

First World War remembered in Anglesey thanks to Lottery funding

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Holyhead's Early Losses of the Great War

When war was declared on 4 August 1914 the British Army was a combat force which had been progressively built up since the 1870s. It consisted of about 200,000 regular troops recruited by the Territorial Force and Reserve. The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was initially formed from six infantry Divisions and six Cavalry Divisions. This comprised roughly half the combat strength of the army of that time.

The BEF arrived in France during the middle of August and first saw action at the Battle of Mons on 23 August 1914. During the next few weeks the BEF fought a rearguard against the mighty German Army and fought to stop its advance on Paris. By the end of 1914 the six regular British Army units were virtually wiped out and replaced.

From Britain began to arrive to make up the numbers. These of the regular army that survived were known as "The Old Contemptibles".

The 2nd Battalion, Welsh Regiment was just of 2nd Brigade, 1st Division. Two Holyhead soldiers, **Thomas Jones** and **Thomas Lee**, of the Battalion were killed with the BEF during these early months of the war but were unfortunately killed.

Private **Thomas Jones** landed in France on 24 November 1914. His Battalion were called upon to support the Belgian Army, who had suffered heavy casualties. The word "Chivrier" (harrier) had been used on Christmas Eve 1914 when a unit struck a hill of a house where he and two others were sheltering. He was 26 years old. He had married Grace Jones in 1902, who died ten years later. In 1911 he was living at 16 Portway, Falmouth, Cornwall with his widowed mother, Sarah Jones. He had been previously employed as a Gunner's Orderly for the LNER. He is buried in Brunel's Road Military Cemetery, Farnborough, France. He was awarded the 1914-15 Star, Victory Medal and British War Medal.

Private **Thomas Lee** landed in France on 22 August 1914. His Battalion was ordered to the "Hedge" from Mons, a march of 200 miles in 13 days before the BEF turned and attacked the Germans at the River Aisne. Having fighting continued as the British advanced against a strong ridge. In all the Battalion lost 11 Officers and 210 Other Ranks before the fighting came to a standstill and both sides dug in to entrenchment. The trench warfare that characterised the rest of the conflict. It is probable that Private Lee was killed on 20 or 21 September 1914 during the battle at the Somme. His service in France ended with three medals.

Private Lee was born in Holyhead the eldest son of Thomas and Ann Lee. In 1911 he lived with his family at 11 Tudor Street. His parents migrated from Mullingar, Ireland. At the time he was employed at a Building Store, aged 16. He was awarded the 1914-15 Star, Victory Medal and British War Medal.

Men of the British Expeditionary Force in France 1914

Private **Thomas Jones**

Private **Thomas Lee**

Medals awarded to Private Thomas Jones and Private Thomas Lee.

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Bilingual interpretation boards at the Holyhead Maritime Museum

HLF has recently awarded over £20,000 to projects in Anglesey, which will ensure the repair of the memorial village clock in Gwalchmai, expand and revitalise Holyhead's Maritime Museum and fund a programme of commemorative events in Beaumaris.

Jennifer Stewart, Head of HLF, Wales said, "We want to help as many communities and people as possible across Wales to commemorate the First World War and to recognise the long-lasting impact the conflict had

on their communities. It's excellent to see so many groups getting involved in Anglesey, with people of all ages playing their part to ensure that the sacrifices made a century ago are not forgotten."

Home to a naval base during the First World War, Holyhead has a long maritime history and the town's maritime museum will now be able to expand its existing collection of memorabilia related to the town's role in the conflict whilst also expanding their exhibition to reflect the significant involvement of Holyhead in the war.

Albert Owen MP for Ynys Môn, museum patron, welcomed the news and said: "This is such a great museum that truly deserves this support from HLF. The grant will enable them to build on their existing collection of artefacts related to the war and helping them to contribute positively towards the commemorations taking place across Anglesey."

The St Mary and St Nicholas Church in Beaumaris will become central to First World War commemorations in the town as a result of their grant with a host of memorial activities including an exhibition about Beaumaris and Anglesey during the war, concerts, drama performances, poetry readings and conservation works. The historic church is home to Beaumaris' First World War memorial, and two church windows that are dedicated to those lost in the conflict will be repaired and restored.

The memorial clock, which has stood at the heart of Gwalchmai since the local parishioners grouped together to provide funding for it in 1926, will be repaired and brought back into action once again. It is recognised as one of the most notable memorials in Anglesey, and research undertaken by local schoolchildren will aim to provide insight and connections with those who continue to live in the small community.

Rhun ap Iorwerth, Assembly Member for Ynys Mon, welcomed the HLF support for First World War projects in Anglesey. He said: "It's inspiring to see so much interest across the island in commemorating the First World War in so many different ways. Anglesey felt the effects of war, providing several military bases, and of course the island lost many of its sons. It is vitally important that this history is remembered and understood now and by future generations, which is why HLF's support is so important."

Note to editors

The following grants have been awarded by HLF to:

- Holyhead Maritime Museum Ltd: Holyhead during the First World War: £3,700
- St Mary and St Nicholas Church: Beaumaris and World War One: £10,000
- Trewalchmai Community Council: Restoration and Repair to Village War Memorial Clock: £10,000

Project plans:

Holyhead during the First World War

Holyhead Maritime Museum (HMM) is a volunteer-led museum in a Victorian Lifeboat House. Their principal collection relates to the area's maritime history but they also have an exhibition of wartime artefacts in a WW2 Air Raid Shelter.

- The project will enable them to add to the existing collection of First World War artefacts by working with local private owners of photographs and memorabilia
- New bilingual interpretation boards and education packs will be created
- Collecting oral histories from local people who remember stories about the First World War in Holyhead
- Engaging with local community groups, schools and libraries to share the project more widely.

Beaumaris and World War One

The 14th-century church is listed Grade 1 and contains many fine tombs, carvings and monuments including

two stained glass memorial windows to officers who fell in the First World War and the main town war memorial is situated within the churchyard.

- Repairs to the two First World War memorial windows and installation of protective guards.
- Research will be undertaken about Beaumaris and Anglesey in the war, informing a temporary display within the church and will be published in an accompanying memorial booklet
- Work with volunteers, local youth groups and schools to research the eight Commonwealth War Graves in the parish and effect of the war on the community
- Educational packs will be produced and a series of commemorative talks, concerts, poetry readings and events will be held in the church
- Production of a project DVD and use of the People's Collection to upload key project information

Restoration and Repair to Village War Memorial Clock, Gwalchmai

- The Gwalchmai war memorial clock commemorates local First and Second World War military servicemen who lost their lives
- Repair and restoration of the clock mechanism, returning it to full working order
- Schoolchildren from the local primary school will research the monument's history and names of those listed; making connections with those who continue to live in the community
- Local schoolchildren involved with the project will read out the names of the fallen at a service on remembrance Sunday

Further information

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