

David Arnold would like to hear from readers of *County Yarns* who have stories and illustrations about Sussex to share with us. Email david.arnold@me.com or write to him at 14 St John Street, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 2QE. For information on the Memorial Chapel visit www.lewesprioryschoolmemorialchapeltrust.org

Two Lewes men laid to rest in foreign fields far from home

Last week I wrote about the Memorial Chapel in the grounds of what is now Lewes Priory School and how it was built to commemorate the 55 former pupils of the original Grammar School who lost their lives in the service of their country in the Second World War.

I also related how I have become a de facto honorary "Old Lewesian" (despite my having attended Mountfield Road Secondary School and not the Grammar) and am part of a volunteer team producing a book telling the remarkable story of how and why the chapel came to be.

Team members include my long-lost friend from Lewes Pells Junior School, School, David Carter, and the Old Lewesians Organisation (OLO) Secretary, Eric Mears. We are already gathering a wealth of fascinating information.

One person with a direct family link to the 55 is Ray Moore.

Now aged 90, Ray has written to us concerning his brother, Frederick Martin Moore: "Fred was born on 13th October 1916 and attended Southover Infants School in Lewes.

"Later he won a scholarship to the County Grammar School in Uckfield.

"Fred cycled from Lewes to Uckfield and back on every school day.

"When a new County Grammar School opened in Lewes in 1930, he at once transferred to it.

"I followed in his footsteps and became a pupil at the school in 1937.

"Fred was an enthusiastic Boy Scout and rose to be assistant leader of the 1st Lewes Troop.

"Upon leaving school he joined W.H. Smith and progressed to be assistant manager in Lewes.

"In May 1940 Fred became 2014352 Sapper Moore, Royal Engineers.

"Following basic training he was posted to London where he was issued with a bright yellow bicycle and a football rattle – an image that caused us not a little amusement!

"In the event of a poison gas attack, Fred's role was to tour the streets using the rattle as a warning to the public.

"On 10th November 1940 Fred married his childhood sweetheart, Muriel Alma Birdsey of Priory Street, Lewes. We know from Fred's army pay book that he became a driver/mechanic.

"He was shipped out to North Africa in November 1942 to join the Allied 1st Army in 'Operation Torch'.

"This was the Anglo-American invasion of Morocco and Algeria that followed on from the Eighth Army's defeat of Rommel's Afrika Korps at El Alamein in Egypt the previous month.

"In May 1943, after much hard fighting, the remnants of the German

army surrendered in Tunisia. Fred took part in the Allied victory parade in the city and then enjoyed a spot of leave.

"In September 1943 he landed at Salerno on the Italian mainland.

"It was another hard-fought action. "Fred then accompanied the Allies right up the leg of Italy as far as the German-held Gothic Line that stretched from Rimini on the Adriatic all the way across to Italy's west coast.

"It is a grim irony that after surviving the fighting in North Africa and the travails of the Italian Campaign, Fred's death came from shrapnel wounds sustained on 2nd October 1944.

"He is buried in the Coriano Ridge War Cemetery alongside almost 2,000 other Allied casualties.

"Soon after the war my niece visited his grave and found it marked by a simple white wooden cross bearing his name, number, rank and regiment.

"Much later a nephew made the same pilgrimage and found the white standard headstone was now in place."

Ray was born a decade after Fred and did post-war National Service in the Far East with the RAF.

This meant he was away from Lewes when serious fundraising for the chapel was under way.

However he told us: "I do know that my family were always busy baking cakes and making things to be sold to help raise money. All of us also made a financial contribution."

Ray nowadays lives in Little Neston which is located in the Wirral, Cheshire.

He has a nephew, Peter Fellows JP,



Above left is Fred Moore, a former Lewes schoolboy killed in 1944 during the Italian Campaign. Alongside him is a German propaganda poster decrying the slow progress of the Allied advance in Italy. The second serviceman is Dennis Moppett, another of the 55 Lewes Grammar School pupils who lost their lives in the war.

Below: The Memorial Chapel as it is today in the grounds of Priory School, Lewes. The other photograph (supplied by John Davey) shows Grammar School boys helping dig the building's foundations. It was completed in 1960.

living in Seaford. Peter himself is an Old Lewesian and kindly facilitated the contact with Ray.

When I first started out on this journey of discovery concerning the 55, I had no inkling I would uncover a connection very close to home.

In 2010 I produced a book called "Seventy Years On" being a collection of individual experiences of conflict woven against the whole story of the Second World War.

One feature concerned Dennis Moppett who was the brother of a neighbour of ours, Felicity.

Dennis joined the RAF in 1940 and was posted to the Far East. After the Japanese invaded the East Indies in early 1942 he was on the island of Java when his unit was

ordered to surrender by their British commanders.

In captivity Dennis kept a cache of letters concealed in a bamboo container.

They were meant for his family in Lewes but could never be sent.

Dennis died of illness caused by malnutrition in a POW camp in January 1945, eight months before the end of the war with Japan.

Post-hostilities, a Dutch companion to Dennis delivered the bamboo container to his family and the letters make for the most poignant reading as reproduced at length in my book.

What I had no idea of at the time, was that Dennis Moppett was one of the 55 former pupils of Lewes Priory School.

