

Marlow Trenches Heritage Day

12 July 2015

The First World War training trenches at Pullingshill Wood, Marlow Common, are one of the most visible and poignant reminders of the impact of the conflict on the people of Marlow and the surrounding area.

They were dug by soldiers from the Grenadier Guards who were stationed in Marlow in the summer of 1915. To commemorate the 100th anniversary of their construction, the Marlow Remembers World War One Association organised a heritage event, in partnership with the Woodland Trust on 12 July 2015. In planning the event, we had three broad objectives in mind:

When we first planned the event, we wanted it to achieve three primary objectives:

- To provide a fitting tribute to the soldiers who dug and trained in the trenches before going to the Western Front, many of whom did not return to England
- To provide an opportunity for local people to find out more about the history of the trenches and their place in the heritage of Marlow and the surrounding area
- To enable people to have fun and enjoy themselves.

The event was attended by the Lord-Lieutenant for Buckinghamshire (Sir Henry Aubrey-Fletcher) and various representatives of local councils. It was also supported by local cadet groups and we were delighted, in particular, to welcome a detachment of the current Grenadier Guards.

The day commenced with a moving open-air church service conducted by John Bustin. After the service, members of Archaeology in Marlow conducted regular tours of the trenches which proved extremely popular. There were also a number of displays to bring to life the experience of soldiers in the trenches as well as an impressive collection of photos of troops in Marlow during the War that had been prepared by Michael Eagleton. For the benefit of the many younger people who attended there was also the re-enactment of a drill routine from the First World War conducted by an appropriately fearsome regimental sergeant!

It is estimated that approximately 250 people attended the event during the course of the day. Many of course were local residents of all ages – some who had played in the trenches in their youth and knew a lot already about the background; some more recent residents who were visiting them for the first time. Attendees also included people who had travelled from the Midlands and who had family connections with the trenches, as well as someone from Germany who was in the area on a business trip.

While heavy rain eventually curtailed activity later in the afternoon, this was a very successful heritage event that simultaneously entertained, informed and acted as a fitting tribute to the men who dug the trenches 100 years ago.



Many training camps with trench systems were established across the country in 1914 and 1915 to teach new army recruits the skills needed for the front lines in France and Belgium. The trenches in Marlow were constructed in June 1915 by soldiers from the Grenadier Guards (4th Battalion). The regimental diary for 18 June 1915 records these events:

“During the week the men have been kept busily employed with their training. The range at Quarry Woods has been used for firing parties nearly every morning and trench digging and field exercises have been carried out in the woods to the north of the town.”

The trenches were used for field exercises from June until at least November 1915 by a number of different regiments who were billeted at the nearby Bovingdon Green Camp. Although the camp was closed in November 1915 after a storm, troops continued to be billeted in and around Marlow until at least March 1916.

Throughout the summer of 1915, the local South Bucks Free Press newspaper carried reports of sports and social activities involving the billeted troops, including football matches and concerts. The presence of the troops made a lasting impact upon many local residents who could still recall them many years later:

“There was a lot of training of soldiers at Marlow Common, which is still called ‘The Trenches’ and I can remember them marching through the town to the station...I can remember being at Bisham and there used to be a pear tree in Temple Lane and we boys had picked a lot these pears and we were throwing them to the soldiers as they marched by” (Percival Plumridge, 1988).

“We had the troops all round here because of the trenches. They were practising, rehearsing, in the trenches...We used to love to get down in the trenches and play but mother had two of the soldiers billeted on here and they had lice...She went to the farm and said that she couldn’t have them unless they cleaned themselves up” (Lily Cox, 1988).

The trenches can be found off the main road in Marlow Common and are open to the public – please do visit!



