Remembering the Astons during the First World



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Awarded through HLF's First World War: then and now programme, the project will focus on restoring the Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe war memorial and hosting a community exhibition on 8 and 9 November to tell the story of the community during the First World War.

The project is registered with the Imperial War Museum's Lives of the First World War project and will help villagers understand and commemorate the lives of all those from the community affected by the First World War. As well as the names on the war memorial, the group has researched many of the 81 men remembered on the village's Muster Roll.

The discovery of John Masefield's name on the Muster Roll led the local history group to research and explore the life of the poet, author and writer who lived at Lollingdon Farm near Aston Tirrold from 1914 to 1917. Research has centred on his poetry and writings during the years of 1914 -1918. His poetry has been linked to the lives of the soldiers, and to those who stayed behind but who were also deeply affected by the war years and their legacy.

Also explored were The Robert Moon diaries: the transcriptions of a unique and unpublished series of diaries from Dr Robert Moon who lived in Aston Tirrold and was a serving doctor in France, Serbia and Salonica during the First World War. His diaries, letters and postcards will be on display for the first time at the exhibition.

The history group has contacted living relatives of many of the village's fallen soldiers involving them in parts of their own family history that they were not previously aware of. These families have donated stories, letters and photos for this exhibition, many of which belonged to the Berkshire Regiments. This has helped protect and enhance their own as well as the village's vibrant heritage for posterity and will preserve the legacy of these solders for future generations.

Local people and groups are actively involved in researching the history of village families, children and schooling, food and rations, women's rights, suffrage and conscientious objectors. The exhibition will include audio oral histories, documentaries, music and sound, along with stories, photographs, letters, diaries, artefacts, press cuttings and First World War memorabilia.

The exhibition kicks off with two talks on the Saturday 8 November followed by an official opening by Lord Bradshaw who used to live in Aston Tirrold. The show will allow the public to discuss, remember, contribute, share and commemorate. The exhibition will also have a local genealogist on hand to help individuals locate more information about their own serving relatives during the First World War and give them more information to enable them to research further into their own family history afterwards.

Local schools have been invited to help link with ongoing project work on the First World War and parts of the exhibition will be aimed specifically at children and families with a number of digital displays, including sound tracks and online learning modules.

There will also be a family self-guide "Poppy Trail" which takes people round both villages and introduces them to a number of First World War related facts about village life and the soldiers and families.

The Women's Institute will present information about women during the First World War, their lasting legacy in war work, food and rationing and the emergence of the local and national suffrage movement.

A digital archive and dedicated website will be created after the exhibition to preserve and share all the information gathered.

Commenting on the award, Emma Lewins, Chair of the Astons History Group said: "We are thrilled to have received the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund and to be able to commemorate the history of our villages and the brave men and women who contributed to the war effort in such a fantastic way."

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East, said: "The impact of the First World War was far-reaching, touching and shaping every corner of the UK and beyond. In the year we mark the centenary of the start of the First World War, we're pleased to support communities such as Aston to explore the continuing legacy of the conflict and help local young people in particular to broaden their understanding of how it has shaped our modern world."

Notes to editors

About The Astons History Group

The Astons History Group has been in existence since 1994. It has an active membership and operates across both villages, holding meetings about four times a year as well as staging exhibitions, arranging outings and raising money for publications.

Further information

For further information, images and interviews, please contact Astons History Group Project Co-ordinator, Anna Dillon on 07786 876 411 or dillon.anna@gmail.com.