

1. Good evening everyone

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Jane Mills and I am Chairman of the Llangwm Local History Society. A very warm welcome to you all this evening for the official opening of our exhibition LLANGWM – A VILLAGE AT WAR which commemorates the centenary of the ending of the First World War.

2. I would particularly like to welcome back to Llangwm for her second visit this year Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Dyfed, Miss Sara Edwards. We are thrilled that she is able to come along to open our exhibition as we appreciate that there are a lot of events happening around this time to commemorate the ending of the First World War. So we are delighted that she has found time to come to our event.

3. I would also like to welcome the Chairman of Pembrokeshire County Council, Councillor Aden Brinn and his consort, Mrs Rose Blackburn. Amongst other roles, Councillor Brinn is an Honorary Life member of the Welsh Guards and has long been serving our Pembrokeshire communities in many ways, so we are delighted that he is here for this exhibition. I would also like to welcome Dr Simon Hancock, Vice Chairman of Pembrokeshire County Council and a very good friend to the Llangwm Local History Society, as well as our own councillor, Michael John. We also have representatives of our Community Council, local organisations, other local history societies and numerous people who have supported the History Society in many ways to mount this exhibition. So welcome to you all.

4. Our aim in mounting this exhibition is to show the part that the small rural community of Llangwm played in the greatest conflict that had ever been seen. In the farthest part of west Wales, the community was a long way from the conflict that was set off by the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria in Serbia in 1914. And yet, so many men from Llangwm joined up to fight for King and country, leaving their women to run the farms, keep the fishing going and support their men at the front. In total, 66 men from the community enlisted which would have had a tremendous impact on life in Llangwm. Of these 66, 17 men with Llangwm connections died in that conflict and we have been commemorating their sacrifice on the anniversary of their deaths throughout this year. A further 49 men enlisted and survived the conflict.

5. The exhibition shows the stories of real people – some tragic, some comic and some, fairly mundane - but set in the national and international context. But

they show the resilience and courage of a community taken out of its comfort zone to take part in a conflict that they probably didn't understand.

6. Two small examples:
7. There is a report in The Guardian in 1918 about a butter snatching incident in Haverfordwest which illustrates the Llangwm spirit exactly. And I quote "A local farmer donated a quantity of butter for sale at the Kings Arms on Saturday. Many people were there in the hope of getting a supply, but the Llangwm-Hook Amazon contingent of market women are said to have snatched up the whole lot in a twinkling. To get butter nowadays it would be advantageous to practice the pugilistic art" said the reporter.
8. A further illustration was quoted to us by Beryl Davies. Philip Thomas Bevans served in the first battle of The Somme and reached his 21st birthday on 16th July 1916. His resourceful mother sawed off the corner of a Tate & Lyle sugar box, emptied out the sugar and filled it with gooseberries from her garden. Philip wrote to his sister saying that he and his friends had thoroughly enjoyed the contents in the trenches and that he would write to his mother later. She received a telegram on the afternoon of the 16th to say that Philip was missing, presumed dead.
9. Out of the research that the History Society conducted came an extraordinary production of an opera. This used Llangwm's actual experiences to show an amazing story of love and loss, as well as giving a history lesson in how this dreadful war came about. 5 performances were put on in 2014 and a concert version performed at the international music festival in St Davids cathedral in 2016 to mark the centenary of the Battle of the Somme. We were then amazed and delighted to win a national award for our whole First World War project from the Remember WW1 organisation. Dame Julia Cleverly called it "an audacious project" and Peter Grant reckoned that the music would be remembered along with that of Delius and Benjamin Britten.
10. At this point, I must make a plug for our final performance of the opera which will take place on Saturday 10th November at The Follies Theatre, Folly Farm. It will be a different production to either the 2014 performances or the 2016 cathedral performance in that we have film of the scenes of the story taken on location in Llangwm. It will be a truly moving performance to mark the end of the First World War.
Tickets are still available!

We also have copies of the DVD of the original opera available to buy as well as recent publications by both the Hook & Llangwm Local History Societies.

Those are my plugs over.

11. And now, a few thank yous – there are too many people to mention individually as so many have taken part to make this First World War project so memorable, but I must thank the History Society Committee who have worked tirelessly to make the project happen. Also Sam Howley, Peter George and Carol Mackintosh for making the opera such a success. And Mark Thomas from Scolton Manor who produced these wonderful exhibition boards that you will have an opportunity of viewing shortly.
12. One final comment I would like to make is that there is one museum in Belgium amongst the many which show the impact of First World War, but also shows the flags of countries which have been involved in conflicts since the First World War. One fact stands out – since the armistice at 11.00 am on the 11th November 1918 there have only been 9 months when there has not been conflict somewhere in our world.

We should learn the lessons that the First World War can teach us.

13. And now I would like to ask Miss Sara Edwards, Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Dyfed, to open our exhibition.