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Victoria Cross recipient set to be honoured with memorial stone



Claude Nunney. Picture from Canadian Archives

THE town's only winner of the Victoria Cross (VC) during the First World War is set to be honoured with a lasting memorial.

As part of Government plans to mark the conflict's centenary next year, Private Claude Nunney, who was born in Bexhill Road, St Leonards, will have a commemorative paving stone placed in town.

The Government is planning a four-year programme from 2014 to mark 100 years since the First World War started, with 480 VC winners being commemorated.

Communities Secretary Eric Pickles has announced a national competition to design specially commissioned paving stones which will be presented to councils in the areas where VC recipients of the First World War were born.

Local research Peter Silk, who has researched into the life of Pte Nunney for more than 10 years, said he was born in St Leonards in 1892, not Dublin in Ireland as is claimed.

Mr Silk said: "He was born Stephen Sargent Claude Nunney and was the fourth of eight children. His parents worked at Bradford's Steam Laundry in Bexhill Road.

"The family moved to Kentish Town in London around 1897. After their mother died of food poisoning in 1899, Claude went into care and was sent to Canada as a child migrant, along with two of his brothers.

"I got interested in him because I realised there was a VC recipient born in Hastings, when it was claimed he was born in Dublin. He certainly never went near Ireland and his family were several generations Oxford born and bred.

"I would like to see him commemorated here in Hastings and St Leonards."

Pte Nunney was a member of the 38th (Ottawa) Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force in the First World War.

He was awarded the VC for his actions during the operations against the Drocourt-Quéant Line near Vis-en-Artois in France at the start of September 1918, where he led his men to victory despite coming under heavy German fire. The Drocourt-Quéant Line was a set of defensive lines constructed by Germany between the towns of Drocourt and Quéant during the First World War. It was part of the northernmost section of the Hindenburg Line, a vast German defensive system that ran through northeastern France.

Pte Nunney died on September 18, 1918, aged 25 after being mortally wounded. He was buried at Aubigny Communal Cemetery Extension, near Aubigny-en-Artois.

Earlier in the war he won the Military Medal and the Distinguished Conduct Medal at the Battle of Vimy Ridge in April 1917.

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