JOHN COLLINS VC

John Collins VC is the only Somerset born VC holder from the First World War. He was born locally in Bickenhall on 10th September 1877, his parents moved with family to Ashill and then back to West Hatch when John was four. They moved to Merthyr Tydfil when John was 11 so all the early memories for John are of his time at West Hatch Village School. As a result, his records show this as his place of birth, and as a community we are honoured to host the site for the memorial plaque on the very school he attended.

His bravery and gallantry under fire is beyond question and besides being one of the oldest Victoria Cross recipients, John was awarded many other Orders, Decorations, Medals and Investitures. For the Victoria Cross the following citation was published at the time;

*The award of the Victoria Cross, for action at Wadi Saba, Beersheba, Palestine on 31st October 1917, was published on page 13223 of London Gazette No 30433, dated 18 December 1917.*

*The citation reads:*

*No. 355652 A./Cpl John Collins, R. Welsh Fus. (Merthyr Tydfil). For most conspicuous bravery, resource and leadership, when, after deployment, prior to an attack, his battalion was forced to lie out in the open under heavy shell and machine-gun fire, which caused many casualties. This gallant non-commissioned officer repeatedly went out under heavy fire and brought wounded back to cover, thus saving many lives.*

*In subsequent operations throughout the day Cpl. Collins was conspicuous in rallying and leading his command. He led the final assault with the utmost skill, in spite of heavy fire at close range and uncut wire. He bayoneted fifteen of the enemy and with a Lewis gun section pressed on beyond the objective and covered the reorganisation and consolidation most effectively, although isolated and under fire from snipers and guns.*

*He showed throughout a magnificent example of initiative and fearlessness.*

John Collins died on 3 September 1951, aged 70. He was buried with full military and civic honours at Pant Cemetery, Merthyr Tydfil.

The special commemorative stone in memory of the Taunton-born war-hero, will be unveiled at West Hatch Community Hall (previously the Village School) following a service at St Andrew’s Church on Sunday 29 October 2017 at *2pm (see programme).*

The Mayor of Taunton Deane, Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey warmly invites local residents to join with representatives from the Armed Forces, civic invitees and members of the Collins’ family to honour and remember John Collins VC.

This commemoration is part of a nationwide campaign to honour First World War Victoria Cross recipients. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) are providing 469 commemorative paving stones to local authorities, 145 to the National Arboretum and 35 to the Republic of Ireland to mark the bravery of the people awarded the Victoria Cross during the First World War. Each stone will be laid on the 100th anniversary of the heroic action for which each soldier was recognised.