

# Military Honours



**Ilford PDSA Animal Cemetery is the final resting place of more than 3,000 animals, including 12 animal heroes from World War II that were awarded the PDSA Dickin Medal, the animals' equivalent of the Victoria Cross.**

Over the years, the Cemetery had fallen into disrepair. Many of the graves were unmarked and any surviving headstones weathered and broken.

With the help of a £50,000 Lottery grant, this special project has restored the Cemetery to its former glory and is achieving its aim to create a final resting place that is fitting for animal heroes.

The restoration work has included not only repairs to the headstones, but work on the entrance gate, the creation of a visitors map and work to number the graves.

A garden of remembrance has also been created, along with information boards detailing the animals' stories.

Recently the cemetery, dubbed "Arlington for Animals" after the graveyard for America's war dead, was the scene for a service of remembrance. Between them the feathered and furry of the animal kingdom have often been the unsung heroes of war.

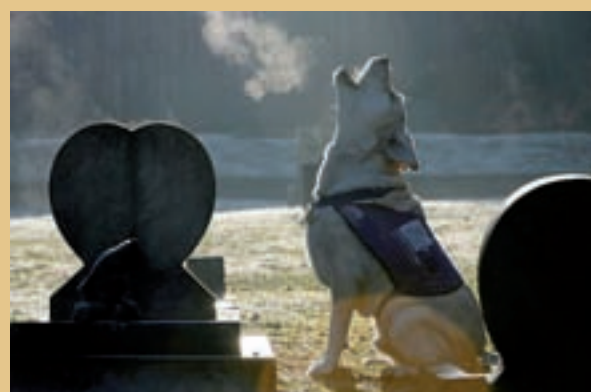
At the ceremony, heroic animals who have put their lives on the line for the sake of thousands of servicemen and women, as well as civilians, were given official recognition.

Representatives from the different services joined a tiny handful of those who once proudly worked with some of the animals buried there and handlers of living recipients of the award, braved a chilly morning to lay wreaths and pay their respects. A bugler from the Kings Royal Rifles Corps played the Last Post.

In the unique ceremony military honours were given to the 62 animals who over the years have received the PDSA Dickin Medal - the animal equivalent to the Victoria Cross.

First awarded during the height of the Second World War in 1943, recipients have played a part in just about every conflict involving British troops in locations as far apart as Burma, Italy, France, Iraq and Afghanistan as well as in the UK.

They include a dog who shielded his human comrades from a grenade blast, a pigeon who saved an Italian village from being bombed, and horses who remained a steady and calm presence on the streets of London during the Blitz. Only one cat has ever received the Dickin Medal. Ship's cat Simon, who proved his worth during a siege on the River Yangtze, is buried at Ilford Animal Cemetery, in Essex.



## Peter DM

Search and Rescue dog, Peter, came with a bad reputation for fighting other dogs and destroying his owner's belongings. However, his service during World War II was outstanding and he became a reformed character. His PDSA Dickin Medal citation reads:

For locating victims trapped under blitzed buildings while serving with MAP (Ministry of Aircraft Production) attached to Civil Defence of London.

The information he gave to his handler resulted in the saving of many lives and he was singled out for special attention at the Civil Defence Stand-Down parade in Hyde Park before the King and Queen and Princess Elizabeth in 1946.



## Rip DM

Picture of Rip the dog, Dickin Medal recipient saving a young boy from a bombed building

Rip was found homeless and starving after a bombing raid in 1940 when he became the mascot of the Southill Street Air Raid Patrol in Poplar, East London. During heavy gunfire and bombing raids, Rip was always on duty, never getting in the way, but working quickly to sniff out casualties. He had over 5 years active service to his credit, and his PDSA Dickin Medal citation reads: For locating many air-raid victims during the blitz of 1940.

## Tich DM

Tich was adopted by Rifleman Thomas Walker of the 1st Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps before El Alamein and serviced in North Africa and Italy until the end of WWII. Tich accompanied Walker on the front line all through the fighting in Italy, riding on the Bren gun carrier or on the bonnet of a stretcher jeep. Tich was severely wounded several times but always refused to leave her post even when under heavy fire.

PDSA director general Marilyn Rydstrom paid tribute to the animals. "Many lives were saved as a result of the courage and dedication to duty of the animals buried at Ilford. Sadly, over the years, the animal graves at the cemetery had weathered and broken.

"So we decided to embark on the restoration project as a mark of respect for the PDSA Dickin Medal recipients and the 3,000 other military animals and family pets buried there."

And - appropriately for the animal affair - there was a flypast of pigeons. For almost as long as men have waged war pigeons have been messengers in battle.

Incredibly 32 of the recipients of the Dickens medal - which carries the words "For Gallantry" and "We also serve" beneath a laurel wreath - have been of the winged variety.

Also present were two dogs who have been awarded the PDSA Gold medal, which goes to heroic animals who serve outside of military conflict.

PC Bob Crawford, of the Metropolitan Police, had to put his life and faith in the hands of his cocker spaniel Jake when terrorists wreaked havoc in London on the July 7 bombings.

Jake, with his handler, was sent into the bombed wreckage of the Tavistock Square bus when officials still feared a second blast to ensure that there were no more explosive devices.

Labrador Endal was given the Gold Medal for saving the life of his owner Allen Parton. During the Gulf War in 1991, naval engineer Mr Parton suffered severe head injuries in a car accident and was left wheelchair bound, unable to speak, read, write or remember. Endal became his partner and slowly coaxed him back from the brink. Today the dog can respond to more than 100 commands, push lift buttons and even use a cashpoint.

