Valleys volunteers share story of local hero

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When Gaynor Oliver moved to the village of Pontlottyn in the Rhymney Valley over 30 years ago, she was surprised to find that there was nothing in the village to commemorate a local war hero. Since then, with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the 67 year old has been the driving force behind a project in his honour.

The Edward Chapman VC Memorial Project celebrates the courageous life of the Pontlottyn hero who was awarded the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest military honour, for 'outstanding gallantry and superb courage' in Germany in April 1945. The project brings together the people who knew Edward Chapman to share their memories with the younger generation in the community.

Former head teacher, Gaynor, explains why it was so important for the community to learn about a man who made such a difference during World War II: "Pontlottyn was home to Edward Chapman for many years and still is for many of his relatives today. He received the most prestigious honour for his bravery during the war, and I felt that it was only right that he was celebrated in the village where he was born.

"We wanted the project to bring together both the younger and older generations living in the community, for memories to be shared and for the young people to understand what life was like for people in Pontlottyn back in the 1940s.

"We stepped back in time and brought the past to life with this project by hosting a wartime dance, complete with a big band, boiled ham and 40s attire. The whole community got involved and it was a great celebration. Local schoolchildren from Pontlottyn Primary have also been involved by helping to create an exhibition, which includes photography and creative writing."

Pontlottyn Communities First Partnership received £27,600 from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the project, which aims not only to commemorate and celebrate the life of Edward Chapman, but to research what life was like in Pontlottyn during the 1940s.

The project is one of five featured in a new magazine, Heritage Matters, published by HLF Wales, and Gaynor is encouraging others to learn about their local history to help keep it alive for future generations to explore.

Jennifer Stewart, Head of HLF in Wales, said: "Projects like these give local people the opportunity to explore their area's history and learn about the people that made it the place it is today.

"People are at the heart of HLF projects, which is why we've produced the Heritage Matters magazine, to give the people behind the projects a voice to share their stories and encourage others to get involved in local projects."