



Carlow

The Pells of Lewes

pool · park
places · people



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It was 18 months ago that a textile project was first suggested to mark the Pells Centenary in Lewes. And so a kitchen table project began - to make bunting that would decorate the streets, park and swimming pool. Now, after three months of lockdown, the number of bunting flags has risen to 180 sewn by more than 70 people and the first strings - roughly 25 metres - were hung last weekend in a gesture to mark the special centenary date. "It's amazing how people have responded," said designer Emma Carlow. "It's literally a community of flags - individuals' work all coming together - and will be

a lasting legacy of creativity in Lewes during lockdown. Our target was 100 metres, but it will be even longer by June 2021."

Simple images

Emma of Talbot Terrace, and Marilyn Willis, an embroiderer from Toronto Terrace, led a small team of residents keen to be involved. Simple, visual themes were chosen to represent the area: swimmers (inspired by Pells Pool) and 1920s swimming costumes to mark the centenary; wildlife including ducks, fish, trees and bees; landmarks such as the pub, the church and the Finnish memorial plus all those people who used to live in the Pells area: dairymen, jockeys,

milliners and boot-makers.

Free bunting packs

Emma's designs flowed off her computer and applied cut-outs were pinned on triangular coloured flags. Meetings upstairs at The Elephant and Castle continued, where people stitched and chatted, bringing scraps of cloth, old sheets and remnants from home. Free sewing kits were made and people were invited to stitch - whatever their level of skill - and to embellish the flags with buttons, beads and sequins. 'Swim and Sew' packs, each with a needle and three coloured threads, were available at the Pells Pool kiosk, then when winter set in, there were 'Sip and Sew' kits at the

church café in St John sub Castro. In January 2020, at the old Pells school, ten locals met one Saturday morning to sew backing to flags - with three sewing machines, two ironing boards and a camera on a tripod to photograph each one.

Stitching during lockdown

In March the Covid-19 pandemic put the centenary plans on hold, but bunting enthusiasts kept on sewing, some inventing their own designs and exploring new ideas. Jane Lee of Church Row stitched 35 pennants, mostly to her own designs in response to the local environment - broods of ducklings and moorhens, foxes on the prowl, dogs on leads and

cats in gardens. She said: "Designing and sewing pennants has really helped me get through the isolation of lockdown as it gave me a focus every day which kept me sane! The stitching was totally absorbing and let me be creative in a way I've never explored before. I'm so looking forward to seeing the result of everyone's labours when we finally hold a centenary event."

Historic portraits too

Susanna Longley, whose paintings of Pells' streets will feature in the new book, turned her hand to sewing unusual portraits of key figures: John Rowe who first gifted land in 1603; Wynne Baxter, first Mayor of Lewes and Len

Willey, a Labour councillor who campaigned for Willey's footbridge to be built in the 1960s.

Susanna said: "The level of concentration required to do the sewing, completely absorbed me; time passed without a visit to the fridge, or even a coffee! What's more at the end of each portrait, I felt as if I had done something productive - and positive feedback kept me going. "I suppose the lesson I've learnt from this lockdown is that to get through times when you feel powerless, finding something you like to do and a motive for doing it, gives you back that power and the world around you evaporates."