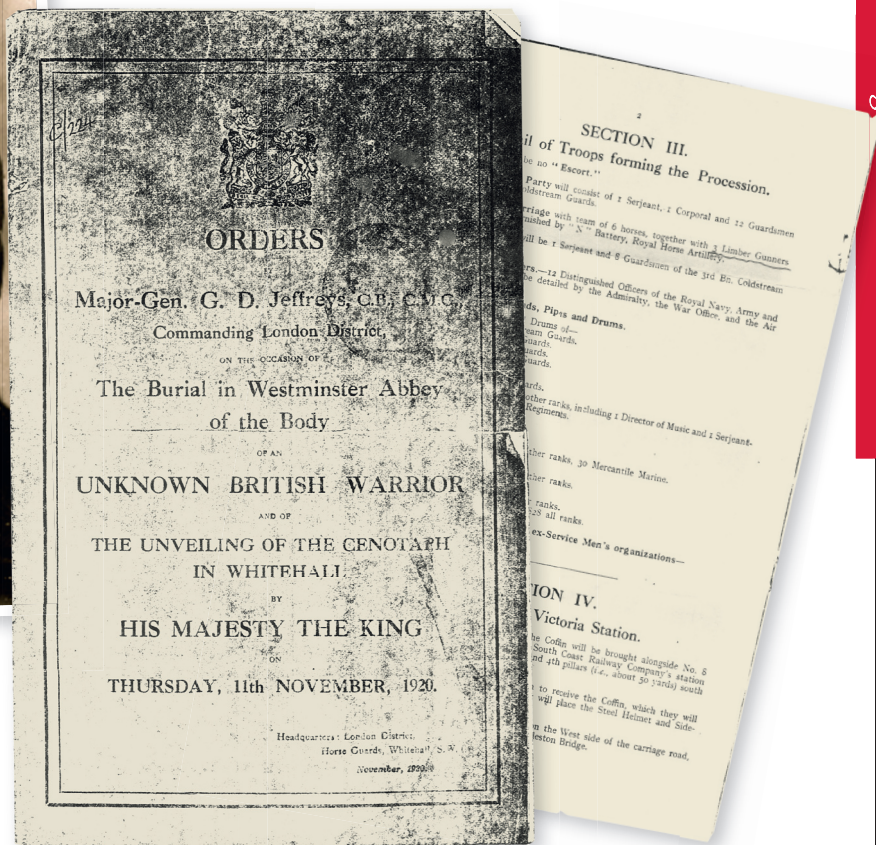
WEAPON

13-pounder

The 13-pound artillery gun was capable of more rapid fire than previous models. Its use during the retreat from Mons in 1914 was recognised with a number of Victoria Crosses



“His highly dangerous role involved keeping all artillery units in the field supplied with ammunition”



By the end of the year he was stationed in Umballa (or Ambala), where he remained until the outbreak of World War I. Amazingly, his records state he was sent to France with A Battery on 11 November 1914 – it would be four long years to the day before peace returned.

He spent the majority of the War with the 7th Brigade Ammunition Column. This was a dangerous role that involved ensuring all artillery units were supplied as quickly as possible in the field. One can only imagine the scenes of horror he witnessed during his four years in France.

Presumably, on the short time he had on leave during the War he made his way home to Eastbourne to visit his parents

Above Frank Francis Strudwick in his uniform, taken in 1918
Right The orders issued for the burial ceremony of the Unknown Warrior

FUNERAL

Princess Diana

On 6 September 1997, the RHA was again in the public spotlight, when the King's Troop carried the coffin of Diana, Princess of Wales to Westminster Abbey on a gun carriage

and maybe catch up with news of his older brother William, who was invalided out of the Army after catching malaria on the Salonika front in 1916; or his younger brother Albert, who was part of the Royal Flying Corps. His youngest brother Frederick, (my grandfather) was only 16 at the outbreak of War and joined the Merchant Navy.

Anonymous hero

After the War many mourned their lost husbands, brothers,

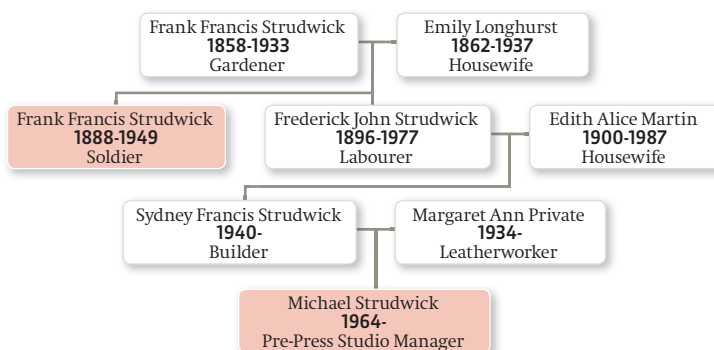
sons or lovers but didn't know where they'd fallen. The Unknown Warrior's Tomb became the focus for their sorrow; it was possible that the soldier buried there was in fact their own kin.

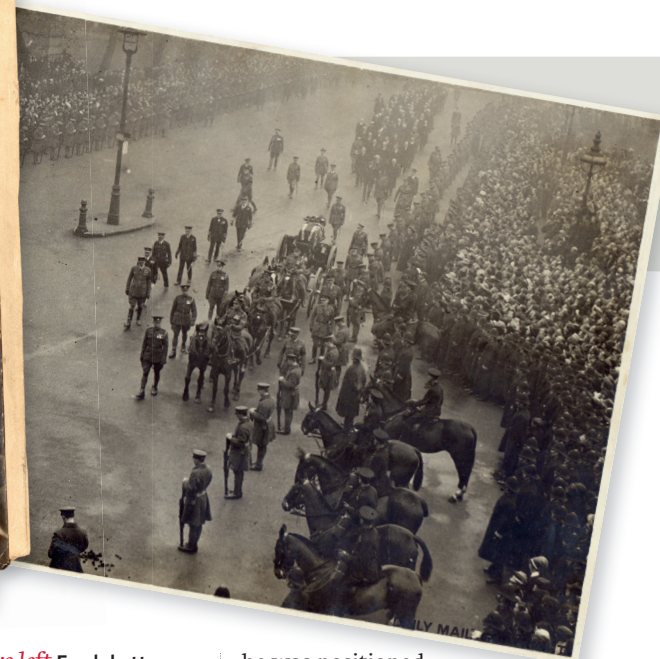
The tomb lies a few steps inside the entrance of Westminster Abbey: a black marble tombstone, underneath which lies an anonymous British soldier killed in WWI, a representative of the 1.6 million men who died in battle.

The day the Warrior was buried, the funeral procession formed at Victoria Station, where the coffin had been placed after its journey across the Channel the day before. As the gun carriage with its six black horses waited, 12 of the nation's highest-ranked officers took their places, including Field Marshal Douglas Haig and Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty.

At 9.40am the procession moved off, in 'Slow Time' and at that moment, the sound of drums and Chopin's *Funeral*

THE STRUDWICK FAMILY TREE





March could be clearly heard. Thousands of mourners stood in silence as the coffin passed them on its way to the Cenotaph. Here it was met by His Majesty King George V, who unveiled the Cenotaph for the first time as Big Ben chimed 11am. Following this, the entourage, now including the King, proceeded to Westminster Abbey for the internment. The congregation at the Abbey was made up of nearly 1,000 widows and mothers of soldiers killed in the War.

Gunner's role

There's certainly plenty of information about the day and what it meant, but I was unsure where could I find details about a regular soldier's role in the occasion. First, I wrote to the National Army Museum and enclosed a copy of the pictures shown above. I was sent a photocopy of the orders issued for the occasion by Major-Gen GD Jeffreys. A month later, a

letter arrived from the Royal Artillery Regimental Museum in London, giving me more details of my uncle's role. The Museum had no record of the names of any of the gun detachment that took part, and it was pleased to have now identified at least one of the soldiers.

The Museum told me that N Battery was stationed at St John's Wood and normally carried out all the artillery's ceremonial duties in London. This particular gun team ('team' refers to the horses) was used because they were all black, and one black team was always maintained for funeral purposes. The drivers are mounted on the left-hand horses and in the RHA the whole detachment would normally be mounted. Due to the importance of the occasion and the expected size of crowd, one Limber Gunner would be stationed alongside each right-hand horse to calm or restrain them. This was my great-uncle's duty and

Above left Frank, **bottom right**, facing forward walking beside the horse © Daily Mail

Above right The funeral procession of the Unknown Warrior makes its way to Westminster Abbey

he was positioned nearest to the gun carriage.

Frank was stationed in Cologne in March 1919, but by May he was back in England and was discharged. He was awarded the Victory and British Medal and the 1914 Star.

Presumably, the life in the RHA was all he knew (he never married), because in July that year he re-enlisted. He spent the next three years in this country before being sent to Egypt in 1922. He returned seven years later to finally be discharged on 25 April 1930, aged 41, having served 22 years. He lived through another World War and passed away in 1949.

According to my father, Frank, like many of his generation, never talked much about the War and what he'd seen. However, he does remember playing with Frank's medals as a small boy, now unfortunately lost over the passing years. Luckily, we have the extraordinary photos of him on parade to remember him by. ■

MUSEUMS

Records

If you find service details from the Ministry of Defence, make a copy and send them to the museum of the regiment your ancestor was in to see if you can find out more

Fitting tribute

How the Unknown Warrior was selected and buried

The selection of the Unknown Warrior was carried out under the supervision of Brigadier General LJ Wyatt. He had given out instructions that four bodies should be exhumed from Aisne, the Somme, Arras and Ypres on the Western Front. The remains were taken to a chapel at St Pol in northern France, and the Brigadier had no idea which body had come from which battlefield. On the night of 7 November, he selected one at random and it was placed in a coffin.

The Warrior was then transported to the port of Boulogne. Travelling with the coffin were six barrels of

soil from the Ypres battlefield. At Boulogne, the body was loaded onto HMS Verdun, which sailed for Dover. Once there, it was taken to London, in preparation for the procession on 11 November by train.

For days after the ceremony, people filed past the grave and on 18 November, the six barrels of soil were used to fill the tomb. In the words of Brigadier General LJ Wyatt "the body should rest in the soil on which so many of our troops gave up their lives".

CONTACTS

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Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, London, SE18 6ST
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WEBSITES

The Long, Long Trail

w. www.1914-1918.net