

# Neatishead, Irstead and Barton Turf Community Heritage Group



## Chairman's Report – Claire Penstone-Smith - AGM 24<sup>th</sup> October 2016

My report covers the duration of the WW1 project to January 2016; the presentation later will cover from then and looking to the future.

It was three years ago when I invited representatives of the Churches and Parish Councils, and those involved with the individual village history projects to a meeting in October 2013, having seen an article in the EDP inviting bids to a special fund set up by the Heritage Lottery Fund for communities to undertake projects to commemorate WW1.

Knowing of the interest in the history of the villages I believed this was an opportunity to draw the three villages together to form one group. At this point I had no idea what that project would be but our starting point would be the names of those who fell during WW1 and who are remembered in our churches.

So the group was formed, a constitution written, bank account opened and officers elected. At this point I would like to thank Barbara, Carol our secretary, Gail, Gareth our treasurer, Jane, Michael and Susan for their belief in my vision, their unstinting support and dedication to the project and without whom it would not have been the success it has been.

At this point I must also pay tribute to Colin who very sadly and suddenly died in August 2015. He played a key role in putting our project application together and his legacy must surely be the amazing database he created of documents held by the Norfolk Record Office which he photographed and we have access to. I'm not sure how many times he visited there but on one day alone he took over 700 photographs of documents and although all parish records are available on Ancestry.com we have our own database of the Births, Deaths and Marriages for not only Barton, Irstead and Neatishead but also Ashmanhaugh, Beeston St Lawrence, Catfield, Horning, Hoveton St Peter, Hoveton St John, Ludham

So by November 2013 we had a title for the project and an outline of what we wanted to achieve. In February 2014 we were thrilled our application for the two year project "Living through WW1 in three Norfolk Broadland Villages" had been accepted.

Gareth will talk you through how the money was spent in his Treasurer's

*The outline for our project was that over two years, the group will research local families whose relatives served in the armed forces during the First World War, who died or lived through it; and explore village life in Neatishead, Irstead and Barton Turf during this time. Local artefacts, documents, records, photographs, recollections and oral histories appertaining to this research will be collected and collated.*

*This will be used to create a living history day at the local primary school, individual exhibitions during August 2014 in the five village churches, each focussing on the particular parish or church community, and collectively later in the New Victory Hall towards the end of the project. A memorial plaque would be made with the names of all those who served during WW1 and all the material will be made available as a permanent resource and via a dedicated website. Material from the project will be offered to a local creative writing group in order to develop a script for a drama based on wartime experiences, which will be performed by the local drama group, NABS, during November 2015.*

So we organised a Living History Day at Neatishead Primary School which took place in the summer term 2014 and complemented project work on WW1 undertaken by Y6. Slide shows children making 'soap box carts' with John.

Exhibitions during Open Churches week 2014 took place in each of the 5 village churches, over 9 days, each focussing on a different aspect of village life 100 years ago, displayed various artefacts and information on the men who had served that we had collated thus far. Refreshments were served at all the churches and money raised for the benefit of the churches and the group. We also organised a Children's Trail across the churches.

The event was picked up by BBC Radio Norfolk and featured on Treasure Quest on the Sunday morning with I did a follow up interview later that day.

In addition to the churches' event the group held 6 open afternoons at the NVH during the course of the project, in order to publicise the project and to show how it was developing. We tried to introduce different aspects of the project at each afternoon and March 2015 saw our Community Chest displayed with items and artefacts used 100 years ago in the home and at war together with toy, books and posters in order to give a "hands on" opportunity at exhibitions and something that could be borrowed by groups or used for talks.

So in addition to our project group meetings, many many hours were spent researching, writing, printing, talking, displaying and organising. Gradually details of our project spread, photographs, artefacts, stories and family histories unfolded.

Many of you will have attended one of the events organised over the past two years and will have seen the project grow with the culmination of the project over Remembrance Weekend November 2015. There were many highlights for each of us over the two years,

- was it the chatter, the tears and the laughter heard at our two day exhibition?
- or the drama, "When I come home" produced and performed by NABS Drama Group it was written for the project, and inspired by the story of Horace Pestell, born and brought up in Irstead, who lost his arm during WW1?
- or was it the poignancy of the drama, the tears and laughter heard at our exhibition or the solemnity of the ecumenical Remembrance Service – "one of the best I have ever attended" was a comment by a member of our community? And of course this was when the memorial plaque comprising the 136 names of those who fell and those who returned from all three villages was dedicated and which complements the other memorials in the villages.

Which was it for you I wonder? Each so very different but encompassed our aims so completely.

Although a representative of the HLF visited our Churches' exhibitions, it was disappointing they were not able to visit again in November, especially after the enormous amount of work put in to the project. However I was successful in getting the project picked up by the EDP who produced a double page spread. I had sent a press release to the BBC a couple of weeks before, but had received no response, so sent it again the following week and to my amazement received a phone call from them on the Wednesday asking if they could come and film the project. After frantic phone calls to arrange a couple of interviews for them, and organising the cast of the drama to be filmed prior to the performance, we welcomed the BBC to the New Victory Hall on the Friday afternoon as we were putting up the exhibition. The resulting broadcast on Look East and the live piece from the reception that evening confirmed to us that our project was something special. It was also featured on Radio Norfolk on the Friday evening, Saturday and Sunday.

Following the success of Remembrance Weekend, We calculated about 500 people attended the events over the Remembrance weekend. However, the project wasn't quite complete, we then worked on producing a dedicated website in order for our research to be made accessible. This was designed and went live by the end of January this year. It is all functioning but is not quite complete – but we hope to do this by the end of the year. As well as being available on the website, hard copies of all the information about each of the men from our exhibition can be viewed in folders in the bookcase beneath the memorial plaque together with other material from the exhibition.

So to end I would like to thank again everyone who helped make the project such a success, especially the committee/project group and will end with a few of the comments from our Visitors' Book.

- "Wonderful efforts to collect these memories. What a waste of life war is.
- Very proud to see my grandfather remembered and I'm sure he would have been very pleased.
- A good use of Lottery money for the good of the community and remembering those of served.
- Really interesting mix of social history and WW1
- Totally amazing and so moving, thank you to the whole group."