‘Think of Me’ was a Horsebridge led community project to mark the centenary of the First World War by remembering the soldiers associated with Whitstable who lost their lives during the conflict.

We researched and discovered the personal heritages of 291 soldiers which enabled us to compile the first complete record of all local men who died as a result of the war. To commemorate these soldiers, we created one sweetheart pin cushion for each serviceman which featured in a memorial exhibition from 3 – 18 November in the Horsebridge Galleries.

The project was made possible with the help of a dedicated group of volunteers. In addition to our lead researcher and creative specialist we had a regular team of 9 core researchers, 9 regular sewing and embroidery workshop helpers, 5 exhibition installers, a creative session support workers and over 290 participants who made the sweetheart cushions.

The project began with the volunteer research group who met at the Horsebridge to start work on researching the personal heritages of the soldiers from Whitstable. At the beginning of September, Chris Kempshall from Gateways to WW1 project provides a free training session and talk on how best to progress with the researching process and recommends websites and resources that would be beneficial to the project.
By mid-September, the researchers had found a total of 291 men connected to Whitstable which enabled volunteers to collate the information into the individual soldier biographies, whilst others continued to put together the individual sewing kits that accompanied the stories.

“The research carried out to track all of Whitstable’s losses was painstaking and meticulous, with a constant fear of missing anyone. Each grave on foreign soil was recorded with the cemetery name and grave number, to help those who may venture to the battle areas to find the final resting place of a family member.” Brian Baker, lead researcher.

Throughout September and October, The Horsebridge Centre provided a place for members of the public to drop in with stories, artefacts and war items or pass on their own research inspired by the project for display in the final exhibition.
By the end of September, volunteers had transcribed all the histories of the soldiers into individual biographies and these were added to the individual sweetheart pincushion kits. The project was now ready to move on to the making stage. These sessions were mainly held at the Horsebridge Centre, but workshops also took place at local after school clubs, schools and Age UK social meetings.

“I looked up where my soldier was buried and really felt for the first time what it would be like. I’m not an advocate of war at all. But to know who these names are who gave their lives for us so long ago…”

Kerry, cushion maker

“At our Stars homework club last week, several of the children made a point of telling me they’d been to the Horsebridge with the school to see all the hearts. They so enjoyed being part of it, and I’m so grateful to you for visiting our group and enabling them to participate. One of the lads said after the session “I wish we could do this every week Trish”, and he’s one of the children who find it difficult to engage with the craft session.”

Trish, Youth worker at the StArs club
"We received a lovely phone call from a lady, who is the granddaughter of James Prescott, who was one of the soldiers featured in Think of Me at The Horsebridge Centre. The cushion had been made for the exhibition by Tyler in 5W. She phoned the school because she wanted to thank Tyler for caring so much and producing such a lovely keepsake for their family.” Extract from Whitstable Junior School newsletter printed 30 November.
The Horsebridge secured additional funding from Canterbury Arts Council to run a Think of Me children's festival from 22 – 25 October, offering free workshops designed for young people aged 2 – 17, all based around the theme of remembrance:

- Cushion workshops
- Paper poppy making
- Storytelling for all ages and sing and rhyme for pre-schoolers
- Creating Remembrance lanterns
By the end of October all the cushions had been returned and on the 31st, we started to hang the memorial exhibition in the Horsebridge Galleries with the help of a team of volunteers.

On 2nd November the Think of Me Memorial Exhibition is finally ready. It opens with a special evening event for participants of the project.
The Chairman of the Royal British Legion and the Mayor of Canterbury formally open the exhibition.

"Thank you so much for organising this wonderful experience!! Remembrance has always been quite moving and sad, but I wasn’t expecting the huge emotional involvement making this heart for a named individual soldier has been for me. Archie has become part of my family.” Simonne, cushion maker.
Our adjoining Galllery displayed all the findings from the project, the creative responses from the community and the items on loan from relatives of some of the soldiers.

“It was my pleasure to have our family items seen. A lot of people we know visited and praised the Think of Me exhibition, especially all the effort put into the sweetheart cushions. They truly put into context the number of men who lost their lives”. Simon, Grandson of Soldier Charles Keam, who loaned family keepsakes for inclusion in the project.
During the 2 weeks it was open, the exhibition attracted over 4000 visitors. It was attended by the community groups and individuals who made the cushions and contributed to the research as well as general visitors to the centre.

St Alphege Primary School made a special visit with Military Veterans as part of their Remembrance activities.

Reading the names on the wall of remembrance.
The response from the local community was overwhelming and the exhibition played a significant part in the town's remembrance events.

“Very poignant and beautiful, thank you. I found a lovely heart with my Grandfather’s name on it. The exhibition is truly humbling and makes you reflect others sacrifice.” Pat, Herne Bay

“What an impressive project. I loved that every heart was different and special – just like the courageous men they commemorate. Thank you.” Alison, Whitstable

“Very moving. Norman had been searching for his Great Uncle Bertie and found him here!” Valerie, Canterbury
Once the exhibition closed, many of the cushions continued their journey. Families of the soldiers were able to collect the hearts to take home or pass on to other family members. One has travelled all the way to Australia. Four of the cushions have been returned to St Peters Church in Whitstable to be blessed and will hang next to the photographs of the four men, who were all choir boys in their youth.

“**A beautiful coming together of generations, uniting the town.**” Debbie, Whitstable.

Designed and created by volunteer Dianne Ansell, this cushion was specially made for the memorial exhibition, with the poem that inspired the project stitched on the front.