

NEW MILTON ADVERTISER & LYMINGTON TIMES

Restoration call for First World War hero and Victoria Cross holder Lt Col. George Wheeler's 'failing' grave in New Milton

By [Chris March](#)

chris.march@advertiserandtimes.co.uk

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NEW Milton councillors are looking into restoring a First World War hero's "failing" grave to its former glory.

The stone commemorating Victoria Cross holder Lt Col. George Wheeler has already been replaced once since he was buried at St Mary Magdalene Church in 1938. But a recent town council meeting heard Milton Heritage Society's Nick Saunders had told the council's listed building working party it required work.

Born in 1880, Lt Col. Wheeler was awarded the VC by King George V in 1919 for his courage in a crucial mission as major with the 2/9th Gurkhas. In Mesopotamia (Iraq) in February 1917, his squad crossed the River Tigris and cleared Turkish forces for the British Army's advance on Baghdad.

Despite suffering a severe bayonet wound to the head, he helped disperse the enemy and continued to consolidate his position. Retiring from the Indian Army in 1922, Col. Wheeler settled in Barton and became involved in local activities, including New Forest Players and the conservative club.

His grave was vandalised by the 1990s, and members of Bedford School and the Gurka Rifles Association clubbed together in 1999 to replace it.

Passed into the town council's care in 2008, the stone now requires attention, Cllr Steve Clarke told the meeting. Cllr Steve Clarke asked for support from fellow councillors towards the grave being restored.

"Town council workers have done a very good job keeping it neat and tidy and clean, as they should for a grave belonging to one of our VCs. But the fabric is failing and needs repair. We'll look for any surviving relatives or anyone else who wished to contribute and will look to have the grave properly restored to its glory."

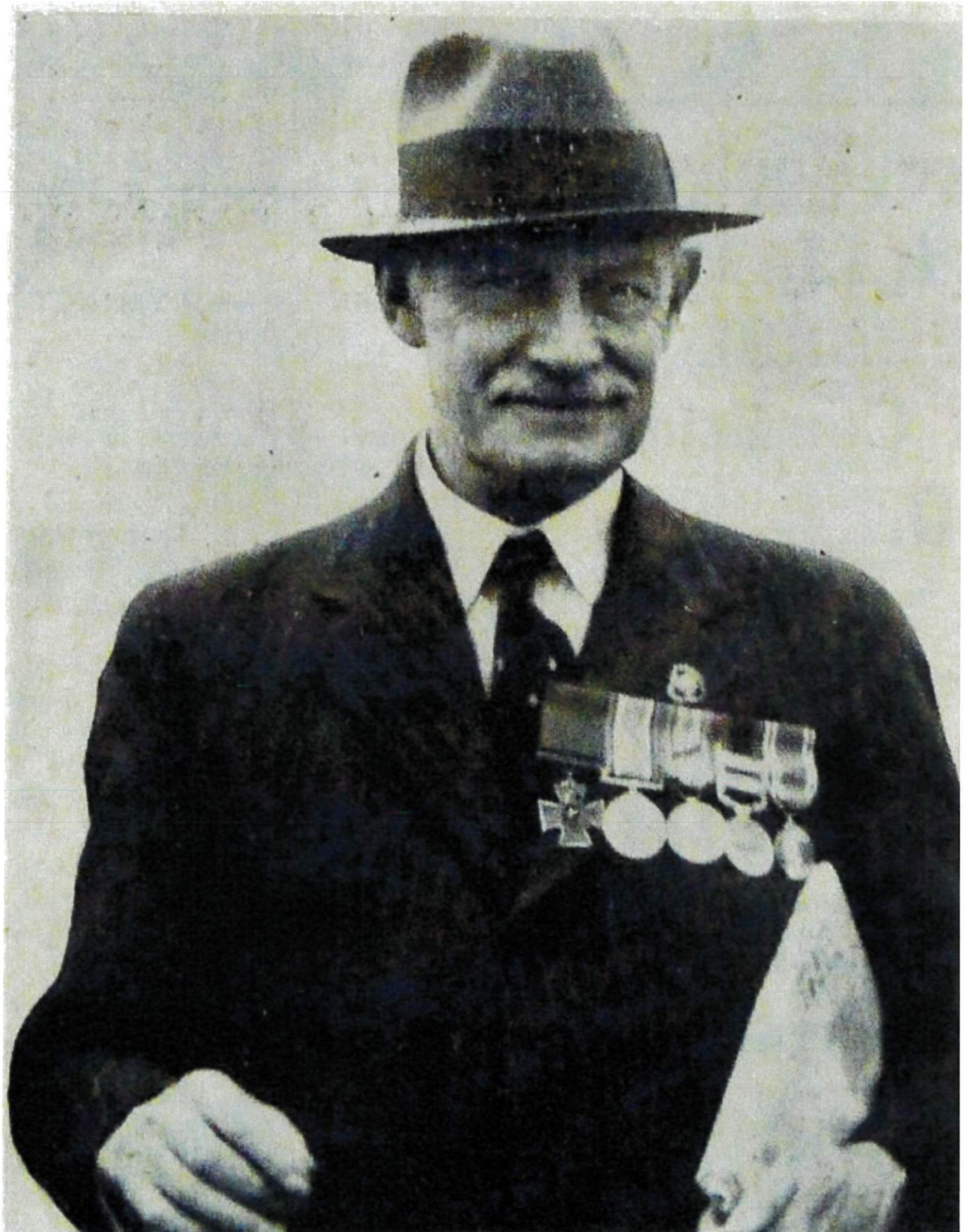
He asked if the council might be willing to offer financial support if such funding proved unavailable, but chairman and mayor Cllr David Hawkins believed more discussion was needed.

"Yes, he is a VC who should be held in very high esteem, but we shouldn't burden the taxpayer," Cllr Hawkins said. "Before we make any decision on footing the bill, we should bring this back to council for discussion. I think that's the fairest thing to do."

Members agreed in principle that the grave's condition needed to be addressed.



Lt Col. George Wheeler's grave (picture: Milton Heritage Society)



Lt Col. George Wheeler is buried at St Mary Magdalene Church