

The Bradley Stoke War Memorial

This year, at another very successful town festival, a small stand formed part of the 1st Bradley Stoke Scout Group area to let everyone know that the group is joining forces with the Willow Brook Centre to create a war memorial for our town. We were also asking people to help us decide the inscription that should appear on one of the memorial plaques. I am very pleased to announce that the winning phrase was “We Will Remember Them”. Thank you to everyone who stopped and voted and took an interest in the memorial plans. I feel the inscription really captures everything we want it to stand for – a truly generic memorial to represent anyone affected by conflict.

Why should a new town like Bradley Stoke have a war memorial?

Unfortunately we know that wars are not consigned to the past and our brave service men and women in today’s armed forces are continually putting themselves at risk (sometimes even without leaving our own country). Also, there are still many people who were involved in conflicts that lost their lives at a later date, but who are not represented on any memorial. Why should these forgotten survivors not be awarded the same honour as those who perished while the conflict was still being fought? Many of them would almost certainly have suffered terribly, possibly having sustained life-changing injuries or dying prematurely. Today we are more aware of the devastating condition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), but back in 1945 the thousands of people recovering from the Second World War (both civilian and service personnel) were expected just to carry on as normal. Even in much later conflicts like the Falklands and Gulf wars, PTSD remained undiagnosed in many service personnel.

Bradley Stoke now has a major MOD base (Abbey Wood) just around its corner. We have many service families taking up residence here who need no reminding of the serious consequence of modern conflict. The geographic landscape of our town also proves how close it was to the war effort. Filton airfield, once home to the Bristol Aeroplane Company (BAC) that was producing aircraft parts at a frantic rate during the Second World War, needed to be protected from air raids. The land around our very own Savages Wood (just opposite the Willow Brook Centre) spent some time as a decoy airfield for Filton. Complete with pretend landing lights, the site had to be close enough to the real thing to be convincing, but just far enough away to avoid causing any real damage to the precious factories and runway. Thank goodness we didn’t have the volume of houses that we have today! The men and women employed at BAC were classified as having a “reserved occupation” (they were forbidden to join up) unfortunately this status did not offer them protection from the falling bombs and sometimes they were at just as much risk as their friends and family who were on active military service. The workers also endured unfounded accusations of cowardice from those who did not understand the nature of their critical work. Of course, the later arrival of Rolls Royce brought our community significant employment and still maintains our links with the military through engine production today.

As one of the Leaders with 1st Bradley Stoke Scouts and an ex-Royal Naval Nurse I felt it was a great shame that a town the size of ours does not have somewhere where we can hold a proper Remembrance parade. I view Remembrance Sunday as a very special event and I see it as my duty to ensure the next generation not only learns about it, but actively carries on the tradition of Remembrance. Next year will see the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War (the reason why the first war memorial was ever built in London). While it saddens me as a parent that my

children have to learn about this important part of history, we must teach the next generation the mistakes we have made in the past in the very best hope that they are never repeated.

So, back in October 2012 Ben Walker (Chairman 1st Bradley Stoke Scout Executive Committee and also ex-Royal Navy <http://www.benwalker.org.uk/>) and I began discussing how we could plan our own Remembrance parade for the following year. Ben suggested that we try approaching the Willow Brook Centre as a possible source of funding to help build a memorial and we started looking around our community for a possible venue. We met with Scott Lahive (Manager of the Willow Brook Centre -<http://www.willowbrookcentre.co.uk/>) fully prepared to “sell” the importance of Remembrance. We needn’t have worried, right from the very start Scott was as enthusiastic as we were and not only agreed to fully fund the project, but also offered us the impressive granite pillars in the town square to use! We ended that first meeting already discussing the logistics of holding a parade!

Then I began to search for someone to help us design and build it. I was very keen to use a local company. After a few months, the best design was found. A highly skilled stone mason, Alwyn Leek from Kingswood-based Bristol and West Memorials joined the team. Anyone who came to our stand at the festival will have seen the amazing examples of his work and we know that we have made an excellent choice.

“We feel privileged to have been chosen to design and produce the granite plaques that will make up the Bradley Stoke War Memorial. It is our aim to create something both contemporary and traditional, which will reflect the dedication of all local people who have been involved in conflicts past and present. Having met local residents at the recent Bradley Stoke Festival, we were impressed by their enthusiasm and commitment to the idea of a war memorial for the Community and we look forward to fixing the finished plaques in place on the pillars at the Willow Brook Centre, in time for the Remembrance Parade in November.” Alwyn Leek - Bristol & West Memorials <http://www.bristolandwestmemorials.com/>

There will be an official dedication ceremony (date to be confirmed), but we would very much like to know if anyone has someone they would like us to consider including in the roll of honour on the memorial? As I have already alluded to, there are few restrictions on inclusion, so we are happy to consider those who fought and died, fought and survived (and have now passed away) or civilians involved in conflicts past or present (including those in a “reserved occupation”). Wherever possible we would like to verify their details with relevant agencies so please ensure correct spellings and include as much information as possible. For example, details such as: Full Name, Date of Birth, Date of Death, Service Number, Rank, Regiment, Force, Place of Death, any Battles/Conflicts known or any Medals would be helpful. Suitability of candidates will be decided by the Friends of Bradley Stoke War Memorial. You can submit a written response to: Management Suite, Willow Brook Centre, Savages Wood Road, Bradley Stoke, Bristol, BS32 8BS or via email to FriendsofBSWM@gmail.com

We also have one final request – if anyone knows of a marching band who would be available to attend our inaugural Remembrance parade on Sunday 10th November 2013 we would very much like to hear from you (please use the same contact details as above).

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<http://bradleystoke.ukscouts.org.uk/>