

Frederick Kelly

1881 - 1916

Kelly the Soldier

Frederick Kelly - the Soldier

When war broke out in the summer of 1914, Kelly quickly volunteered for service. He was commissioned into the Royal Naval Division, a unit established by Winston Churchill to divert sailors into the army. Kelly joined this unit as an officer because it required no previous military service.

Between February 1915 and January 1916, he fought in the unsuccessful Gallipoli campaign and was twice wounded in action. He was one of the last British soldiers to leave in the withdrawal from the Gallipoli peninsula, was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for bravery and promoted to the lieutenant-commander.

In May 1916, Kelly's unit was redeployed to fight on the Western Front in France. On 1 July, the British and French armies launched a huge assault against the opposing German troops in what became known as the Battle of the Somme. The battle continued throughout the summer and autumn, resulting in over one million casualties on both sides.

At the Battle of the Somme

On the morning of 13 November 1916, towards the end of the Battle of the Somme, Kelly's unit was involved in an assault on German positions at Beaucourt-sur-l'Ancre. The attack soon got into difficulty and it was reported that 'Kelly, setting an example at the head of his men, had led an attack on a bombing post' where he was killed instantly by machine-gun fire. Out of the 25 officers and 535 men who took part in the attack, only 4 officers and 250 men were left alive and uninjured.



British and German wounded soldiers, walking together during The Battle of the Somme. Photo courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.



Headstone at the grave of Frederick Kelly, Martinsart British Cemetery, France.



Martinsart British Cemetery, France where Frederick Kelly is buried. Photo courtesy of Commonwealth War Graves Commission.



Bisham War Memorial. Photo by Chris Elliott.

Kelly was buried in Martinsart British Cemetery in France. His sister Maisie commissioned the sculptor Eric Gill to design a memorial to Kelly and other men from Bisham who died during the war. It still stands today near Bisham Abbey. Kelly is also commemorated in the parish church in Bisham, Marlow Rowing Club and the Leander Club.