

September 1918...

Of course, no one knew the end of war was just two months away. The war machine still ran on like a runaway train and casualty lists filled local newspapers, consequently many Brandon names were contained among them. Lingwood was in hospital with a severe wrist wound, Dixon had been in a gas attack and had temporarily lost his sight, poor Wilby was suffering shell shock and Norton had been wounded a second time in as many months. The list went on. The names of those Brandon lads killed, also went on. Hector Lockwood (21st Aug), Albert Malt (21st Aug), Arthur Kent (22nd Aug) and John Wharf (29th Aug). On 30th August, Edgar Johnson was killed, providing Brandon's 'roll of honour' with its sixty-first name. Edgar also has the distinction of being the only Brandon lad whose death directly resulted from the war, to be returned home for burial.

Edgar did not have the best of childhoods. His mother died when he was just eleven and within two years he was working on a farm, to boost the family's income. By the time he was in his twenties he was boarding with the Godbold family at Manor Farm and working as a cowman. Then war was declared. Edgar immediately volunteered for the army as one of 'Kitchener's Army', and was thrown into action on countless occasions over the years. It was during August 1918, when his unit was subjected to heavy artillery, including gas-filled shells, that Edgar was most severely wounded. His life hung in the balance and his chances for recovery were slim, especially if he stayed in the Army's field hospital. Doctors decided Edgar should be immediately returned to Britain, so he could receive specialist treatment. They put him on the hospital ship, 'Gloucester Castle', which sailed across the English Channel. Sadly, Edgar's journey finished before the ship docked, when his condition deteriorated, and he died from his wounds. He was thirty-one.

War did not offer time to preserve, or even arrange logistics for, a corpse to come home. To be honest there were too many corpses for that kind of work anyway. So, casualties were buried close to where they were killed, that is provided their remains were found! There are many foreign fields where Brandon lads lie. From France to Turkey, Iraq, Greece and Palestine. Some died at sea. Sam Wells, died on board a hospital ship in 1915, en route to India, and was buried at sea. However, Edgar's body was brought back home to Brandon for burial.

In the first week of September 1918, Edgar's corpse became a symbol for all those who had lost a loved one in the four years of war. His funeral, held at St Peter's church, was attended by practically all the townsfolk. Some knew Edgar, others did not. This single funeral represented a goodbye to the dozens of Brandon lads killed in the war, whose remains would never return home. Following the service, the town's Volunteer Training Corps, led by Sergeant-Major Shears, formed up over Edgar's grave and fired a volley of shots into the air. One of the V.T.C. lads, Corporal Ernest Royal, then produced a bugle and sounded the 'Last Post'. Today, Edgar's grave is identified by the Commonwealth War Grave Commission headstone, the only one in the town's cemetery. However, the CWGC did not initially recognise his grave, which subsequently meant his headstone was not commissioned until 1973. The CWGC have also recognised one other war grave in the cemetery, that of William Mutum, who died of complications from diabetes twelve days after the Armistice.