

## **Lynsted with Kingsdown Society First World War project - Final evaluation**

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### **1. Background**

The Lynsted with Kingsdown Society is a small, rural amenity group (100 members from a total population of around 1,000). Our project ran from 2010 and is ongoing as more evidence and data comes to light.

The Society's principal objective was to record and commemorate the 37 men lost to the Parish of Lynsted with Kingsdown. This was delivered through:

- Clergy Remembrances made during services on the centenary of each death;
- the publication of a not-for-profit book containing their biographies;
- web-publication of biographies to make them freely accessible through the Society website ([www.lynsted-society.co.uk](http://www.lynsted-society.co.uk));
- awareness-raising events e.g. exhibitions and showing films; and presence at several parish events.
- In addition, we undertook research into the lives of all casualties from the other villages in our ecclesiastical parish (Newnham, Doddington, Norton, Oare, Luddenham and Wychling) - 145 casualties in total.

### **2. Community and volunteer involvement**

Although the bulk of research and event organisation fell to 2 people, this needs to be understood against the backdrop of a small but very active rural community. There were several Society Members who lent their time and energy to the larger events. As is so often the case in small communities, those who are able to get involved in community projects are distributed over several amenity and special-interest groups. While our community grows with the introduction of new housing schemes, we are quickly becoming a dormitory village with commuters having little time and energy to get involved in village events. In these circumstances, we have benefitted from the efficiencies gained through the IWM Partnership Programme that helped deliver high quality materials for exhibitions.

We received considerable help and support throughout the centenary period from several family members of our WW1 casualties. Some from as far away as Australia. Also, some people, when visiting European battlefields helped us by photographing the graves and memorials of some of our casualties. History groups from other villages also assisted us with our research and we reciprocated whenever we could.

At the Society's final event, a large display, launch of our book, short films and refreshments consisting of food from the First World War, we were astonished to have a packed church with visitors coming from far and wide – many family members with whom we had been in contact. Some had travelled from Canterbury and Chislehurst in Kent, Hertfordshire, Yorkshire and Birmingham. Several stayed for the weekend so that they could attend the Remembrance Day service the following day and lay wreathes by the Lynsted Church Memorial. The weekend led some family members from Birmingham to arrange a family reunion in Lynsted, meeting up for the first time in 50 years. Those who were reunited were able to provide even more photographs for the Society archive. We could never have anticipated the impact our Project has had at a very personal level for descendants. These outcomes were unexpected but very rewarding.

### **3. Funding**

The Society was fortunate to receive several grants from Swale Borough Council's First World War Centenary Commemoration Fund. This allowed us to:

- undertake deeper and more meaningful research through otherwise costly subscriptions to genealogy research websites; purchase equipment to help us produce flexible and comprehensive displays, exhibitions and events;

- produce our 350 page book “They Shall Grow Not All” to sell on a not-for-profit basis. The grants also allowed us to make presentation copies available to our village school, the Lynsted Church, Libraries in Faversham, Teynham, Sittingbourne, and Maidstone as well as to the Faversham Society and Sittingbourne Historical Research Group. Further presentation copies went to the IWM and British Libraries. This would definitely have been beyond the resources of the Society to fund.

Without this funding our project would have gone ahead but on a very limited basis.

#### 4. **Difficulty in engaging with all generations**

The Society has always tried to encourage schools to take part in relevant projects. Sadly, pressure on teachers’ time and limitations in the syllabus were usually given as reasons for non-participation in the WW1 Project. We wrote to the head teachers of our 5 local secondary schools in Sittingbourne and Faversham, Kent, offering up a screening of “The Battle of the Somme” film while on loan from the Imperial War Museum, along with supporting display material. We received no reply from any of them. Some local students took part in trips to the battlefields and war cemeteries during the centenary period (our nearest town of Sittingbourne is twinned with Ypres and visits are the norm), but others may have benefitted from the opportunity to view these important films and the supporting IWM Partnership material. The Society believes this was an opportunity missed.

However, the educational impact on the older generations must not be overlooked. We were overwhelmed by responses to our work from those in their 50s-90s. They were grateful for our dissemination of information on how the war started, its progress, the Armistice and the end of the war. Many people in this age-range had contact with WW1 veterans, but all too often these veterans did not want to talk about their experiences. One example of this was that we were able to inform one of our community that his father had joined up three times while underage, then served in the Machine Gun Corps for three years. He had never told his son. During school years for this age range of people, WW1 was not far enough back in time to make it on to the history syllabus. Therefore many older people felt they were probably less knowledgeable than younger generations. We received a lot of positive feedback from the “older generations”, thanking us for the insights offered into the lives of men serving in WW1, often relatives or families known to them. This feedback continues as more people discover the stories from our website and as we discover many were not aware that the war did not end with the Armistice.

#### 5. **Importance of the First World War Centenary Partnership**

Membership of the IWM First World War Centenary Partnership brought substantial and invaluable benefits to our project. We feel that access to **trusted, consistent and timely** display material, images, films etc, gave our project more gravitas. We are clear that without the assistance of the IWM, most of the events arranged over the 4 years of the Centenary simply would not have gone ahead. The feedback from attendees of our events was extremely complementary of the quality and educational content of the display material and films. We also attach **considerable value** to the approachable, knowledgeable and encouraging team members in the IWM Partnership team. The delivery team in IWM did a sterling professional job.

Elisabeth Heriz-Smith

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