



EDGAR EVENTS

**Researching and sharing Edgar family
history No. 92, September 2014**



DNA Update



by James Edgar (james@jamesedgar.ca)

All is quiet on the DNA front—I have nothing to report. That being the case, I'll add a photo further down.

As I write this, Jodie and I are only a few days away from a flight to the UK where we will attend a family history conference organized by our good friends, Fred and Heather Feather of the Essex Society for Family History (www.esfh.org.uk and home.btconnect.com/esfh/Speakers.html). It promises to be a good one in Basildon, with loads of speakers and activities.

We've attended their enjoyable meetings previously while visiting the Feathers in Southend. By the time you read this, we'll be deeply immersed in a talk about some facet of our fascinating hobby. What's not to like?

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A couple of weeks back, I got an email from **Michael Reid Foster**. He was searching for information on his mother's family and he came across our newsletter #73 where I described discovering the families of **Edgars** in Halifax. One side of the family is descended from **James Delmar Edgar**, the other side from **John Reid Edgar** (there's a clue to Michael's ancestor). **Michael's** mother was **Helen Edgar**, **John Reid's** daughter! Newsletter #81 gave the story of our Halifax gathering last September.

**Michael**, who works and lives in Ottawa, has a sister **Pamela Silver** in Halifax. I've been onto the phone with them both, and they're so excited that they found us. 😊

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And now, we have this first of two offerings from SteveUK...

DNA Origins



by Steve Edgar (steven-edgar@sky.com)

I have recently been reading some books on the origins of mankind in Europe by Stephen Oppenheimer “The Origins of the British,” and by Brian Sykes “The Seven Daughters of Eve.” These authors use both yDNA from men and mDNA from women to trace the migration paths of the various DNA groups of people in the past, and attempt to date the migrations by using DNA subclades and language as a guide.

I would encourage everyone interested to borrow or buy these books, they are truly fascinating.

In the books, the R1b Celts are traced to their origins in southwest Europe, beginning their journey in northern Spain and thence on to Britain and Ireland after the Ice Age. They also track the invaders of Britain—Saxons, Vikings and Normans—looking at the DNA they left behind, mostly verifying the history that has already been recorded over the millennia.



Hadrian's Wall with the Kebab Shop removed

All of our Edgar DNA can be traced to Celtish, Saxon, or Viking DNA except one group—my own, the E1b “Greek” DNA group. The hypothesis Richard, James, and I came up with in a cafe in Newry some years ago was the “Kebab Shop on Hadrian’s Wall” idea. Basically, the Romans never used local militia to guard or serve in any given province. A soldier signed up for 25 years, could not be married, and retired (if he survived!) as a free man of Rome. The idea we had was that a Greek soldier was serving in

the north of England on or about the Hadrian’s Wall area, he fathered a male child who was absorbed into a British family that somehow became an Edgar. For want of a better idea, this has stood us in good stead—until now!

In Oppenheimer’s book, he identifies the E1b1b group as the E3b (we were E3 until information was updated a few years ago). He also traced the frequency of this group over the whole of the British Isles—none in Ireland and less than 5% in Britain except for a 35% cluster in Abergele in North Wales.

The E1b group traces its origins back to East Africa 25,000 to 30,000 years ago. They left Africa after the Ice Age and settled in the Balkans where their population expanded 7000-8000 years ago. This DNA group is recorded as being 35% present in modern Greeks and south Balkan descendants.

By using the statistics of modern populations, the presence of any particular group’s arrival can be calculated.

The less than 5% of E1bs in the UK would support a single male ancestor, but to my mind, it is a bit weak. A son would have to be born to a father for each generation over 2000 years, which does not seem entirely possible—not impossible, but not likely.



So, the origins of my DNA must be the 35% cluster in Abergele. This raises the questions when, why, and who? Abergele sits very close to the Great Orme—a huge rock outcrop that projects into the Irish Sea. On top of it are the Bronze Age copper mines dating back 4000 years.

These mines were established very quickly and operated for hundreds of years. The miners dug into the hard rock to extract the valuable copper. There is no sign that these mines or a mining tradition grew up in the area. The archaeological evidence does not support a very ancient culture developing; it was developed suddenly.



The Great Orme Copper Mine entrance

Prior to this time, copper mining and smelting was already established in the Balkans. The Bronze Age in Greece is recorded as starting at about 5000 years ago—a thousand years before they started mining on the Great Orme. Somehow, some copper ore must have found its way from Wales to Greece, and the richness of this ore must have encouraged a group of Greek E1b copper miners to leave the warmth of the Adriatic coast to go to the bleakness of Great Orme and start digging holes!

From an economic point of view, digging and shipping ore to Greece would not have been viable; far more sensible to set up a smelter in Wales and export the copper as billets or rough castings back to Greece to be finished as weapons or tools. This mining continued for about 1000 years, until the Iron Age. Iron is a lot harder, keeps its edge longer, wears more slowly and its ores are more common all over the country.

Once established, the miners and smelters must have lived locally, probably married local women and became “Welsh.” Certainly, over two or three generations, their connection to Greece would have been lost. To communicate with the locals they would have had to speak Celtic (Welsh) as well. Their only contact would have been the boats arriving on the beach to carry the copper back to Greece. These boats may well have not even been Greek. Any trader or sailor would have spotted the commercial value of this. Over the years, an estimated 1800 tonnes of copper would have been extracted from the known workings.

Perhaps the sword that Theseus used to kill the Minotaur was made from copper mined on the Great Orme!

The story of King Arthur and the Sword in the Stone hark back to the tradition of using stone moulds to cast bronze implements. Copper and tin are added together to make bronze, which is much harder and stronger than copper alone and it will hold a sharp edge longer. A stone would be carved out with the shape of the sword and molten bronze poured into the relief shape. This would only allow one side to the sword to be moulded, a later development was to carve two sides of the sword in stone and put them together, face to face with a hole at the top. Molten bronze was poured down the hole. When the bronze cooled, the two halves of stone were split apart to reveal the sword. Much filing, grinding, and sharpening resulted in a finished item.



The shape of the sword was developed over many years to be an effective weapon.

A bronze sword back then would cost the same as a small car now. Over 1000 years the miners only managed to extract 1800 tonnes of copper, less than 2 tonnes per year. One tonne of ore would make about 15 lbs of copper, but it would take much effort to remove the surrounding rocks to get to the ore. The amount of labour needed to dig the ore was huge and not very effective; then to heat it with wood and charcoal (which had to be brought in from afar) using a process that was not very efficient at extracting all the copper, moulding it, sharpening, etc., was a huge investment in time and materials.

In conclusion, there would be a likelihood that my E1b ancestor left Wales at some time and travelled further afield looking for more copper, to Scotland or the North of England? Who knows?

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## Myth or Fact?



by Steve Edgar ([steven-edgar@sky.com](mailto:steven-edgar@sky.com))

### The Edgar Crest at Wedderlie

Further to my August article, pictured below is the Edgar Crest above the door at Wedderlie; the damage was deliberately done as the last Edgar left the house. The date on the crest is 1694, which would suggest that whoever sponsored the carving did so in the late 17th century. It may have been carved to celebrate a marriage of an Edgar. Given that J.H. Lawrence-Archer states that the crest above the door is that of Sir Richard Edgar and consists of the Edgar lion rampant and the water boujets of the Ross of Sanquar family

I have managed to enlarge the crest detail as shown below. This is clearly NOT a water boujet, to my eye it looks like a hand bell ? (please let me have your opinions on this)

From the layout of the crest, it looks like there are three of them to each quarter (again let me know your thoughts).

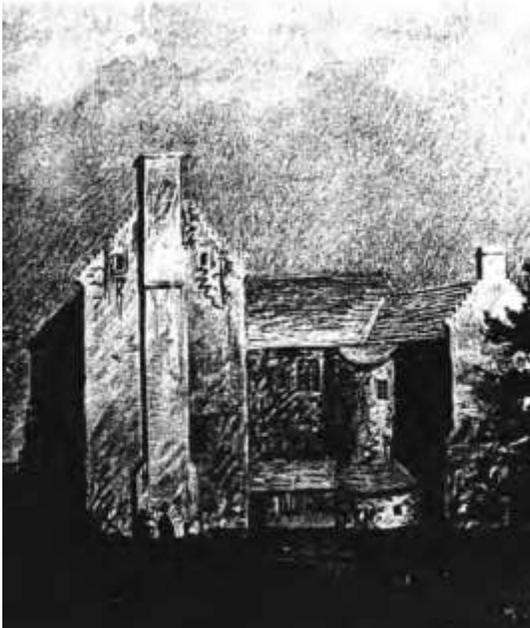
This crest is on the front wall of the extended portion of the house that was built in the 1600s and abuts the 13th century fortalice, which is the original building built by Sir Richard Edgar.



The original fortalice part is shown here to the right of the building. On the left is the larger extension, below it looks to be a porch.



I have montaged two photos to show the main entrance. The defaced crest is inside the door and over another decorated internal doorway—not easy to see without a camera flash or a torch. It seems totally illogical to put this crest in this position. The crest must have been above the door of the extension when it was built, and the porch added afterwards.



This illustration, at left, drawn in the 1800s and is in J.H. Lawrence-Archer's book. It shows the fortalice, at right, the extension and a projecting wing that no longer exists.

Interestingly, there is a turret that could well be an internal staircase.

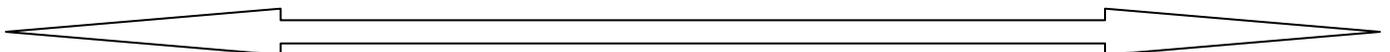
So, who was the lady married to an Edgar and who had a family crest consisting of three hand bells?

A quick look at the Web site came up with this:

**Crest:** Viz. Azure, three bells, the crest, a hand holding a dagger, paleways proper, with the motto, "I beir the bel."

On the Wedderlie Edgar family tree there is a George Edgar married to a (?) Bell who had children Richard and Patrick in about 1680. This would fit, but

I don't have evidence to support this.



## Pewter Badges

Looking for a solid pewter Edgar Crest? At \$18, plus shipping, they're a great way to say "I love my family!" (Pewter buttons also available.)

Email me [james@jamesedgar.ca](mailto:james@jamesedgar.ca)



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Thank you, Robin Hagedorn of Adelaide, for this snippet:

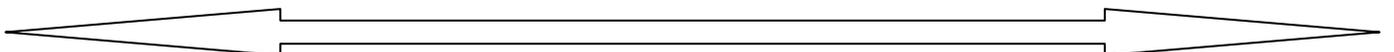
Notice for the September Newsletter. A reminder to everyone that Ancestry.com is closing its Genforum.genealogy.com Web site on 2014 September 5. The contents are supposed to remain as an archive online.

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## Picture Time



*This was the view out the front window of our South Armagh B&B in 2009.*





From Richard Edgar of Tandragee  
 ([edgar888@yahoo.com](mailto:edgar888@yahoo.com))

Richard provides these clippings from his local paper, *Portadown Today*, remembering the 100th anniversary of the beginning of The Great War.

24 THE PORTADOWN TIMES www.portadowntimes.co.uk Friday, August 12, 2014

## WORLD WAR ONE

### Commemoration Fitting tributes to The Fallen

# Events to mark outbreak of war



**Pictured outside St Mark's Church of Ireland are members of the Portadown branch of the Old Comrades RIF Association, whose New Standard was dedicated on Sunday night – left to right – Daniel Steele with the Old Standard, Wesley Tutton, Jim Thompson, Col Arthur Reid (president), Oliver Laffie, Gordon Bullock and Sam Thompson, with the New Standard.**



**Stewart DSD Minister Danny Kennedy with Colonel Arthur Reid before the service at St Mark's Parish Church on Sunday night. INM374-426**

**By Victoria Gibson**  
[vicgibson@portadowntimes.co.uk](mailto:vicgibson@portadowntimes.co.uk)  
 @PortadownToday

**Portadown's special week of events marking the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of World War One began on Sunday night when St Mark's Church of Ireland was packed to capacity for a moving and emotional service.**

A highlight of the service was the laying up of the Old Standard and the Dedication of the New Standard of the Royal Irish Fusiliers (RIF) Old Comrades Branch, which involved the officers of the branch and the town's Royal British Legion officers. It was led by Colonel Arthur Reid, president of the Old Comrades.

The service was conducted by Rev Canon Jim Campbell. The praise was led by the church choir, organist Stuart Nelson and St Mark's Silver Band conductor James Park. Canon Campbell was assisted by members of the town's main churches and a wreath was laid to commemorate all who had died in the 1914-18 conflict.

Another moving aspect was the reading by local historian Richard Edgar, from the *Portadown News* of the era, the reports from the front, soldiers' letters, and accounts of great acts of bravery by those who never came home.

Craigavon Mayor Colin McCusker and several robed members of the borough council attended the service, as did Stewart DSD Minister Danny Kennedy. Also attending were Royal British Legion officers: President Major (Retd) Peter Hodgson; chairman William Stewart; secretary Rosale Hynes; treasurer Sam Thompson. RIF Old Comrades President, Col Arthur Reid; chairman, Sam Thompson; secretary, Wavel Hobson; treasurer, William Doyle; standard bearer, Daniel Swale.

Instead of a sermon, there were three reflections, the subjects being 'The Soldier', 'The Medic' and 'The Padre', and throughout the service there were contributions by the various ministers of clergy.

Pride of place on the front cover of the full-colour Order of Service was given to three divisions who fought so bravely in 1914-18 – the 9th (Lancashire) Division; the 20th (Irish) Division; and the 10th (Irish) Division.

And on the back were colour pictures of the 10th Irish Memorial Cross at Wytschaete, Belgium; The 1914 Ulster Tower, Thiepval, France; and the 20th Irish Memorial in Yugoslavia (now Macedonia).

The processional hymn was 'All people that on Earth do dwell', during which the standards were received and the recessional hymn 'Soldiers of Christ Arise'.

The welcome and introduction on the Order of Service summed it up – "We welcome everyone to this special service at St Mark's, particularly the clergy and members of the local Church of Ireland, Methodist, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian congregations and from other churches. Also welcome are those who represent civic life of our borough, members of the Royal British Legion and members of the Loyal Orders, and all others here to remember and reflect on this solemn occasion."



**Sunday's Remembrance Service in Tandragee. INPT30-725**



**The Rev Shaun Forster taking part in Sunday's service. INPT30-722**



**The Royal Irish Regiment were represented on Sunday. INPT30-728**



**A war veteran during the weekend service in Tandragee. INPT30-729**

## NEWS

Service Mystery surrounds death at height of Somme

# Story of first name on town war memorial

By VICTOR GORDON  
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@portadowntimes1

**The first name on the Portadown War Memorial – that of Private Robert Harper Cooper of Atkinson Avenue – reflects one of the great local mysteries of World War One.**

Not only is Private Cooper listed as being in the First Australian Imperial Force, but his nephew and great-nephew – well-known Portadown men Fred Cooper and Leslie Cooper – tell of a family still mystified over his death at the height of the Battle of the Somme in August 1916.

As Craigavon Mayor Colin McCusker started read out the first batch of names at the special Act of Remembrance on Monday night to mark the Centenary of the Outbreak of the First World War, little did the 500 strong crowd at the event realise the drama that still surrounds the killing of Private Cooper.

The fact that he joined the Australian Force is a story in itself. Born in 1885 in Killeter, near Castlederg, the family moved to Portadown. Robert emigrated in 1908 to Canada and then to New South Wales, Australia, where he joined up and found himself fighting in France.

Fred and Leslie attended the Monday night event, and told the Portadown Times that their uncle was shot in the leg at The Battle of Delville Wood (15 July – 3 September), part of a series of engagements in the 1916 Battle of the Somme.

Said Leslie, "He was admitted to Etaples Hospital, where



Fred Cooper, left and Leslie Cooper with the death penny. Inset, photo of Robert Harper Cooper.

he died. The family assumed he had died as the result of his wounds. At the time they tried to get to the bottom of it, but never succeeded. It was suggested that robbery was the motive, but nothing has ever been proven."

The official reasons were highly complicated – the first bulletin said 'Killed in Action'; the second stated 'Accidentally Killed'; and the third, 'Felo-

nously Killed - Manslaughter'. The third reason was on his death certificate which Leslie still has in his possession. He also had the notorious bronze 'death penny' given to families of The Fallen, and which bears the name 'Robert Harper Cooper'.

Said Fred, "To this day, nobody knows how he was killed, why and by whom. It's a family mystery that was never solved.

We believe he was murdered, but no satisfactory explanation was ever given. We never figured it out."

Robert, who was 31, was the son of William John Cooper and the brother of Thomas, Sarah, Elizabeth and Kate Cooper. His was the first of 321 names read out on Monday night, the final one being that of Private Joseph Flannagan, Timakeel.

## COMMENT

# Portadown Times

## Fitting tributes to town's war heroes

Portadown was united in remembrance and sad nostalgia at the turn of the week as the townspeople paid their respects to the Fallen and the survivors of World War One with the various Centenary commemorations.

The main events began with the opening on Saturday in the High Street Mall, by Mayor Colin McCusker, of the borough council exhibition, 'Living With World War 1', showing life in general in the town of that era.

The exhibition has been well received - it continues through August and September - and showcases the 1912-1914 Home Rule crisis, recruitment, the home front and experiences of war.

A combination of documentary sources, text, photographs, film footage, models and artefact tell this fascinating story. Many of the items, including artefacts loaned from the Armagh County Museum and the Royal Irish Fusiliers Museum, are displayed for the first time ever. Go and enjoy.

The support for Sunday evening's anniversary at St Mark's Church of Ireland - packed to the gunnels, as they say - caught the organisers by surprise. They expected around 300, and printed that number of programmes. Over 600 turned up, and the event did great credit to the town and to St Mark's, with Rector Canon Jim Campbell in charge.

It was especially gratifying to know that representatives of the Roman Catholic Church were there. Have a read at the superb 'A Call To Arms' book by local Richard Edgar, which names all the town soldiers who served, and you will realise that many Catholics went to war - both among the town's 321 victims and the hundreds of wounded and survivors. Richard read excerpts from war records at the service. It was one of many highlights, which included the laying up of the Old Standard of the town's Branch of the Royal Irish Fusiliers Old Comrades Association and the Dedication of the New Standard.

It was a true community event, as was the third of the commemorations on Monday night in the Town Square when the 321 names of The Fallen were read out. Mayor McCusker recited the first group of those killed, followed by members of the town's Royal British Legion.

It was surprising how many people - most of a more mature age - had poignant stories to tell of grandads and great-uncles, starting with the first name read out - that of Private Robert Harper Cooper, who fought with the Australian Imperial Force, having emigrated from Atkinson Avenue via Canada. Two of Robert's grand-nephews were there - Leslie and Fred Cooper. They told the harrowing tale of how Robert wounded at The Somme, but survived, only to be murdered in a French Hospital.

And there was the story of three brothers from Bright Street in Edenderry (long since bulldozed) who died in the conflict - Jackson, Joseph and Maxwell. One can only imagine how their parents Robert and Ellen bore the grief.

Portadown can look back on a week when it did its war heroes proud. Heroes of all communities went off to war, and the events of the last few days show that their heroism and sacrifices have not been forgotten 100 years on.

### Unveiling at Ballymore Parish Church

# Memorial window is unveiled

A new memorial window was dedicated in Ballymore Parish Church, Tandragee, on Sunday during a service which commemorated the centenary of the start of the First World War.

The memorial window was unveiled by the Vice-Lord Lieutenant for County Armagh, Mr Richard Hamilton-Stubber. It was dedicated by the Rector of Ballymore, Canon Shane Forster, who said, "It was dedicated to the glory of God and in honour and loving memory of those who served their country and suffered in defence of the dignity and freedom of all people in the First World War, the Second World War and in the many conflicts since, including here in our own Province".

There were over 300 people in the congregation, including The Deputy Lord Mayor of Armagh City and District Council, Councillor Joy Rolleston and other members of the council. Mr Danny Kennedy MLA, Minister for the Department of Regional Development, Mr William Irwin MLA, The President of the Royal British Legion NI Col (Retired) Mervyn Elder, The President of the Royal British Legion NI Women's Section Mrs Joanne Andrew Steer.

Also there were The Chairman of the Royal British Legion NI Mr George Black, The Chairman of the Royal British Legion NI Women's Sec-

tion Mrs Sheila Thompson, The Officer Commanding and Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment, Major Simon Cassels, PSNI Area Commander Chief Inspector Ian Campbell and representatives of various community organisations.

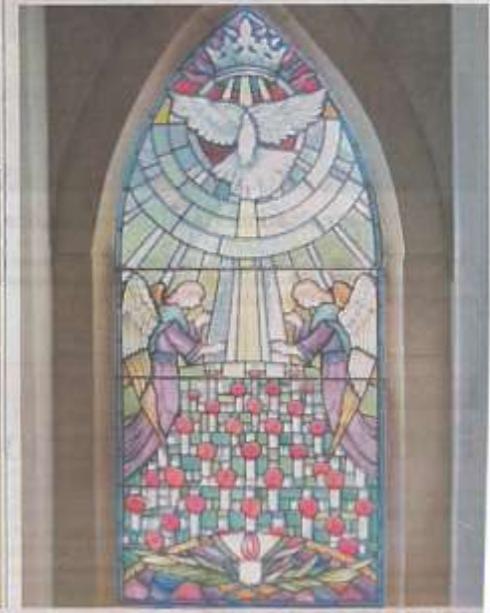
Two Second World War veterans were present, who stood by the window for the unveiling: Mr Thomas Vennard who served with the Royal Horse Artillery and Mr William Cooke who served with the Royal Navy.

The theme of the memorial window is 'remembrance'. The poignant words from the poem 'For the Fallen' by Laurence Binyon, "At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them", are central to the design.

Two angels below representing mercy and grace in our time appear either side of a field of crosses each with a central poppy flower. This interlinking pattern of crosses serves as a memorial to the Fallen.

The crown of life above and the palm leaves below symbolise the victory of Christ over death on the cross as He reconciles the world while a lighted candle (centre bottom) represents the prayers of those who grieve.

The Window was designed and created by David Esler of Leadlines.



# WORLD WAR ONE

## Commemoration Fitting tributes to The Fallen



Paying tribute on Monday night. PT22-206.



The Mayor of Craigavon Council Bar Colin McCusker reads out some of the names of local soldiers who did not return from France. PT22-212.



The bugler who played The Last Post at Monday night's event. PT22-208.



Members of Portadown Royal British Legion Women's Section. From left, Tracey Gilliland, Jackie Harvey, Helen Watson and Debbie Coleman.



Part of the large crowd which attended the WWI 100th anniversary event in Portadown on Monday night. PT22-211.

# Recognition of town's 321 Fallen at the centre of ceremony

**It was a straight-forward, moving ceremony at the town's war memorial as Portadown honoured its 321 Fallen of the First World War. And of the 300 who attended on Monday night, many had stories to tell.**

Stories that had been handed down the generations, telling of heroism and of young lives wasted in the violent Theatre of War in Western Europe.

Rev Canon Jim Campbell of St Mark's conducted the event. Craigavon Mayor Colin McCusker started off the reading of the 321 names of the WWI victims on the war memorial. And this was followed by Royal British Legion President Major (Rtd) Pete Hodgson and members of the Legion competing the mammoth 25-minute task of reading the names.

They were read in alphabetic order of streets where The Fallen had lived - starting with Private Robert H. Cooper (Australian Forces). His was probably the strangest story of all, with his nephews - Fred and Leslie Cooper - later telling of his "murder" in a French hospital. The story is carried elsewhere in the Portadown Times.

The Biblical portions were read by council members David Jones and Robert Smith. Mr Jones was one of 50 many at the commemoration who lost two of his ancestors - great uncles Private Edward Jones, killed in August 1917 at Battle Langemarck, and Sgt William Gordon, killed at The Somme on July 1, 1916. Edward's brothers David, Henry (David Jones' grandfather), Joseph and James all served in the war, as did Sgt Gordon's brother Robert, most of them wounded. Both the deceased

left wives and children. Jane Jones (Edward's wife) lost her husband and brother.

Two friends at the event - Jean McClelland and Merle Edgar - spoke proudly of their fathers surviving the war. Jean's dad Robert James McClelland was shot in the leg and arm and was gassed. Merle's father - Johnny Dwyne - signed up at 16, but was sent home prior to the Somme as he was too young, but returned later to do his bit for King and Country.

Later, he was well-known as long-serving chairman of Portadown's British Legion Branch, having also served in World War Two in the African Campaign. He was granted the Legion's Gold Badge.

Audrey Quinn's great-uncle James Phair was wounded in 1915, having been hit in the leg and was signed out for medical reasons. Also there was Portadown 'Black' District Master Robert Wallace whose granddad Sammy Rooney signed up too young, was 'bought' out by the family, but returned to survive The Somme.

Sammy later told the family story that he returned late one night, and that Sgt Gordon - who was on sentry duty - turned a blind eye! The two families were inter-married.

Monday night's reading was restricted to those who failed to return, and it took 25 minutes, plus 13 readers, to get through the list - everyone from Privates to Majors, Seamen to Riflemen, Drivers to Captains, soldiers decorated with MC and Bar, like Thomas Crosbie of Malton, and DCM, like William Armstrong of Irwin Street.

It was illuminating to reflect on how many streets are no longer in Portadown through redevelopment -

like Fowier's Entry, John Street, Marley Street and Mary Street. And not forgetting Bright Street in Filenderry where one family lost three of four sons - Jackson, Joseph and Maxwell Stothers.

One distinguished retired soldier Colonel Arthur Reid, loaned the Portadown Times the original list from 1925 when the war memorial was commissioned and unveiled and dedicated by Lieut General Sir Travers Clarke, and the panels read for the first time. Binyon's lines 'We Shall Remember Them' were spoken at Monday night's conclusion, Aaron Watson of St Mark's



Silver Band sounded the Last Post - followed by The Silence - and then the Reveille. Major Hodgson laid the wreath and the Blessing was spoken by Canon Campbell.

WORLD WAR ONE REMEMBERED

W O I W WAR



Major T.J. Atkinson's grave.



Ancre Cemetery.

# Still impacting our lives today

By RICHARD EDGAR

Whenever you mention the First World War, some people say "but that was one hundred years ago, its history, it doesn't affect me today."

The fact is a century on from the outbreak of this war, the changes it brought about are still impacting our lives today. In terms of the history of the 20th century, the war was year zero, after it nothing would be the same.

The war would bring about the end of three great empires and the Royal Families who ruled over them, The Empire of Germany, The Austro-Hungarian Empire and The Russian Empire. The British Empire would be the only survivor of this great conflict, but it emerged out of the war victorious but badly battered and bruised, in less than fifty years from the war's end the British Empire would be no more, replaced by the British Commonwealth of Nations that we all know today.

Every country has its creation story, its tales of heroes and their legendary actions that are woven into the very fabric of their national identity. Mention the First World War to an Australian or New Zealander and they will immediately tell you how the soldiers of the ANZAC Aus-

tralian and New Zealand Army Corps) fought so bravely during the Gallipoli campaign. The Canadian's will tell you how on the battlefield of Vimy Ridge the nation of Canada was born. Virtually every country in what is now the British Commonwealth emerged from the war with this new pride and national identity. The fact is men from Portadown fought in all of these battles, one glance at the Portadown war memorial tells the story of local men in all of these, what at that time were, colonial armies.

In a war that would last 1,566 days, one day stands out in our country's memory more than any other day, local men would fight and die right throughout the war, but it is 1st July 1916 and the Battle of The Somme that is etched deep into the identity of the people of Northern Ireland. It is also here on that day in the now beautiful Ancre Valley that Portadown would suffer its blackest day.

On that bright summer's morning at 7:30am the vast majority of the 36th Ulster Division would attack out of Thiepval Wood fighting over the ground where The Ulster Memorial Tower now stands. But two battalions 9th Royal Irish Fusiliers and 12th Royal Irish Rifles would attack in

the Ancre Valley, separated from the rest of the Ulster Division by the marshy valley of the River Ancre. Their objective that morning was the German trenches that protected the approaches to Beaucourt



Railway Station; this was the main supply and communications centre for the German army in the Thiepval area.

The Royal Irish Fusiliers were the County Armagh regiment, and it was in the 9th battalion that the largest number of men from Portadown and its surrounding villages and townlands served. So in the midst of this massive attack, in this one small valley Portadown would go to war.

During the night and acting against what their orders had stated the men of the 9th Royal Irish Fusiliers crawled out into no-mans land, they had about 400 meters to cross before they reached the first German trench, as zero hour approached the men lay well over half way to the German lines, as the whistle sounded at 7:30am the Portadown men of the first wave rose to their feet and charged towards the German lines, they crossed the steep valley and were on top of the Germans taking few casualties due to the fact that by crawling out under the cover of darkness they now had less ground to cross under German fire. The subsequent waves of men were not so lucky as the German machine gun tears now had the time to come up from their deep dug-outs and get into position and fire on the advancing Ulstermen.

Despite now taking heavy losses the Royal Irish Fusiliers continued to advance and one platoon under the command of Portadown man Major T. J. Atkinson (inset) fought their way through the German lines and reached their objective Beaucourt Station. Sadly there were no reserves available to reinforce the men at the station and despite reaching their objective Major Atkinson

and his men could not hold the position, none of the men who reached the station would survive the day.

The Ulstermen now found themselves cut off and under German fire from both flanks as well as from the front, there was now no other option but to try and make their way back to the British lines they had left earlier that morning, many men lay wounded and incapable of making their way back to their own lines. It had been a bloodbath, that morning 600 men of the 9th Royal Irish Fusiliers had advanced on the German lines, by the end of the day 518 of those men were listed as killed, wounded or missing. For the town of Portadown it had paid a heavy price, over 70 men from the town and surrounding area lost their lives that day, many more suffered horrible wounds that would change their lives forever.

Every death was a tragedy, a loved one ripped from his family, but amongst those 70 local deaths that day some families suffered double tragedy's, brothers Absalom and James Abraham the sons of George and Mary Ann Abraham, both serving with the 9th Royal Irish Fusiliers were killed in action that morning, a third brother Thomas was killed serving with the Canadians at the battle of Vimy Ridge. Brothers James and Joseph Hewitt also serving with the 9th Royal Irish Fusiliers and the sons William John and An-

nie Jane Hewitt, were also both killed in action that morning.

Many more local men would fall in battle before the First World War came to an end, but the events in the Ancre Valley on Saturday, 1st July 1916 will rank forever as the blackest day in the history of Portadown.

It is also in this valley Lieutenant Geoffrey St. George Shillington Cather VC (9th Royal Irish Fusiliers) and Rifleman Robert Quigg VC (12th Royal Irish Rifles) won their Victoria Crosses

So now if you are lucky enough to get the chance to visit the battlefields of The Somme, you should visit The Thiepval Memorial, The Ulster Tower and Thiepval Wood, these all have their place in the story of Northern Ireland, but don't forget to spend a few minutes walking through Ancre Valley. If you are in the grounds of the Ulster Tower and looking towards Newfoundland Park it is the Ancre valley that separates them, in this valley you will find a cemetery that contains more men local to Portadown than any other battlefield.

The story of the Ancre valley was summed up perfectly by the magazine Seagoe Parish Church a number of years ago, beneath a picture of Ancre Cemetery they wrote simply "Sacred to this Parish" and they were correct, in the story of Portadown this is indeed sacred ground.

