Telling the story of Summerdown Camp

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Working with local volunteers, the project focuses on the stories of the people who worked and convalesced at Summerdown Camp and its impact on local life during the period. The project will offer a vital opportunity to reflect and commemorate the lives of the soldiers briefly resident in Eastbourne during the First World War.

Eastbourne Borough Council Cabinet Member for Tourism and Leisure, Cllr Carolyn Heaps, said “It is very exciting that this project will be coming to life, offering a vital opportunity to reflect and commemorate the lives of the soldiers briefly resident in Eastbourne during the First World War.”

The camp opened in April 1915 and was the first, and at the time the largest, of three purpose built convalescent camps designed for rehabilitation of the wounded from the many horrific theatres of the First World War. The camp was dismantled in 1920 and most of the land has since been redeveloped as housing. The only existing reminders of the camp are in the street names Summerdown Road and Old Camp Road.

The soldiers being cared for at the camp were known as ‘Blueboys’ because of the coloured (and often ill fitting) uniform they were required to wear. They became a familiar sight around Eastbourne and brought home the terrible realities of war as well as some much welcomed soldierly cheer to the town’s residents.

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East, said: “Summerdown Camp played a pivotal role during the First World War and provided a place of refuge and respite for the wounded. Today’s Heritage Lottery Fund investment will help bring the stories of those who worked and stayed there to the forefront once again. The First World War changed the face of modern history touching the lives of everyone in this country and beyond. We have already supported with over £33m to projects across the United Kingdom and will continue to support as many applications as we can afford to those that want to commemorate the centenary.”

Over the course of the project, Eastbourne Heritage Service will undertake research to uncover the untold and unheard stories of Summerdown Camp to inform commemorative events, education activities, workshops, lecture, displays and a dedicated Summerdown archive. The project will also tell the stories of the people who worked and lived at the camp. It will uncover new information about the buildings through archaeological fieldwork, medical treatments (both physical and mental), patients, staff and legacy of the First World War on Eastbourne and the BlueBoys of the Camp.

The centenary of the opening of Summerdown Camp will be marked by an emotive exhibition and lecture exploring the stories of the men and women of Summerdown. The archaeological excavation of part of the site is scheduled for Spring 2014. As always with such ventures, volunteers are a big part of this project and Eastbourne Heritage Service will provide training in archives, exhibition design, and archaeology and research skills.

Schools and community groups can also get involved in this project with craft workshops and events both in class and at the Redoubt.

Eastbourne Heritage Service is looking for any information about Summerdown Camp and the people who convalesced and worked there. So if you have any stories or objects from Summerdown Camp no matter how small or trivial it may seem or would like to get involved in the project, please contact Katherine Buckland, email

Katherine.buckland@eastbourne.gov.uk or 01323 415 641.

Further information

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