



WORLD WAR I PROJECT

In 2018, as part of the national WWI centenary commemorations, Cockermouth Heritage Group and Kirkgate Arts & Heritage were awarded a Heritage Lottery grant for a project to develop and share understanding of the effects of World War I and its aftermath on those living and working in Cockermouth and the surrounding area. We were particularly interested in the ways in which the War led to a shift in the position and status of women in society, and how children were affected by the War.

Our activities began in September/October 2018, when members of the Heritage Group visited Whitehaven Archives office and Workington Library to research local records and newspaper cuttings pertaining to Cockermouth during and after the time of the First World War.

The project was bookended by an exhibition. The first, over Armistice weekend (November 10th and 11th, 2018) displayed the findings of the Heritage Group research, along with artefacts and photographs from our existing archive. The exhibition was accompanied by a film, 'In the Footsteps of Our Fathers'. The final exhibition (on display at three locations during 2019: Cockermouth Hospital, Cockermouth Library and Christ Church) was enhanced by new material uncovered over the course of the project: objects and photographs donated by local people with stories to tell about their forefathers.

Activities

Exhibition Boards

During the project, new material was uncovered about life in Cockermouth during and after the First World War, through objects and photographs donated by local people. This was displayed in an exhibition celebrating the end of our project and was taken as a touring exhibition to Cockermouth Hospital, Cockermouth Library and Christ Church during 2019.



The exhibition (Cockermouth and World War One) reflected the realities of life for the people of Cockermouth in the First World War, for those who went away to fight and those who stayed at home.

Youth Theatre Project

In the autumn term of 2018 the Kirkgate Youth Theatre, led by drama teacher Letitia Thornton, created two pieces of theatre, stimulated by WWI objects from the Heritage Group archive collection. The plays were 'The Blackberry Pickers' and 'Dead Man's Penny':

'The Blackberry Pickers' – Kirkgate Young Performers (ages 10-14) were inspired to create this play by a diary begun in 1917 by a 10-year old Cockermouth girl, Joycelyn Mitchell. In the play, imagined letters from the children to their fathers and brothers at the Front were interwoven with scenes depicting the children's home life during the War.



'Dead Man's Penny' – Kirkgate Young Actors (ages 14-18) created and performed a play which dramatized the experiences of soldiers convalescing at Cockermouth Castle (requisitioned as a military hospital during the War), and the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurses who cared for them.

The two pieces were linked through the recipients of letters in the first play appearing as convalescing patients in the second. The plays previewed at the Allerdale 100 event in Workington in September 2018 as part of the Centenary commemorations. They were then performed in full at the Kirkgate Centre in December 2018 and in local care homes in February 2019.





Final Exhibition

The final exhibition, Cockermouth and World War One, reflected the realities of life for the people of Cockermouth in the First World War – for those who went away to fight and for those who stayed at home.

Cockermouth and World War I

The Cockermouth Heritage Group has produced this display to reflect the realities of life for the people of Cockermouth during World War I – for those who went away to fight, and those who stayed.



Funding raised by
The National Lottery



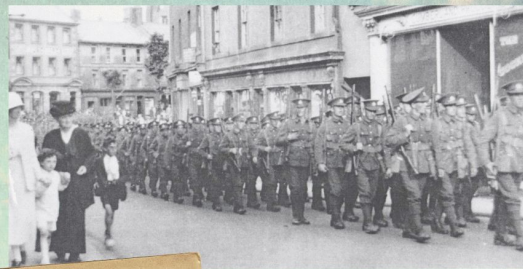
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**Come into the ranks
and fight for your King
and Country—Don't stay
in the crowd and stare**



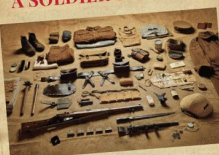
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THE SOLDIER



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A SOLDIER'S KIT 1916



Rifle
Bayonet
Grenades
Steel helmet
Gas mask
170 rounds ammunition
4 bombs
Haversack
Greatcoat

Water bottle
Shovel
Entrenching tool
4 empty sandbags
Groundsheet
Washing kit
Mess tin
A day's rations
Iron rations

By the end of the Battle of the Somme a soldier's full kit exceeded 66lbs (30 kgs).

THE CHICKEN FAMILY

Thomas Henry Chicken and 3 of his sons went off to fight in July 1915. Sadly, one son (William Percy) was killed 6 months later. The other 2 sons who went to fight (Joseph Glaister and Arnold) came home from the war with their father. The family were then living at 10 Market Place. Thomas Henry and his wife Elizabeth had 5 sons and 4 daughters in total. Son Arnold later served as a Lieutenant-Colonel in WWII, and Chairman of the Urban District Council.



caption

THE SOLDIER

COL. THOMAS WILSON MACDONALD D.S.O.

Col. MacDonald had a lifelong connection with the Border Regiment and a highly distinguished military career. During WW I he was injured in June 1915 at Hooge (Flanders), and was mentioned three times in despatches. In 1918 he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order by George V at Buckingham Palace. He and his first wife Molly married in 1914 and lived at Hundith Hill. Sadly, Molly was a victim of the flu epidemic and died in 1919.



caption

JOSEPH WILLIAM JOHNSTON

Joseph came from a Bothel farming family of 9 sons and 4 daughters. Six of those sons became police officers, and Joseph too joined up in 1914. Soon after he enlisted with the Coldstream Guards and fought in the Battle of the Somme. He was seriously wounded and narrowly escaped being buried alive, as his obituary from 1978 reports.

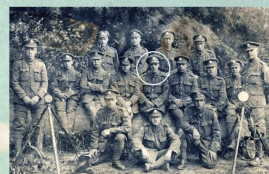
"After the carnage of the Battle of the Somme he made headlines as a soldier who came back from the dead. German shellfire had wiped out most of his platoon, and he too was in the hands of a burial squad, when a twitching leg showed that none of the shells had, after all, 'had his number on', as soldiers say."

Joseph lived to tell the tale and came back to his job in the police force, serving in several local towns, the last being Cockermouth. After retirement in 1945 his smallholding near his home on Brigham Road was his main interest. He lived to the age of 87.



GEORGE AND HAROLD MARTIN

George and Harold were two sons of Robert and Jane Martin of Kirkgate, where Robert had a grocery business in 1911. Both sons went off to fight in WWI. Harold served in the 6th Battalion, Army Cyclists' Corps and was killed in action on 28th December 1916, aged 22.



George Martin is circled in the photograph above



Harold Martin

Brother George served with the 5th Battalion, Border Regiment. He was wounded at some stage but carried out vital repairs to signal wires whilst under heavy bombardment, and for this he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. When George returned home he carried on the family grocery business on Kirkgate.

CITATION

5TH BATTALION THE BORDER REGT.
DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT MEDAL.
1490 L. CORPORAL G. S. MARTIN
4/2/1916

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty on the morning of 16th January 1916, when during a very heavy bombardment he reloaded and repaired the signal wires between Battalion Headquarters and the three companies in the front line, involving the taking of wires across the open, a distance of 300 or 400 yards. This communication was maintained during the 5 1/2 hours bombardment.



caption



caption

THE RIDDLE FAMILY

Robert and Mary Ann Riddle of Victoria Court in Cockermouth, seen here with son Robert and daughter Mary Evelyn Nannette. Robert senior went off to fight in World War I, and was one of the lucky ones who came through the fighting and back home to Cockermouth.



THE DEAD MAN'S PENNY
was a bronze memorial plaque given to the families of servicemen killed in the fighting of WWI.



Extract from "The Border Regiment in the Great War"
by Colonel H C Wyllie C.B. — page 152

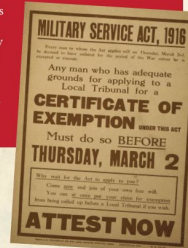
Nov. 2nd 1917

That god may bless and comfort you is the earnest prayer of

Yours very sincerely
Harry C Sykes



Early in 1917 the Military Service Act was passed in Parliament and military conscription began. In the national list of conscientious objectors six men are identified as living in Cockermouth. They appeared before a local tribunal at Greecian Villa (then Town Council offices) to state their cases. One man appealed on the grounds of a moral objection to war, but his wish to join the Friends' Ambulance Corps was rejected. He eventually was imprisoned in Wormwood Scrubs in London, but was freed early because of illness, and discharged from any kind of service in 1917. Conscientious objectors had a difficult time, being viewed as cowards, and were frequently offered a white feather in the street as evidence of the public mood.



Thames Mill

[illegible]

MARGARINE AND BUTTER

Stores of *The Whiting*
 address *1100*
Edwards

Interpretation

Key of number *13*

Name of *Edwards*
Edwards

USE THESE EXHIBITS

April 1941	June 1941	August 1941
July 1941	Sept. 1941	Nov. 1941
Oct. 1941	Dec. 1941	Jan. 1942
Feb. 1942	March 1942	May 1942
June 1942	Aug. 1942	Oct. 1942
Nov. 1942	Jan. 1943	Mar. 1943
May 1943	Sept. 1943	Nov. 1943



"... women are constitutionally unfitted for work in signal boxes, and that such employment constitutes a danger to the travelling public ..."

"Baking was not, and never could be a woman's work" (so thought a baker from Torpenhow). He needed to replace a worker, but women were not too good: "too much flapping and talking with them"

(West Cumberland Times, 31.5.16)

The Court House was the initial depot for the collection of bedding and clothes, towels, money, offers of help to sew garments at home, all destined for the men serving overseas. With opening of the Cottage Hospital in 1915 this activity was transferred there.



"Derwent Mills, Cockermouth v. Cleator Mills. These teams met on Monday in the presence of big holiday crowds. Mrs TW Harris started the ball and the home side at once showed superiority, F. Burns scoring in the first ten minutes..."

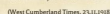
(West Cumberland Times, 8.8.1917)



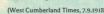
BACK ROW (left to right): Peter THOMPSON, Janet BARNES, Tommy BIKETT, Evelyn GORLEY, Agnes PENNINGTON, Hannah Lena BIKETT (goal-keeper), Will HARRIS, Lily BARNES, Jimmy CONWAY, Mabel SCOTT, — THOMPSON

MIDDLE ROW: Ada GLAISTER, Bert HOLMES, Florrie BURNS, Tom HARRIS, Lizzie SIM, Annie HOLMES, Annie SUART

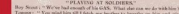
FRONT ROW: Maude PLASKETT, Belle SUART, Hannah MA STARKIE, Sarah Ellen MORGAN, Sally BAXTER, Elsie BIRCH



In school children received certificates instead of book prizes during the war years.



(West Cumberland Times, 7.9.191)

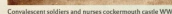
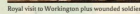
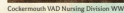


(West Cumberland Times, 8th August, 1936)



WWI fund-raising advert with hospital

Mo. Edgar



TO MY DEAR WIFE FROM YOUR LOVING HUSBAND

Merry Christmas

TO YOU FROM YOUR DAUGHTER

TO MY DEAR MOTHER FROM YOUR LOVING SON



"For service rendered to wounded soldiers in Dublin whom she assisted from the street to her mother's house, being repeatedly under fire. She also rendered valuable assistance throughout the rebellion (14-29 April 1916) by bringing bread, medical supplies, bandages, etc. for these wounded men, from the Adelaide Hospital, on every occasion being under fire from rebels."

December 1914 saw the arrival of Belgian refugees – 14 initially and 15 more later. They were housed in two Derwent Street cottages, a house in Horsman Street and one in The Goat. Red House, Market Place, and Bleamish House in Greyhound were later equipped to accommodate more. The refugees, all from Ostend, arrived at the railway station and were welcomed by curious townsfolk. They were lucky to be able to escape sheltering in Ostend on their own boat. The refugees were invited to a free meal serving at the Picture Palace-Cockermouth's newly-built Grand Theatre. One of those to arrive was Octavie de Waele, a well-known local name. Dickie Stewart and remained here to raise their family. Other refugees returned to Belgium in March 1919.



THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND

WOMEN AND THE VOTE IN THOSE PRE-WAR YEARS

In 1897 Millicent Fawcett had founded the National Union of Women's Suffrage, calling for women's right to vote, and they sought to achieve this by peaceful means. Progress was frustratingly slow and in 1903 the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was founded by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters Christabel and Sylvia. This group became known as the Suffragettes, and they were prepared to use violence to achieve votes for women if necessary. With the outbreak of WWI, however, a temporary halt was called to the fight for votes for women.



Gladys Duffield (1882-1973) was a Suffragist who lived in Walker Street, Cockermouth for many years. She was a talented pianist, accompanying the silent films shown at the Grand Theatre on Station Road. She also accompanied Kathleen Ferrier, the renowned contralto, when she sang locally. As a young woman Gladys went on the Women's Pilgrimage to London, and wrote an account of that event.



Part of Gladys's account of the walk to London in 1913:

The walkers arrived in Cockermouth from Aspatria on Friday afternoon, 20th June. That evening they formed a procession, headed by the Cockermouth Borough Band and paraded the crowded streets with their banners, before holding a meeting at the Mayo monument.



Next day they continued their march to Keswick:

"The pilgrims entered Keswick in bright sunshine, a goodly procession, the leading banner reading: 'National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, President Mrs Fawcett, Law-abiding Pilgrimage, Watling Street Route'. The Carlisle and other banners followed. A huge crowd was assembled in the quaint old market square to hear what the ladies had to say..."

"Monday, June 23, was a dull, damp day. There were about 30 of us assembled in the market square at Keswick. We wore cockle cockades on our hats, of red, white and green straw. With high hearts and high resolve we marched out of Keswick on the long trek which was to lead finally to London. Out of Keswick, we turned into the Ambleside road and eventually came to the lake of Thirlmere..."



THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE PILGRIMAGE

Branches of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) from all over the country met to take part in the Women's Suffrage Pilgrimage, when 50,000 women assembled in London's Hyde Park on 26th July 1913. Women from this area took part and were given an enthusiastic send-off from the Market Cross in Carlisle on June 18th. The women wore red, white and green shoulder sashes and carried local banners.

1918: THE END OF THE WAR BRINGS NEW CHALLENGES

FLU PANDEMIC

In 1918 there was an outbreak of what was termed 'Spanish Flu', which spread rapidly throughout the world. Many soldiers caught it and brought it back home. In 1918 it seemed to affect mainly young adults. There were three waves of flu: spring 1918, autumn 1918, and spring 1919. The outbreak of autumn 1918 was the most serious. To add to problems, there were shortages of medical staff, undertakers and grave-diggers. Schools in Cockermouth were closed between November 11th 1918 and January 6th 1919.



St Michael's Church, Lamplugh

By the end of November 1918 there was an 'acute and serious' situation in Cockermouth, with hundreds of people suffering, and whole households in some cases. Many flu-related deaths were reported in the local newspaper in November 1918. Ten burials in one day were reported at Cockermouth Cemetery. Christ Church, Great Broughton, saw the funeral of two children, Joseph and Annie Robinson:

"The coffins were borne to the graveside by relays of young people. The little folks who died from influenza were buried together and the mound was covered with wreaths of flowers..."

German prisoners of war, working locally in the Lamplugh area, were also affected by the flu epidemic. Seven of them died and were buried initially in Lamplugh Churchyard before later reburial at the Cannock Chase German War Cemetery.

FLOODING

Flooding has always been a feature of life in Cockermouth, and 1918 was no exception, with disruption to many parts of the town.



Barnard Bridge 4-10-1918

CELEBRATION AND COMMEMORATION

ARMISTICE - 11TH NOVEMBER, 1918

The news of the end of the war was received thus:

"... with quiet expressions of joy and thankfulness, and flags soon made their appearance at business premises in the main thoroughfares and at many private houses. In the evening the church bells, which had been so long silent, were rung, those at All Saints sending forth a glad some peal."

This was a town exhausted by years of war and deprivation, the loss of loved ones, and now fighting a flu epidemic. The Peace Treaty to end the war would not be signed at Versailles until 28th June 1919, marking the official peace with Germany.



Cockermouth's Peace Celebrations took place on 19th July 1919, with its focus on children and old people in the town. Soldiers' Day on 7th August focused on men who had been members of the armed forces.

On the 6th July there was a church Thanksgiving Service for the end of the war. The event two weeks later, on 19th July, saw the town decorated with flags and streamers. The bell-ringers at All Saints opened proceedings, whilst 100 former soldiers paraded at the Drill Hall, and then marched to Harris Park, led by the Mechanics' Band and their Bandmaster, Mr E Lindsay. A wagonette with disabled men brought up the rear of the parade.

In Harris Park there was a short service of thanksgiving, followed by the planting

of two donated pine trees that had been brought from Italy for the occasion. Major Dykes planted one 'in commemoration of what the sons of Cockermouth had done for England', and Captain Wadham planted the other 'for the celebration of peace'.

The afternoon was devoted to the entertainment of the children, who had assembled at their respective Sunday Schools and marched to the Fairfield. Each of the 1,400 children received a medal as a memento. The children marched back to Main Street to sing hymns by the Mayo statue and Memorial clock, before being given tea in their schools. Then came games and sports on the Castle Lands. The town's old people were treated to a knife and fork tea in the Drill Hall, accompanied by music.

After dark came illuminations, fireworks and bonfires, including one on the Hay, and many visible from surrounding areas (Broughton Moor, Tallentree Hill, Silladaw, Grisdale Pike, Halvellyn and Scafell). Brilliant electric effects were in place on the roof of Derwent Mills and the Cinema.

A TANK FOR COCKERMOUTH



At the end of the War, tanks that had seen active service in France and Flanders were offered to 265 towns and cities around the country, in recognition of citizens' efforts to raise funds through investing in War Bonds and War Savings Certificates. Cockermouth was one of the towns to receive such a tank.

Cockermouth's tank arrived in February 1920 at the Goods Station in Low Road, and then proceeded under its own power to a concrete plinth prepared for it at the corner of Station Street and Gallowbarrow, on the western end of Fairfield. Its drive chains and magneto were removed to immobilise it. Today the site it stood on has a bench and flower beds, overlooking Fairfield School. The tank was taken away for scrap at the outbreak of WWII.



SOLDIERS' DAY

Soldiers' Day on 7th August 1919 saw the town widely decorated again. Over 450 men proceeded in a column of fours, under the command of Major Dykes, and led by the Mechanics' Band, from the Drill Hall to the sports field at Sandair. Bringing up the rear were tradesmen's wagons, decorated for a competition.

The day proceeded with a full programme of sports, including a tug-of-war, wrestling, boat race, a marathon (a 7 mile course via Brigham), bicycle race, hurdles, and sprints.

A knife and fork tea was served at the Drill Hall for the men. Music was provided by the Mechanics' Band, and Billy Bowman's Band, with dancing at the Public Hall that evening.

GIFTS OF LAND

The National Trust proposed that the dead from WWI should be commemorated in gifts of land. Lord Leconfield gave Scafell Pike as a memorial to the men of the Lake District in 1919. A memorial tablet was added to the cairn on 24th August 1921.

Members of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club of the Lake District are remembered on a plaque at the summit of Great Gable, and an annual memorial service is held there on Remembrance Day. The Club bought 3,000 acres of land at the end of WWI and donated it to the National Trust in memory of those who had died.



Lord Leconfield

Cockermouth's War Memorial was originally to be erected in Harris Park but, after opposition to that proposal, it was unveiled in its present location on 24th September 1922. After WWII the names of those people of the town who had died in the war were added. The memorial has been the location for the annual commemoration service ever since.



War memorial

Collections

During our project we investigated many aspects of WWI and have collected images related to that period. These are shown in a separate gallery so you can zoom into the images



Oral Histories

To find out what life was like in Cockermouth in the first half of the 20th Century we trained volunteers in oral history techniques and sent them out to record interviews with some of Cockermouth's oldest citizens, then living in four local care homes.

To stimulate the residents' memories, we first took in a small exhibition relating to Cockermouth's WWI experiences and left it on display in each care home for a week. We then returned with a collection of WWI objects to talk to residents about their memories. We identified around a dozen people to record and have transcribed those interviews, which now form part of the Heritage Group's historical archive.





World War I Project – Schools

Schools' Education Resource Pack

A resource pack for primary schools was distributed to schools in Cockerthorpe and some other schools in the local area in 2019. It contains information and photographs about life in Cockerthorpe around one hundred years ago, and is divided into sections:

- What life was like for children
- What life was like for women
- What homes were like
- What it was like for the men of Cockerthorpe who went off to fight in the First World War
- What the town of Cockerthorpe was like

The packs contain laminated A3 photographs for use in the classroom, and are invaluable as a source of information for the Local History element of the National Curriculum for History. Please contact us for further information: heritage@thekirkgate.com