

With the death of Barry Summers on the 30th of June this year Market Harborough lost one of its most dedicated local historians. For many in the Harborough area he will be remembered as a fair-minded local politician and as a popular and inspirational teacher of history at Welland Park Community College (see his obituary in the *Harborough Mail* of 6th July 2000), but it is as an historian in his own right that he also needs to be honoured and mourned.

When I first came to the Harborough Museum in 1987 I found a fascinating temporary exhibition on the 'Harborough Boys' occupying a central place in the displays. I soon learned that this exhibition on those local men who had fought in the First World War had been put up several years before as a very short-term measure, but that the immense interest it engendered made it impossible to replace. Meeting Barry soon after I soon saw why the exhibition had so caught the popular imagination. Like many local historians Barry was thoroughly versed in the intricacies of his subject but unusually he had not lost sight of the bigger picture, especially how Harborough's reaction to the First World War provided a fascinating view on how the town's community functioned at so many levels.



During the following eight years I got to know Barry well and he soon became that great boon of all local museum curators, the expert with an encyclopaedic knowledge who takes the same amount of care answering the most trivial and the most complex of enquiries. I'm sure his willingness to help was motivated by the same sense of public duty that made Barry such a good teacher and politician. As time went on he became aware that he had started his research just in time to catch the testimonies of the last generation of Harborians who both fought in or remembered the war. His wide contacts throughout the community put him in touch with many other people who still treasured photographs and memorabilia of the conflict and this was made global when Barry's great interest in information technology enabled him to establish a website on the Harborough Boys which received many thousands of 'hits' each year.

Barry's research methods were meticulous and his quest to understand accounts of fighting on the Western Front led him to take several trips to the battlefield of northern France (one of my greatest regrets is that I didn't have time to accept Barry's offer to accompany him on a week-long tour back in the early 1990s). Such first-hand field research was augmented by a very wide range of material and Barry was particularly skilled in blending together information from the less-traditional sources such as buildings, historic film and artefacts. Sadly this approach to research resulted in slow progress being made in writing up the history of the Harborough Boys. Just before Barry's illness was diagnosed last year he had only completed a fair draft of the text taking the story up to the summer of 1917, and I know that one of his major frustrations towards the end of his life was that both the research and the book were unfinished.

Barry Summers (1939-2000)

Barry's account of this community at war, which lies on my desk as I write, is inclusive social history at its best. A vast amount of the personal information could never be researched again and the insight the book provides on the life of the Harborough area at the beginning of the last century is acute and detailed. We owe it to his memory and to the memory of all local people who were involved in that conflict to ensure that the *Harborough Boys* gets into print.

Steph Mastoris
(Curator of the Harborough Museum, 1987-1995)