

November 1915

In November our attention turns to Remembrance. A memorial service this month, held at St Peter's church, saw the town gather to remember the seventeen Brandon men known to have been killed in the war. I say "known" because James Dyer is still officially "missing", despite the belief he was killed during the battles of August last year. Rector Wyatt read the service, which included verses from Isaiah XLIII 1 and 2. Those verses describe the Lord calling our dead men up to His side. A call He is likely to repeat to other Brandon men, not yet dead. This month it was underlined to Brandon that the act of remembrance should be extended beyond remembering purely those killed ...

In Brandon's police courtroom, the magistrates are hearing a case against Harriet Randall, who has been charged with theft. Police Inspector Mobbs informs the court he paid Harriet a visit in connection to items being taken from outside a property on the Avenue, while the occupant was cleaning inside. After questioning Harriet she eventually admitted she was in possession of an enamel bowl, ceramic pail and a towel, all taken from the house on the Avenue. Harriet's only defence was that she could not recall how the objects came into her possession. Harriet is guilty and her lack of memory will not serve as a defence.

On the surface this seems a straightforward case and she is expecting to be heavily fined. However, the magistrates take a sympathetic view of Harriet's predicament and show her leniency. She is bound-over under the Probation of Offender's Act, meaning no further action will be taken against her providing she does not re-offend. It is rare for this to happen, but today, for Harriet, the Magistrates have exercised compassion. Now I shall explain why.

Harriet is a widow. When her husband died four years ago the role of 'breadwinner' fell on the shoulders of Harriet's eldest son, Walter. He went to work as a porter at Brandon's railway station, working long hours for a meagre income to put food on the table for his mother, and many brothers and sisters. Then war came to Harriet's family and Walter, along with two of his brothers, left the family home to fight. Harriet, barely able to cope, was persuaded to take a break in London, staying with her sister, for a few days respite. She was lucky to survive London when a Zeppelin bomb hit the cinema she was visiting. She wasted no time in returning home, although she now suffers badly through severe anxiety and her actions consequently have become erratic. All this explains the actions of a woman whose world is in turmoil. Nonetheless the law has to be respected at all times. So why did the Magistrates choose not to fine Harriet? It is because mood in the town is one of sadness. Last month the town lost six sons to the war. One of them had been Harriet's rock, Walter, killed in Gallipoli.

So if this month you remember poor Walter, please also remember his mother. When you remember those other fallen men, remember all those forgotten poor souls left to mourn the loss of a son, a brother, a husband or a father. For every man taken, many more are left with battle scars not physical but emotional. War takes much more than then men listed on a Roll of Honour or any memorial.