Leonard Hearne, died 21 October 1915, aged 19

It is often assumed that in Victorian and Edwardian times ordinary people did not travel far, but in fact the Empire and the New World tempted many people to seek new prospects, hoping for a better life than the one they led in the UK. Many British people went out to Argentina in the second half of the 19th Century and there was a large established community in Buenos Aires. An English High School was founded in 1884, an Anglican Church was established in 1896 and Harrods even set up a branch there in 1912.

Leonard Hearne's parents, Albert and Kate Hearne, moved out to Buenos Aires immediately after their marriage in London in 1893, settling in Quilmes just to the south of Buenos Aires, and their four eldest children (including Leonard) were born there. His father's occupation is not available, but presumably it was steady enough to keep him in Argentina, even after his wife and children had returned to London.

In 1911 Mrs Hearne and her five children lived in 8A Sedgemere Avenue. Maurice (17) and Norah (16) have no occupation, while Leonard (14) was a pupil at Finchley County School. Gilbert (8) was also at school, although 4 year old Harold was too young.

Although the property in Sedgemere Avenue was modest (just four rooms) Mr Hearne was presumably earning enough to send money home to support his family, as Mrs Hearne did not work.

When war broke out in August 1914 Leonard was 17, and he enlisted in the London Irish Rifles (part of the London Regiment) in Chelsea soon afterwards when he reached 18. On 9 March 1915 they were mobilised for war and embarked for France, arriving in le Havre. They were engaged in the Battle of Aubers Ridge in early May; this was an ineffective action and later the troops moved a few miles to the south to engage the enemy again, in an action known as the Battle of Festubert. This too achieved little. The Battalion regrouped, and were then engaged in the Battle of Loos from the last week of September. This was the largest action on the Western Front in 1915; British tunnellers undermined German positions, and British forces used poison gas for the first time.

Battalion records record the battle thus:

'The London Irish gained their most famous battle honour at the Battle of Loos, where they led their Division into action, and where Rifleman Frank Edwards and his comrades dribbled a football across No Man's Land before kicking it into the Germans' trench with a joyous shout of "goal". The battalion were able to lead their Division to overcome two lines of German trenches into the village of Loos, before withholding a massive enemy counterattack. During the battle, 5 officers and 66 other ranks were killed, and 4 officers and 144 other ranks wounded. 27 other ranks were also reported as being missing.'

Once more the action achieved little; British casualties numbered 59,247, and Field Marshal Sir John French was relieved of his command of the British Expeditionary Force in December as a result of the perceived failure. He was succeeded by Field Marshal Douglas Haig.

One of the casualties was Leonard Hearne, who was killed on 21 October. He was originally buried in Tosh Cemetery, part of a communications trench called Tosh Alley; this cemetery was used from October 1915 to September 1917 to bury 171 soldiers, so 19 year old Leonard was one of the first to be buried here.

This was not to be Leonard's final resting place, as after the war ended this and several other small cemeteries were consolidated into Dud Corner Cemetery some 6 km northwest of Loos. This cemetery is so named because of the large number of unexploded shells found in the area after the Armistice; it was not much used during the war itself, but now there are nearly 2,000 graves here as well as the Loos Memorial commemorating over 20,000 officers and men who have no known grave. In 1920 Mrs Hearne (by now living at 38 Sylvester Road) paid 17/6 for the following inscription on her son's headstone:

'To have lived
How sweet it is.
To know how to die,
How glorious.'

Hans Anderson

Leonard's name is commemorated on the war memorial in All Saints' Church, and also on the Finchley County School memorial.

The Finchley County School War Memorial