Ampthill Armistice100 is a volunteer-led project to research and remember how the Great War affected Ampthill, and provide a focus for learning and reflection. The project has the support of Ampthill Town Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Building on Tommy’s Footprints (2016) the project delivered from July 2018, leading up to a programme of events in November 2018 which tied in with the national tribute of “Battle’s Over.”

The project engaged with community groups, schools and the business community. The public art and events helped to bring the town together and attract visitors.

**Ampthill Armistice100**

The programme includes –

- Unveiling the WWI interpretation board at Ampthill Gala day on 1st July.
- WWI Living History encampment on 12th and 13th October in Ampthill Great Park.
- In November – large poppies on lamp posts along the main roads that lead into Ampthill.
- Inviting local people and businesses to fly flags on Remembrance Sunday.
- Ampthill Roll of Honour boards outside Ampthill Fireplaces.
- Tommy’s Footprints and 67 Ampthill’s Fallen crosses in Ampthill Great Park.
- Zonita film night in Parkside Hall on Saturday, 10th November.
- Armistice talks for local schools and community groups. These focus on how Ampthill received the armistice news on 11th November 1918.
- 11th November Remembrance Sunday parade which concludes with church bells and a service at St. Andrew’s. That evening, the beacon will be lit in Ampthill Great Park and then at 19:05 the bells will peel at St. Andrew’s Church as part of the national tribute.
- WWI Ampthill illustrated talk on Friday, 16th November in Parkside Hall.
- WWI Ampthill guided walk on Sunday, 18th November.

**Remembrance Sunday 2018**

A hundred years on the people of Ampthill came together with passion and in droves to mark the Armistice Centenary and remember in many ways.

Blessed with sun, Remembrance Sunday started with a huge, parade from the Ampthill Camp Memorial and down past Tommy’s Footprints to The Cenotaph where historian John Hele read out the names of Ampthill’s Fallen. Onwards through the Market Place which was dressed with flags and hundreds of vibrant, knitted poppies for an intimate service in the churchyard at St. Andrew’s where the Revd Canon Michael Trodden presided at his final Remembrance Sunday.

In the afternoon there was opportunity to follow Tommy’s Footprints and visit the graves of seven of Ampthill’s Fallen who are buried in a quiet corner of St. Andrew’s. The King’s Arms Garden was open for peace and reflection, and many came to see the thought-provoking works of art.
In the evening Tommy’s Footprints and the Ampthill’s Fallen cross were lit as hundreds gathered in Ampthill Great Park to light the poppy-red beacon as part of Battle’s Over. Bishop Richard read a touching ‘Tribute to the Millions.’ The crowd wend their way into the Market Place where The Ossory Pump poppy installation was beautifully under-lit; a hint of the church bells drifting through.

What a day! Thank you to everyone who made Ampthill Armistice100 their own. We marked the Armistice Centenary with passion and pride, and together we remembered.

Ampthill Armistice100 Review

See paper received on 9th January 2019 by the Ampthill Town Council Park & Amenities Committee. The Heritage Lottery Fund has also commissioned a routine project review.

Forward look

March 2019

Publish book: Ampthill Armistice100 | Remember.

Progress WWI heritage trail + trenching ground project for 2019/21.

date tbc

WWI Guided Walk ~ repeat for Ampthill Rotary, the Inner Wheel & Friends of Ampthill Christmas Lights.

October 2019

AA100 talk for the RBL Bedfordshire Bikers Branch.

November 2019

Ampthill & District Inner Wheel is interested to add to and reinstate poppies in the Market Place.

Acknowledgments


Prepared by Stephen Hartley
Background

Ampthill was significantly affected by the Great War and in ways that it could never conceive:

- Local men volunteered and others were later conscripted for active service. This affected families and employment. Three hundred and seventeen Ampthill boys are named on The Roll of Honour. Sixty-seven Ampthill boys did not return and others were wounded. There are seven CWGC WWI graves in St. Andrew’s Churchyard.
- The Bedfordshire Training Depot was established in Ampthill Great Park and this went on to train 2,235 local men. The uniformed drafts often marched through town. One third of the ‘Ampthill Camp’ volunteers did not return and many more were injured.
- A trenching ground was created in Steppingley Woods, the remains of which still exist.
- Three voluntary-aided relief hospitals were set up in Ampthill to support and nurse convalescent soldiers. A V.A.D. Slipper Working Party fabricated woollen items for the frontline.
- Local people helped to convey the wounded from the hospital trains which arrived at Ampthill Midland Station.
- Ampthill Railway Tunnel was guarded day and night for fear of espionage.
- Ampthill Munition Workers supported the war effort.
- The No.9 ‘Ampthill’ Command Depot was established in Ampthill Great Park to rehabilitate and retrain wounded soldiers. 8,369 men who passed through the Depot. A third of these men returned to the firing line.
- Secret, emergency plans were made to requisition the National School and convert it for medical use in the case of enemy invasion.
- The Canadian Forestry Corps, supported by Portuguese labour, occupied Cooper’s Hill (1917-18) and felled the pines in the locality for use as trench posts and pit props. This activity changed the face of that landscape.
- On Armistice Day flags dressed the town, there was a grand, impromptu military parade through the streets by torch light and the Command Depot drum and fife band played in the Market Place. The bells of St. Andrew’s Church rang out.
- There was much civic debate about how to remember the Fallen, and four war memorials were erected.

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