

**Funding raised by
The National Lottery**
and awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund



The Airships: An exhibition of WW1 local history on your doorstep

Local community organisation Creative Force spent several weeks at the end of 2018 working in Willingdon to research, with local people, information about the site of the World War 1 Royal Naval Airship Station (R.N.A.S.) Polegate.

In 1914 The Admiralty requisitioned 142 acres of land below the combe that sits above Willingdon (known locally as Donkey Hollow), from Wannock to what is now the A22, to build Polegate Airship Station on. The station had a huge impact on Willingdon, then a tiny village, whilst the airships and their crews were to play a crucial part in patrolling our coastlines during World War 1. Gasbags was a term of affection used by crews who worked on airship stations to describe their airships, so called because they were, in fact, naval vessels.

The aim of the project was to unearth stories, relics and facts about the Airships, the Airship Station, the people who worked on it and who lived in the village, then, with this information, create an exhibition so that people could learn about this extraordinary piece of local history.

Astoundingly new information came to light through research and, importantly, in the form of relics and photographs from descendants of crew who worked on the station. This included photographs of the trophy won by the R.N.A.S. 1917 and 1918 football team, a pair of goggles worn by a pilot and a logbook detailing the flights he made, including missions that were both dangerous and secret.

Creative Force also worked with ten children from Willingdon Primary School in an after school club. The children became the reporters for a special edition of 'The Ripping Panel', the magazine produced by the Airship Station crew, telling, with some creative licence, about the lives of crew and some of the incidents that happened locally and nationally both during and just after The Great War. As part of the club, the children were immersed in a World War 1 workshop, led by Katherine Buckland at Eastbourne Heritage, to give them an idea of what it would have been like to live during the war.

Creative Force is registered as Your Creative Force CIC co. number 9200146
Registered office: 7 Cedar Road Road, Eastbourne, BN22 0SF
Telephone: 07432 678228 Email: info@creativeforce.org.uk
Web: www.creativeforce.org.uk

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Teri Sayers-Cooper, Creative Force Director and Project Lead, states "We started this project having no idea what might be unearthed or who might be involved. Many think that everything can be found 'on the internet', yet, through the generosity of people involved in this project, we have been able to find out more about the station and its crew than had previously been in the public domain. At the same time children and adults have learned about and recorded a part of our local history which sits right on our doorstep. We feel privileged and honoured to be able to bring this work together for Gasbags Ahoy! Thanks to funding through the Heritage Lottery Fund we've been able breathe new life into this story"

The project and exhibition has been made possible through Heritage Lottery Funding, thanks to money raised by National Lottery players.

Dates and times of Gasbags Ahoy!

Saturdays 16th, 23rd and 30th March : 11.00am to 4.00pm

Sunday 17th and 31st March : 12.00 to 3.00pm

Venue:

Trinity Church

Coppice Avenue

Willingdon BN20 9PN

Entry Free

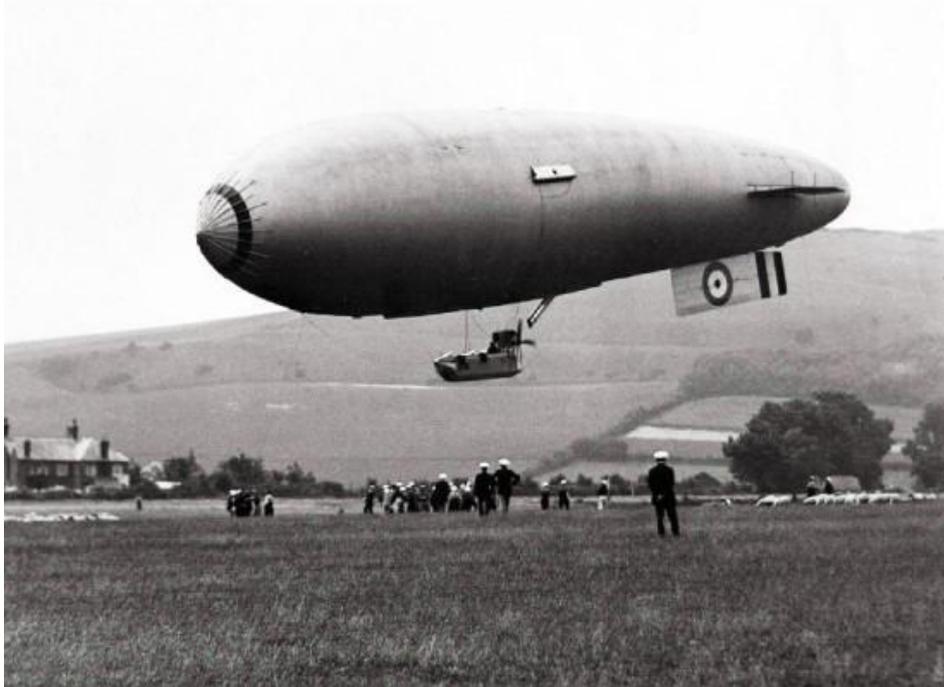
On street parking with Blue Badge parking available at venue

Buses 45 51 51x 54 54A 56 98 125

For more information T: 07432 678 228 E: info@creativeforce.org.uk

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A Sea Scout Zero Airship at R.N.A.S Polegate Airship Station

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Goggles worn by airship pilot William Chambers. Courtesy of John Chambers

Photo by Teri Sayers-Cooper @ Creative Force