



## Diana Hope Rowden

Have you ever wondered about the lives of the people whose names appear on the stones in our churchyard?

One name that is hardly noticeable, that epitomises just how much people are prepared to give for others, is Diana Hope Rowden. I first learned about Diana when I was a child living in Tilford, where the Rowden family lived for some of the time. The grave is a family memorial, her father died in Holybourne and her mother was living latterly in Binsted.

Diana's life was much different, she was born in England on 31st January, 1915, when still a child her mother took her and her two brothers to live in the south of France. As a teenager she returned England to go to boarding school but went back to France in 1933 to finish her education at the Sorbonne. At the outbreak of war she joined the Red Cross as part of the Anglo-American Ambulance Corps of the British Expeditionary Force in France, the occupation of France began and she took the route through Spain and Portugal back to England.

She joined the WAAF and was assigned Intelligence duties. Diana with her fluency in French and familiarity with France would have been well fitted to start training with Special Operations Executive (S.O.E.) in 1943; within three months she had been dropped in the Loire Valley to join the Acrobat circuit in the Jura Mountains. With the code name 'Paulette' became involved in delivering messages and sabotage operations including the Peugeot factory which manufactured tanks. Not long after her arrival the group organiser was betrayed by a double agent and arrested, Diana and others in her group went into hiding

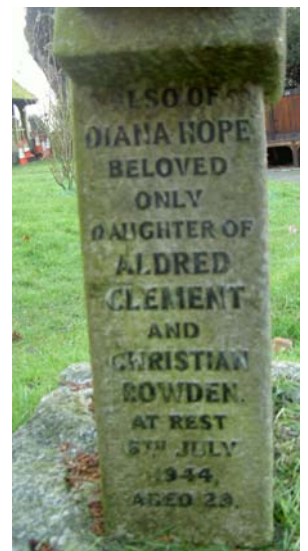
On 18th November, 1943, Diana was arrested while with other members of the group. She was taken to Avenue Foch, the Gestapo headquarters in Paris and after being interrogated for two weeks she was sent to Fresnes Prison. On 13th May 1944 the Germans transported Diana and seven other SOE agents, Vera Leigh, Andrée Borrel, Sonya Olschanezky, Yolande Beekman, Eliane Plewman, Madeleine Damerment and Odette Sansom, to Germany.

On 6th July 1944, Diana along with Vera Leigh, Andrée Borrel and Sonya Olschanezky, were taken to the Concentration Camp at Natzweiler for 'special treatment'. Later that day they were injected with phenol and put in the crematorium furnace. Diana was only 29 years old.



Diana received the Croix de Guerre and MBE, her name, along with other names you may recognise, is on several other Memorials, but one memorial to a very brave and selfless young woman is in our churchyard, not far from the main path through.

When you next walk through, take the time think of her bravery and spare her a thought as a person not just a name.



*References:* <http://www.64-baker-street.org> <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk>  
<http://www.scrapbookpages.com/Natzweiler/SOEagents.html>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special\\_Operations\\_Executive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Operations_Executive)

*Reading:* Kramer, R., *Flames in the Field: the story of four SOE. agents in occupied France*, London, Michael Joseph, 1995