



Centenary 1915 - 2015 of the formation of the BWIR

Blue Plaque Commemoration at Alfriston Road Cemetery in Seaford Town

Seaford is an old coastal town situated at the foot of the South Downs in East Sussex. In the autumn of 1915 soldiers from Trinidad and Tobago, St. Vincent, Grenada, Guyana, and Barbados were garrisoned at “North Camp” in the town. In October of that year the British West Indian Regiment (BWIR) was created in the town by the War Office and ratified by King George 5th. The troops from these four countries became the 1st Battalion of the BWIR.



During their time in the town they experienced a modicum of good will as well as a challenge to their fighting for Britain. Coming from a Caribbean climate to wintry Seaford was a massive shock to most of the soldiers. Many succumbed to the mumps epidemic of that year as well as pneumonia which is said came from harsh training at the camp; between October 1915 and January 1916 nineteen soldiers



died. They were all young men, and their Commonwealth War Graves can be seen at Alfriston Road Cemetery.



In this centenary year, Nubian Jak Community Trust formed a partnership with Seaford Museum and Heritage Society, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Lewes Council, Seaford Town Council, East Sussex Council, and Sussex Community Rail Partnership to install Blue Plaques at the Alfriston Road Cemetery, and Seaford Railway Station. These historic markers of “Black Presence” in Seaford are now available for all to see and remember the contribution and experiences of people of African and Caribbean descent during WW1.



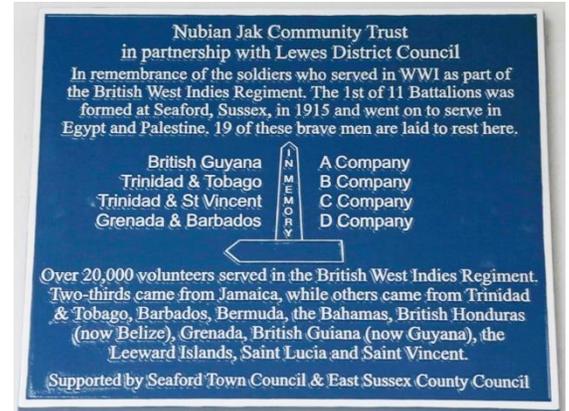
The unveiling ceremony was opened by Professor Gus John who poured libation in the traditions of West Africa, and most present drank from the libation cup to honour the men laid to rest there.

The Chair of Lewes District Council, Councillor Ruth O’Keeffe, gave a beautiful and respectful presentation that told these soldiers story. Tribute speeches followed from Councillor David Argent, Mayor of Seaford Town Council; Glenn Hearnden, Education Manager at CWGC; Beulah Coombes, Relative of a Soldier of BWIR; Miles Jenner, Chief Executive Harvey’s Brewery - a sponsor of the event.



Nairobi Thompson read her poem

“Mustard Gas & Herbert Morris”



On 27 November Nubian Jak Community Trust together with WW2 veteran Allan Wilmott, and author Arthur Torrington, made a presentation to Year 6 students at Richard Atkins School in Brixton. We told the stories and experiences of WW2 and of the BWIR, their formation in Seaford, and that 19 were



buried in the cemetery. These pupils had never heard of war graves or that any graves were specifically looked after by an organisation that did this all over the world. We explained that there were many cemeteries that had war graves and that they could look them up. We added that sometimes there might be only one grave in the entire cemetery. They became



somewhat intrigued by this started to create reasons as to why a soldier would be by himself, and everyone see him. We reminded them of the importance and value of his grave being looked after. When asked whether they would be interested to look after a grave, only a few said yes, others didn't want to go there at night, and others wanted to know what exactly they would have to do.

Nubian Jak Community Trust – African & Caribbean War Memorial Initiatives – BWIR Blue Plaque Commemoration Seaford