

Remembering *Forgotten* Heroes

Exploring the Indian Army contribution to the First and Second World Wars, through the personal memories and photographs of ex-servicemen living in Slough.



Living memories

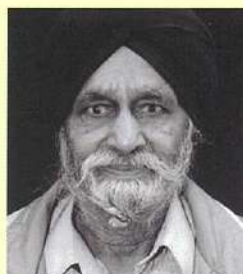
The Undivided Indian Ex-serviceman's Association of Slough has been working with English Heritage Outreach Department over the past year. We have aimed to seek out together the memorials in the South East of England which commemorate the contribution of the Indian Army, to reflect on the significance of these memorials and to record and share in their own words the experiences of the veterans and their relatives. We hope this exhibition will help raise awareness amongst people of all ages and backgrounds, of the remarkable role played by the Indian Armed Forces in both world wars.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the contributions of many people. First and foremost English Heritage would like to thank the members of the Undivided Indian Ex-serviceman's Association of Slough for their generous participation, fascinating memories and good company. It has been a privilege to work with you all.

English Heritage would also like to thank Padmini Broomfield (Oral Historian, Southampton City Council) for carrying out the interviews and translation; Tina Cockett (Woking Galleries) for co-ordinating the Woking site visits; all the young people and staff of Aik Saath, for their enthusiastic participation and Dominique Oliver (Resource Productions) for co-leading Aik Saath's workshops; Sue Perks (Perks Willis Design) for the design of this booklet; James Simpson for his portrait photography and all the venues who are kindly hosting this exhibition. Images accompanied by a negative number are courtesy of the Imperial War Museum, London.

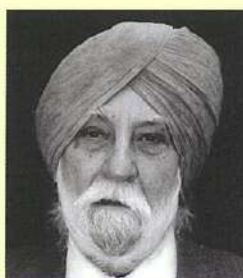
Mr Jagat Singh



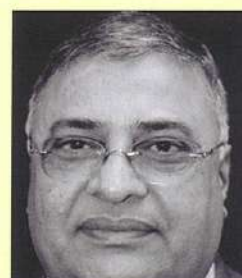
Mr Anwar Khan



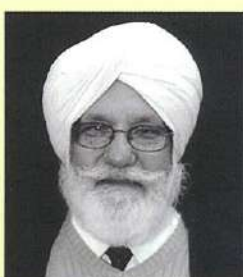
Mr Amar Singh



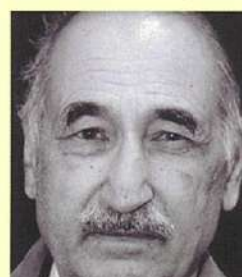
Mr Harjinder Ghatora



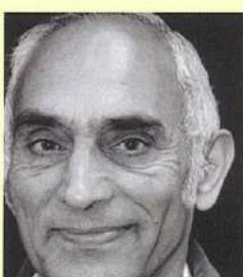
Mr Dyal Singh
Nijjar



Mr Sohan Lal
Ahluwalia



Mr KK Sharma



Mrs Sumitra Sharma



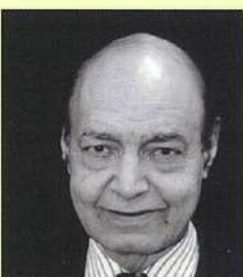
Mr Charan Singh



Mr Gurcharan Singh
Klair



Mr Jaimal Johal



Mrs Sushil Johal



Mrs Pritam Singh



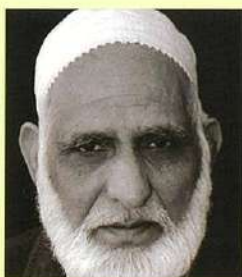
Mr Pritam Singh



Mr Baldev Sharma



Mr Mohammed Anwar



Remembering Forgotten Heroes

1



In 1985, Second World War veteran Lieutenant Colonel Assa Singh, founded the Undivided Indian Ex-serviceman's Association based in Slough, Berkshire. Through the Association Indian Army veterans and their relatives gather together at ceremonies and memorials, to acknowledge the enormous contribution of the Indian Army to both world wars.

The Scale of the Sacrifice

By the end of the First World War in 1918, India had sent over one million volunteer troops to fight side by side with the British. The Indian Army included soldiers from present day Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. They saw action in France and Belgium; in Gallipoli and Salonica; in East Africa; in Mesopotamia, Egypt and Persia. Over 47,000 were killed and 65,000 were wounded.

During the Second World War over 2.5 million men and women from the Indian sub-continent, formed the largest volunteer force ever seen in history. They served in

Europe, Africa, India, Burma, Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore and in the Middle East. Thousands of Indian women contributed to the war effort in many ways including as WACS (Women's Auxiliary Corps, Indian), WRINS (Women's Indian Naval Service), nurses and manual workers. Again casualties were high. Over 24,000 killed and 65,000 wounded. As in World War One, hundreds of military awards were won. These included 30 Victoria Crosses, the highest award for bravery.

2



3



4



5



1. Lieutenant Colonel Assa Singh.

2. Indian stretcher bearers bringing in a wounded officer, near Ginchy, France, September 1916. Neg. no Q1216

3. Indian cyclists at the cross roads on the Fricourt-Mametz Road, France, July 1916. Neg. no Q3983

4. Women of the W.A.C (India) took over many technical jobs during the Second World War. Here they are checking the breech of a 5.5 medium gun. Neg. no IND4781

5. Thousands of Commonwealth soldiers from across the world joined the Allied forces in the world wars, including the Indian troops. Here members of the West African Expeditionary Force and Indian soldiers meet at a training centre in 1944. Neg. no IND4044

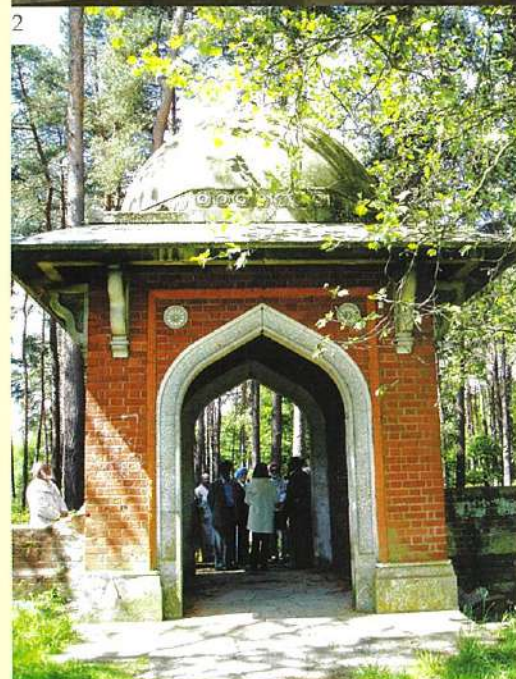
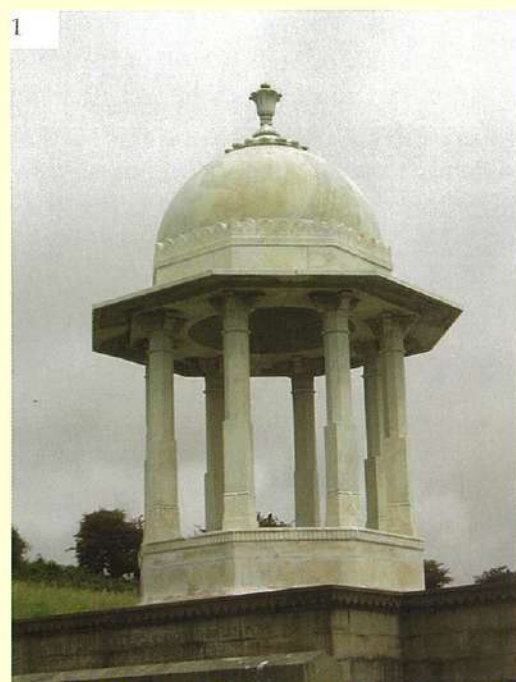
Map showing locations of Indian Army action in World War One



Map showing locations of Indian Army action in World War Two

"We have to remember these things – remembrance for the others"

Mr Dyal Singh Nijjar



Within the first month of the First World War Indians were in active service in France. Nearly 140,000 were on the Western Front, taking part in the major battles including the First and Second Battles of Ypres. Of the 16,400 injured, the majority were transported to the South Coast of England for hospitalisation and convalescence.

Famously, the Royal Pavilion in Brighton was converted into a special hospital for Indian soldiers. However it was just one of several such hospitals set up elsewhere in Brighton, Bournemouth and the New Forest.

Honouring the ultimate sacrifice

Whilst some did not survive the journey to England, other soldiers sadly died whilst in hospital here. By 1921 three unique, yet rarely visited memorials, had been erected in the South East, in remembrance of these men and all Indians who gave their lives.

1. The Chattri, Brighton

The Hindu and Sikh soldiers that died whilst in hospital at Brighton, were cremated at a peaceful site on the Sussex Downs above the town. The Chattri was unveiled there by HRH Prince of Wales in 1921, in remembrance of all Indian soldiers who died.

2. The Muslim Burial Ground, Woking

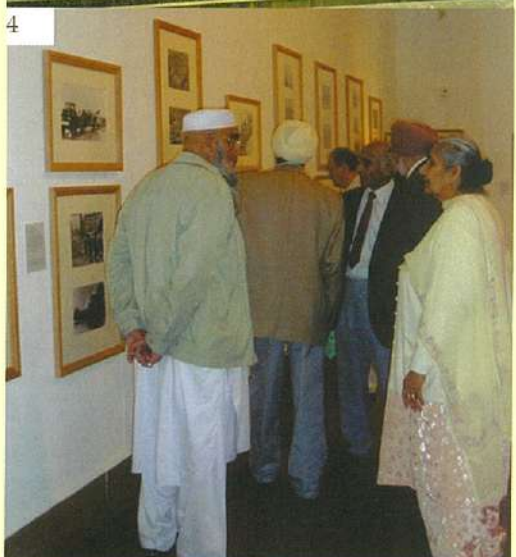
Muslim soldiers that died in Brighton were buried in a purpose-built burial ground near to the Shah Jehan Mosque in Woking, Surrey. In 1968 the bodies were removed to the military section of Brookwood Cemetery, but the burial ground still remains.

3. The Barton-on-Sea Memorial

At Barton-on-Sea, a small sea-side town in the New Forest, a converted hotel was used as a hospital for convalescing Indian troops. The staff of the hospital paid for the erection of an obelisk memorial in the town which commemorates their patients.

"The schools and history should reflect this – that we came from India and fought in two world wars..."

Mr Harjinder Ghatora



English Heritage Outreach Department arranged for the Indian Ex-servicemen involved in the project to make several visits over the spring and summer 2004, to memorials to Indian soldiers in the South East of England.

1. Muslim Burial Ground, Woking

"...There are no graves there now and it is in ruins... I was expecting to find some evidence of a list of names of those who were wounded in France, but there was no mention of names... (Memorials) need to be looked after for the next generation to know about... If they just disappear then the new generation will not know about the contribution Commonwealth countries made to Britain." MR JAIMAL JOHAL

2. Commonwealth Graves section, Brookwood Cemetery, Woking

"I learned a lot from visiting the cemetery... We all owe our gratitude to the former heroes... People came from all over the world and fought together for a common cause and all generations should show respect and gratitude." MR KK SHARMA

3. The Chattri Memorial, Brighton

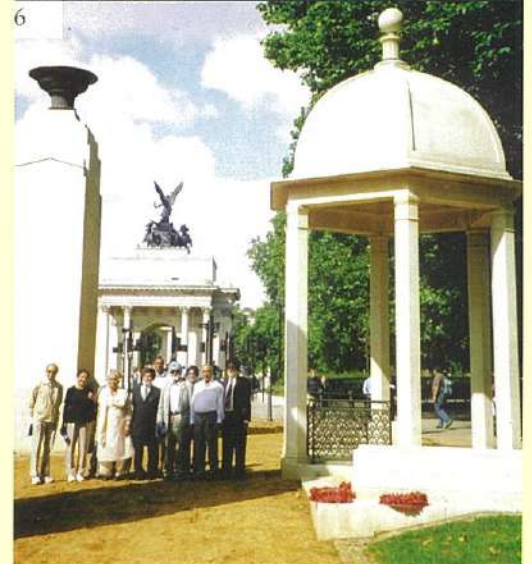
"We have been attending (the Chattri memorial service) for a very long time, since 1987. We get the time to meet each other, to pay tribute to the soldiers who fought for us."

MR PRITAM SINGH

"The architecture is unique. The Chattri means an umbrella, which means those who were cremated at this spot are protected at this site and it symbolises that no harm can be done to them..." MR JAIMAL JOHAL

4. Robert Capa Photographic Exhibition, Southampton Art Gallery

"I really enjoyed looking at the photos – how they and other objects had been preserved... It made me remember the



Second World War. It gave me pleasure to see these things being remembered (but) I feel sad thinking about the sacrifices the men made at the time..." MR ANWAR KHAN

5. Barton-on-Sea Memorial, New Forest

"We've been here for 42 years in England and we didn't know about (this memorial). It has given us real pleasure. All this information about our ancestors..." MR ANWAR KHAN

6. The Memorial Gates, London

"Now with your efforts to show us these things we have learned a lot. Like, for example that information you sent about (my uncle) Shahamad Khan. ...we had only heard about him but didn't know too many details about him." MR ANWAR KHAN

"The Memorial Gates are unique. Many of us attended the opening ceremony (in 2002) but on this visit we had the time to see the names of the people who got the Victoria Cross, inscribed on the Chattri... It had been my father's wish to see that memorial built and he lived to see it."

MR JAIMAL JOHAL

From rural Punjab to the jungles of Burma

Mr Charan Singh and Mr Pritam Singh both joined the Indian Army before the age of 18 and went on to serve for over 20 years. During World War Two they saw active service in the Far East, taking part in the Burma Campaign so crucial in defeating the Japanese.

Mr Pritam Singh was born in 1926 in the Punjabi village of Jandi. At 16 he secretly left his family farm to join the army. He knew his parents would worry and would not have let him join up.

"At the end of 1942 I joined the Indian Army as a Wireless Operator... After 2 years (in Burma) we were required to go to Singapore... Along with our regiment we three signallers were sent out on a sea mission to capture Japanese soldiers... Our boat got left behind, the engine failed, and the boat began to take in water... It became dark, and due

to the strong current we began to be carried downstream towards a waterfall. The three of us became dispirited and all we could do was remember our families and pray... I made the signal with the inspection lamp, in the meantime HQ received our signal and sent out help. We were finally rescued and felt so grateful."

Mr Charan Singh also came from the Punjab from Chak Maidas village. His family had fields to grow sugarcane, wheat, chickpeas and maize and owned cattle. Born in 1921, he joined the army at 17.

"We came from Manipur (in India) – near where Burma starts – near there we were at a place called Tiddim on the border of Burma and India... Three brigades of the 23rd Division went into that area. Then when we had dug in defence positions... our commanders realised that the Japanese had cut us off. They had come from Kohima and cut us off from behind... We had a lot of losses. Two of our officers died... Fighting in the jungles and mountains is very difficult... it was very hot and there was a lot of rain... War is not an easy thing."



1. Mr Pritam Singh in uniform, 1942.

2. Mr Pritam Singh with his wife and daughter.

3. Mr Charan Singh being inspected c. 1940.

4. The Queen visits Slough during the Golden Jubilee celebrations, 2002. Mr Pritam Singh stands 4th from the left.

5. Mr Pritam Singh meets the Queen at the Hounslow Gurdwara opening ceremony, 2004.

Subedar Charan Singh and Havaldar Pritam Singh (left to right)

Family connections

Mr Mohammed Anwar and Mr Anwar Khan were both born in the late 1920s, in the Punjabi district of Rawalpindi. They were inspired to join the army by the military service of their older relatives, for whom they continue to have the deepest respect.

Anwar Khan

"Shahamad Khan, who was an uncle of mine, he was the one who was awarded the Victoria Cross in the First World War... He was a very good man. He has children and grandchildren – when we go back to Pakistan they ask us to find out about him. They say his name must be in the history here... When I go back there in a couple of months I'll show them the information I found out about him by coming here."

"...I too joined the army in 1942... During the Second World War I was serving in India... First there were armoured cars and then we had tanks. I worked on the tanks in Lucknow... When I joined the

army my parents were not very happy about it... My father said if there is a war and my son dies what use is it to me? ... But as things turned out neither my brother nor I went to war."

Mohammed Anwar

"(I was born in) Rawalpindi – village Gujar Khan in 1927. (My father) was a landowner... When I joined the army I was 16 and a half years old – I was only a child. I liked the idea of joining the army, but my family didn't... as my older brother had been killed in Malaya – Singapore... But I insisted and went off..."



Shahamad Khan VC

Shahamad Khan's act of bravery which led to his being awarded the Victoria Cross occurred from 12-13 April 1916, near Beit Ayessa, Mesopotamia. It was recorded in the London Gazette, 26 September 1916, from which the following is an extract:

Naik Shahamad Khan "was in charge of a machine gun section in an exposed position, in front of and covering a gap in the British new line, within 150 yards of the enemy's entrenched position. He beat off three counter attacks and worked his gun single-handed after all his men, except two belt-fillers, had become casualties."

Naik Shahamad Khan was also awarded the Russian Cross of St. George, 2nd class.



1. Mr Mohammed Anwar's brother, Mr Atta Mohammed, is pictured here 2nd in from the left on the back row, with his regiment in Delhi, India, June 1937.

2. Notification of the death of Mr Mohammed Anwar's brother.

3. 7th Light Cavalry, Ahmednagar, October 1945. Mr Anwar Khan is pictured in the middle row, 2nd from the left.

4. Shahamad Khan's name is seen listed here with other VC winners on the interior of the Chattri, which forms part of The Memorial Gates in London.

Mr Anwar Khan and Mr Mohammed Anwar (left to right)



On the front line

Memories of World War One

Mr Gurcharan Singh Klair was born in the Jalandhar district of Punjab in 1923, four years after his father had returned from service in the First World War. Mr Klair also participated at the end of the Second World War, as a Sergeant undertaking administrative duties in India.

"My father was a military man who served in both the world wars. And in the first he served in Gallipoli and Mesopotamia... His regiment which was a cavalry regiment came to France and he took part in the action in France and Belgium. He even came here in England in 1917. "

"In France there is a small town Neuve Chapelle. We stayed there for a fortnight... There is a memorial – there is written most of the names of the casualties who

were killed. And there I found the name of the unit of my father also... His regiment was 6th DCO Lancers... I just imagine the shape of my father, how he would have been on the horse or... running around there."

Surviving the trenches of Burma in World War Two

Joining the Indian Army in 1941, Mr Jagat Singh became a Range taker for the machine gun battalion of the 12th Frontier Force.

"There was a lot of fighting on the Burma border. Our company was under siege in a large farm in Maungdaw... The major saab said you can surrender, we said we didn't want to surrender. We have machine guns... We would rather die... After two months the reinforcements with tanks arrived and fired towards the mountains where the Japanese were dug in. Then at night we ran onto the ship. Only one man died. Even the man who was shaving and had to jump in the trench halfway through his shave, was saved."



1. Indian cavalry marching into Kut-el-Mara, Mesopotamia during World War One. Mr Gurcharan Singh Klair's father was besieged here when fighting against the Turkish army. Neg. no Q25223

2. Indian troops en route to India from Mesopotamia, on board transport in the Persian Gulf. Neg. no Q25709

3. The jungles of Burma. Neg. no IND4147

4. Mountain gunners of the 5th Indian Division advance on a jungle path to support infantry near to the Burma open plains. Neg. no IND4148

Mr Jagat Singh and Mr Gurcharan Singh Klair (left to right)



"...For the sake of the people who are dead and gone, who fought for their country and fought for the world..."

Mrs Sushil Johal

Mr Jaimal Johal was seven when the Second World War ended in 1945 and for the previous six years had seen his father little. Both his grandfather and father fought in the Indian Army in Europe during the First and Second World Wars respectively.

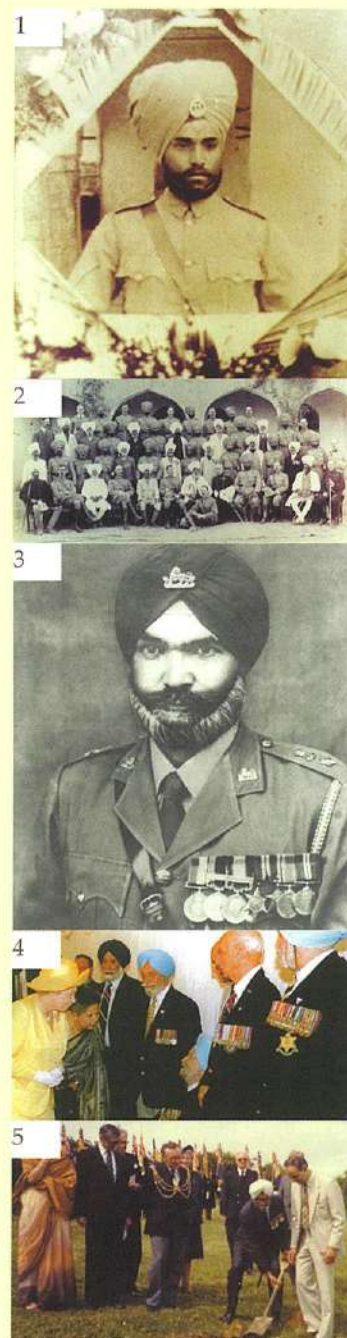
Following Mr Johal's marriage and move to Britain in 1964, his parents eventually joined him. Soon after his arrival his father, Lieutenant Colonel Assa Singh, on realising the numbers of Indian Ex-servicemen living locally and considering his own family history, founded the Undivided Indian Ex-serviceman's Association of Slough.

"(My father) joined the army in 1926 when he was about 17 years of age. Even his father, which is my

grandfather, was in the British Indian Army... During the First World War he got wounded in France and was brought to a hospital in Brighton. And unfortunately because of the wounds he passed away there and was cremated in a place known as Patcham. The exact place is Chattri, which is quite a memorial place and since Dad came to this country he has been visiting that place... every year a lot of Indians and our family go there... To me Chattri means a lot..."

"...My father... joined the same regiment where my grandfather was (2nd Royal Battalion). He joined right at the bottom as a seepoy who worked his way up. He was a very good hockey player... and very popular with the other officers. And when the war broke out in 1939 he was sent for his commission... He rose up to be a Major in the same regiment till 1948. And in 1948 early he was given the command... (of) the 1st Dogra Regiment. He took the command of the Dogra Centre from 1950 to 1954."

Mr Jaimal and Mrs Sushil Johal



1. Subedar Manta Singh, Mr Jaimal Johal's grandfather.

2. Group photo, Jan 1913. Mr Johal's grandfather, Sub Manta Singh, stands 4th in from the left on the top row, with Lt Henderson on the right. Both men were wounded and hospitalised in Brighton after Sub Manta Singh attempted to save Lt Henderson on the battlefield having suffered an injury. Unfortunately only Lt Henderson survived. Their sons went on to become comrades and friends during the Second World War.

3. Lieutenant Colonel Assa Singh.

4. Lieutenant Colonel Assa Singh meeting the Queen in 2000.

5. Lieutenant Colonel Assa Singh planting a tree at the Chattri with his son, Mr Jaimal Johal.

An association of interest

Mr Harjinder Ghatora was born in India in 1944 in Moga, near the Pakistan border. At 18 he left home to join the Indian Air Force during the India-China War and became an aircraft engineer. He left the air force in 1971 and five years later had arrived in England, where he has lived and worked ever since.

"I became Secretary of this branch (of the Indian Army Ex-servicemen's Association) in 2001... Some of our ex-servicemen, they served in Monte Cassino... That was a great opportunity for me also to take 15 of our ex-servicemen to Italy... There were so many things turned up in my mind. My goodness! So many battalions, you know. And their names written... Singhs, Khans, Sharmas and Pathaks... So many people sacrificed their lives for the freedom and prosperity we enjoy today."

Mr KK Sharma is the Treasurer of the Association. Born in 1937 in

Palandari, Kashmir, he comes from a military family. As a young person his education was disrupted due to the upheaval of Partition, so he was unable to join the armed services.

"After my retirement I joined this association because... most of my brothers were in the army, some of them holding very high positions, even to the rank of General... So it is a family history of military service. I'm the only exception and that's why I'm in the association and interested in anything about the armed services... This project has put me in touch with the past and the sacrifices people have made..."

Mr Baldev K Sharma (born 1936, Lahore City) spent 24 years in the Indian Territorial Army, joining in 1962. During his service he worked on the railways, ensuring trains were ready to transport the army throughout India.

"Giving value to the ex-servicemen in the army... I am very happy and very much impressed... We have gone to the graveyard in India and Pakistan. We are minding their memories in our hearts, how they have sacrificed for this nation. That sacrifice will remain in our hearts forever."



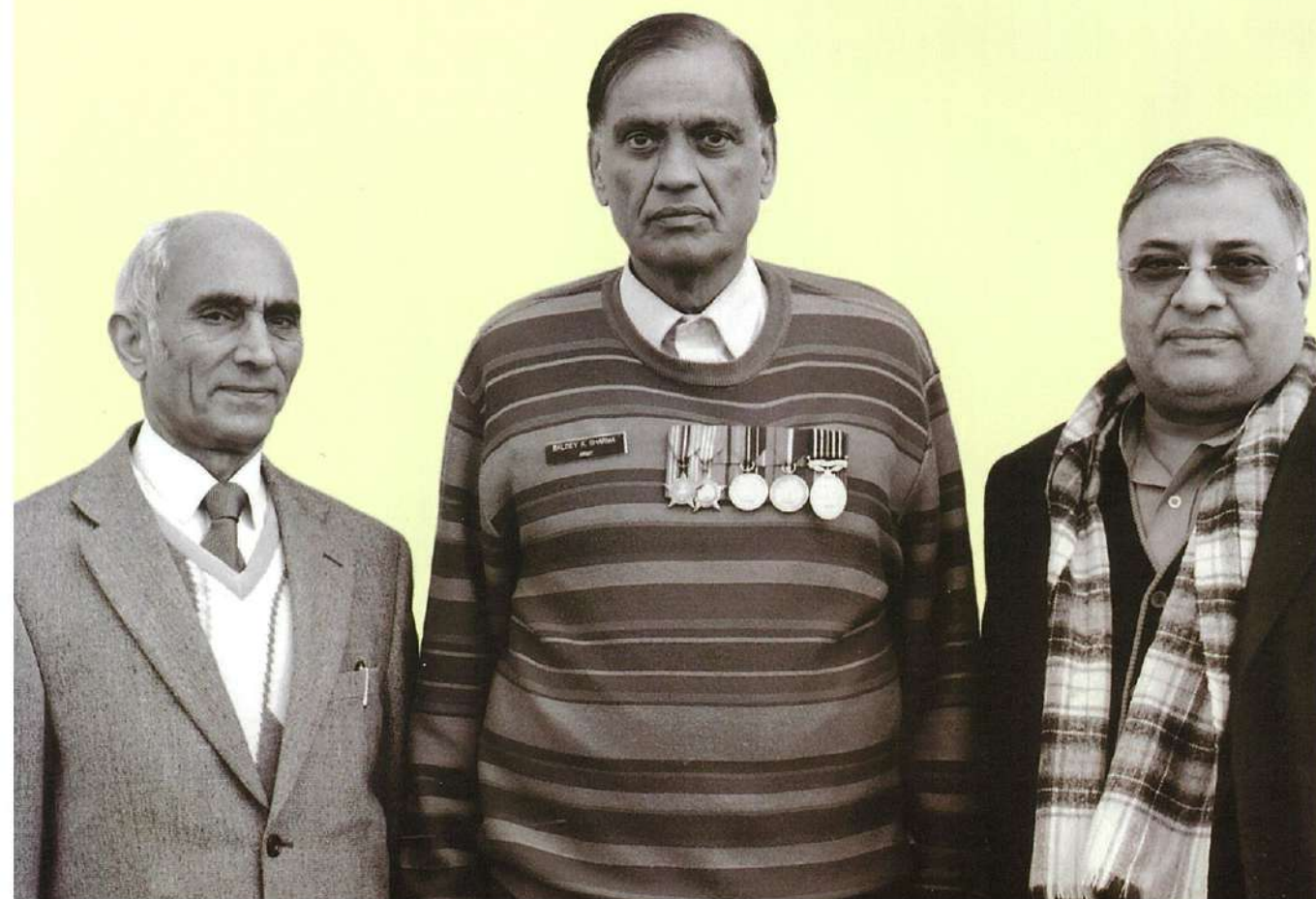
1. Mr Harjinder Ghatora, Indian Air Force Engineer, 1963.

2. Mr Sharma's brother, Major-General Mohan Lal, commissioned during World War Two.

3. Major-General Mohan Lal with the President of India.

4. Mr Baldev K Sharma, having joined the Territorial Army, 1960s.

Mr KK Sharma, Mr BK Sharma and Mr Harjinder Ghatora (from left to right)



We will remember you

Aik Saath is an organisation of young people dedicated to the promotion of peace and racial harmony, through the teaching of conflict resolution skills in the local community of Slough and its surrounding areas. Members of Aik Saath met with the ex-servicemen to find out about their lives.

"When I heard of this project about war veterans from Undivided India, wanting to tell their story, I was really excited." TEJINDER

"We asked them questions in Urdu, Punjabi and English. I really enjoyed it and learnt a lot. Although I was nervous at first I got more confident along the way." ASIM

"I didn't know so many people fought in the Second World War from India, let alone the First and you know I really want to know about my roots." TEJINDER

"The fact that they were so young when they actually joined up was a big thing for me. Three of our group members are the same age now, as some of the ex-servicemen were when they volunteered." ROB

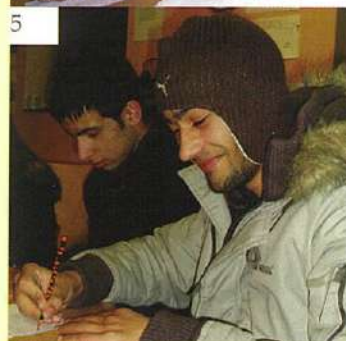
"I think it was nice to hear what they had to say because they were explaining we're all equal...and how you shouldn't judge people because of who they are... everyone's the same, no matter what religion they are..." SONYA

"Pritam Singh said to me, there is no difference between you and us." RAJA

"They were telling us about their start of the day when they were training. They had to wake up... and go for a 10 mile run and jog and walk and then have breakfast and it was just like reliving their daily life, when they were in the army, which I found really interesting because there's not a lot of people I know that could do that!" TEJINDER

"For the young people... it's something that they've never talked about, never heard about, never discussed or never even thought about. So for them it was a real education." MANDEEP

"Not many people can say they have met with these great role models but we can, so thank you." ASAD



1. Members of Aik Saath went out into Slough and took photos of places which are special to them. They then discussed these photos, as shown here and went on to think about why memorials are special places to ex-servicemen.

2. The ex-servicemen and Aik Saath meet at the Slough Young People's Centre.

3. After meeting the ex-servicemen, members of Aik Saath decided what they wanted to say about their experience, to share in this booklet. Here, Shay and Sotoodeh discuss their ideas.

4. Mandeep and Tejinder in the panel design workshop.

5. Asim and Raja working on the panel design.

Some Aik Saath members – Asad, Rob, Asim, Sonya and Raja (from top left to bottom right).

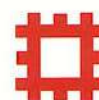


This booklet accompanies an exhibition touring venues throughout the South East of England, during 2005. For further details contact English Heritage Outreach on 01483 252000

English Heritage champions England's historic environment for the people of today and for future generations. The Outreach Department aims to actively engage people from all backgrounds in sharing their own perspectives on heritage and learning from, enjoying and valuing the historic environment.

Cover photograph '9th Hodson's Horsemen near Vraignes, France, April 1917' courtesy of Imperial War Museum, London Neg. No. Q2062

April 2005



ENGLISH HERITAGE