



# VC's Unmarked Grave

By Daphne Chamberlain

**Somewhere in East Finchley is the grave of a young man who won - and lost - the Victoria Cross. His name was Valentine Bambrick, and he committed suicide in prison.**

Private Bambrick was born in Cawnpore, India, where his father was a major. In 1858, when Valentine was 21, he was serving in the 1st Battalion of the 60th Rifles, King's Royal Army Corps, during the Indian Mutiny, and it was then he won his VC. The citation said that he "showed conspicuous bravery" resisting an attack at Bareilly, where he was wounded twice.

Five years later, a hero due to be discharged, he was spending his last night in the army in barracks at Aldershot. Why he destroyed his world that night is still a mystery. The judge trying his case commented, "Nobody could understand. It must have been drink."

Whatever the reason, Valentine Bambrick, acting completely out of character, assaulted a fellow soldier, nearly suffocating him. Then he stole his victim's medals, which were later found in the possession of a woman.

Bambrick was tried at Winchester in December 1863. He was found guilty of assault and robbery, and sentenced to three years penal servitude. Only his reputation saved him from being flogged. He also lost his VC and his pension.

When he heard his sentence, Bambrick said, "It is of no consequence what you do now...I don't care what you do with me. You may hang me if you like."

He was sent to Pentonville - then a revolutionary new prison, where all cells were completely self-contained, prisoners wore special hoods to prevent them seeing or talking to other inmates, and even the chapel stalls were partitioned from each other. Less than four months later, he hanged himself.

He is buried in an unmarked and unknown grave in St.

Pancras and Islington Cemetery. However, Valentine Bambrick might still get a memorial. A retired officer from his regiment (now the Royal Green Jackets) is working towards it.

Footnote: - in 1920, it was ruled that a Victoria Cross can never be taken away. George V wrote, "Even were a VC to be hanged for murder, he should still be allowed to wear his VC on the scaffold."

*Acknowledgements to Andrew Mussell, Borough Archivist, who included this story in his talk, "Buried in Barnet", at East Finchley library in December.*



Class 3 of Martin School (then Great North Road School) in 1927. Photo supplied by Joan Killingback, formerly Joan Jarvis, (second from right, second row from back.)

## Martin School Memories

By Jessie Tanner (formerly Jessie Crook) who now lives in Bishop's Stortford

**I am 70 years old, and lived in East Finchley from 1934 to 1974. I lived in Durham Road, and when I was a child, it was so very quiet. Of course, few people owned cars in those days, and I used to skip up and down Hertford Road to the Martin School (home for lunch, I must add), calling to collect friends on the way.**

In the winter it was great fun to make the entire journey to school by walking in Wellington boots all the way up Hertford Road, on top of continuous heaps of snow lining the gutter. These heaps were made by householders clearing their little patches of pavement.

My second school route was through the alley-way to Creighton Avenue - a beautiful road with its pink pavement. In the spring-time, it came to life with all the blossoming trees lining it. This was a delightful walk - so peaceful, no through traffic, and no traffic islands.

On the corner of Creighton Avenue and the High Road

was a sweet shop. Here, many school children spent their pocket-money on various goodies displayed specially for them on a small card table.

### Shelter sing-songs

Of course, World War Two played a great part in my growing up. I was nine years old when it started, and at first, before the school air raid shelters were completed, we were told to meet for morning lessons in particular houses nearby. A teacher would visit that house. In the afternoon we did homework in our own homes. It was easy for me, as I had to go to my friend's house at no. 90, and I lived at no.94.

When the shelters were built, it was back to school with gas masks, and sing-songs in the shelters when there was an air-raid. I can still recall the smell of damp cement in those shelters!

Martin school days were reasonably happy ones, and I can remember many of the teachers. Miss Piggott (the headmistress), Miss Abson, Miss West, Miss Lane, Miss Newcomb, Miss Beaupre, Miss Booth, Miss Hammond, Miss Dollin (with whom we did country dancing), and finally Miss Hawkins (who became the headmistress when Miss Piggott retired. All Misses - no married teachers were allowed in those days! I wonder how many other people recall these names?



A daiquiri on the counter in La Floridita Bar, Havana. Photo by Jane Revell

## Cuba cycle fund raising

**You may remember that almost exactly a year ago, local resident Jane Revell cycled across Cuba to help raise money for the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association.**

Although Jane has already raised much of the money she committed herself to, she still has a fair way to go! She hopes to make up the difference by holding a sale of all kinds of bits and pieces on Saturday 24 March at the Finchley Youth Theatre from 10.30 to 12.30.

All proceeds will go to the GDBA, salsa music will be playing in the background (and you're welcome to dance!) and everyone attending will receive a copy of a daiquiri recipe from the famous La Floridita bar in Havana that Ernest Hemingway used to frequent.

### East Finchley Baptist Church

just off the High Road in Creighton Avenue N2  
Sundays at 11.00 am and 6.30 pm  
for more information contact 8446 3571

**Visitors always welcome**

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Rev Jim Patterson will present his message

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Our Sunday morning Family service with facilities for children starts at 11:00am ~ Visitors will always be welcome



**CONTACT** CONTACT, East Finchley's Good Neighbour Scheme, is appealing for **VOLUNTEERS** to support the elderly and housebound who need help in the N2 area.

Expenses will be paid and training given. Please call the co-ordinator between 9am and 1pm on 020 8444 1162.

**CONTACT**

42 Church Lane  
London N2 8DT



Telephone:  
020 8444 6265

### EAST FINCHLEY ADVICE SERVICE NEEDS VOLUNTEER ADVISERS

Do you enjoy helping others?

Could you give advice?

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#### Training given

If you are interested contact the co-ordinator on 020 8444 6265.