**Ellen Terry’s funeral, 24 July 1928**

Places: Smallhythe and Tenterden

In the days before the great Victorian actressEllen Terry died on 21 July 1928, the nation had been on tenterhooks for news of her health. An efficient ‘news bureau’, staffed with her daughter Edy Craig’s friends, had been set up in her house at Smallhythe Place to field press inquiries, but reporters descended nonetheless.

One such friend was Velona Pilcher who wrote about the event in a chronicle titled ‘The Marvellous Death of Ellen Terry’:

The night was a nightmare… Four murderous motors, their livid headlamps levelled on the farmhouse, cottages and roadway, were waiting in the dark with reporters sent by the morning papers to be in at the death, or die. Last night one had crawled through the hedge, and tried to spy in at that curtained window. Tonight the town of Tenterden had sent police to guard the house. But no one could slip out of the sick-room to take courage from a star, or strength from the fresh air, without staring strangers making a note of it… To use the telephone meant first making sure that no eavesdroppers were crouching outside the cottage window to make a scoop of sorrow.[[1]](#footnote-1)

[Christopher St John]( 20c/20c-st-john-biography) wrote, ‘The first funeral wreath was brought from Tenterden by a chauffeur who had often driven the car Ellen Terry hired… And soon that bright wreath was joined by others. From North and South, from East and West they came, until all the gardens of England seemed to be massed on the lawn outside Ellen Terry’s house.’[[2]](#footnote-2)

‘That was not the only strange sight in Smallhythe on …the day of Ellen Terry’s funeral. The road for miles was packed with cars, moving as slowly as in a busy street in a great city. On the grass bank skirting the 100 yards of road between the house and the church were clustered groups of photographers…’[[3]](#footnote-3)

‘Another strange sight, exquisitely strange, was to be seen as the coffin was borne up the steps into the church. There, outside the porch was a guard of honour fit for one who had been simple in her life, and loved beauty in her ways. The men from the fields had left their work for an hour, and had come to the church with their tools – haymakers with their rakes and pitchforks, shepherds with their crooks and sheep-dogs…’[[4]](#footnote-4)

‘The town of Tenterden was beautiful… as we strange mourners… drove through it in our cars, following Ellen Terry on her last journey to London, the journey that, living, she had taken so many times. …All businesses had been abandoned. The shops were closed; the sun shone on houses darkened by drawn blinds. The people stood silent and motionless in the High Street, as if they were observing the Two Minutes Remembrance on Armistice Day. No sound except the muffled peal of the big church bells.’[[5]](#footnote-5)

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Bibliography:

St John, C. (1933) (ed.) *Ellen Terry's Memoirs*. Victor Gollancz Ltd.

1. *Memoirs* 336. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. 338. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid 338. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid 339. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid 339. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)