

## LEST WE FORGET



*Romerics Communal Cemetery Extension*

Enoch Owen and George Longshaw were two of the original trustees of Balls Bank Primitive Methodist Church when it opened in January 1870. It was at Packmoor Church on November 17<sup>th</sup> 2012, the weekend of our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, that my wife Cynthia and I met a lady that we learned was a direct descendant of both men. That lady was Val Bassett from Cheadle who on the day came to Packmoor accompanied by her husband to visit the church where many of her ancestors had worshipped. Enoch Owen's son, John did marry George Longshaw's daughter, Hannah Eliza. John and Hannah were Val's Great Grandparents; their Daughter Rebecca was her maternal Grandmother.



*William as a Boy Scout*

John and Hannah raised most of their large family at Brewhouse Bank and later in life lived in Samuel Street Packmoor. Val told us about her mother Alice Durber whose maiden name was Grocott. Alice was a nurse at Westcliffe Hospital and worked there tirelessly for many years. Her great uncles John and George Owen and George's wife Florence were very big Methodists. George and Florence helped by John who lived with them, ran a shop in Thomas Street for many years. Cynthia who remembered George and Florence was able that day to show them the premises, no longer a shop, where George, Florence and John had lived for many years. John was a musician who enjoyed playing an organ at home and it is thought that he helped out at Packmoor Church from time to time by playing the organ.

Val also told us about William Owen another of her great uncles and also the son of John and Hannah. William a soldier was sadly killed in action in Northern France, just a few short weeks before the Armistice. We have a Book of Remembrance at Packmoor which commemorates the lives of local men who fell during the two world wars and it was in this book we looked for William's name. We did not find it which was very disappointing and a matter of regret.

The 4<sup>th</sup> of August this year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the day Britain entered one of the costliest conflicts in history – the First World War – with fighting continuing until the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1918, Armistice. Mindful of this, with the help of Val and her family, we have worked towards learning more about William in order that we could properly commemorate his life and his sacrifice not only in the remembrance book at Packmoor but in our hearts and minds.

William was born on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1898 at Brewhouse Bank and would have been just 16 years old when war broke out. At the time of his death Private William Owen was serving with the Suffolk Regiment, Second Battalion although formerly he had served with the South Staffs Regiment. William died on October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1918, aged just 20 years. This would have been during the Battle of the River Selle, part of the Final Advance which saw the British drive the Germans out of a new defensive line along the River Selle, a line that they had taken up after being forced out of the Hindenburg Line. It was early on 23<sup>rd</sup> October that Field Marshall Douglas Haig launched a night attack with all three of his British armies, the First, Second and Fourth. The villages of Romeries and Beaudignies were liberated on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October. William's last resting place is the Romeries Communal Cemetery Extension, Northern France.

monieux was employed at the Ford Green Colliery.  
 Mr. and Mrs. J. Owen, 60, Samuel-street, Packmoor, have received official intimation that their son, Pte. William Owen, Suffolk Regiment, was killed in action on October 23rd. He was 20 years of age, and was formerly employed at Brown Lees Colliery. A brother has served four years in the Army.  
 Lce-Sergt. George Jones, North Staffords, of 55, Albert-street, Fenton, who was reported missing on March 21st last, is now reported killed. Up to the time he enlisted Lce-Sergt. Jones was employed by the Burslem Co-operative Society at their Fenton Branch. His eldest brother died in France in 1918. Another brother

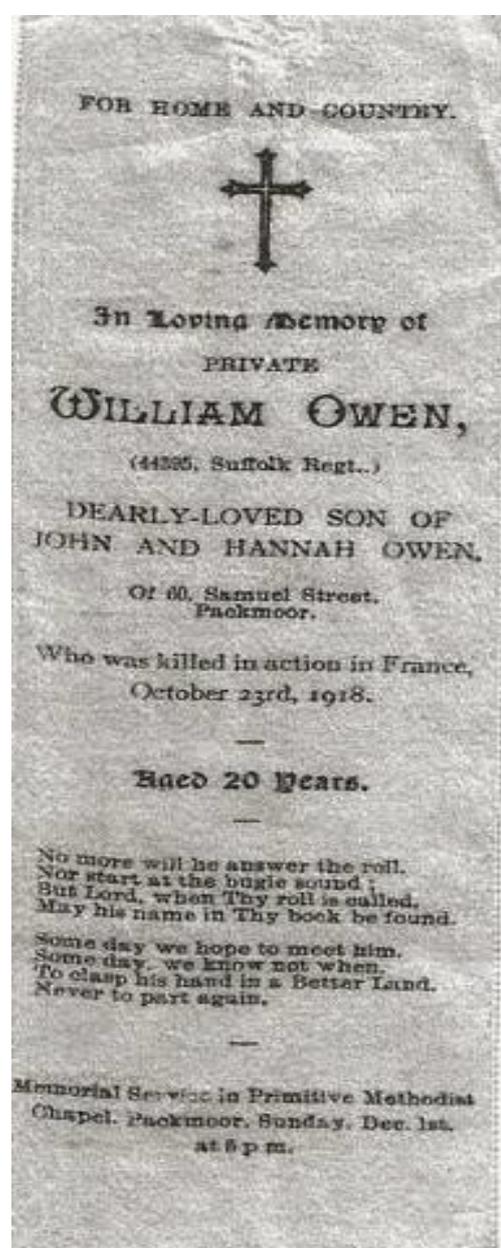
William's name appears on the Memorial Wall at Tunstall Memorial Gardens and he is also remembered on a Headstone and a memorial vase which both sit on the grave of his mum, dad and brother John at St. James Cemetery Newchapel. Now of course he does have his rightful place in the Book of Remembrance at Packmoor alongside the names of many other local men who made the ultimate sacrifice, names which include that of John Harold Rhodes VC, another son of Packmoor. William's brother John also served in the war as a soldier for four years and although he survived he did become a casualty after suffering burns.

Almost a million British soldiers died in the Great War. Although officer deaths were usually quickly notified to families by telegram, what the families of other ranks got, sometimes referred to as a 'telegram', was in fact form B104-82 a fill in the blanks type form.

Casualty lists were usually compiled in Belgium and France and sent to the War Office who sent them to the London Gazette and thence to county newspapers. The loss of young life during the war was grim and terrible but for a long time neither the government, nor the military, gave thought to the devastation heaped on families and communities by the loss of so many brothers. Today we can only try to imagine the terrible grief and despair suffered by mothers when they learned of the death of their sons.

This year that marks the centenary of the start of World War One is rightly a chance for the generations of today to reflect not only on the sacrifice of all those who fought in the conflict but also the lives of millions of civilians who died because of it and the greater millions who were left bereft by it.

The following words taken from William's memorial notice are words of comfort and faith that I think may resonate with many who suffer or face bereavement.



*No more will he answer the roll  
 Nor start at the bugle sound;  
 But Lord, when Thy roll is called,  
 May his name in Thy book be found.*

*Some day we hope to meet him,  
 Some day we know not when,  
 To clasp his hand in a better land,  
 Never to part again.*

John Taylor

June 2014