

The Shapwick War Memorial Restoration Project

By Katherine Seymour, Branch Memorials Officer and Regional Volunteer, War Memorials Trust

At the February 2011 meeting of the Dorset and South Wiltshire Branch of the Western Front Association an eighty-strong audience heard details of the support given by the Branch and by War Memorials Trust to the project to restore the First World War memorial in the village of Shapwick in Dorset.



Since 1997, War Memorials Trust has been providing specialist advice as well as grants to ensure the protection and conservation of war memorial heritage throughout the UK. Memorials which have benefited locally from grants, for work including cleaning, re-lettering and repairs, include East Stoke and Portland in Dorset and Broad Chalke and West Dean in Wiltshire. A full list may be found in the Grants' Showcase on the Trust's website: <http://www.warmemorials.org>

The Dorset and South Wilts Branch of the WFA has recently developed its own memorials policy in response to the growing number of requests for help with restoration projects. Details of previous Branch memorial projects may be viewed at <http://www.wfa-dorsetswilts.org.uk/war-memorials/index.htm> Keen to promote best practice, one condition for the awarding of grants from the Branch is that the project, where appropriate, meets War Memorials Trust conservation guidelines. Grant applicants are also made aware of the work of WMT and information, including a file showing details of local projects supported by the Trust and WMT advice helpsheets, is always available at Branch meetings and events.

Shapwick - "Sheep farm" - between Wimborne Minster and Blandford, has had a market cross at its heart since the medieval period. In 1920 the war memorial, which has as its base the octagonal steps of this village cross, was unveiled. Forty-three names are engraved on the memorial. These include the seven names, along with their regiments: the Black Watch, the RFA and the Dorset Regiment, of those men from the village who did not return from World War One.



Unfortunately, when repairs were last needed, in 1997, the joints on the base of the memorial were re-pointed using cement mortar. Cement has been found to be too inflexible and impermeable as a mortar for historic stone, which needs to breathe and to move. When "suffocated" by cement mortar, dampness can build up inside an historic structure such as Shapwick memorial, leading to decay. The rigidity of cement also prevents natural movement within the structure and this can cause cracks to appear.

By Spring 2010 it had become clear that the use of cement mortar had caused serious problems for the base of Shapwick's memorial. Joints between the stones were being exposed by flaking cement. If the rainwater which was penetrating the structure froze the stone would be severely damaged. It was feared that without urgent remedial action the memorial would not be able to withstand another hard winter.

Mrs Shirley Kerley is Chairman of the Pamphill and Shapwick Parishes. Born and bred in Shapwick, the memorial is "only a stone's throw" from her house. Her children and grandchildren have been amongst the many youngsters who have played on and around the village cross. Determined that the memorial would not fall into disrepair, Shirley has tirelessly led the restoration campaign. Fund-raising began in June 2010 with a tombola and table-top sale during the village Open Gardens week-end, followed by events including a concert in the church and what Shirley told Branch members was her "most disheartening moment" of the whole project, a pitch at a car boot sale which netted just £10! Fortunately, however, funds continued to mount up. Donations were received from organisations including the National Trust, which owns the nearby Kingston Lacy estate. Even the very youngest members of the village community were involved in the project, with the children from Shapwick Nursery holding a sponsored "Singalong" at the memorial itself.

Whilst the fund-raising continued, specialist advice was being sought on the best way to restore Shapwick memorial. War Memorials Trust advises that mortar used for pointing should always be softer than the surrounding masonry. Moisture will travel through the weakest part of a structure and thus a softer mortar will encourage the necessary transfer of moisture from the inside of historic stone to the surrounding atmosphere. The most suitable material for mortar in historic buildings and monuments, used routinely until the late nineteenth century, is lime mortar. Available in varying strengths, even at its strongest, where it is used for hard stones such as granite, lime mortar remains permeable and flexible. Inevitably, because of the role it plays in absorbing moisture, lime mortar crumbles and has to be renewed from time to time. The plan by the village to restore Shapwick memorial includes provision for regular inspection and an on-going maintenance fund. Replacement of

the mortar is not only cheaper but also preferable to replacing the original stone of a monument,

As part of the WMT grant application process, before work began to carefully rake the cement mortar out of the joints by hand, extensive trials were undertaken in order to establish the exact mix, colour, texture and finish of mortar which would be appropriate for the friable and weathered stone which makes up the base of Shapwick memorial, which is thought to date from the fifteenth century. Although the mixture finally chosen will remain a darker colour, due to the specific aggregates in this mortar, it will weather to become harmonious with the colour of the stone. Describing the challenges of this project, WMT Conservation Officer Amy Davidson explained that the age of the base of this cross meant that the project was particularly interesting for WMT as the majority of memorials seen by the Trust are structures which date from the early twentieth century.



I read about the £637 grant awarded to Shapwick by WMT in my regular Regional Volunteer newsletter. In view of the extent of the work needed, the obvious commitment of Shirley Kerley and the village to the project and the approval of WMT for the work undertaken, a decision was made by the committee of the Dorset and South Wilts Branch of the WFA to make the maximum Branch grant award of £500 to the Shapwick War Memorial restoration fund.

After viewing a powerpoint presentation showing images of the history of the memorial, as well as before and after photos of the restoration work, some of which were kindly provided by Mrs Kerley's 13-year old grand-daughter, Amber, Branch members were thanked, on behalf of Shapwick village, by Shirley, who was presented with a cheque by Branch Chairman, Martin Willoughby.



(Photographs courtesy of: Shirley Kerley, Minster Memorials, & Dorset & South Wiltshire Branch WFA)