Changing lives: Scout learns about terror of the



For Morgan Taylor, the First World War was just a part of the distant past, until a Scout group heritage project brought it much closer to home

Seventeen-year-old Morgan Taylor has grown up with the Scouts, having first joined the organisation when he was only 11-years-old. He's been fortunate enough to have had lots of exciting and interesting experiences during this time, but none have had such an impact on him as his latest venture.

Morgan is a member of the 1st Menai Bridge Scout Group, which thanks to National Lottery players, is currently working on a two-year project exploring the role of North Wales Scouts and Scout leaders during the First World War.

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>
> - Morgan

Morgan freely admits that initially the project didn't grab him: "I was aware of the many commemorations around the First World War and important anniversaries associated with it, but I wasn't really convinced it was so relevant to our lives today. It was over a hundred years ago, and so much has changed over the decades."

Changing attitudes

His attitude soon changed, however, when the group discovered a Scouting connection to the war. “John Fox Russell was an Anglesey Scout in the Wolf Patrol group, and during the war was awarded the Victoria and Military Crosses, some of the highest honours possible for his service. As soon as we realised that he was only my age when he joined the army – a 17-year-old teenager – we couldn’t believe it. It actually scared me to think that could have been me.”

Morgan and his fellow Scouts began collecting information from local archives and libraries as part of the £22,000 HLF-supported project, but while reading the stories gave them some context about the realities of the war, nothing could quite prepare them for their visit to the battlefields. The foreign journey formed only a small part of the overall project, but it had a significant impact on many of them including Morgan.

The true impact

“As part of our research we organised a visit to Ypres in Belgium to see the iconic war memorials there and some of the most infamous scenes of battle. It was here that the true impact of the war really became clear to me and the other Scouts.

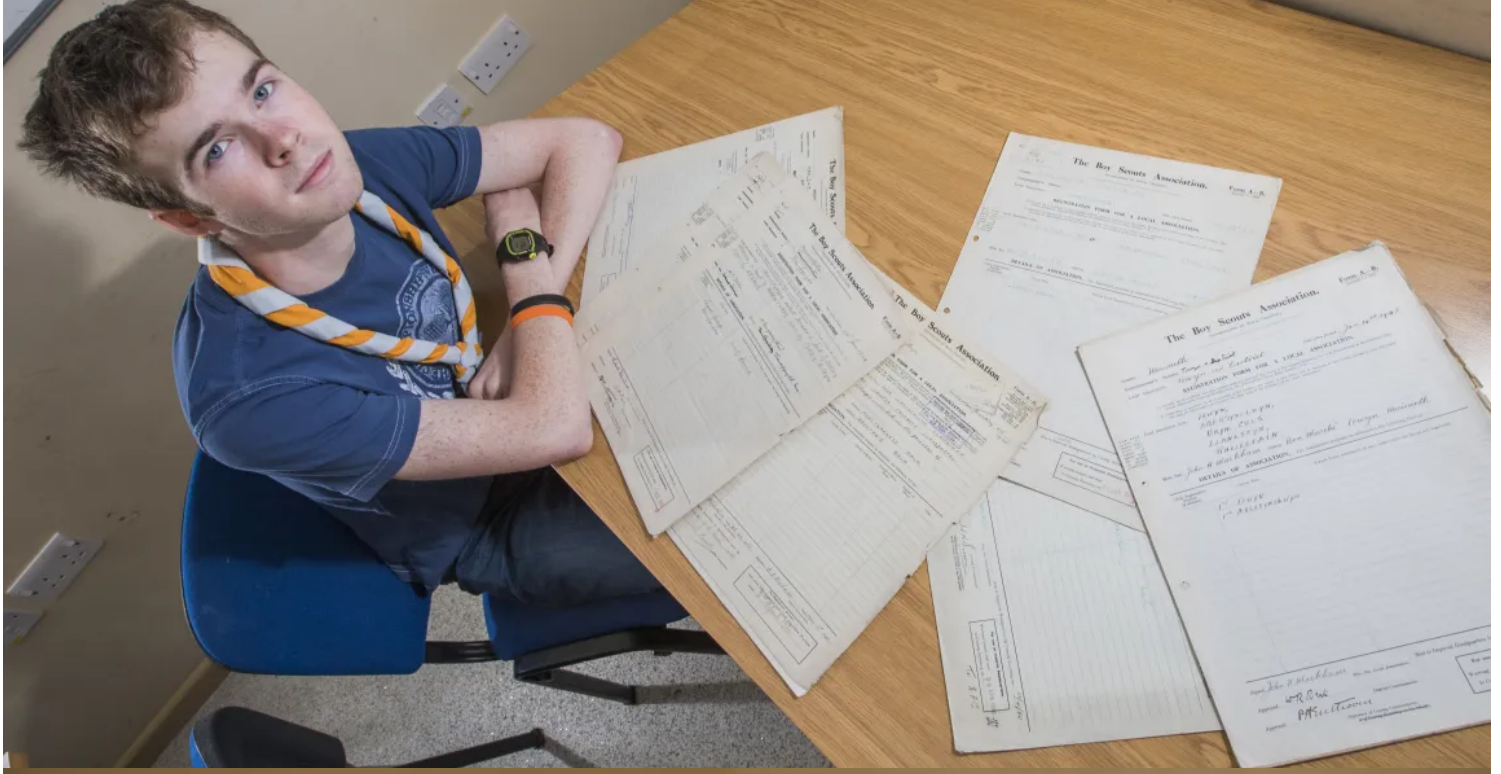
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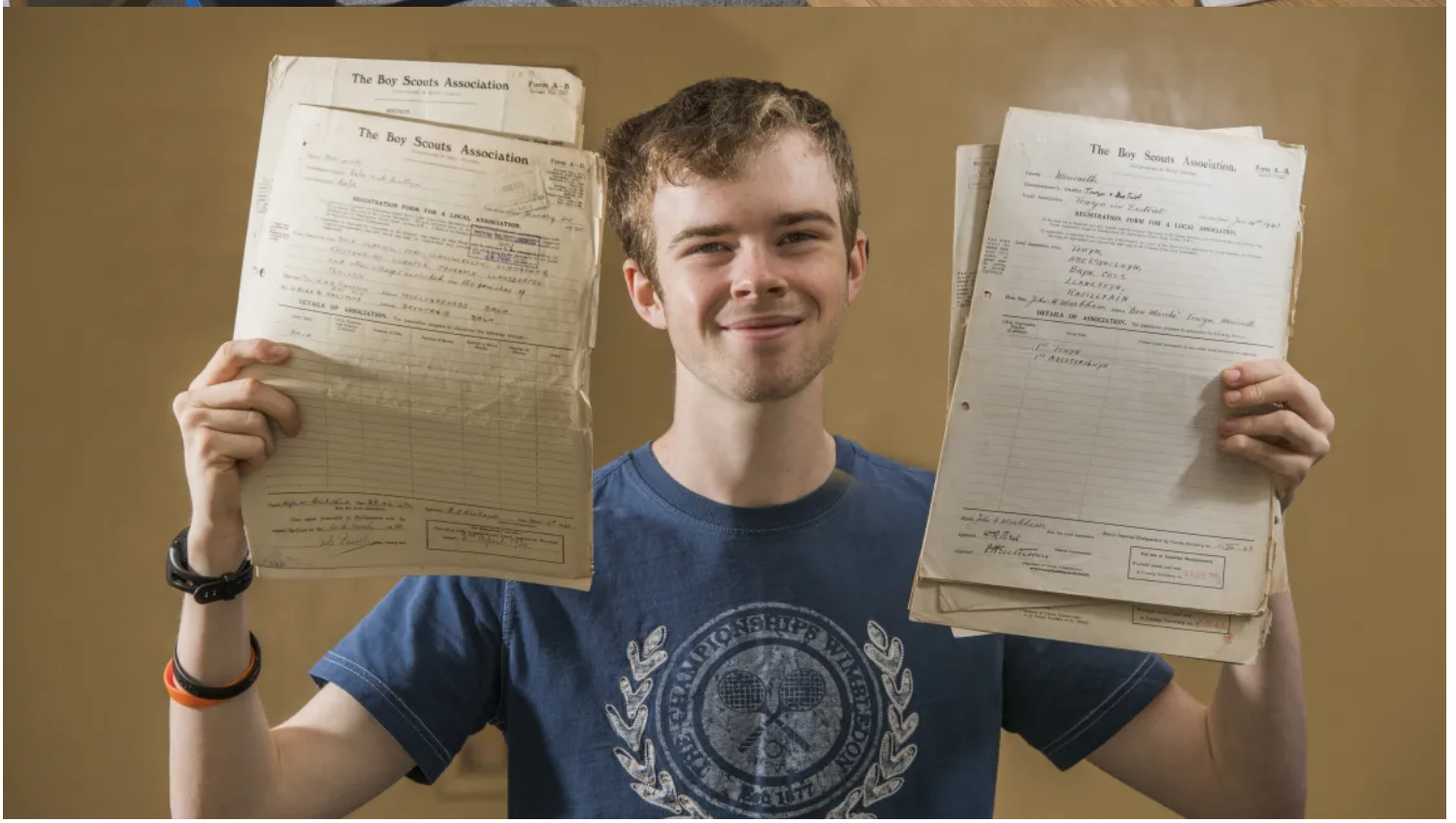
“Seeing line upon line of graves with names of soldiers from different countries, some of them younger than I am now, was quite upsetting and it felt very real all of a sudden. While there we managed to track down the grave of John Edwards, who was Scout Master of our Menai Bridge group when war broke out in 1914. Seeing his grave really brought it home – one day he was scouting, the next day he was fighting in the trenches.

“Worse still were the rows of unmarked graves, where the names of so many soldiers are still unaccounted for because their bodies have never even been found.

“It’s uncomfortable to see, but at the same time I’m really glad we went and had that experience because it has made me think and feel differently about the First World War. It doesn’t just seem like some distant event which we remember each year - I feel more connected to it and genuinely feel thankful that those men and boys who fought and died to protect us today.

"I will always remember that gratitude, having been there and been part of that history for a moment.”


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1st Menai Bridge Scout Group finding out about the scout leaders who went to fight in the First World War. Photo: Paul Pickard



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1st Menai Bridge Scout Group wins Heritage Lottery support