



# Press Release

2 October 2018

+++++ EMBARGOED UNTIL 13:00hrs on TUESDAY, 2 OCTOBER +++++

## War widow discovers long-lost grave of war hero grandfather after chance encounter on Virgin Trains service

- *Train Manager helps solve 100-year-old family mystery*
- *A visit to Béthune Town Cemetery locates Private Thomas Bryan's final resting place*

FOR Rita Armin, the whereabouts of her Grandfather's grave after he died fighting in World War One remained a 100-year-old mystery which her family had given up on solving.

But thanks to a chance encounter with a Virgin Trains employee, Mrs Armin was able to piece together the final resting place of the man she never met.

While travelling to London on a Virgin train from Stockport to Euston, the 85-year-old was assisted on her journey by Train Manager Wayne McDonald who just happened to be a war enthusiast.

The pensioner, who is a member of the War Widow's Association, was on her way to Buckingham Palace for a reception to mark Prince Charles' 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her husband, Corporal Henry Armin of the Royal Engineers (Airborne), died of the injuries he sustained in World War Two.

As Mrs Armin and Mr McDonald got chatting on the two-hour journey and it transpired that the family had been unable to find out where her Grandfather, Private Thomas Bryan of the 2nd Ox and Bucks Regiment, was buried since his death during the Great War in 1915.

She explained: "My Grandma used to talk about him fighting in France in the First World War, and she never saw him again after he left home to fight in his best suit.

"All she received after he died was a parcel with his suit in, full of French clay. This story had stayed with me, even though I was only a little girl when she talked about it."

She asked Mr McDonald if he could anything to help find out the full story as he had an interest in the history of the conflict. As they parted ways, Mrs Armin thought it was unlikely she would hear from the train employee again.

"I had tried previously but there were so many names the same as my Grandad, that I gave up," she said. "I gave Wayne as much detail as possible and he said he would come back to me if he found anything.



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"A few days later I received an e-mail from Wayne with the most amazing information that he had tracked down the location of my Grandad's grave.

But Mr McDonald also discovered more surprising information: "Grandad had died in France, but unbeknown to me he was actually my Step-Grandad," she explained.

"Grandma had married again after her first husband had died, leaving her with five children the youngest being my father."

"Never, in a million years, did I expect to receive all that lost information about my paternal Granddad. For years I have wondered what he was like, where his remains are. I am so grateful to Wayne, I'm having difficulty in expressing the words to thank him."

Not only this, but Mr McDonald visited Béthune Town Cemetery where Private Bryan was buried to pay his respects and take a photograph of the burial site for Mrs Armin.

Mr McDonald, who describes himself as an amateur war researcher, found the grave with the help of some old census data and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, ahead of his visit to the cemetery in Northern France.

He said: "It was fascinating listen to Rita's family stories and an absolute privilege to help solve the mystery of what happened to Thomas."

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## **About Virgin Trains**

Stagecoach and Virgin are working in partnership to operate the West Coast inter-city route under the Virgin Trains brand, revolutionising travel on one of the UK's key rail arteries.

The network connects some of the nation's most iconic destinations including Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and London.

Virgin Trains is committed to delivering a high speed, high frequency service, offering shorter journey times, more comfortable travel and excellent customer service. Customers consistently rate Virgin Trains ahead of other long-distance rail franchise operators in the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) commissioned by industry watchdog, Transport Focus.

Virgin Trains has a proud record of challenging the status quo - from introducing tilting Pendolino trains, to a pioneering automated delay repay scheme, introducing the industry-leading onboard entertainment streaming service, BEAM, and becoming the first franchised rail operator to offer m-Tickets for all ticket types.

Virgin Trains operated the East Coast route between March 1, 2015 and June 24, 2018. In that time, we invested £75m to create a more personalised travel experience, including over £40m in the existing fleet.



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Customers have benefitted from 48 additional services between Edinburgh and London every week, and an extra 22 Saturday services between Leeds and London – a total of 1.74 million additional seats since May 2015.

Working together, the partnership railway of the public and private sectors has published a long-term plan, called *In Partnership for Britain's Prosperity*, to change and improve Britain's railway. The plan will secure almost £85bn of additional economic benefits to the country whilst enabling further investment and improvement, and contains four commitments which will see rail companies: strengthen our economic contribution to the country; improve customers' satisfaction; boost the communities we serve; and, create more and better jobs in rail. For more information go to [Britain Runs on Rail](#).

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