

A few years ago I was given a Silver War Badge. When I showed it to my dad, his colour drained, after a pause he reverently took it out of the blue box and silently examined it before returning it. He then spoke: "Your Granddad, my dad, had one of these."

My dad rarely spoke of his father, whilst I knew he had served in the Great War I knew little more. Dad opened up. My Grandfather, like so many from this county, had found himself 100 years ago at the Battle of the Somme which is commemorated across the country this weekend. He was gassed in 1915 and then in 1916 he was shot in the shoulder and discharged.

He never wore his medals, from either war (he was a member of the Home Guard in World War Two) and I didn't know him as the effects of the gas and the shattered shoulder led to him dying in his 50s.

A few years ago I went to the Somme to visit the battlefields. The fields marked now by British and Commonwealth cemeteries, with people from throughout the world. I visited cemeteries full of people from China, the Indian subcontinent, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa and of course the United Kingdom. Thiepval's monumental arch stands over it all commemorating 72,196 whose graves are still unknown; their names carved into the stone.

My family, like families in towns across Lancashire whose pals' regiments were devastated in the Somme campaign, was changed for ever. Those who survived the war were scared physically and emotionally for life, the families of those who died were devastated.

Whole towns, communities and families would never be the same again. Hopes and dreams for the future irretrievably altered and some destroyed.

Such pain, loss and grief both personally and collectively cannot be glossed over or glibly ignored. It requires a true honouring and recognition. For Christians there is the hope of resurrection, that God will transform even the worst horrors, but this hope is only reached by God's personal involvement and indeed suffering and death of his Son.

It is with this faith that my father and I try to understand the past, it is with this hope that I and my son seek to understand the present and it is with God's love that we must commit to the future.

Archdeacon Michael Everitt

Archdeacon of Lancaster