

Leonard Wakeling

'Remember Louvain'

This is a unique story about my Uncle Len Wakeling, which starts before WW1.



Leonard Wakeling was born in about 1905 and was raised in Purfleet. Len, as he was known by, was too young to take part in the Great War, but he became a Docker in the twenties. He married Kath Hopcraft in the early thirties. Kath's father was a very well respected gentleman in Grays in the late 1800 and early 1900s. He owned a jewellers shop in the old High street in Grays, and repaired clocks and watches. He was responsible for winding many of the outside clocks in the Grays area, and a founder of the Grays Fire Brigade. He died in 1927/28.

Len moved into the Hopcraft family home with Kath and her mother.

Len and Kath didn't have a family of their own, and although she was considerably younger than him, she died in the mid sixties.

We saw a lot of Uncle Len growing up as he was on his own, and in later years we enjoyed a regular pint with him on a Sunday evening.

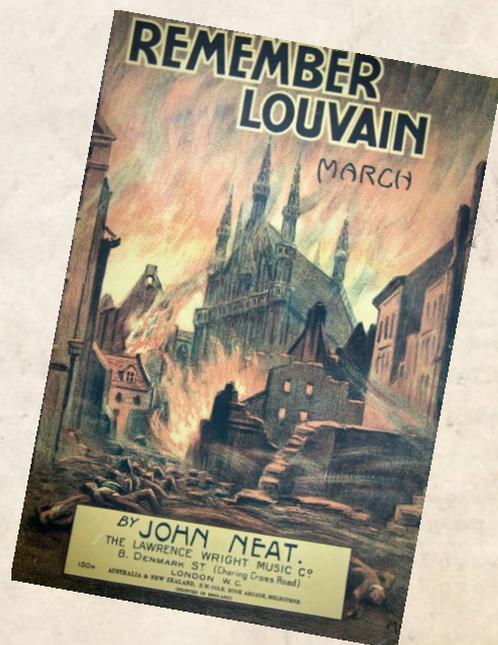
Sadly Uncle Len passed away in 1982, and whilst emptying his house we came upon memorabilia left by Kath's father, Mr Hopcraft. This included some old Fire Brigade photographs and a box of sheet music. Apparently Mr Hopcraft, Kath's father, had been a keen musician.

My brother Peter took the box of sheet music home and stored it away for more than 30 years.

He came across the box more recently and was taken by a piece of music called 'Remember Louvain' which was written by John Neat in 1914.

Louvain was the name of a city in Belgium, about thirty miles east of Brussels and about thirty miles south of Flanders.

The front cover of the sheet music showed Louvain, now known as Louven, completely destroyed by the German Army



My brother Peter contacted the Louven library and after some time the Archivist at the Louven university contacted him and showed tremendous interest in this music as they had no idea that it existed.

They invited Peter to come to Louven with this music. Peter had already got the Head of Music from the Oakham School in Rutland to play and record it on CD.

On Tuesday 8th August this year Peter and my nephew Phil Orpin travelled to Louven on Eurostar. This was no easy journey for my brother as he is in his late eighties, but with the help of Phil he managed it.

They were invited to the Louven university to present the Alderman of the city of Louven, Denise Vandevore, with the music and also a letter from the Lord Lieutenant of Rutland.

The photograph shows Peter Orpin and Alderman, Denise Vandevore, holding the 'Remember Louvain' sheet music in Louven.



The presentation was shown on national television about four times during the day, and they really did make a fuss of them.

The grand finale of the day was the 'Remember Louven' piece of music being played to the whole town from the 48 bell Carillon keyboard at the top of clock tower of the university.

Story provided by Len's nephew, Len Orpin.



The picture shows the devastation to the town of Louvain during WW1