



Briefing for Beddington and Wallington Local Committee

SUTTON REMEMBERS WORLD WAR 1: OUR WAR GRAVES

Summary

This briefing paper informs the Committee about a project to raise awareness and commemorate First World War servicemen and women who are buried in Bandon Hill Cemetery.

Background

People assume that all the war dead are buried in graves on the continent but there are 126 Commonwealth War Graves from the First World War in the London Borough of Sutton. This project hopes to retain and where necessary restore the history relating to those heroes.

The graves are spread across the two municipal cemeteries and five churchyards. Responsibility for the site remains with the owner, either the London Borough of Sutton or local churches, with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission taking responsibility for the headstone.

The practice of non-repatriation of the dead meant that service personnel who died on active service were buried abroad. The majority of those buried in the UK died at home, in military hospitals, training accidents or were killed in action in the air. Consequently, not everyone buried in Sutton is from the local area.

The graves represent people of different ages and backgrounds from teenagers injured at the front and sent home, to experienced servicemen with wives and families. The proximity of Croydon Airport, home to the Royal Flying Corps, means that some of the earliest air casualties of war are buried here. Over twenty graves are airmen, some of the most engaging stories from the war. Bandon Hill is also the location of the grave of Corporal William Stevens, a military policeman. There are 55 graves in Bandon Hill Cemetery.

The project held a successful launch event on 3 March and has now attracted many volunteers. It is stimulating a number of activities, including:

- Caring for War graves - We would like to see each grave 'adopted' and cared for. This will entail visiting the grave and keeping the plots neat and weed free.
- Researching the servicemen so that we can learn more about their lives, their families and their military careers. We can offer workshops to help with this.
- Headstone rubbing, laying flowers, holding vigils, etc

- Drawing a picture or taking some photographs, either on a camera or your phone, to be shared online on our specially established Facebook page.

An exhibition on the project has been put together, and it is intended that interpretative panels will be installed at Sutton and Bandon Hill Cemeteries.

Volunteers will soon be offering to help at Bandon Hill Cemetery, and we need someone prepared to coordinate them and help them get organised. We hope that one of the community groups that attends the Local Committee will be prepared to help here.

The project, which is being sponsored by the Friends of Sutton Life Centre, has been awarded £9,100 from the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is supported by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The Friends are running this initiative in conjunction with the London Borough of Sutton's World War One Commemorative Steering Group, chaired by Lord Tope, which is overseeing a range of events to commemorate the centenary of the First World War.

It would be helpful if community groups could indicate if they would like to be involved in the project and can suggest venues for the exhibition.

If you would like to volunteer for any aspects of this project please contact.

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Sutton WW1 Commemorative Steering Group

