

February 1918...

On September 25th 1917, George Marchant, with the sun going down behind him, stands in a trench near Gonnellieu, France. When the sun disappears completely, and darkness cloaks everything beyond the trench, George, along with his comrades in the Suffolk Regiment, will leave this sanctuary and head off into the gloom. Their mission will be a surprise raid on enemy trenches to capture and bring back prisoners for interrogation. George's thoughts might hark back to Brandon, where he served as a Territorial in the British Army while working at the fur factory on George Street. Perhaps thoughts of his sweetheart, Elizabeth (Wharf), who he married eleven years ago, fill his head? His last letter to her was a couple of days ago, so he is overdue to write another. Perhaps after he returns from tonight's mission? George is totally unaware to his fate tonight. We, on the other hand, can observe proceedings as recorded in history. We might reflect upon a mission classified as a success, with men returning in about an hour's time and guiding German prisoners back with them. However, George will not be among them. His absence will lead to him being recorded as "*missing*".

According to history, five months later in February 1918, George's family, gravely concerned that there had been no news whatsoever about him, wrote a desperate plea asking for any information. Perhaps buoyed by the fact local newspapers had reported on Brandon men being taken prisoner, such as Bert Wicks and John Bullock who were both wounded during capture, George's family wondered if that fate had befallen George. Perhaps someone saw him lying in a German hospital, too badly wounded to write? Their plea was printed in the Bury Free Press. The following week they received a reply ...

"Madam. - I see by the papers you want information about your son, Private G. Marchant, 12th Suffolk Regiment. I am sorry to inform you he was killed in action on September 25th while on a raid into the enemy's line by a trench mortar. He was liked by all that know him. I was with him at the time of his death, in charge of the party that he was with, and am sorry to lose him. I am on leave, and saw the paragraph in the paper, and thought I would write and let you know.

I remain yours faithfully, Sergeant J.W. Wright, 12th Suffolk Regiment, Nowton Court Farm, Bury St. Edmunds."

History also records that in 1920 Brandon saw the unveiling of a war memorial, bearing the name of "George Marchant". Then, following a second 'World War', the name "Ernest Marchant" was inscribed on that same memorial. A father and son forever remembered. A year or two after George's death another of his sons took a job earning 2s 6d as an errand boy in a grocer shop on Bury Road. The son, Arthur, soon became manager of the shop, which stood in the shadow of the fur factory where George once worked. When the shop's owner retired and had no one to hand it over to, the owner gave the shop to Arthur, knowing it would be in safe hands. In 1976, it was the turn of Arthur Marchant to retire, so he shut the shop one last time and it was no more. Developers demolished the shop, replacing it with a chemist and flats, although people of a certain age still retain their memories of Arthur and his shop.