

## **After the Armistice...**

Cecil Crocker steps down from a steam train carriage, places a foot on the platform of Brandon railway station and feels he is almost home. Home is Foord Farm, where his family have lived for decades. In fact, his grandfather, William Foord Crocker, was reverend of St. Peter's church for many years. In the distance, as he walks home, he catches glimpses of the tower of St. Peter's and counts himself very lucky to be back in Brandon again. You see, on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1918, when the German's were pushing for a breakthrough in their 'Spring Offensive', he was captured and taken prisoner. Cecil has the distinction of being the first Brandon lad to return home after the Armistice.

Other ex-prisoners soon followed - Ernest Bullock, John Bullock, Fred Edwards, Stanley Nichols, Charles Talbot, Ernest Talbot and Bertie Wicks. Another prisoner, John Linge, entered France in August 1914 as a Reservist with the Suffolk Regiment and was captured within days, spending the entirety of the war in a prison camp. Perhaps his old job at the butcher shop was still open.

Beyond Christmas and into 1919, other men had the added excitement of receiving a bravery award. Walter Gentle received the Military Medal, as did Walter Royal, while Harry Royal got a Distinguished Conduct Medal. Two other lads received their medals in Brandon House. John Bullock received his Military Medal from Colonel and Lady Hamilton, then General and Lady de Lotbiniere similarly awarded Charles Talbot his Distinguished Conduct Medal there. General de Lotbiniere went further, setting up a sports club, named Brandon Recreation, for the benefit of townsfolk. He then did a similar thing for the folk of Town Street.

It was clear there were people making huge strides to improve the lives of this weary town. Then one day it spectacularly unravelled. Fred Gentle, a local councillor, farmer and butcher shop owner, assaulted someone who had moved to the town just seven months earlier. When residents heard what had happened, they stormed out on to the High Street, outside Fred's butcher shop, with threats to kill him. Police estimated the number was about one thousand, which, from a population of two and a half thousand, was a significant number. The mob wrecked Fred's shop, forcing him and his family to flee from their home. Newspapers across the nation reported on this civil unrest. Why did it get out of hand? It came down to the fact Fred had assaulted a one-legged war veteran. Those who had served their country, deserved respect. Brandon had calmed down by July 1919, when peace was finally declared across Europe. The final act of Brandon's war came in October 1920, when a huge Union Jack was pulled from the town's new war memorial to unveil the names of sixty-five Brandon lads. Perhaps then the ghosts of war could finally be laid to rest.

Through the years, it is the people's stories that keep them alive, long after their physical presence is gone. That has been my aim for the Brandon people of one hundred years ago. However, now seems a good time to let them go. I thank Terry and Gary for providing me with this platform over the past five years. This shall be my last story. I recall years ago, when I first started writing these, that another contributor informed me they were struggling to meet their deadline for the magazine. I replied that my articles were easy. The stories had already written themselves a hundred years ago!