



## *Celia Luetchford Smith - Lambeth Cemetery*

L/Cpl Robert Kells VC RVM 1832-1905  
(Grave No:391 F2 Consecrated)

L/Cpl Robert Kells VC RVM 1832-1905, 9th/12th (Queen's Royal) Lancers, won VC at Bolundshadur during the Indian Mutiny 28th September 1857, aged 25 years. " He dashed to the rescue of one Captain Drysdale, whose horse had been shot from under him, and who was lying in the street defenceless, with a broken collarbone. The then Lance Corporal Kells, single-handedly kept the enemy at bay and saved the Captain from certain death."

L/Cpl Kells was born in Meerut 1832 and attested for the 9th Queens Royal Lancers at 12 years old, later taking part in the Second Sikh War and winning the Punjab Medal 1848 when nearly 17years old. When his regiment left India in 1859 he applied for 19th Hussars in order to stay in India. He left the army on Christmas Eve 1868 as a result of injury and disease 'due to climate' probably Malaria, and moved to London. In 1881 he became a Queen's Yeoman and is thought to have been a pallbearer at Queen Victoria's funeral, and an attendant at all the great state occasions. He was presented with the Royal Victorian medal in 1901. Robert

Kells VC died in London on 14th August 1905. In 2005 following the sale of his medals, the new purchaser decided to loan them for display in the Regimental Museum. His full medal entitlement is: Victoria Cross, Royal Victorian Medal, Punjab Medal (1857-58), Two Clasps, Chilianwana – Gujarat, Indian Mutiny Medal, Three Clasps, Delhi-Relief of Lucknow and Lucknow medal, Queen Victoria Jubilee Medal (1887) and Clasp, King Edward V11 Coronation Medal (1902), Army Long Service & Good Conduct Medal

For some time we had known of a pair of holders of the Victoria Cross Medal who both served during the Indian Mutiny (albeit at different times and theatres of war) with the 9th / 12th Lancers. Although they probably never knew each other, they both ended up at Lambeth Cemetery. After sporadic correspondence between the cemetery and the descendants of the first holder (Regimental Sergeant Major David Spence VC), we ascertained that his Grandson was going to have him commemorated by the Casualty Cell of his Regiment. However the other recipient, Lance Corporal Robert Kells VC RVO had, as far as we could tell, no living relatives. Then one day a man who was trying to trace his grandfather sent in a search form, and bingo, he was searching for him! Mr Friston, the grandson supplied all the information we needed to research and include Robert Kells in our 'Tomb Trek' of Lambeth Cemetery.

As was the case with Rgt Sgt Major David Spence, there was no memorial to L/Cpl

Kells, so we decided to do something to commemorate him, as his service history fell outside the remit of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. We knew that all the Friston family were coming to our Open Day at Lambeth, so after speaking to his daughter, we decided to surprise Mr Friston with a memorial plaque to his grandfather. We had a piece of white marble, which was surplus to requirements and approached A E Vaughan's Memorials to see how much it would cost to put L/Cpl Kells' name and dates on it. To our delight and surprise, Vaughans', (which is part of J E Gillman Funeral Directors), agreed to do the inscription for nothing.

A proof was drawn up and agreed upon, and the plaque was inscribed in anticipation of our surprise presentation. Mr Friston's daughter, who was in on the surprise plan, would bring her father to the Cemetery before Open Day started so that there weren't the usual hordes of visitors around, and we would be waiting with the plaque installed on the unmarked grave. All went according to plan on Open Day; Mr Friston and family were guided to the last resting place of Robert Kells, where Ian Beeson the manager and Stuart Payne from Gillmans, were waiting. Mr Friston's face was a picture; he was absolutely bowled over by the plaque, and the fact that we had done this for him. It transpired that most of his family had served their country in various theatres of war over the last 150 years, and their credits are listed in the Tomb Trek entry followed by the epithet; 'Well Done Thou Good And Faithful Servants'.

