

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**THE QUEEN'S OWN ROYAL WEST KENT REGIMENT
MUSEUM TRUST COMMITTEE**

REPORT OF MUSEUMS DIRECTOR

Report prepared by Samantha Harris, Collections Manager

Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment Museum Trust

Annual Report 2015-16

1. **Learning.**

The Learning Team have run a several workshops based on WW1 and WW2 and related to artefacts and history of the QORWK regiment throughout 2016.

Activities include the Peacefields Project where 5 secondary schools in Kent signed up to have their playing fields twinned with the Peacefields in Ypres. We ran a workshop for a class from each of the 5 schools, that focused on the life of a soldier and using the re-enactment group 'They Shall grow not old...'. Part of the session include the students focusing on the exhibited collection to research information about the QORWK involvement in WW1. 150 students took part in the workshops. It also involved the Learning Officer visiting each school as part of their twinning ceremony, representing the museum.

There was also the WW1 themed workshops for 128 KS2 children (4 classes) and WW2 workshops for 131 KS2 children (5 classes)

In addition, the museum ran a series of WW1 themed Arts Awards days for schools where children investigated different elements of WW1, looked at different pieces of art linked to the war and found out about soldiers from the regiment. This award was written to go with the temporary exhibition – 'Coming Home' and will be adapted once the exhibition has finished to focus on permanent exhibits around the museum. 78 children from 3 classes took part and achieved their WW1 Discover Arts Award. 78 KS2 children (3 classes) took part and achieved their awards. These are being presented in January.

Café Culture sessions: The informal group is open to over 65s and a legacy of the innovative 'Museums on Prescription' programme ran between UCL and Canterbury Christchurch University, which demonstrated the health and wellbeing impact of museums on socially isolated older people. During this year the Collections and Learning Teams at Maidstone Museum held a WW1/QORWK regiment themed session with object handling and viewing of the temporary exhibition

(mentioned later). The themes for these sessions change from month to month, so it is likely that the regiment and collection will feature in future sessions also. They are being very well received by participants.

2. **Publicity.**

In the past 12 months the museum's website has been updated, including more information on the QORWK Museum, as well as more graphics and a clearer, user-friendly format:

<http://museum.maidstone.gov.uk/our-museums/queens-own/>

There has been much publicity surrounding the 'Coming Home' temporary exhibition. In addition, a number of social media stories relating to the regiment and collection have been written and used on facebook, such as this winter related item most recently:

Here are some images of the 97th Regiment (which became the 2nd Battalion RWK) in Halifax, Nova Scotia where they were stationed in 1879. One shows the officers and their wives in matching outfits in the snow with snowshoes.

Another is of Capt. Partridge and his wife, with snowshoes, probably in a studio. When the Regiment became the 2nd Battalion the then Lieut. Col. Commanded them. The third is of a very festive sleigh ride with a beautiful hand decorated boarder.



3. **Acquisitions.**

During the period Jan 1 – Dec 31st 2016, the following items have been accessioned into the collection. All were donated. There have been no items bought for the collection.



Object no.: MNERM 2016.1702.1

Object name: Map

Creator:

Title: Search map of the October 22nd 1951 ambush on the Ulu Caledonian Estate

Dating: 1951 to 1951

Location: Box 4031



Object no.: MNERM 2016.1702.2

Object name: Photograph

Creator:

Title: 1st Battalion "The Queen's Own" Colours in the Officers' Mess "Erskine Camp" Kuala Kubu Bahru in 1951

Dating: 1951 to 1951

Location: Box 4031



Object no.: MNERM 2016.1703.1

Object name: Medal

Creator:

Title: 1924 2nd XI Football tournament medal

Dating: to

Location: MS Medal Chest 5-14



Object no.: MNERM 2016.1703.2

Object name: Badge

Creator:

Title: Queen's Own Royal West Kent 2nd BN

Dating: to

Location: MS Medal Chest 5-14

Object no.: MNERM 2016.1704

Object name: Booklet



Creator: Control Commission for Germany
Title: British Services Tattoo, Berlin 11th to 16th August 1947
Dating: 1947 to 1947
Location: Box 4035



Object no.: MNERM 2016.1705
Object name: Plaque
Creator: Memorial Plaque Factory
Title: Deadman's Penny for Pte Bertram Arthur Jones
Dating: to
Location: Box 4202



Object no.: MNERM 2016.1705.1
Object name: scroll
Creator:
Title: Memorial scroll for Pte Bertram Arthur Jones
Dating: to
Location: Box 4202



Object no.: MNERM 2016.1705.2
Object name: Letter
Creator:
Title: Letter from King George in memory of Pte Bertram Arthur Jones
Dating: to
Location: Box 4202



Object no.: MNERM 2016.1705.3
Object name: Receipt
Creator:
Title: Receipt for Deadman's Penny of Pte Bertram Arthur Jones
Dating: to
Location: Box 4202



Object no.: MNERM 2016.1706
Object name: Photograph
Creator: UNKNOWN
Title: The Queen's Own Regiment at Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
Dating: 1850 to 1899
Location: Box 4172



Object no.: MNERM 2016.1707
Object name: Photograph
Creator: British Army
Title: The Officers and Sergeants of the 7 Bn The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment 1944
Dating: 1944-10-01 to 1944-10-31
Location: Box 4175

Maidstone Museums have recently implemented a more transparent process for acquisitions, with the creation of a Collections Development Panel, with representatives from across the museums departments meeting quarterly to assess and decide on items offered for donation, loan requests and potential disposals. Viewing items in this proactive manner will allow the museums to make informed rather than reactive decisions on items entering and leaving the collection, building a case for each item and identifying potential costs, duplication, and use etc. Going forward the QORWK collection will also be subject to this panel to ensure the collection evolves in a qualitative, sustainable and ethical manner.

4. Gallery & Exhibitions.

The temporary exhibition, 'Coming Home: Conflict & Care in 1916' has been developed since the last committee meeting, and was displayed in the Museum's two temporary exhibition rooms from Sat 24th Sep 2016 to Sat 7th Jan 2017 – entry was free. This links with the national WW1 commemorations, and particularly the centenary of the Battle of the Somme.

The First World War exhibition was based on two paintings in the museum's collections by artist Frank Hyde:

- 'Trones Wood' – QORWK Collection, framed by QORWK Committee funding, to feature in the display, showing the QORWK's battle on the Western Front
- 'Wounded Soldiers Arriving at Maidstone East' – Maidstone Museum Collection- Linking with the civilian experience on the Home Front

The 'Trones Wood' painting was accompanied by an array of items from the QORWK Collection, which were usually in store, along with sounds and images from the conflict. Uniform and military equipment used by the soldiers are shown, including a Lewis gun (which enabled the 7th Queen's Own to hold Trones Wood in the Battle of the Somme). The 'Arrival of a Convoy of Wounded Soldiers at Maidstone East' painting tells a different story, this time of the home front. Images and objects such as prosthetic limbs, medical uniforms and equipment, and even a wedding dress reveal the lives of the injured returning home and of the people who remained at home. Loaned items were included from the Science Museum, English Heritage, Tunbridge Wells Museum, and individuals linked to the reenacting group, to support the exhibition, which received funding from Southeastern.



Many positive and emotive comments were left in the comments book and pinned as postcards to the hospital bed. Comments include:

- "Outstanding exhibit, congratulations to all involved. Well Done."
- "Very interesting – old enough to have heard stories but parent, grandparents and younger people should see this."
- "Very, very moving"
- "Very evocative and moving experience, well presented on an unusual aspect of war"
- "Poignant and disturbing yet informative and beautifully curated. I hope lots of people see this exhibition and take away knowledge – and a deeper experience of the horrors of war. I like the exhibitions here as they always seem innovative and surprising and brilliantly linked to works in the collection."
- "One of the best exhibitions relating to VV1 that I have seen. Congratulations."



Also a digital timeline was developed detailing WW1 events on the Home Front, Western Front, and involving the QORWK Regiment during WW1. It will be viewable for the length of the WW1 commemorations here: <http://museum.maidstone.gov.uk/world-war-one-exhibition-timeline/>

In addition to the temporary exhibition, the permanent gallery has been updated. The 6 framed and glazed Regimental colours mentioned in last year's report, have now been rehung in the gallery (following their removal and storage a number of years ago).



5. Enquiries.

The manner in which Regimental Enquiries are managed has been made more consistent, now processing Family History research enquiries only after payment has been received. Previously large amounts of work was undertaken and forwarded to enquirers, before requesting payment, but the money was rarely received. This new method enables time to be spent on those enquiries where the customer has paid for them to be progressed. The charge remains at £15 per enquiry, but non-family history enquiries (such as those relating to artefacts) are free.

Enquiry numbers remain high due to the WW1 Centenary capturing the imagination of the nation and encouraging them to undertake family history research. Enquiries for 2016 are estimated to number around

250 by telephone, face to face and post, but mostly via email and a 'contact form' which has been set up on the museum's newly updated website. Each enquiry takes at least 30minutes. In response to the high number of enquiries we continue to set expectations informing of a 1 month turn around, and have also updated the advice on the QORWK website for people wishing to research WW1 regimental records.

The regimental museum continues to be very well served by volunteer staff and particular mention should be made of Mr. Steve Finnis (ex RWK) who is doing sterling work with museum collections artefacts.

6. Activities.

A number of adult and family events have also been run relating to the Regiment and WW1. In October 2016, a talk called 'If the Kaiser should come' which was given by Victor Smith, attended by 19 people.

In November 2016, the museum ran an event called 'World War 1 – A Soldier's Life' – with a craft activity for children making Sopwith Camel biplanes and a trail around QORWK. Alongside this were three interactive talks throughout the day from 'They Shall not grow old' re-enactment group about a soldiers life in WW1. Over 100 people attended these sessions.

7. Documentation.

Volunteer, Steve Finnis, has completed the audit of the 3D items in the regimental collection and has now progressed to the photographs. The information is in the process of being updated digitally by staff on the existing access database and will be uploaded to Adlib (the new Collections Management System), longer term as part of the Human History Collection digital audit by March 2018. This process will enable research and additional information to be added to increase our understanding of the collection, as well as making the items more usable and accessible going forward.

8. Conservation/Collections Care.

The Frank Hyde painting, Trones Wood (Accession number MNERM 818), has been reframed by the Anthony Saward Gallery at the cost of £447.10 + VAT, plus £25 van hire for transportation – all invoiced to QORWK Committee following agreement at the previous committee meeting. The results are very pleasing, with a choice of sympathetic frame adding to, rather than detracting from, the artwork and enabling it to be one of the highlights of the 'Coming Home' Exhibition.



9. **Staffing.**

Since May 2016, Victoria Barlow has been in post as full-time Museums Director.