

## Reverend Wilfred John Harding



Wilfred John Harding was born in Battersea on 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 1885. By 1891, his family were living at Soudan House, Eglantine Road, Wandsworth. His father, Richmond Arthur Harding from Somerset, was a traveller and collector (brewers). His mother, Alice Emily (née Tucker), came from Bristol and they had married in September 1883 in Barton Regis in Gloucestershire. The family employed a cook and a nurse. Wilfred had an older brother, Richmond Arthur, who was born in 1884 but died at the age of 11. His younger brother, Reginald William Fowler Harding was born 18 months after Wilfred and was followed by a sister, Marjorie Alice in 1890. Wilfred and Reginald were educated at St Paul's Preparatory School, Colet Court, Hammersmith. By 1901, Wilfred was 15 and a schoolboy at St John's Foundation School in Leatherhead, primarily for educating the sons of poor clergy of the Church of England. After his schooling, which included Christ's College, Cambridge where he received his MA, Wilfred moved into a 32-room house in Camberwell Road with a clergyman Revd William Henry Hatchard Ellis where he was described on the 1911 census as a boarder, living by private means. In 1911, his family were living at Cranmore, Osterley Road, Isleworth and had another son, Norman who was working as a clerk at an estate agent's and his father was working as a brewer's agent.

Wilfred was a curate in Luddenham, West Yorkshire from 1912 – 1914 and when war was declared, he enlisted into the Royal Army Medical Corps as Private 43130 attached to the Drake Battalion on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1914. He was sent to France on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1915 and was stationed at a hospital base in Boulogne. He was discharged from the RAMC in May 1917 in Blackpool and married Mary Riley on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1917. He was awarded a chaplaincy in St Annes-on-Sea and again sailed for France on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1917. Wilfred was killed in action at Passchendaele on 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1917 while stretcher-bearing during the heavy fighting. The Lieutenant-Commander of the Drake Battalion commended his bravery and wrote to Wilfred's widow Mary:

*"The work for which your husband was awarded the MC was as follows: Stretcher-bearers had each case to carry over 2 miles over the most impossible ground before reaching a road or ambulance. He insisted on going into "No Man's Land" with the stretcher-bearers in search of wounded men under the most intense fire and in broad daylight, when he was exposed without cover of any kind, regardless of his own safety so long as he could be a comfort or of use to any of the wounded. Everyone was loud in his praises. It was just behind the line, while returning, that he was killed. No man could have done his duty more nobly than he has done since joining this battalion. He was always with the men, early and late, and in front of the forward posts. He was a great favourite among all the ranks, always cheerful and self-denying under all*

*conditions, and his devotion to duty was an example to us all. No M.C. was ever more thoroughly earned."* Another officer wrote: *"Where the fight was thickest, there he was, and when he was with us, we knew no fear."*

Wilfred was awarded the Military Cross (London Gazette 18/1/1918) and is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial, panel 160 and on the Memorial at St Mary the Virgin, Luddenden.

He is also remembered on the monument in St Mary's, Spring Grove, Osterley and at St Lawrence's Heston. His brother, Captain Reginald William Fowler Harding, also died in action under a month later on November 7<sup>th</sup> 1917.

