

LANCE CORPORAL WILLIAM HENRY HEWITT VC (1894-1900)

William Hewitt was born at Westhill Elm Lane in Copdock, near Ipswich, Suffolk on the 19th June 1884 and was educated at Framlingham College. He decided to emigrate to South Africa on 25 March 1905, joining the South Africa Constabulary for one year and then transferring to the Natal Police in which he served for three years (1906-09). In 1906/7 he was awarded the Natal Rebellion Medal. In 1909 he left the Natal Police to become a farmer.



After the outbreak of the First World War, Hewitt, although a good horseman, enlisted into the 2nd South Africa Light Infantry on 24th December 1915. His regiment arrived in France for active service in July 1916 and was involved in the Battle of the Somme, which lasted from July to September 1916. He was wounded in Delville Wood, which was the most costly action the South African Brigade fought on the Western

Front. On 14th July 3,153 men went into the wood and on 20th July only 778 emerged unscathed.

From May 1917 he was involved in the third battle of Ypres – Passchendaele, which lasted until November 1917. On 20 September 1917, the South African Brigade's task was far from easy. Their troops had to advance 1.5km from Frezenberg and reach a line beyond Bremen Redoubt. At the end of August and early September, this terrain had already been captured a number of times by British battalions, but had to be conceded each time after counter-attacks.

At 05.40 on 20 September, the attack was launched. After a preliminary artillery barrage, the 4rd and 3rd SAI advanced behind a smoke curtain and a creeping barrage. They successfully reached their objective, the Red Line, capturing Beck House, Borry Farm, Mitchell Farm and Vampir Farm. The troops displayed great courage by not just running behind the creeping barrage, but actually risking jinking through it, surprising the Germans who did not have the time to get out of their pillboxes to put their machine-guns on the roofs.

An hour later, the second stage of the attack began. On the right, the 1st SAI had to 'leapfrog' the 3rd SAI to reach the Green Line. The 2nd SAI had to 'leapfrog' the 4th SAI and advanced towards Bremen Redoubt. The 2nd SAI came under enfilading fire from Hill 37 and Tulip Cottages. In the meantime, the terrain became a quagmire, with men struggling waist deep in the mud. It was during this second stage in the battle that **L/Cpl William Henry Hewitt** captured a pillbox single-handedly. He threw a grenade into a doorway, but the Germans threw a stick-bomb that blew off Hewitt's gas-mask and knocked out four of his teeth. Furious because he was engaged to be married and now feared that his fiancée might no longer find him attractive, Hewitt reached the rear of the pillbox. He tried to lob a bomb through a loophole, but missed and had to dive for cover. With only one bomb remaining, Hewitt crept right up to the loophole and, from beneath it, pushed the grenade through, receiving a shot in the hand.

The South African Brigade reached all its objectives, but at a considerable cost. On most of the headstones of the South African graves, there is only one date, 20 September 1917.

He was awarded his VC near Ypres, Belgium on 20 September 1917 and his citation records :

For most conspicuous bravery during operations. Lance Corporal Hewitt attacked a pill-box with his section and tried to rush the doorway. The enemy garrison, however, proved very stubborn, and in the attempt this non-commissioned officer received a severe wound. Nevertheless, he proceeded to the loophole of the pill-box where, in his attempts to put a bomb into it, he was again wounded in the arm. Undeterred, however, he eventually managed to get a bomb inside, which caused the occupants to dislodge, and they were successfully and speedily dealt with by the remainder of section.



On 16 January 1918 he was invested with Victoria Cross by King George V at Buckingham Palace.

After the war he returned to S Africa with rank of 2nd Lt and up until 1925 farmed in Natal, before moving to farm in Kenya until 1939.

During WW2 he was appointed a Major in Kenya, becoming Assistant Provost Marshal of Mombassa

In 1950 he retired to Greenway Cottage, Greenway Lane, Charlton Kings near Cheltenham.

He died on the 7th December 1966 in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, was cremated on the 10th December and his ashes scattered at sea off Hermanus Cliffs, forty miles East of Cape Town, South Africa on 2 January 1974.

In 1967 this VC was donated to Framlingham College by his widow, Mrs Lily Hewitt and on 23 April 2004 his VC and that of Flowerdew were presented on permanent loan to the Imperial War Museum, escorted by the College CCF Colour Party. His daughter Mrs Colvin, was present. Also see <http://www.oldframlinghamian.com/article.php?story=2004052911320598> for further information on his VC being presented to the Imperial War Museum.

This photo was taken of the medal display in the College Chapel



This later photograph of Hewitt is from the SOF archives.



On 17 September 2017 the village of Copdock in Suffolk marked the 100th anniversary of him winning his VC on 20 September 1917 in the Battle of the Menin Road. Initially below is the order of service for this special occasion, produced by Jennifer Jones (Village Recorder). The College and OFs were well represented.

The following is Richard Sayer's description of the day :

It rained most of the morning, rendering the seats so carefully laid out along the closed main street too wet for the chosen few to sit upon, soaking the papers clutched in the hands of the dozen or more hardy souls standing ready to make their speeches, drenching the Colours and Standards of the British Legion, and making even more difficult the task of the brass section of the Suffolk concert band.

The weather at the village of Copdock, near Ipswich, on Sunday, 17th September 2017 was a dramatic reminder of the far worse conditions which prevailed on the Menin Road to the north east of Ypres on Thursday 20th September 1917, as former Copdock resident Cpl William Henry Hewitt won the Victoria Cross during the third battle of Ypres, near Passchendaele.

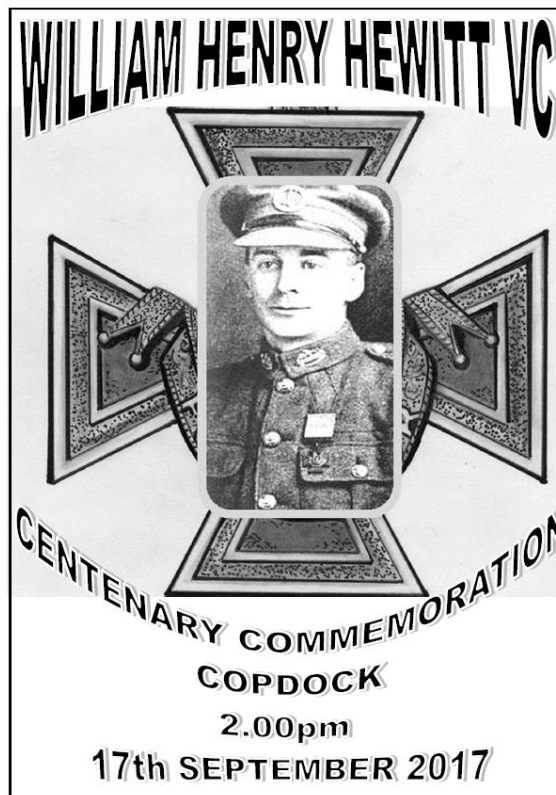
Hewitt was educated at Framlingham College from the age of 10 to 16. Within five years he had emigrated to South Africa, joining the Natal police before farming for seven years in Kenya. He enlisted in the 2nd South African Light Infantry on Christmas Eve 2015, survived the South African killing ground in the battle of Delville Wood in 1916, and was one of nine VCs awarded on the 20 September 1917 in the Ypres salient.

Some 80 people braved the 2017 weather to attend the event – the unveiling of a stone and plaque to commemorate Hewitt's action - a ceremony initiated by the decision of HM government to mark you in this way each of the WW1 VCs, on a date as near as possible to their individual centenary. The event was the culmination of three years research and planning by Copdock and Washbrook Parish Council's working party led by the indefatigable Jennifer Jones, hugely helped by OFs James Ruddock-Broyd and Norman Porter.

As the sun finally blessed the company, the commemoration stone at the foot of the Copdock village sign was officially dedicated by the Lord-Lieutenant of Suffolk, Clare, Countess of Euston. Hewitt's grandson read the VC citation, his great great nephew and niece unfurled the flag of the Union of South Africa, WW1 songs were played, photos of Framlingham College from Hewitt's time were on display, and local primary pupils told the story of Hewitt's life.

Martin Myers-Allen, leading a smartly turned-out Framlingham College CCF contingent, spoke of Hewitt's time at the College, the Rector led a prayer, a local bugler played an evocative "Sunset", and the damp crowd managed a good rendering of the National Anthem. It was impossible to move in the Brook Inn as tea and cakes and stories were consumed. Copdock had done well.

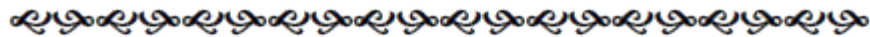
The following pages contain the order of service for the centenary celebrations, a leaflet put together on his life by Jennifer Jones, close up photos of his actual VC, many photos taken on the day, finally followed by the display boards used on the day.



**Music by members of the Suffolk Concert Band
Conductor Simon Pulham**

&

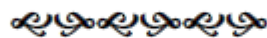
**World War One Songs recorded
by the pupils of Copdock Primary School**



**The Colours/Standards of the British Legion,
Military Representatives and
members of Framlingham College CCF march on.**

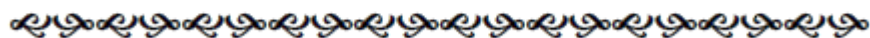


Welcome from Copdock & Washbrook Parish Council

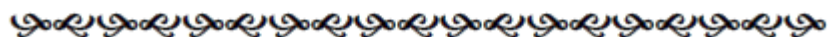


**Lord Lieutenant, High Sheriff, distinguished guests;
members of the Hewitt Family
drawn from across the world;
friends and neighbours.**

**We meet here today to honour the bravery of
William Henry Hewitt, born at West Hill in Copdock in
1884 and who was awarded the Victoria Cross for valour in
the face of the enemy on the 20th September 1917,
during the 3rd Battle of Ypres.**

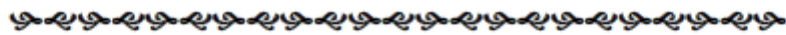


**Pupils of Copdock Primary School and the Village Recorder
tell the story of his life before, during & after the Great War.**

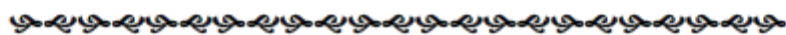


**A representative of Framlingham College
explains the connection with the College**

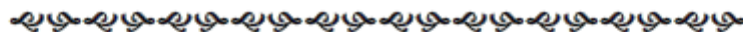
The Grandson of William Henry Hewitt reads the Citation.



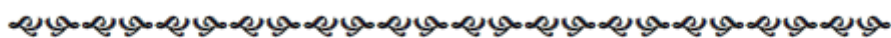
For most conspicuous bravery during operations. Lance Corporal Hewitt attacked a pill-box with his section and tried to rush the doorway. The enemy garrison, however, proved very stubborn, and in the attempt this non-commissioned officer received a severe wound. Nevertheless, he proceeded to the loophole of the pill-box where, in his attempts to put a bomb into it, he was again wounded in the arm. Undeterred, however, he eventually managed to get a bomb inside, which caused the occupants to dislodge, and they were successfully, and speedily dealt with by the remainder of section.



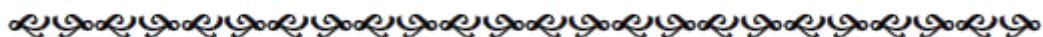
William Henry Hewitt's Great Great Nephew & Niece
remove the flag of the Union of South Africa 1901—1929.



The Lord Lieutenant Clare Countess of Euston sets the stone.



“Sunset” bugle call



The Revd. Annette Shannon, Rector North Samford Benefice
O God from whom all holy desires and just works do proceed:
Give unto thy servants the peace that the world cannot give;
that both our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments,
and also that by thee we being defended from the fear of our enemies
may pass our time in rest and quietness, through the merits
of Christ our Saviour. **ALL: amen**

Royal British Legion Chairman

“They shall not grow old as we that are left grow old; age shall not weary them nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning we will remember them.”

All—we will remember them

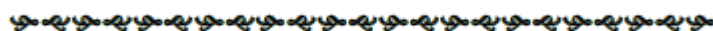


THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

(one verse)



**Standard bearers and parade march off to music by the
Suffolk Concert Band**



**EVERYONE IS INVITED TO PARTAKE OF LIGHT REFRESHMENTS
IN THE BROOK INN AFTER THE CEREMONY.**



Copdock and Washbrook Parish Council would like to express its thanks to all those who have contributed to this unique village event, especially to the small working party that has been active over the past two years researching the background, contacting relatives and other guests, sorting out the site for the Paving Stone and organising the celebration.

It also must express its gratitude to the Celebrate England Big Lottery Fund without whose grant the activities would have been much curtailed.



The following pages were also put together by Jennifer Jones to cover his life in full

**CENTENARY COMMEMORATION
of the award of the
VICTORIA CROSS
to
WILLIAM HENRY HEWITT
on
20th September 1917
3rd Battle of Ypres ~ Passchendaele**





1884—1905
Born and lived
West Hill, Elm Lane
Copdock



WILLIAM (HARRY)



1894—1900
Educated at
Framlingham College

as were
Lt. Gordon Flowerdew VC,
and
Captain Augustus Agar RN VC



1905 emigrated to South Africa

Joined the

S. African Constabulary

1906 - 1909

with the Natal Police:

1906/7 awarded the Natal
Rebellion Medal



1908—1915 FARMING IN KENYA

THE GREAT WAR

24.12.15 enlisted in 2nd S.A. Light Infantry

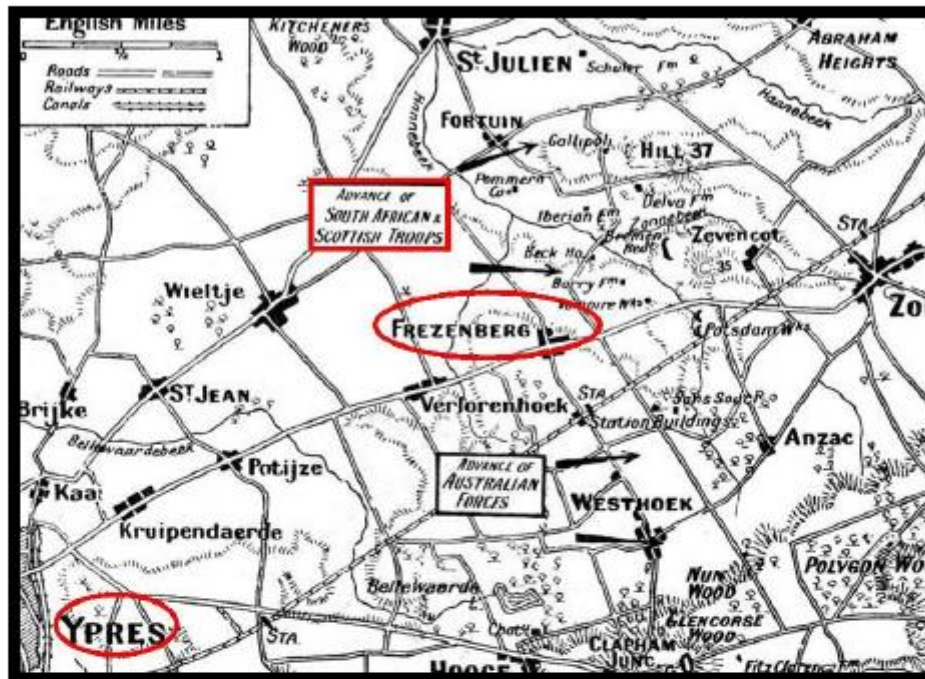
July–Sept.16 fought in Battle of Delville Wood

24 Oct. 1916 wounded at Butte of Warlencourt

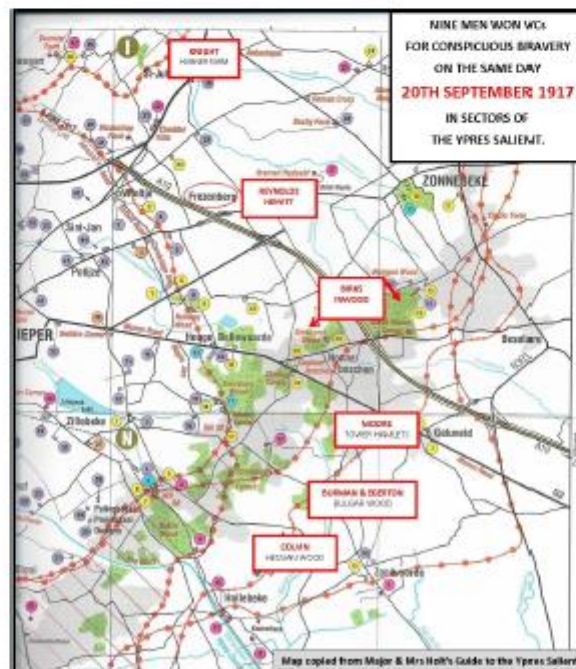


20th September 1917

- awarded VC for his action on the Menin Road -



part of the 3rd battle of Ypres - Passchendaele
8 other VCs were awarded on that day



16th January 1918
invested with the VC for his bravery
by King George V.

Congratulations from his C.O. & colleagues



and from Framlingham College

1920—1950 COFFEE FARMING IN KENYA



Aintree Farm

1919
Married Lily in London
returned to Durban



1930 Family visited the UK



Lily with
Pamela (1925) & Jill (1926)
(Barbara born 1932)

William Henry with his sisters
Evelyn, Marion, Mabel Mary



WWII 1939—1945

Promoted to Major and
posted Provost Marshall
in Mombassa



1956

attended the VC Centenary
Parade in Hyde Park



1950—1961

Retirement

Hermanus

South Africa



7.12.1966 he died in Cheltenham and on

2.1.1974 his ashes were scattered off Hermanus



**HIS BRAVERY IS COMMEMORATED
in South Africa in the Military Museum**



**in London
on the Memorial Gates Constitutional Hill & IWM**



in Suffolk in Framlingham College Chapel



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**and now -2017- in Copdock**



The following are a front and rear images of his VC, courtesy of IWM



The following are a selection of photos taken on 17 September 2017





























## William Henry Hewitt

19.06.1884 - 07.12.1966

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This stone was placed here on 17th September 2017 to commemorate the actions of Lance Corporal William Henry Hewitt who was awarded a Victoria Cross during the First World War. Copdock was the place of his birth.





**William Henry Hewitt**  
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LANCE CORPORAL  
WILLIAM HEWITT  
AFRICAN LIGHT INFANTRY  
19TH SEPTEMBER 1917



### William Henry Hewitt


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LANCE CORPORAL  
WILLIAM HEWITT  
SOUTH AFRICAN LIGHT INFANTRY  
20TH SEPTEMBER 1917

The following are the story boards that were on display in the marquee

**THE SEVEN AGES OF  
WILLIAM HENRY HEWITT VC**




**1884—1894**




**1895—1900**




**1905—1915**




**1916—1919**



**1920—1938**




**1939—1950**



**1951—1966**

*compiled by jmkj mainly from the photo collection of Ian Gordon*





# 1884 ~ 1894



## West Hill Copdock

| THE HEWITTS OF WEST HILL IN 1900                             |                |               |       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|-------|
| WILLIAM HENRY HEWITT SENIOR                                  |                |               |       |
| with the children of his first wife MARY SHERMAN (died 1880) |                |               |       |
| MAUD MARY                                                    | GEORGE ROBERTS | HELEN ANNE    |       |
| 1870                                                         | 1873           | 1874          |       |
| and                                                          |                |               |       |
| his second wife MARY MARSH                                   |                |               |       |
| and their children                                           |                |               |       |
| EVELYN                                                       | MARION         | WILLIAM HENRY | MABEL |
| 1881                                                         | 1882           | 1884          | 1887  |



Copdock 1901



West Hill c.1900

William Henry Hewitt senior with his 2nd wife Mary in the West Hill garden.

He died in March 1915 and the rest of the family moved away to Sussex.



His grave in Copdock churchyard



# 1894 ~ 1900



## Framlingham College



The College was founded in 1864 in memory of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband, largely for the sons of the Suffolk middle-class, many of them farmers.

According to the first prospectus "It is situated on an eminence in a healthy and pleasant position. It is about ten minutes walk from Framlingham Station on the Great Eastern Railway, and is distant 90 miles from London. The building is well arranged and thoroughly suited to its purpose. It is built for the accommodation of 300 boys. Each boy has a separate bed, and the dormitories are spacious and airy "



Harry at the foot of Prince Albert



# 1905 ~ 1915



## Police & farming in South Africa



The SS Ruapehu



ship's passenger list

### 1905 –6 SOUTH AFRICAN CONSTABULARY

This was created to police the conquered Boer republics.

### 1906—1909 THE NATAL POLICE

He served in the Natal Police for three years and four months. During this time he saw service in the Zulu Rebellion when the Zulus resisted a poll tax and received the service medal. After the Unification of South Africa in 1910

the days of the Colonial police were numbered and in 1909

he left the police to become a farmer in Natal.



# 20th September 1917



soldier ~ hero



The Third Battle of Ypres



The Battle of the Menin Road



London Gazette, 26 November 1917, Near Ypres, Belgium, 20 September 1917, No. 8162, Lance Corporal William Henry Hewitt, 2nd Bn, South African Light Infantry.

For most conspicuous bravery during operations. Lance Corporal Hewitt attacked a pill-box with his section and tried to rush the doorway. The enemy garrison, however, proved very stubborn, and in the attempt this non-commissioned officer received a severe wound. Nevertheless, he proceeded to the loophole of the pill-box where, in his attempts to put a bomb into it, he was again wounded in the arm. Undeterred, however, he eventually managed to get a bomb inside, which caused the occupants to dislodge, and they were successfully and speedily dealt with by the remainder of section.



1919 ~ 1939



## family and farming in East Africa



Lily and Diana near Port Shepstone



Aintree Farm, Kenya



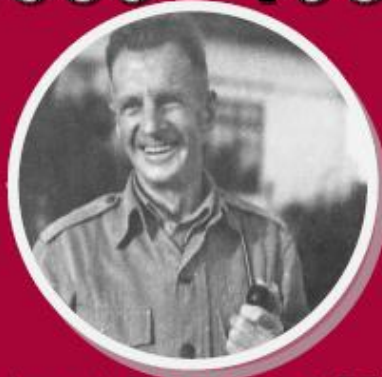
Billy with Jill and Pam



and with his sisters



# 1939 ~1950



**Assistant Provost Martial  
farming**

**WW II**

In 1939 he re-enlisted and served as Liaison Officer and Assistant Provost Marshal in Mombasa with the rank of Major.



*"The South African troops in East Africa loved Billy Hewitt and regarded him more as a father than as a senior officer." Uys*

Major W. H. HEWITT, V.C. (94-00) complains from H.Q., Mombasa, that at the age of 61 he has been kept at the Base and not allowed to see any real action! After the war he intends to leave Kenya and settle in South Africa. Old Framlinghamians News letter



**Billy & Lily, Barbie, Jill & Pam**



**Old Framlinghamians**  
The Society of

[www.oldframlinghamian.com](http://www.oldframlinghamian.com)

# 1950 ~ 1961



## retirement at Hermanus



In 1956 He attended the VC Centenary parade in Hyde Park

## 1961 - 1966 - ill in the U.K.

**7th of December 1966**

**William Henry Hewitt VC died in Cheltenham**

On 2nd January 1974 his ashes were scattered off the cliff at Hermanus where a bench was dedicated to his memory.



# His Medals

Lily gave his VC to Framlingham College in 1967



His daughter Pam was present  
when the College presented the VC on permanent loan to  
the Imperial War Museum in 2002



And his Great Nephew (and Hewitt Family Researcher)  
Ian Gordon saw his other medals displayed at the  
Castle Military Museum, Cape town





# His name is remembered

IN LONDON ON THE HYDE PARK MEMORIAL GATES



IN CAPE TOWN AT THE CASTLE MUSEUM



IN SUFFOLK IN FRAMLINGHAM COLLEGE CHAPEL



AND NOW - AT LAST - IN COPDOCK

