



**Learn, Laugh,  
Live**

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PIER VIEWS

SPECIAL EDITION

THEIR FINEST HOUR...Comes to Bognor Regis U3a!!

WW11 'Their Finest Hour' Project Team - Valerie Henke, Jane Weston, Iain Palôt Trevor Pitt and Bill Page

Their Finest Hour (TFH) is a Lottery funded campaign run by Oxford University to digitally preserve the stories, memories and objects from the Second World War. The University had approached various organisations and groups, seeking volunteers to organise Digital Collection Days to gather this information.

In June, a notice in the Bognor Regis weekly bulletin sparked the interest of two of us to get involved with the project. Undaunted by a 3 hour online training session, we persuaded a third member to join us and the Planning Committee was born.



## Setting up



**After agreeing a date (11th November) and a venue (West Meads Community Centre) for the event one of us approached Oxford University for funding. Eventually we were awarded a grant of £250 to be used to hire the venue, for stationery and refreshments for the event. This money would be reimbursed.**

**Having booked the venue we next moved on to recruiting volunteers. Oxford had provided a basic framework of how the events worked with three teams (Welcoming, Interviewing and Digitising) ensuring the smooth flow of the day. It was important that volunteers had relevant skills**

**and/or experience for the roles required. Using the knowledge of Bognor U3a members we managed to recruit 30 suitable volunteers to cover all the roles required. Better to have too many than too few so that we could cover any unforeseen absences.**

**Our next recruit to the Planning Committee provided the technical expertise to run the Digitisation Team. So with an experienced administrator, a person with good all round experience and excellent contacts, an experienced interviewer, and a technical person we felt we had all the skills needed to make a successful event.**

**Next came publicity. Articles and advertisements were placed in a number of local magazines and newsletters. Interest groups such as ex-servicemen's clubs were contacted. We even contacted a local radio station. With no way of knowing how many would attend the event doubts crept in. What if too many came? Could we cope? What if no one turned up? The volunteers could interview each other. Most of them had their own family stories which they were eager to record.**

**All through the summer, committee meetings continued. In September two members attended two separate local events, looking for hints and tips. One in Worthing had 40 attendees and the Portsmouth Historic Dockyard one 19.**

**It seemed publicity was paramount. We knew lots of people with interesting WW2 stories. We just needed to encourage them to come.**

**How do you attract people of a 'certain age' to attend an event? You offer them free refreshments and a warm, friendly place to chat. So another committee member was recruited to oversee the catering on the day.**

**Two of the committee members set up displays of WW2 maps and family history. One volunteer organised a bucket collection and a local patchwork group donated a selection of hand-made quilts. The sale of these and the collection raised £149.02 for the British Legion.**

**Further committee meetings followed to 'fine tune' the event plans. In October a 'dry run' proved a challenge, but taught us a lot.**

**Then on 11th November the sun shone and it was a beautiful day. At 10.30 a.m. all expected volunteers arrived and set to putting up displays, arranging tables and chairs and organising refreshments. At 11 o'clock we all gathered in the main hall to honour the two minutes silence before beginning the event.**

**By 11.15 a.m. people were already queuing to be let in. This set the tone for the rest of the event. A constant flow**

of people, all eager to have their families' stories and memorabilia recorded forever. It was such a great day, but a very busy one. There were soon 5 teams of interviewers, interviewing constantly and still there were lots of people waiting to be seen. At 3.30 pm it was agreed that we should stop interviewing, take the details of those we had not been able to see and arrange to see them at a later date.

By the end of the event we had interviewed and digitised the stories and memorabilia of around 60 people. We had registered and taken the details of a further 17.

Since the event we have managed to interview some of those we could not get to on the day. There are still a few interviews left to do and we will be in touch with those people soon.

Apart from the interviews to be done we have the mammoth task of uploading all of the data we have scanned, photographed and digitised so far. All of this information needs to be sent to Oxford University by 5th April 2024 to enable it to be added to the 'Their Finest Hour' database.

Despite the hard work our Digital Collection Day was such a rewarding experience. It touched on all human emotions. The stories were varied: A lady told us how as a little girl she had been taught to knit by an airman



billeted in her Tangmere home. Descendants of 2 escapees of the 'Great Escape' told us stories of the bravery of their relatives. The niece of a Land Army girl told how her aunt had become involved in Intelligence work. Another lady provided a diary of the Army School of Cookery course her uncle took, complete with recipes for 100 men. Their Finest Hour project is coming to an end now but all the data collected will appear on the website from June 2024 <https://theirfinesthour.englishox.ac.uk/>

Please take the time to read these fascinating stories and maybe look up the one we recorded on behalf of your relatives. At the moment we at Bognor Regis U3a Their Finest Hour Planning Team are still working hard to record our stories. We would like to thank all of those who contributed for their help in making our event such a success. To those we have yet to record we will be in touch.

## **Behind the Welcome Desk at Bognor Regis U3a TFH Event 11th November 2023**





**‘This is where we lived and that’s where the bombs fell!!’**

## *Luftwaffe Map*

