



LORD ASHCROFT'S  
"HERO OF  
THE MONTH"

# Chaplain to the Forces, 4<sup>th</sup> Class The Rev Edward Noel Mellish

VC, MC

## SACRIFICE

AGGRESSION • BOLDNESS  
INITIATIVE • LEADERSHIP  
SKILL • ENDURANCE

The many Victoria Crosses and George Crosses in the Lord Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum in London are displayed under one of seven different qualities of bravery. Whilst The Rev Edward Noel Mellish's award is not part of the collection, Lord Ashcroft feels that it falls within the category of sacrifice:

"In what is apparently the simplest quality of bravery, Sacrifice epitomises selfless responsibility. Noble, strong, dependable, life is offered up to protect, save or comfort others. It is not always lost, but it is always freely given."



ABOVE RIGHT:  
A drawing of  
Chaplain to  
the Forces, 4<sup>th</sup>  
Class, The Rev  
Edward Noel  
Mellish during  
his rescue  
work on the  
bullet-swept  
battlefield at St  
Eloi. (ALL IMAGES  
HISTORIC MILITARY  
PRESS)

**E**DWARD NOEL Mellish was born on Christmas Eve, 1880, in Oakleigh Park, Barnet, North London. Noel, as he was widely known, was the son of Edward and Mary Mellish and the couple had one other child, Richard Coppin Mellish. Noel was educated at Saffron Walden Grammar School, Essex, before working for a wine company at Waterloo Bridge, London. However in 1899,

he became a member of the Artists' Rifles at the height of the Second Boer War, from 1901-2, he served as a trooper with Baden Powell's Police against the Boers.

After being discharged from the Police in 1903, he worked on the Springfontein and Jagersfontein Railway in Orange River Colony before working at a diamond mine in Jagersfontein. He also did missionary work and in 1907 he worked as a lay reader. In 1910, he started studying theology at King's College, London, and he was ordained in 1912.

At the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, Mellish was assistant curate at St Paul's, Deptford, East London. However, he was determined to do his bit for the war effort and volunteered for service in the Army's chaplains' department in early 1915.

In May 1915, Mellish arrived in France and, two months later, at Rouen, he became attached to the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment). His brother, Second Lieutenant Richard Mellish, his only sibling, was killed in action on 25 September 1915 at the Battle of Loos, while serving with the Middlesex Regiment.

By early 1916, and still attached to the same regiment, Noel Mellish was serving in the Ypres Salient, Belgium. It was during the first three days of the action at St Eloi that he showed outstanding bravery. St Eloi is a village some two miles south of Ypres on the Messines road and on 27 March the British attacked a German position known as The Mound from which the enemy was shelling them. After a preliminary artillery barrage and the explosion of five mines, the British advanced and destroyed The Mound but, in achieving their objective, they suffered extremely heavy casualties.

On three consecutive days from 27 to 29 March inclusive, and during heavy fighting, Mellish, who was by now thirty-five, repeatedly risked his life, continuously operating between the original British trenches and the captured enemy trenches. His simple aim was to rescue and treat as many British soldiers as possible despite repeatedly encountering heavy shelling and machine-gun fire. On the first day alone, in an area swept by enemy machine-gun fire, he rescued ten severely wounded men. Three men were actually killed while he was tending their wounds but, remarkably, Mellish remained uninjured.



On the second day of fighting, his battalion was relieved but Mellish returned and saved a further twelve wounded men. On the third day, Mellish took charge of a group of volunteers and rescued an unspecified number of wounded men who consisted of the remaining wounded from the trenches. All in all, however, he is believed to have saved the lives of more than twenty wounded soldiers.

Mellish's VC was announced on 18 April 1916, just three weeks after his heroics, when his citation concluded that: 'This splendid work was done voluntarily and was far outside the sphere of his normal duties'. He was the first member of the Army chaplaincy to be awarded the Victoria Cross during the Great War. The defence of St Eloi is commemorated by the Hill 62 Memorial. Mellish received his VC from King George V in an investiture at Buckingham Palace on 12 June 1916.

In 1918, the final year of the Great War, Mellish was Mentioned in Despatches and awarded the Military Cross. He married Elizabeth Molesworth at St Paul's, Deptford, on 3 December 1918 and the couple went on

to have a daughter and three sons. He remained in the Army chaplaincy until February 1919.

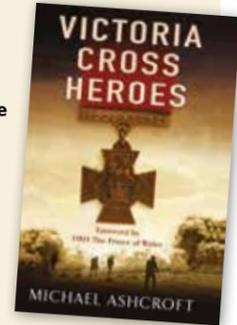
In that year too, on 2 August 1919, Mellish officiated at the wedding of Sidney Frank Godley VC, also of the Royal Fusiliers, when the young private married Ellen Norman. Godley was awarded the VC on 25 November 1914 for outstanding gallantry in the defence of the Nimy Bridge at Mons, Belgium. He held the bridge, using his machine-gun, for nearly two hours despite being seriously wounded. The wedding is believed to have been the only occasion when a vicar who had been awarded the VC officiated at the wedding of a soldier who has also been awarded Britain and the Commonwealth's most prestigious award for gallantry.

After leaving the Army, Mellish continued a career in the Church of England. He was vicar of St Mark's Church, Lewisham, East London, from 1919-25; vicar of Wangford-cum-Henham, Suffolk from 1925-8; and was vicar of St Mary The Virgin's Church, Great Dunmow, Essex, from 1928-47. Throughout the Second World War, he served from 1939-45 as an Air Raid Precautions



## VICTORIA CROSS HEROES

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His five books on gallantry include Victoria Cross Heroes. For more information, please visit: [www.victoriacrossheroes.com](http://www.victoriacrossheroes.com) Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collection is on public display at Imperial War Museum, London. For more information visit: [www.iwm.org.uk/heroes](http://www.iwm.org.uk/heroes). For details about his VC collection, visit: [www.lordashcroftmedals.com](http://www.lordashcroftmedals.com) For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit: [www.lordashcroft.com](http://www.lordashcroft.com). Follow him on Twitter: @LordAshcroft



**TOP LEFT:**  
An aerial  
photograph of  
St Eloi, taken  
by a Royal  
Flying Corps  
reconnaissance  
flight from  
6,500 feet at  
09.00 hours on  
27 March 1916.  
The attack, also  
known as the  
Battle of the  
St. Eloi Craters,  
was launched by  
the firing of  
six very large  
mines.

**BELOW LEFT:**  
The attack at St.  
Eloi, 27 March  
1916.

**BELOW RIGHT:**  
The Canadian  
Hill 62  
(Sanctuary  
Wood)  
Memorial. The  
memorial is  
located beside  
Sanctuary Wood  
on the top of  
Mount Sorrel,  
which lies next  
to 'Hill 62'.



RIGHT:  
Chaplain to  
the Forces,  
4<sup>th</sup> Class,  
The Rev  
Edward  
Noel Mellish.

