

Captain Robert Gee VC, MC, MP

Robert Gee was born at 29 Metcalf Street, Leicester, on 7 May 1876, His parents were Robert Gee (snr) and Amy Gee (nee Foulds) both framework knitters from Anstey, Leicestershire. The young Robert was orphaned just before his ninth birthday and was later admitted to the Leicester Workhouse prior to admission to the Countesthorpe Cottage Homes on 5 August 1887. He was discharged on 8 March 1890 and three years later enlisted into The Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment). In 1902 he married Elizabeth Dixon of Huntingdon, the couple had two daughters.

By the outbreak of the First World War, Robert Gee had reached the rank of Regimental Quartermaster- Sergeant. He was commissioned in May 1915 and served in Gallipoli where he was promoted to Acting Captain.

The following year he was seriously wounded on 1 July 1916, the opening day of the Battle of the Somme, where he displayed outstanding leadership for which he was awarded the Military Cross.

On 30 November at Masnieres and Les Rues Vertes, France, Captain Gee single-handedly attacked a German machine gun post. He captured the gun, killing eight of the crew, and was wounded in the engagement. It was described as "a magnificent exploit". On 11 January 1918, it was announced in the London Gazette that he had been awarded the Victoria Cross.

Captain Gee, then aged 41 years, was decorated by King George V, at Buckingham Palace , on 23 February 1918. He had also been Mentioned in Despatches on three occasions and wounded three times.

Following the war, Captain Gee embarked upon a political career. He, unsuccessfully, fought the Consett Division of Durham Parliamentary seat in December 1918 before winning the by-election, as a Coalition Unionist at East Woolwich in 1921 defeating James Ramsay MacDonald a future Labour Prime Minister.

As a Member of Parliament, Captain Gee spoke on issues important to him, particularly on military matters including Army estimates and questions relating to ex-servicemen. He worked to secure better pensions, especially for those who had been gassed and to obtain financial assistance for war widows. Often he would have to leave the chamber, during late night sittings, owing to the effects of his war wounds.

He lost his seat in 1922 and then fought two further unsuccessful campaigns at East Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Bishop Auckland before returning to Parliament as the Conservative member for Bosworth, Leicestershire in the 1924 General Election.

In 1925, the Honorary Freedom of the City of Leicester was conferred upon the former workhouse boy by the Leicester City Council.

The following year, Captain Gee emigrated to Australia. This remarkable soldier and politician died in Perth, Western Australia on 2 August 1960 aged 84 years.

Derek Seaton