From 2014, many different events will be taking place around the hundredth anniversaries of the outbreak of the First World War, and the principal battles of that conflict. But what distinctive contribution can be made by academic research in the arts and humanities, in deepening our understanding of the Great War, and engaging people in the commemorations?

We spoke to Andrew Thompson – Professor of Modern History, Director of the Centre for Imperial and Global History at the University of Exeter, and member of the AHRC’s Council – about the variety of ways in which the Arts and Humanities Research Council is helping to mark the centenary of the First World War.

Why is it important to remember the events of 1914–18?

The scale of the suffering was extraordinary. Although the exact figures are contested, this was a conflict that saw around 65 million soldiers mobilised, between eight and ten million of whom lost their lives, with a combined total of 37 million military and civilian casualties. Its sheer magnitude is part of the explanation for the level of public interest the First World War has generated. Each generation has visited afresh the events of 1914–18 – the causes, course and consequences of the war. The centenary projects and events that we as a Council are funding and participating in show that there is still a very big appetite among the public today to know more about what happened and why it happened.
How do we see the war differently now, compared to the way we did, say, fifty years ago?

Commemoration opens up a dialogue between the past and the present. Compared to previous anniversaries, we have a very different perspective. In commemorating the war, each successive generation has tended to recast the conflict to reflect its own perspectives and concerns. In Britain today we have a growing awareness that this was a global war, not just involving European soldiers fighting in Europe, but soldiers from across the Commonwealth fighting in the Middle East and Africa and beyond. This is a response to Britain’s growing ethnic and racial diversity over the last half century.

Patterns of remembrance and commemoration are also influenced by new directions in scholarship – even if there can be a considerable time lag between the two. With the rise of cultural history, we’re currently witnessing a growing emphasis on the home front, and a greater appreciation of just how much the war affected not only those who went off to fight but those who were left behind. For example, the First World War is now seen as a critical chapter in the history of disability, both in Britain and elsewhere, with people with disabilities suddenly very visible during the 1920s, and new proponents of disability rights and new legislation for the disabled being passed as a result. And there’s greater emphasis on things like the medical history of the war. The war provided a major stimulus to the development of an international humanitarian movement, with the rapid expansion of the services provided by the Red Cross, for example.

Indeed, the experience of the First World War echoes current concerns over the civil war in Syria today, especially in terms of international law and humanitarian norms. Recent scholarship has seen a focus on the events of 1914 to 1918 in the development of international humanitarian law, for example with the Geneva Convention protocols of 1925 on the use of poison gas, and of 1929 on the treatment of prisoners of war.

Above all perhaps, we are now in a position to better appreciate the profound geopolitical changes that the First World War ushered in. After 1918 there was a move from a world of empire states, to one where nation states would increasingly become accepted as the norm. The First World War began the process of imperial collapse, and in its aftermath we saw the birth of a world that was asked to respect Wilsonian principles.
of national self-determination – albeit initially more likely to be applied to the European than non-European world. That was a momentous change in world history, and it’s possible to see it much more clearly now than we could in 1964, with the Soviet Union no longer with us.

■ **Will the commemorations be different this time, too?**

Inevitably there will be differences. To mark the fiftieth anniversary, for example, the BBC commissioned a 26-part history of the First World War, co-produced by the Imperial War Museum, which for the first time gave veterans’ own accounts of their experiences, in their own voices. But for us this is no longer a war of living memory. The last of its veterans have died, and we will increasingly rely on written and recorded memories to bring it back to life.

■ **And what can research in the arts and humanities bring to the centenary events?**

The arts and humanities can contribute enormously, not least through the variety of perspectives that they provide. This isn’t just about understanding the causes and consequences of the war, but the shifting interpretations of the war over time. The First World War has been subjected to successive rounds of historical revisionism – a conflict that generated conflict, a war of the pen as well as the sword. The centenary is likely to bring some of these conflicts of interpretation back to the boil. Should we have fought the war? Were ordinary soldiers betrayed by the generals? Did the harshness of the peace settlement ensure that hostilities would eventually resume?

AHRC-funded researchers are also interested in the cultural history of the war. We know much more about women’s experiences of the war than we did at the 50th anniversary. The centenary is an opportunity to distil and communicate this research on women’s involvement in the war to wider audiences. And, critically, we can provide a wider international perspective: we can help counter the tendency for countries to lock themselves into their own narrow, nation-centric points of view, and to see the war from the perspectives of other societies and cultures. That could be a very powerful and positive legacy of the centenary commemoration.

■ **What would you like to see, coming out of the centenary?**

Centenaries are an opportunity to gain new perspectives on the past. Much of the pressure to remember and commemorate wells up from below. But that in turn gives rise to the challenge of how to link what is local and specific to broader national narratives of the conflict.

We have a chance to expand our understanding of the war – historically, and in terms of what it means for us now. The value of research lies in its unearthing of new evidence which may challenge entrenched myths and guard against commemoration being hijacked for more immediate political agendas. Blackadder and O What a Lovely War might lead you to think that the First World War was one of unrelenting carnage, for example – but we easily forget that despite the terrible loss of life 88 percent of those who fought in the war actually survived.

There is also danger of commemoration becoming too cosy and comfortable. Both at the time and after the First World War’s significance has been hotly contested. Close to home, we know this only too well from the experience of Northern Ireland. But in other parts of the world too, the war evokes painful memories – the autumn of 1914 a rift opened within Afrikaner society. Certain Afrikaners rebelled against conscription and the question of whether South Africa should side with Britain against Germany, and the revolt took three months to suppress. Meanwhile in Canada anti-war feeling among French Canadians in Quebec was widespread and led to anti-conscription riots in 1918, forcing the Canadian authorities to suspend the arrest of army deserters.

The arts and humanities can help to make commemoration more inclusive – recovering voices and perspectives that have been lost or marginalised. It’s equally important for a wider appreciation of the war to understand the different national cultures of commemoration which will be thrown into sharper relief by the Centenary. Why, for example, is the centenary being more actively commemorated in some countries than in others?

As for how the culture of commemoration is changing in this country, we’ll just have to watch this space. What’s for sure is that this major historical anniversary will offer fascinating insights into the public perception of one of the twentieth century’s two major conflicts and how and why that conflict still resonates 100 years on.

For further information: www.ahrc.ac.uk/ww1

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CENTENARY

An AHRC-funded network project is asking some searching questions about the anniversary of the First World War, writes Caroline Roberts.

What does the nature of a centenary commemoration tell us about collective memory and current social attitudes? How have commemorations changed over time? What are the most appropriate ways to handle the remembrance of traumatic or politically sensitive events?

These are just some of the questions explored by ‘The Significance of the Centenary’, an AHRC-funded research network, which comes under the ‘Care for the Future: Thinking Forward Through the Past’ umbrella.

It’s an especially timely project given that this year marks the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, and commemorations need to strike a balance between popular interpretations of the events: a ‘just’ war in the context of its time; the tragic waste of life portrayed in the poetry of Owen and Sassoon; or the shambles depicted in the satirical TV programme Blackadder.

The network is led by the University of Birmingham in collaboration with the Universities of Cardiff and Sheffield, the National Library of Wales, and Historic Royal Palaces, an
independent charity looking after sites such as the Tower of London and Hampton Court.

A series of workshops, beginning in April 2013, have brought academics together with practitioners from the museum and heritage sector. The first two workshops focused on comparative studies of centenaries throughout history, ranging from the centenary of the Mexican revolution, events marking the work of Jane Austen, to the hundredth anniversary of Swansea Football Club.

‘We tried to draw up a framework for investigating the significance of a centenary,’ explains Dr Joanne Sayner, Senior Lecturer in cultural theory at the University of Birmingham and the project’s leader. ‘Are people trying to convey a message through it? Are certain voices more prominent than others? What role do groups such as lobbyists and fan clubs play?’

The terminology used is important, she adds, and words such as ‘commemoration’ and ‘celebration’ can be problematic. ‘We prefer the term “centenary event”. Of course, 1918 was seen as a time of celebration, but now people feel very reticent about using that term in relation to the events. We’re trying to raise these issues and get people to think about the language they are using.’

In subsequent workshops, the network turned its attention to the First World War. Sayner and her co-investigator, Dr Jenny Kidd from Cardiff University, looked at the build up to the centenary in the media and on social media sites. ‘We tried to plot the changing way it was being talked about, and what role museums were being given,’ she says.

Alongside this, museum staff discussed the challenges of developing large-scale exhibitions and archives, and how you measure their success, particularly given that £50m of public money has been made available for the First World War commemorations.

One of the project’s participants, Alex Drago, is a learning and engagement manager at the Historic Royal Palaces. ‘For us, the value of these networks is to engage with other practitioners and
‘The past has an impact on us today in terms of how we react to it, interpret it, learn lessons and apply it to our lives.’

academics, who can inform what we do from their theoretical understanding,’ he says.

Drago has been trialling various learning strategies with local schools to help a younger audience develop a greater understanding of the war centenary. One successful project involved a group of Year 7 and 8 students at The Grey Coat Hospital School, a girls’ comprehensive in Westminster. Working with history teacher Rocky Haines, art teacher Philippa Prince, and visiting animator John Harmer, the students made a short film with images and commentary on the theme of commemoration.

‘The past has an impact on us today in terms of how we react to it, interpret it, learn lessons and apply it to our lives,’ says Haines. However, he adds, the purpose of the project was to encourage the students to reflect on the idea of memorialisation itself, rather than just on the events of the war. As part of their research, they examined artefacts such as war memoirs and medals, and visited the nearby Cenotaph. ‘They said they had walked past so many times but never really thought about what it means.’

The voiceover on the film reflects a wide range of responses from the students. One says she feels disconnected from the war as ‘it’s a different time,’ and another says she believes it should be remembered, but as ‘something that never should have happened’. Another sees monuments and memorial services as a ‘conversation with society about remembering the war. Some people need something smaller and more intimate to respond to and some people need something big.’ One girl concludes that ‘This is our history. We need to help people remember the past in order to live our future.’

‘All those opinions have validity,’ says Drago. ‘We are encouraging people to acknowledge that and come to terms with it in their own way.’

Another network participant, Steph Mastoris, head of Swansea’s National Waterfront Museum, agrees. ‘One of the things that came out of the project for me was that for a centenary event to be effective you need to allow a plurality of views. Much of the World War One commemoration will focus on local and personal stories, which sit very much within the curatorial zeitgeist as human history interpretation is central these days. But there is a bigger picture. It was the first fully mechanised war where industry was a major player and at the Waterfront Museum we’re going to look at the legacy for Welsh industry.’

The network’s final workshop, which considers how to measure the impact, legacy and success of anniversary events, took place in May 2014. Coincidentally, it was during the planning stages for that workshop that former Culture Secretary Maria Miller announced a £10m governmental pot for celebrating significant anniversaries, to be administered by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

‘What’s fascinating,’ says Sayner, ‘is that “significant” is yet to be defined. So it ties in perfectly with all the things we are thinking about. If you are going to celebrate or commemorate an anniversary you have to think about why it’s significant and how you are going to convey that. Then you often have to be able to measure whether it works.’

For further information, please go to:

http://thecentenary.wordpress.com
‘I CAN NEVER FORGET SUFFERING’

Not only did Horace Pippin take the war as his subject, but the very way he painted was affected by the wounds he suffered in the trenches of France. But having re-learnt how to paint with a near-paralysed arm, he was able to overcome both his physical limitations and the racial discrimination he encountered, to become a major figure in the American art world of the Thirties and Forties.

From the trenches to Hollywood

The Great War, Pippin wrote, ‘brought out all the art in me.’ ‘I can never forget suffering, and I will never forget sunset [sunsets feature prominently in his work]. So I came home with all of it in my mind and I paint from it today.’

As part of the 369th US infantry regiment, also known as Harlem’s Hell Fighters, Pippin had fought in the trenches as part of an all-black unit led by white officers. But in 1918 his right shoulder and arm were shattered by machine gun bullets, and he had to endure many hours lying in a shell hole, under the body of a French soldier who had been shot trying to rescue him.

Pippin returned to the States in a bad way, both physically and psychologically. To regain strength in his damaged arm, and also to deal with the ‘blue spells’ that frequently overcame him, he taught himself to paint again, using his good left hand and his paralysed right one together. Painting mainly at night, he began to produce painstaking interpretations of what he had seen during the war. Starting with The End of the War: Starting Home (1931), during the following decade he was able to capture on canvas his nightmare vision of the Western Front, in works such as Shell Holes and Observation Balloon (1935), and In Dogfight Over Trenches (also 1935).

While he may have begun creating these images as a way of coming to terms with his experiences, their directness and intensity soon won him influential admirers in the American art world including the pioneering role played by his white dealer, Robert Carlen. As Pippin began to tackle other subjects in the last decade of his life, including scenes of African-American domestic life, as well as producing historical vignettes and pictures on religious themes, his work began to be taken seriously. Through the art collector and educator Albert C. Barnes, Pippin’s work gained a following among a number of Hollywood stars, including Charles Laughton and Edward G. Robinson. But it was Robert Carlyn who played the catalytic role in his life and work.

Painter of no-man’s land

Now, Horace Pippin is widely seen as a significant figure in African-American art history. Many major American collections own at least one work by him. And yet until recently, his life and work have been relatively unexamined, not gaining the critical attention that they deserve.

Aiming to put that right is Celeste-Marie Bernier, who is Professor of African American Studies at the University of Nottingham. With the help of an AHRC Fellowship, she has produced the first major critical study devoted to Pippin’s work. Entitled Suffering and Sunset: World War I in the Art and Life of Horace Pippin, it will be published in 2015. Celeste-Marie Bernier has also embarked on a series of public talks, in the US and UK, to bring Pippin’s work to a wider audience. And the publication of the book will take place at the same time as a major exhibition of Pippin’s work in Philadelphia, close to West Chester where he lived for the majority of his life-time.

Suffering and Sunset also breaks new ground in seeing Pippin’s paintings in the context of his writings: through four unpublished autobiographies, Pippin left behind four handwritten accounts of black soldiers in the First World War, three that were not illustrated and one that was accompanied by full colour sketches. On smudged, torn and yellowed pages, he recorded the nightmarish experience of soldiers on the Western Front, from the effects of rain and shells, to seeing the aftermath of a German plane being shot down. Despite their refusal to adhere to standardised conventions of grammar and syntax, Pippin’s memoirs convey a vivid sense of what he went through: ‘the whole intir batel feel were hell,’ he writes at one point, ‘so it were no place for any hounen been to be.’

According to Celeste-Marie Bernier, his works are ‘alive with iridescent colour. But he’s also a story-teller. His work is about struggle and beauty, life and death. It’s also about memory: the memories of an individual and of a community. It’s hard-hitting. It’s anti-sentimental.’

‘Don’t tell me how to paint,’ Pippin would say to his critics. ‘Pictures just come to my mind,’ he once said, ‘and I tell my heart to go ahead.’ Critics have even tended to treat him as...
something of a naïf, an outsider in the art world, untutored and instinctive. And yet Celeste-Marie Bernier argues that he was a self-made, self-consciously experimental artist as she shows that Pippin was far from being an artistic innocent: he had been a painter before the war, and his shift in painterly techniques was due to his having to re-learn how to paint, as a result of his war wounds. His intense use of colour, for example, comes partly from a self-reflexive understanding and active engagement with the work of the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists as well as from the inspiration provided by African American art-making traditions within his own family histories.

Celeste-Marie Bernier is also able to present Pippin in the context of many other African-American artists who, she says, were able to ‘paint their lives into existence.’ The likes of Edwin Harleston, Malvin Gray Johnson and William H. Johnson were all experimenting with ways of representing their experience of war, as black soldiers.

Ultimately, says Celeste-Marie Bernier, ‘there are two kinds of no-man’s land depicted in the work of Horace Pippin and other African-American artists of the time.’ There is the dystopian horror of the trenches. But there is also the no-man’s land that these artists came from and returned to – the early-twentieth-century America of segregation, and discrimination and lynchlaw.
WORLD WAR ONE AT HOME
LOCAL STORIES FROM A GLOBAL CONFLICT

The AHRC has been playing a major role in the BBC’s flagship, UK-wide project, writes Matt Shinn.

‘These stories offer a unique insight into life on the Home Front 100 years ago.’

The centrepiece of the BBC’s commemoration of the war links stories of the conflict to particular places in the UK – war memorials, factories, former hospitals, even zoos (in Bristol, convalescent soldiers were routinely taken to see the animals) – exploring what the war meant in different communities throughout the country.

An important aspect of this project – called World War One at Home – has been the close involvement of arts and humanities researchers working closely alongside BBC journalists in different localities, regions and nations of the UK. In all, 1,400 stories are being put together across all of the BBC local radio stations and BBC TV regions – 100 stories for each region. The stories, which are appearing as radio and television programmes, are being broadcast throughout 2014 and 2015, as well as online features on the BBC’s dedicated website, at www.bbc.co.uk/ww1

As the BBC’s Head of Programmes for the English Regions, Craig Henderson, puts it: ‘these stories offer a unique insight into life on the Home Front 100 years ago. They reveal familiar places across the nation in a new and fascinating light; places that we might drive or walk past every day without realising their historical resonance.’

The project has also involved a series of events taking place across the UK, including roadshows with hands-on activities, performances and interactive sessions which have attracted tens of thousands of participants.

‘Our critical friends’

Kent Fedorowich is Reader in British Imperial History at the University of the West of England. He helped develop academic involvement in the World War One at Home project, from an initial pilot for BBC West, into something that was rolled out nationally.

As he says, the project would not have been possible without the contribution of academic researchers. ‘The BBC liked to call us “our critical friends”. Our role was to act as historical advisers, suggesting stories in some cases, researching them, giving the wider context and carefully checking facts.’

The Imperial War Museum, the other partner in the project, was able to contribute some of the material assets – the diaries and photos – that were used to support the stories. In many cases, broadcast journalists used county record offices, local archives and regimental museums, to find appropriate local material. ‘And there was a lot of material that the BBC themselves had, but had forgotten about – such as interviews with World War One veterans, from the Sixties.’

As for the impact that the project has had, ‘we’ve seen how astounded people are at the richness and variety of the stories we’ve unearthed. These are stories that have been kept within families for generations, in many cases. They show that the First World War wasn’t just about the trenches – everyday life in Britain changed profoundly during this time. This is something that reaches out across generations, engaging young and old alike: people have been ransacking their garages and offices to find objects to bring to our roadshow events.’

And the World War One at Home project shows how truly global the conflict was. ‘This wasn’t just a white man’s war. Most people have never heard of the Chinese Labour Corps, for example, or know that some 100,000 Chinese labourers were shipped across the Pacific, locked into trains, and sent to
‘We’ve been able to contribute a greater historical perspective’

work in France.’ Many of the ‘local’ stories unearthed through the project involve people who had come to the UK from thousands of miles away.

**What’s at stake in the commemoration**

For Charles Booth, Associate Professor at the Bristol Business School and the other researcher involved in the BBC West pilot, the World War One at Home project has involved understanding the differences between academics and broadcasters. ‘The BBC, as a news media organisation, lives in the moment,’ he says. ‘They do that extremely well. They’re very good at learning quickly, making things happen, making a story, and moving on. We’ve been able to contribute a greater historical perspective, as well as picking up a few tips from the journalists, about how to present a story engagingly.’

And the success of the World War One at Home project is already apparent. ‘The message coming from the BBC is overwhelmingly positive. They have metrics on audience numbers, and we know that between 10,000 and 20,000 people have been coming to some of the roadshow events that we’ve participated in. The BBC are particularly pleased that the project has been bringing new listeners to some of their radio stations. This is exactly the kind of public engagement that we’re trying to achieve as academics.’

**New light on an old war**

‘What has surprised the BBC, and surprised me,’ says Charles Booth, ‘was just how many of the stories demonstrate the First World War was an imperial war, and how the Empire connected with the local’. Our collective view of the war can be a very narrow one, that is, focused on the Western Front only. ‘Academic historians tend to point the finger at the War Poets in this respect: in the UK, a literary interpretation of the war has come to drown out a historical one. And it is then filtered through the mores of the Sixties and Seventies: Rupert Brooke, for example, is derided as being jingoistic, with Owen and Sassoon seen as heroes for their anti-war sentiments. And yet lots of people thought like Brooke, even when (unlike him) they’d gone right through the war.’

‘I hope the project will help people to rediscover the complexity of the subject’, says Charles Booth: ‘to be more questioning of the myths around the war, and to have a more sceptical, more careful response to it. And in particular, I hope World War One at Home will lead people to be sceptical of anyone who tries to filter history through a political lens.’

‘The project would not have been possible without the contribution of academic researchers.’
What must life have been like for the millions of women and children who were left at home during World War One – waiting for loved ones to return, waiting for news, asks Matt Shinn?

For Kent Fedorowich, who is Reader in British Imperial History at the University of the West of England, one of the stand-out stories from the World War One at Home project is about just this kind of private torment, which must have taken place, behind closed doors, in countless homes during the First World War.

Unusually, this particular World War One at Home story takes the form of a song. ‘Last September’ was commissioned by BBC Radio Bristol from singer-songwriter Daisy Chapman. It is a love song, accompanied by piano and strings, based on letters that were sent home from the Western Front to Lizzy Brain, in Bishopsworth in Bristol. The letters brought news of the death of her husband James, and gave details of his funeral: Lizzy also died a few months later, of what her family said was a broken heart.

‘I imagined her gazing out of her window to the East,’ says Daisy Chapman, ‘trying to pick up a sense of what her loved one was doing.’ The song includes lines from the letters that Lizzy Brain received, and it ends: ‘your coffin wrapped in the Union Jack – I’ll see you on the other side.’

The technological war
While Lizzy Brain’s experience was common to many across the UK, other stories from the BBC West region are more specific to the area. Life in Bristol, for example, was very much affected by the fact that the city was a major manufacturing centre, with new technologies being put to military use.

A facility at Chittening, just outside Bristol, was used to fill gas shells with the blister agent mustard gas, also known as Hun Stuff, which was manufactured nearby at Portishead. Situated in the middle of farmland, the factory needed good transport links, and so it was given its own train line and station to ferry workers and munitions to and fro.

The site also had to have its own hospital. Workers at the factory suffered from extremely high rates of sickness, which resulted in their being given one week’s holiday for every twenty days worked – something that was almost unheard-of at the time. Nevertheless, over 1,200 casualties were reported at the site during the war. As Kent Fedorowich says, ‘the gas shells that were produced at the factory probably did more harm to the people who worked there than they did to the Germans.’ The story is a reminder that it was not just those on the front line who found themselves in harm’s way, during the First World War – and yet now, there is hardly anything left at the Chittening site, to indicate what happened there.

Other new technologies that Bristol was associated with include motorcycle manufacture (the Douglas factory in the city made some of the best motorbikes in the world, and turned over pretty much its entire production to making machines for the front).

And then there’s the association of Bristol with aircraft. The World War One at Home project includes the story of Frank Barnwell, who developed the single-seat Bristol Scout before the war, as a private racing plane, but then had his design commandeered by the Royal Flying Corps, for use on reconnaissance missions. After serving as a pilot himself on the Western Front, Barnwell was recalled to Bristol to work on what is widely seen as one of the outstanding aircraft of the First World War, the Bristol Fighter. Generally known as the Brisfit, by the end of the war over 1,500 were in service in the Royal Air Force.

And Bristol is still associated with aircraft manufacture today: in 2010, apprentices at Airbus built a working replica of the Bristol Fighter, while in 2013 the company named its new engineering headquarters in Filton in Barnwell’s honour.
The road to recovery

As a busy port, and with excellent road and rail connections, Bristol was also the place that many wounded servicemen were brought to, to be treated. Charles Booth, Associate Professor at the Bristol Business School, points out that the city was ‘at the forefront of medical advances during the First World War, with pioneering surgery and medical technology being developed.’

A number of new hospitals were established in Bristol, with several even being donated by private individuals. One such was Bishop’s Knoll War Hospital which was converted at his own expense by a former Australian wool-baron, Robert Edwin Bush, and which treated Australian wounded servicemen in its own way. Bristol Zoo also contributed to the recovery of wounded servicemen: by the end of the war, some 32,000 had attended morale-boosting events there.

The crossroads of Empire

Elsewhere in the region is what for Charles Booth was one of the most extraordinary places in the First World War. Taking up around a ninth of the county of Wiltshire, the army training areas of Salisbury Plain ‘give you a sense of the truly international nature of the conflict. It was here that civilians from all over the Empire – from India, South Africa, Australia, Canada, New Zealand – found themselves, and where they were turned into soldiers.’ Photos from the time show soldiers of many different nationalities passing through.

With its wide-open spaces lending themselves to large-scale manoeuvres, Salisbury Plain became the British army’s main training ground. That training itself was hazardous – the area contains the graves of soldiers who were killed in accidents. And you can still see traces of the dummy trenches, built to give recruits an idea of the kind of combat they would be facing in this War to End War – trenches that now sit alongside remnants from more recent times, and subsequent wars.

For further information, please go to:
www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01nhwgx

‘Salisbury Plain gives you a sense of the truly international nature of the conflict.’
‘The contribution of Black and Minority Ethnic troops in the world wars shows the extent to which those communities have played a role in building Britain’

**WHOSE REMEMBRANCE?**

Until very recently, the contribution of people from the former colonies to the two world wars has largely been relegated to the sub-text of mainstream coverage. Studied by specialist historians, and occasionally acknowledged by specific events and commemorations, the subject has all too often been consigned to a footnote in contemporary accounts and in subsequent books and studies.

Given the numbers involved, this amounts to a significant gap in our understanding of the two world wars. In the region of one and a half million Indians served in the First World War of whom 80,000 lost their lives. Over 15,000 men from the Caribbean served with the allied forces. The peoples of the former Empire also played a significant role in the Second World War: the Indian Army grew to be the largest volunteer force ever, with two and a half million soldiers. 370,000 Africans fought – 90,000 travelling to Burma to fight in the war against Japan.

_Whose Remembrance?_ is an AHRC-funded Imperial War Museum project, funded through the Connected Communities programme, which aims to help restore this unfairly forgotten history to its rightful place in our consciousness – an investigation into the state of research into the experiences of the peoples of Britain’s former empire in the wars and its availability to 21st century British audiences and communities.

‘Whose Remembrance? asks searching questions about how history is constructed and handed down,’ says Suzanne Bardgett, Head of Research at Imperial War Museums (IWM).
‘Our hope is that Whose Remembrance? will make the future interpretation of history a more complete and inclusive process.’

“We remember the mainstream story, but the people who wrote the history of the two world wars came from the officer class. There are far fewer personal accounts by colonial troops, and as a result, their stories have not formed part of an “official” history.

‘It is only relatively recently that society has become interested in the stories of ordinary people and realised that everybody’s story counts. Today we see a more intelligent and inclusive attitude to the stories of the black and ethnic minorities.’

‘But recovering these experiences is hard. We actually know very little about what it was like to live as a labourer on the Western Front or to travel from Jamaica to work on Britain’s home front. Whose Remembrance? aims to address that.’

The project consisted of two phases. During the first, which ran between February and October 2013, researchers worked on creating three databases: work published by academics and community historians during the last 30 years; exhibitions and resources developed by museums and cultural organisations; and cultural outputs including films, documentaries, novels and plays.

There were also two successful workshops at the IWM – one for historians, and one for museum professionals, community workers and representatives, which began the process of reaching out to the wider community.

‘The workshops gave everyone a platform to exchange ideas about what they’d been doing in this area, and were an invaluable way of identifying new sources and approaches, as well as the problems of accessing such a dispersed body of evidence,’ says Suzanne.

The second phase was the production of a specially-commissioned film – with £26,000 of further AHRC funding – summarising the study’s findings, which is now being used as a way of reaching out to the wider community.

The film was given a special screening at a House of Commons reception in November 2013, hosted by Diane Abbott MP, who said the Whose Remembrance? project has been crucial in filling a major gap in history.

‘The contribution of BME troops in the world wars is a vital part of community history but also serves in showing the extent to which BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) people have played a role in building Britain,’ she added.

Many of the resources catalogued in the Whose Remembrance? databases reflect a growing awareness of this legacy in Britain’s multi-cultural communities. Patrick Vernon,
founder of Every Generation Media, collaborated with Haringey Library Services on Speaking out and Standing Firm, a multi-media project based on young people’s interviews with African and Caribbean war veterans in the borough.

‘The biggest challenge was to track down and convince these veterans that their stories would be valued and recognised by the young people,’ says Patrick. ‘For many reasons, they had not told their stories before. Like so many men and women in the past, they often faced post-service resettlement problems, with the added complication of prejudice. So they had the double whammy of racism and simply being ignored’.

But the sixth formers at Alexandra Park School were captivated by their stories, and that led to interesting discussions about different types of conflict, why these veterans had joined up and whether they would do it again in the present age.’

According to Patrick, Whose Remembrance? is an important reminder of how people from different parts of the Commonwealth have contributed to the country’s history. It reveals a rich heritage and a relevant history to young African, Caribbean and Asian people, and other ethnic minorities, often for the first time.

Free public screenings of the Whose Remembrance? film have taken place at King’s College and the Whitechapel Idea Store in London, the University of Bedfordshire in partnership with Luton Culture, IWM North in Trafford, Greater Manchester, and in Hackney, London in partnership with Hackney Council and the Black and Ethnic Minority Arts Network (BEMA).

Project Officer Dave Graves, from Wardown Park Museum in Luton, says the project is a great way to engage people across a diverse community like Luton with a heritage that everybody shares. ‘The screening was the perfect event for a small organisation like us to piggyback on the work done by the IWM and generate awareness.’

Suzanne Bardgett says it would have been impossible to do this rich and inspiring project without the AHRC funding.

‘From insights into the experiences of the Chinese or South African labour corps, to letters that reveal what life was like for Indians in Mesopotamia, to a recording of an Indian soldier singing in a German prisoner of war camp, Whose Remembrance? has highlighted many little patches of dense, fascinating material and these can help us reconstruct the colonial soldier’s experience,’ she says.

Suzanne points out, however, that the project is just the starting point for an ongoing journey of discovery.

‘It was very exciting to see the fruits of the project emerging through the film, but it’s a film about the “doing” of history rather than the “making” of history – that has yet to be made. Our hope is that Whose Remembrance? will make the future interpretation of history a more complete and inclusive process.’

To watch the Whose Remembrance? film and for further information on the project, please visit: www.iwm.org.uk/collections-research/research-programmes/whose-remembrance
Women were at the heart of moves to promote an alternative to bloodshed during the First World War, as an AHRC-funded network is discovering. Carrie Dunn reports

Last summer, Budapest played host to an AHRC-funded workshop exploring the role of women’s organisations and female activists in the aftermath of the First World War.

This event was the fourth in a series organised by a cross-continental network funded through an AHRC networking grant which focused on women’s activism during the war and its immediate aftermath. Hungary was a particularly fitting place for the symposium as interest has grown in what was happening in Eastern Europe – usually overshadowed by the dominant Western narrative of war.

‘A lot of the previous literature has been focused on the Western European and North American experiences of cultural demobilisation after the war,’ admits Professor Matthew Stibbe of Sheffield Hallam University. ‘We really found that focusing on Hungary told us a huge amount more, both about the Eastern European perspective but also about transnational links between women activists as well.’

Coincidentally, Budapest was also the venue for a convention just over 100 years ago, which was of great interest to today’s network of academics studying the women’s movement: the last pre-war meeting of the International Women’s Suffrage Alliance in 1913.

‘At that time the Hungarian women’s movement contained a strong liberal, middle-class and Jewish element,’ explains Stibbe. ‘After the First World War, Hungary as a country went through very rapid political changes as the Habsburg Empire..."
disintegrated. The Treaty of Trianon, imposed upon Hungary as a defeated nation, led to severe territorial losses. About a third of Hungarians found themselves living beyond the borders of the truncated nation-state, mainly in Slovakia and Romania. It felt as if Hungary was saddled with blame, and suddenly national issues came very much to the fore.

‘In very quick succession, Hungary went through a brief period of liberalism, then a Communist regime in which proletarian women took part but the old bourgeois feminists were very much marginalised, and then after the end of 1919, a conservative, authoritarian regime, in which right-wing women with a nationalist and anti-Semitic agenda took over and claimed to represent Hungarian women in place of the old liberal feminist movement.’

That meant the isolation of one of the movement’s long-time leaders, Rosika Schwimmer. ‘Before the First World War she was of the younger generation of this great first generation of women politicians. She was very high-profile,’ says Dr Judith Szapor of McGill University, Canada.

‘They were pushing for suffrage but also social welfare, economic and legal and educational equality, and they were middle-class. There were lots of professionals among the leaders – the first doctors and quite a few university-educated women, and they had a very extensive and quite influential international network. That last conference in Budapest in 1913 was a huge success and everyone who was anyone was there, and there were very high hopes because it looked like they were close to a breakthrough internationally.’

With the outbreak of war, though, the drive for suffrage and social change was halted, and Schwimmer ended up in the United States, where she was instrumental in organising the widely-ridiculed Ford ship, a peace initiative funded by motor entrepreneur Henry Ford and entailing various international figures travelling to neutral countries in Europe and advocating for peace.

During the last year of the war, Schwimmer returned to Hungary for another push for women’s suffrage, eventually successful, and after the declaration of the Armistice, her old friend and ally Mihály Károlyi became president of the new Hungarian republic, and sent her to Switzerland as his ambassador.

‘That’s her high point,’ says Szapor. ‘Everything she fought for is achieved. But the Swiss government does not recognise her credentials because she’s a woman and the republic isn’t recognised as an independent state yet. The embassy – the old gentry and aristocrats – they completely ostracise her. She has to come back and resign.’

Szapor describes the extension of suffrage to Hungarian women in 1918 as a ‘paradox’, because by the time any of them actually got to practise their new right – in January 1920 – it was under a counter-revolutionary regime that had isolated anyone associated with the previous administrations, including the liberal feminists who had led the campaigning for years.

‘It was a real counter-revolution,’ says Szapor. ‘Anyone who was in the least associated with either of the two revolutions was practically excluded from political life.’

Yet the wider women’s rights movement did not recognise this difficulty with the installation of the new political regime, focusing simply on gaining the vote. Some of Szapor’s own research has explored this.

‘A couple of years ago I looked at the International Women’s Suffrage Alliance papers in Manchester, and I was curious how they would see it as they had their bulletin that greeted any new development in women’s rights around the globe,’ she recalls. ‘It confirmed what I thought – in 1920 they were greeting this wonderful development, saying that after all those years Hungarian women were able to put into practise the right that they had received two years earlier, so they didn’t realise that it was a completely new set-up. Yes, Hungarian women did have the vote, but they had lost a lot of other, more valuable things, like freedom of press and freedom of assembly.’

Szapor wasn’t surprised by this finding, which she suggests is typical of the period’s perspective, aiming solely for one social change and failing to consider the context in which it was achieved.

However, she points out: ‘In their defence, it’s easy for us in hindsight to see that 1920 was the beginning of a counter-revolutionary regime. At the time, it was the most extensive electorate ever in Hungarian history and nobody really had an inkling what was it going to develop into.’

And some of this wealth of information will now be published by the network in the form of a thematic collection of essays, with Hungary forming a pivotal case study. As Stibbe concludes: ‘Hungary was a paradigm of some of the problems and challenges faced by women’s movements after the First World War.’

For further information: https://arts.leeds.ac.uk/aftermaths/
THE POET WHO LOVED THE WAR

A groundbreaking BBC documentary broadcast earlier this year calls for a re-evaluation of writer and composer Ivor Gurney, reports Carrie Dunn

Ivor Gurney, the war poet who loved war, was the subject of a groundbreaking new documentary shown earlier in 2014 as part of the BBC’s programming to mark the centenary of the First World War – and it all started in a meeting hosted by the AHRC and the BBC.

Professor Tim Kendall of the University of Exeter was one of the guests invited to talk about his current research interests at a joint seminar in London two years ago. After his four-minute presentation, he got talking to BBC editor Michael Poole, and between them, they planned this programme.

‘The AHRC and the BBC put out a call for people who were working on World War One,’ explains Kendall. ‘The BBC were occupied with questions like “How do we mark the centenary of the First World War? What programming should we have? Are we missing something obvious?” To some extent they were wanting something obvious.” To some extent they were wanting to move away from “Tommy on the Western Front”. I stood up and talked about Ivor Gurney.’

Poole had always wanted to do a programme on Ivor Gurney, who was, like himself, originally from Gloucestershire.

‘Gurney continued to write, yet much of that work was undiscovered or ignored, dismissed due to his illness.’

‘He’s buried quite near where I live,’ says Poole. ‘I had this interest in him over the years and had never really done anything with it.

‘Then I was doing a number of programmes about the First World War, some literary and some historical, and was invited to this seminar part-organised by the AHRC. When Tim spoke, I saw my way into making this programme.’

Poole was excited to find an expert so keen on bringing Gurney’s story to a television audience. He explains: ‘When we make programmes, we reach out and use expertise – that’s how we find out about things that are worth doing – but sometimes it can be quite hard. So to go to something like that and sit down for a morning and just have 12 people stand up and talk about what they’re doing is fantastic.’

The documentary, directed by Clive Flowers with Kendall as presenter, highlighted Kendall’s new discoveries in the repertoire of Gurney’s poetry and music composition. ‘He was a composer before he was a poet,’ explains Kendall. ‘He’s one of those greedy people who’s a genius at two things.’
Yet Gurney also dealt with multiple serious mental health issues, beginning as a young man and eventually leading to a breakdown which confined him to a Dartford asylum for the 15 years prior to his death in 1937.

It would be easy to think that the stresses of war did not help Gurney’s mental state, but it seems that his time at the front was, in fact, the happiest of his life.

‘The way that he self-cured was through physical labour,’ says Kendall. ‘Before the war, when he had his first breakdown, he came back from the Royal College of Music to Gloucestershire, and worked at digging fields. He was a great walker – he thought nothing of walking from one end of the county to another to see someone, and slept under hedgerows on the way. He hated London, he hated the city – he found reengagement with the natural world sustaining, and it helped him to recover.

‘That’s why he then thought, when war broke out, “This is going to help me, the whole discipline of army life.” Army life gave him that sense of regimentation and discipline that otherwise he wouldn’t have.’

Serving at the front, Gurney was shot through the shoulder in Easter 1917, and in September 1917 at Passchendaele he was gassed and shellshocked, but Kendall is at pains to point out that this was not what caused his committal to the asylum in 1922.

‘The shellshock was overtaken by schizophrenic episodes after the war,’ he says. ‘The war years were pretty much the most stable of his adult life, and it was after the war that he broke down completely.’

Indeed, he argues that Gurney’s nostalgia for the war actually helped him while confined.

‘He associated war with, yes, all the horror and brutality, but also with the comradeship, that sense of belonging, that sense of place instead of the no-place of the asylum,’ says Kendall.

Gurney continued to write, yet much of that work was undiscovered or ignored, dismissed due to his illness. That was until Kendall and PhD researcher Philip Lancaster combined their efforts to shine a light on his archive – and in Lancaster’s case to produce a navigable catalogue.

‘He was writing and composing feverishly for about four or five years and then there’s ten years of blankness at the end,’ says Kendall. ‘Either the work was destroyed, by him or someone else, or he just fell silent.’

‘We’ve actually discovered what he wrote in the asylum is hugely interesting and entirely lucid,’ says Lancaster.

‘The documentary highlighted Kendall’s new discoveries in the repertoire of Gurney’s poetry and music composition’

‘Personally, I think his best poetry is that of 1926. He wrote 365 poems in that year, one a day, and only 12 of those are so far published. In late 1922 when he entered the asylum, and in 1923, 1924 1925, he was concerned with his predicament, and he was writing for freedom, but by 1926 he seems to have become resigned to his fate.

Gurney’s story may seem to be a sad one, but Lancaster has a strikingly positive attitude towards his life and work.

‘It is easy to get bound up in the tragedy,’ he admits.

‘Because his madness is the most media-worthy part of his story, I think it’s easy to forget that he called himself a “child of joy”. There is a great joy and a great love of beauty in his work. He’s a pure artist. He was so fixed on this idea of beauty, he’s a grounding influence on war poetry. His contemporary Wilfred Owen is full of horror and striking images and has come to define the war; Gurney is a grounding influence because he sees beyond that.’

For further information:
www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03zq4cb
Lester Mason, Lecturer in History at University of Wales Trinity Saint David, singles out the treatment of German immigrants in some communities in Wales, as a particularly dark aspect of the Great War in the Principality. 'We might think of ourselves as liberal-minded,' he says, 'but look at how ordinary, law-abiding people of German descent were dealt with in the First World War – arguably, much worse than British immigrants in Germany were treated.'

Examples include the case of a liberal-minded, anti-Kaiser German Professor at the University College of Wales Aberystwyth, a Dr Ethe, who was forced to leave his post after there were disorderly street protests against him (several papers at the time sided with the protestors). 'It’s a rather ugly story of anti-German sentiment, which was repeated throughout Britain,' says Lester Mason – often mobs would go looking for German workers in barbers and hotels, where they had traditionally been employed. But the trouble wasn’t confined to so-called ‘enemy aliens’: there were also problems between locals and American naval personnel in Pembroke dock, and disturbances involving Belgian refugees in Milford Haven. ‘These are some of the less savoury aspects of the war, which have been forgotten or sidelined.’

A hotbed of immorality

Also unsettling is the way that the authorities treated young women in many parts of Wales, fearing an outbreak of what was called ‘khaki fever’ (the supposedly overwhelming attraction felt by young women towards a man in uniform). Women in Wales were policed under the Defence of the Realm Act, with arrests being made among those who were caught committing ‘indecent acts.’ Women in Cardiff faced a curfew. And at the same time, concerned citizens took things into their own hands: in Swansea, one councillor called the town a ‘hotbed of immorality,’ because of evidence of sexual activity between young women and visiting Scandinavian seamen – the Swansea Women’s Citizens Union subsequently launched a ‘Purity Crusade’ to ‘stem the tide of immorality sweeping over the town’.

Feeding the guns

Elsewhere in Wales, and throughout Britain, women were finding work in the many munitions factories that supplied the Front with bullets and shells. One of the largest munitions factories and weapons stores in Wales was at Pembrey, where dynamite and TNT were produced: from 1916 women were employed on the shop floor, alongside the men.

In July 1917 an enormous explosion left four men and two women dead. But it was the funeral of the two female victims – Mildred Owen aged 18, and Mary Watson, 19 – that drew the most mourners, including from among their fellow workers, some of whom wore their overalls to the service.

The war and Welshness

According to Lester Mason, ‘there has been a perception that the Welsh were less keen to go to war than people elsewhere in Britain. Recruitment figures for Wales are on a par with those for England and Scotland. But there is some anecdotal evidence of farming communities being reluctant to give up their labour. And then there’s the Welsh tradition of Non-conformism: the perception has been one of a more distinct pacifism in Wales.’ This remains a controversial subject, and there is a need for further research into ordinary people’s enthusiasm for war in Wales, based upon changing attitudes during the conflict, as well as gender, town and country, and even class distinctions.

Did the war change the way that people in Wales saw themselves in relation to England? 'There’s a strange mix. There was nothing wrong in saying that you were fighting for England’s glory, or fighting in England’s war – some Welsh war memorials even said that, including the Cenotaph at Pembroke, which carries the inscription, ‘Forget us not o land for which we fell. May it go well for England, still go well’.

But at the same time, ideas of nationhood were also emerging throughout Britain during the First World War, and throughout the Empire. Though Plaid Cymru didn’t emerge till the Twenties, there was a growing sensitivity to being Welsh. People’s attitudes were flexible, and could accommodate the paradox: that you were both Welsh, and fighting England’s fight. And oddly enough it was the sense of belonging in the British Empire – even as the war brought about the beginning of the end of that Empire – that enabled them to do that.’

Rioting in Rhyl

Gerry Oram, Lecturer in History at the University of Swansea, singles out another dark story that the World War One at Home project has uncovered. The Canadian army mutiny at Kimmel Park in Rhyl, North Wales, was one of a series that crept across
Britain, in the latter years of the war and immediately afterwards. It was also one of the most serious. In March 1919 rioting broke out among 20,000 exhausted and disease-ridden Canadian troops, who found themselves stuck for months in a dilapidated training camp, waiting to be taken back to Canada. By the time that order was restored, five of them, having come through some of the great battles of the war, had been killed by their own countrymen. The tombstone that was provided by locals for one of the soldiers that was killed, Corporal Joseph Young, reads: ‘someday, sometime we’ll understand.’

Welsh women after the war

According to Gerry Oram, in Wales especially there is more to the traditional narrative concerning women in the First World War – of opportunities becoming available as the men went off to fight – than meets the eye. ‘We can see clearly that women in Wales were far worse off than in the rest of the UK,’ he says. ‘Their rates of employment were lower before the war, then there was some munitions work, but then after the war the percentage of women who were employed dropped to below the 1911 census figure. In 1931 it dropped further still.’

But then, according to Gerry Oram, the effects of World War One on the Welsh economy were catastrophic. ‘The war made Welsh industry very disjointed. The coalfields took on an importance that they didn’t warrant. Many industries that were given over to war work subsequently declined. And in agriculture too, which had traditionally employed many women, employment rates dwindled. This all led to a huge migration of young women, especially, away from Wales. It fits with one of our key narratives of the First World War: that Wales suffered disproportionately, compared to the rest of Britain.’

Two versions of history

Of course, one of the things that sets Wales apart from much of the rest of Britain is the fact that the country is bi-lingual. Gethin Matthews, who is a Lecturer in History at the University of Swansea, is in a good position to understand the implications of this, as he speaks both Welsh and English. ‘Some narratives come across differently in Welsh and English language sources,’ he says. ‘Take a figure like John Williams, the best-known preacher in North Wales during the First World War: he preached in uniform in the pulpit, encouraging men to enlist. He was seen as quite mainstream during the war itself, but in the Welsh language sources he really comes across as a hypocrite, as someone who had turned his back on the traditions of the Welsh chapel, in preaching for a just war. He’s seen as betraying the old traditions of pacifism and anti-militarism – of betraying the idea of Welshness itself.’

But then, in Welsh language sources ‘disillusion with the war starts earlier, and goes deeper, than it does in the English ones. And indeed, in economic terms the consequences of the war were awful for Wales: it’s impossible to say that the war was worth it. It’s no coincidence that the first conscientious objector to be elected to parliament, after the war, was elected in Wales.’

What the World War One at Home project has shown, though, is that Welsh chapels responded to the war in very different ways. Two Baptist chapels in Briton Ferry (near Neath) illustrate the point. One, Rehoboth, preached the message of a just war, and has 99 names on its roll of honour. Another, Jerusalem, just down the road, was known by its detractors as the ‘Kaiser’s Temple’, being strongly anti-war: it hosted anti-conscription meetings. There was a plurality of attitudes to the war, in other words. But while many historians have focused on the stories of Welsh conscientious objectors, for Gethin Matthews this is ‘more than their numbers warrant.’

Finally, the long-standing narrative of Wales suffering more than the rest of Britain during the war, or being worse treated, has also led to there being a slightly different culture of remembrance in the country, according to Gethin Matthews. ‘The official commemoration is a devolved issue. But it’s quite clear that remembrance is more a matter of community in Wales than it is elsewhere in Britain. In England, money is given to schools to take children to visit the World War One battlefields. In Wales, there are initiatives to encourage children to find out about the men who joined up, and how their communities were affected by their going. That’s quite a different emphasis.’

For further information, please go to:
www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01nhwgx
This is the end and the beginning of an age. This is something far greater than the French Revolution or the Reformation and we live in it.

HG Wells in ‘Mr Britling Sees It Through’

Culturally, the First World War is the war that stands in for other wars.

Pat Barker

I wish those people who write so glibly about this being a holy War, and the orators who talk so much about going on no matter how long the War lasts and what it may mean, could see a case – to say nothing of 10 cases – of mustard gas in its early stages – could see the poor things burnt and blistered all over with great mustard-coloured suppurating blisters, with blind eyes – sometimes temporally, sometimes permanently – all sticky and stuck together, and always fighting for breath, with voices a mere whisper, saying that their throats are closing and they know they will choke.

Vera Brittain, Writer

The First World War killed fewer victims than the Second World War, destroyed fewer buildings, and uprooted millions instead of tens of millions – but in many ways it left even deeper scars both on the mind and on the map of Europe. The old world never recovered from the shock.

Edmund Taylor, Historian

In the Somme valley, the back of language broke. It could no longer carry its former meanings. World War I changed the life of words and images in art, radically and forever. It brought our culture into the age of mass-produced, industrialized death. This, at first, was indescribable.

Robert Hughes in ‘The Shock of the New’

The First World War began the process of imperial collapse, and in its aftermath we saw the birth of a world that was asked to respect Wilsonian principles of national self-determination – albeit initially more likely to be applied to the European than non-European world. That was a momentous change in world history.

Andrew Thompson, Historian

But the old man would not so, but slew his son, And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

Wilfred Owen
“We had a tremendous number of frostbite cases at the beginning of 1917. Their feet were absolutely white, swollen up, dead. Some of their toes dropped off with it.”

BRITISH VAD NURSE KATHLEEN YARDWOOD

“(World War I) was the most colossal, murderous, mismanaged butchery that has ever taken place on earth. Any writer who said otherwise lied, So the writers either wrote propaganda, shut up, or fought.”

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

“The lamps are going out all over Europe: we shall not see them lit again in our life-time.”

SIR EDWARD GREY

“This is not a peace. It is an armistice for 20 years.”

FERDINAND FOCH

“The trench experience was one of the most sustained and systematic shattering of the human senses: it stripped man of the protective layers of civilisation and thrust his naked, fragile body between the ravages of industrial modernity, on the one hand, and the chaos of formless matter on the other.”

TIM KENDALL, HISTORIAN

“The First World War had begun – imposed on the statesmen of Europe by railway timetables. It was an unexpected climax to the railway age.”

A. J. P. TAYLOR, HISTORIAN

“If the women in the factories stopped work for twenty minutes, the Allies would lose the War.”

FRENCH FIELD MARSHALL JOFFRE
How did Indian soldiers, thousands of miles from their home, experience and write about the War? A major AHRC project uncovered their story, writes Carrie Dunn.

The First World War did not just have an impact on Britain and the British, but on people around the Commonwealth, with troops coming from all corners of the globe.

An earlier AHRC-funded project shone a spotlight on one previously neglected area of research, examining letters from and to Indian soldiers during the First World War, looking at how they documented their experience, and how their families at home responded to them. The fellowship led to further research and impacts, and encouraged others to explore a largely forgotten story.

Dr David Omissi of the University of Hull evaluated Indian soldiers’ experience of civilian Europe in wartime, and considered how this encounter may have affected their engagement with Indian values and with post-war India after their demobilisation.

Censors monitored all the letters sent and received by the Indian soldiers, and the chief censor produced a weekly report summarising the contents. Helpfully for Dr Omissi, attached to the reports were excerpts from about 100 letters, translated into English, each one giving the name, rank, and religion of the soldier concerned. He discovered a cache of these in the British Library while working on a history of the Indian army, and decided to take this further.

‘I wanted to really look at how the soldiers interacted with Europe, because that was one of the main themes in their letters: they were writing home, talking about France, sometimes they were in hospitals in Britain,’ he explains. ‘I became interested in how they interacted with the censorship, how they disguised the meaning of their letters sometimes, and used hidden language.’

The soldiers probably did not write all their letters themselves due to low levels of literacy, as the Indian Army recruited overwhelmingly in rural parts of the country. Instead, the troops might have asked scribes, such as the company clerk, to write their letters for them and to read out the letters they had received, adding an extra imperative to disguise their true meaning in places.

Omissi was particularly interested in the correspondence about religion. He says there is an evident concern in many of the letters soldiers received from home about the possibility of their abandoning their faith.

‘Letters from families become very anxious about soldiers converting to Christianity,’ he says. ‘British charities got very involved in supporting Indian soldiers, and one was the YMCA. They distributed writing paper with YMCA inscriptions on...’
BEYOND THE TRENCHES RESEARCHING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Letters from families become very anxious about soldiers converting to Christianity.

Omissi points to one especially interesting correspondent, Mohammed Khan, who married a French woman in 1917. His relations in India were very concerned that he might convert to Christianity, so he hit on a very unusual tactic to allay their fears. ‘He ended up writing home and telling them the king himself had ordered him to marry the woman, so it was his duty to do so,’ says Omissi.

As is evident from this focus on religion and relationships, Omissi’s work explores letters that were not necessarily from the heat of battle – some were miles behind the frontline, and others were written from hospital. ‘I wanted to remind people that a lot of soldiers didn’t spend a lot of their time in the frontline,’ says Omissi. ‘This was true of Indian cavalry, who spent nearly four years on the Western Front, but most of the time weren’t in action. Most of their lives were spent behind the line, interacting with French civilians.’

Omissi wanted to find out how much information about the soldiers’ religious practices was detailed in the letters. ‘How did soldiers deal with fasting? Should they keep wearing turbans or dispense with them? What did they think about European literacy? How were they treated in British hospitals? To what extent were they being respected? To what extent were the British authorities aware of the soldiers’ religious needs and concerns? How well informed were they about them?’ he asks.

The reason this is so key is because one of the censors’ aims of monitoring the correspondence was to get information and pre-empt any disciplinary issues triggered by cultural or religious misunderstandings. This meant censors needed to have language skills as well as diplomacy.

‘The censors were very well informed,’ agrees Omissi. ‘They were literate in Indian languages, and with a lot of experience and knowledge of India.’

As with many archives of wartime correspondence, these letters are often very emotive, and Omissi was struck by the soldiers’ description of the impact and extent of their comrades’ deaths.

Indeed, by November 1918, around 827,000 Indians had enlisted as combatants, in addition to those who were already serving in August 1914. It may be difficult 100 years on to understand why Indian soldiers would be prepared to fight in a European war. It is possibly too simplistic to attribute it just to mercenary reasons, although money may have been one motive for enlistment: many soldiers were recruited from poorer, rural areas, and any additional income would doubtless have been useful.

However, many soldiers saw it as an opportunity to display their bravery in battle and thus bringing honour to their clan or caste, and also a chance to demonstrate their loyalty to King George V, the British monarch and figurehead of the Empire.

There are also more disquieting reasons for their enlistment. From 1916, British authorities in India told local officials to sign up a given number of men from each district, or their jobs would be under threat. That led to widespread bribery and coercion to make sure enough men were recruited. Official figures suggest that, over the course of the four years, 64,449 Indian soldiers were killed.

‘These are long service regulars, mostly,’ Omissi points out, ‘but the war in France was a tremendous shock – just the scale of the losses. That comes out in their letters. Many of them are very, very moving.”

ONGOING IMPACT

David Omissi’s AHRC-funded project grew out of an earlier project to edit a book of Indian soldiers’ letters, published in 1999 as Indian Voices of the Great War. This is now being reprinted by Penguin India, and two of the soldiers’ letters were read out by the High Commissioner for India at the Centenary of the First World War, Service for the Commonwealth, held at Glasgow Cathedral on 4 August 2014, to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the day the Commonwealth joined the war.

David Omissi has been involved with the Indian Embassy in Paris in planning commemoration for the one hundredth anniversary of 1915, which was the Indian Army’s ‘big year’ in France. He gave a short paper at the Indian Ambassador’s residence as part of a workshop in June 2014. This also involved showing a feature by New Delhi Television on the Indian Army in France, for which he was interviewed. The original programme reached an audience of 80 million in India.

The AHRC project will, in turn, be the springboard for further research and outreach on the Indian Army in Europe during the First World War.
CONNECTING PUBLIC AND ACADEMIC HISTORIES

THE WW1 ENGAGEMENT CENTRES

There are five First World War Engagement Centres in the UK, funded by the AHRC. Each Engagement Centre involves academic researchers collaborating with projects across the UK, providing advice and support to community groups that are commemorating the centenary of the Great War. The Centres are funded through the Connected Communities programme and the AHRC’s Care for the Future theme.

The centres with their specialisms are:

**Voices of War and Peace**  
the Great War and its legacy

University of Birmingham, in collaboration with (amongst others), Cardiff, Glasgow, Manchester Metropolitan, Birmingham City, Wolverhampton and Worcester Universities & Newman University College.

The centre offers research support and guidance for community groups around the First World War in general and in particular around the following themes:
- Belief and the Great War
- Commemoration
- Childhood
- Cities at War
- Gender and the Home Front

Enquiries can be sent to: voices@contacts.bham.ac.uk  
http://www.voicesofwarandpeace.org

**Gateways to the First World War**

University of Kent, in collaboration with (amongst others), Leeds, Brighton, Greenwich and Portsmouth Universities and Queen Mary, University of London

Gateways contains a range of expertise which can help you explore the following areas:
- Memorials, commemoration and memory
- Life on the Home and Fighting Fronts
- The medical history of the First World War
- Wartime propaganda and popular culture
- Maritime and naval history
- Operational and military history

Enquiries can be sent to: gateways@kent.ac.uk  
http://www.kent.ac.uk/ww1
Everyday Lives in War
experience and memory of the First World War

University of Hertfordshire, in collaboration with (amongst others), Universities of Central Lancashire, Lincoln, Exeter and Essex

How did war affect daily life between 1914 and 1918; what was the legacy of the conflict? This centre aims to encourage community research into questions such as these and has particular expertise in:
- First World War food and farming
- Theatre and entertainment
- Conscientious objection and military tribunals
- Supernatural beliefs
- Childhood
- Family relationships
- Cartoons, trench publications and popular culture

The centre welcomes enquiries on its specific themes and on general First World War topics: firstworldwar@herts.ac.uk http://www.herts.ac.uk/everyday-lives-in-war/every-day-lives-in-war

Living Legacies 1914-18
From past conflict to shared future

Queen’s University Belfast, in collaboration with (amongst others), Universities of Ulster, Newcastle and Wales and Goldsmiths College University of London

The ‘Living Legacies’ First World War Engagement Centre is exploring the enduring impacts and legacies of the First World War and how it lives on in the twenty-first century.

The Centre is interested in helping communities to; tell their stories and share these stories with others; rediscover the forgotten First World War heritage in our landscapes; find out why and where people moved as a result of the war; express stories about the conflict through drama and theatre. It has particular expertise in the following areas:
- Museums and exhibitions
- Migration and ‘moving lives’
- Material cultures and archaeology
- Digital technologies and digitisation
- Performing arts

Please contact: livinglegacies@qub.ac.uk http://www.livinglegacies1914-18.ac.uk

Centre for Hidden Histories
Community, Commemoration and the First World War

University of Nottingham, in collaboration with (amongst others), Oxford Brookes, Manchester Metropolitan, Nottingham Trent and Derby Universities

Do you feel your community or descendants are being ignored by the 1914-18 commemorations? This centre is particularly interested in developing commemorative projects with national, faith and other emerging communities whose histories are rarely considered, and for whom the traditional Armistice Day celebrations may have strikingly different meanings.

The centre's key thematic interests include:
- Migration and displacement
- The experience of 'others’, from countries and regions within Europe, Asia and the Commonwealth
- Impact and subsequent legacies of the war on diverse communities within Britain
- Remembrance and commemoration
- Identity and faith

The Centre would welcome enquiries if you are interested in their themes or are looking for collaborative opportunities, please contact: HiddenHistories@nottingham.ac.uk http://hiddenhistoriesww1.ac.uk
Nowhere in the world did the First World War have such profound or long-lasting effects than the Middle East. Carrie Dunn reports on an Early Career Fellowship that’s helping to shine a light on a crucial period of world history.

An AHRC-funded research project is the first study of the ideas behind the West’s attempt to replace the Ottoman Empire after the First World War and their consequences.

Dr James Renton of Edge Hill University is looking at the British Empire’s development of the concept of the ‘Middle East’, a system based on the principle of nationality – which also resulted in a plethora of violent ethnic, religious and nationalist conflicts. He argues that the work is vital to understanding the problems across the region today.

‘There’s been an explosion of interest in how the West has understood the Middle East, and the relationship between that understanding and imperialism and colonialism, and it was clear to me that there wasn’t a recognition that there was a massive change at the time of the First World War,’ he says.

The British hoped to mobilise support for the Allies and secure post-war control of strategically important areas in the region by claiming that they were fighting for a new era of national freedom. They embarked on a huge propaganda campaign to make that case. Renton’s project also examines how the idea of a new age of nationality and freedom succeeded in increasing nationalism among Arabs and Jews.

‘I came to realise that this new vision was being presented for political reasons to mobilise the Middle Eastern world behind the war effort,’ Renton says.

He suggests that the British never expected the Middle East to be genuinely independent because of their racial stereotypes about the people living there – that they were somehow inferior and incapable of governing themselves.

Yet the promotion of national self-determination had the apparently unforeseen effect of mobilising widespread calls for
‘The borders are the errors of war... and we’re living with the consequences of that in the present day.’

immediate independence, and when that didn’t happen, there was widespread protest and violence.

‘Political elites across the Middle Eastern world started to have new expectations of complete national freedom, and so although the British and their French allies stimulated a new vision of the future, it took on a life of its own,’ he says.

However, these roars of dissent did not succeed. Instead, the British and French Empires, with the approval of the international community in the newly-established League of Nations, imposed a new autocratic system that remained in place until the beginning of the 21st century.

Renton stresses the complexity of the interactions between the Middle East and the ‘outside world’. He points out that to attribute many of the current conflicts in the region solely to the impact of the 2003 Iraq invasion or the Arab Spring – as many media debates do – is far too simplistic.

‘It’s a picture of complexity that goes back to the First World War,’ he says, and he is keen that today’s policymakers understand that, adding: ‘I’m not talking about some trite effort to learn lessons from the past.

‘It’s not about drawing parallels with then and now – it’s making the case that the war marked the beginning of a system of political instability, with the interaction between this attempt at control and the unleashing of an expectation for national freedom. It’s a wider story that began in 1914 – and it hasn’t ended.’

Left: Surrender of Jerusalem, December 1917 (IWM)
Right, top: Dr James Renton
Right, middle: Arabs capturing Aqaba, 6 July 1917 (IWM)
Right, bottom: Map of the Middle East, 1914.
As the conflicts in the Middle East continue to rage today, Carrie Dunn investigates an AHRC-funded project that looks at how the roots of the problem lie in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

Everyone is fascinated by the post-war partition of the Middle East – the Sykes-Picot borders that emerged,’ he says. ‘In my book I look at how the process of partitioning the Middle East begins very early in the war: March 1915, and goes right through.’

‘The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East’ is the forthcoming book by Eugene Rogan, a research fellow at the University of Oxford. He argues that these boundaries were not part of an imposition of a greater plan, but simply demonstrated what was possible at that moment and what was happening on the battlefields.

‘Every one of the plans, rather than reflecting any deliberate thought by the parties involved about Zionism or Arab nationalism, were agreements that reflected the exigencies of the war at that moment,’ he explains. ‘None of them would have made any sense without the war context. The British, French and Russians would not have engaged in any of this diplomacy. The borders are the errors of war. Rather than creating a stable post-Ottoman Middle East, the borders created an imperial post-Ottoman Middle East, and we’re living with the consequences of that in the present day.’

Rogan’s work explores the experiences of soldiers and civilians from all sides of the war, drawing on personal accounts and newly-discovered and translated diaries as well as official records to give a holistic picture, and using sources from all over the world, from New Zealand to Australia to the archive at his own university.

‘I bring in the Turkish and Arab sources to a story that we tend to know only through British sources,’ he says. ‘I’ve been drawing on the diaries, the memoirs, the journals of Turks and Arabs, civilians and soldiers, from virtually all of the fronts: from the Caucasus to Gallipoli, the fighting in Syria, and balancing that with accounts from the British, French and Anzac soldiers.

There’s frustratingly little primary material out there from Indian soldiers, but where I’ve got letters I use those to try and capture the Indian experience as well. We come away with the most balanced reading of what the war experience was from both sides of the trenches.’

Rogan was not, however, concerned with attempting to revise the established official histories of battles or tactics. ‘When it comes to the big battles and tactics, I don’t think there’s anything there that’s open to revision,’ he explains. ‘We have to remember that anything like [the battles of] Gallipoli or Mesopotamia was the subject of so much investigation at the time because they were catastrophic for the British. The official histories were as a result very well informed on what went wrong; they don’t try and gloss over heroic atrocities in history and they explain some very embarrassing defeats for the British, some of which were also rather politically sensitive. What I was looking for were the accounts of what people went through.’

The idea for the book came from a personal experience of his own – visiting the war grave of his Scottish great-uncle, who was killed in 1915, along with scores of his schoolfriends, at Gallipoli.

‘They suffered so much – the boys had been sent over the top after inadequate shellfire had not reduced the Turkish trenches and so they came straight into machine gun fire – they were just all mown down,’ he reflects. ‘The sadness for the village after all these young men had died was more than my maternal great-grandmother could bear, and that’s when they moved to America. In a sense this was how my mum came to be, and me after her – we owe our lives to his death.’

Yet it was a chance encounter with a war memorial that made him realise just how necessary it was to publish an account of these battles from as many perspectives as possible.

‘When we went to visit, we made a wrong turn, and stumbled upon a war memorial to the Turkish dead from the same
‘So they came straight into machine gun fire – they were just all mown down.’
WW1 IN FIGURES

- **16,000** soldiers recruited from the West Indies
- **8.7 million** served in the British Army at some time during WW1
- **123** Zeppelin and similar airships produced by Germany
- **18** men executed after the signing of the Armistice
- **31,000** soldiers from other Dominions
- **20 million** wounded
- **733,514** men from the United Kingdom in army in August 1914
- **12.8 million** number of allied countries’ soldiers wounded in World War 1
- **304** men executed during World War 1
- **8,865,650** number of civilian casualties in WW1
- **65 million** total number of men mobilized to fight in World War 1
- **12.8 million** number of allied countries’ soldiers wounded in World War 1
- **$186.3 billion** total cost altogether of World War 1
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- **7.7 million** number of missing POW’s from World War 1
100,000
size of German Army allowed under Versailles Treaty

1,524,187
soldiers recruited from the Indian Army

9,720,450
number of World War 1 military casualties

8.5 million
total number killed in World War 1

37 million
total number of casualties in World War 1

51
German warships scuttled at Scapa Flow, 21 June 1919

68
average daily British advance in yards, 3rd Ypres – Passchendaele, 31 July - 7 Dec 1917

420
diameter in millimetres of German ‘Big Bertha’ siege mortars

21,500,000
estimated deaths in 1918 Spanish influenza pandemic

32,000,000
estimated artillery shells fired in Battle of Verdun

416,809
soldiers recruited from Australia and Tasmania

418,035
soldiers recruited from Canada

58,000
estimated British casualties, 1st day on the Somme

7
German armies invading Northern France under Schlieffen Plan
An extraordinary story of philanthropy and humanity is being uncovered by one of the AHRC Engagement Centres in partnership with the YMCA. Matt Shinn reports

The average Joe probably just thinks of the song by the Village People,’ says Michael Snape, Reader in Religion, War and Society at the University of Birmingham. Few of us now would associate the YMCA with the First World War, or know that the organisation was involved at the time in one of the greatest philanthropic endeavours ever undertaken in British society.

The support that the YMCA gave to soldiers in the Great War was material, educational and spiritual. It covered everything from providing recreational huts and tents when young men began their training, to supplying pastoral care, writing materials and cups of tea at hundreds of centres, many very close to (and sometimes on) the front line (the YMCA centre at Ypres, for example, was in a dug-out that frequently came under shell fire). The YMCA was one of several organisations that gave soldiers a small reminder of the civilian world, even in a front-line trench.

Then there was what Michael Snape calls the ‘amazingly touching’ service that the YMCA provided, of taking family members to hospitals in France, to say farewell to soldiers who were dying and who could not be moved. ‘I had a great uncle who was fatally wounded at Messines,’ he says. ‘My great grandfather received the news, and was asked to travel to be with him in his last hours. I puzzled over that for years – how was it possible for a working-class man to get over to France in 1917? The answer was that the YMCA had made it possible.’

Elbow room
The YMCA’s work in the Great War was a huge logistical undertaking. And given its range, cost, and the number of people involved, says Michael Snape, ‘the fact that it’s now so little known shows just how much of the legacy of the First World War has been forgotten.’

The project that is bringing this forgotten history to light has been supported by the Voices of War and Peace Engagement Centre, based at the University of Birmingham but involving other universities and a wide range of organisations (see inset box). Like other projects supported by the Engagement Centre, it shows how much the role of religion in society has changed in a hundred years, and how important the work of faith-based agencies was at the time of the First World War.

The YMCA’s work in the conflict was entirely independent of government: it was carried out by volunteers, and supported by donations totalling £2.5 million over the course of the war – a huge amount at the time. ‘The latitude the YMCA was given shows how much Britain was a liberal Christian society, and the care that it took of its soldiers,’ says Michael Snape. ‘It’s in marked contrast to some of the black legends of the Great War, with their clichés of every 16-year-old being tied to a stake and shot for cowardice. The elbow room given to philanthropic organisations shows the real attitude of the army and of the state, and the extent to which British soldiers
were looked after. The French and the Germans didn’t have anything like it.’

There is a fundamental contrast, in other words, between the work of the YMCA in the trenches, and the image of the army as a callous machine. ‘I’m not trying to bang the drum for the generals, but key figures in the military top brass, including Field Marshal Haig, were important in promoting the YMCA’s work: Haig’s wife even worked for the YMCA in London.’

It was natural that Voices of War and Peace should be involved in this project: the YMCA’s main archive is in the Cadbury Research Library at Birmingham University. As Michael Snape says, it is an ‘absolutely astonishing treasure trove of photographs and manuscripts. And this is a very important story to tell. But one of the problems has been that the YMCA is an activist organisation: it tends to be busy with what it’s doing in the present, rather than thinking about the past.’

The YMCA Goes to War project has involved running day schools, to teach people who are interested in the conflict about this neglected aspect of it. It also involves encouraging local YMCA branches to work with the organisation’s archives, and make use of them. Bradford YMCA, for example, has created a display to catch the attention of passers-by, and show them something of the work that the YMCA did during the Great War – a deliberate echo of the kinds of awareness-raising that the YMCA went in for during the conflict, including the creation of mock dug-outs, to demonstrate the conditions that the soldiers were fighting in. ‘We’re telling YMCA people themselves about their history,’ says Michael Snape, ‘and enabling them to engage with the public in a very direct way, taking stuff out onto the streets.’

An international effort

The YMCA’s Head of International Affairs is Ken Montgomery. He points out that many of the YMCA’s volunteers in the First World War were women, who often came to understand much more of the reality of the conflict than those who stayed at home. ‘Many, indeed, found themselves in harm’s way: Betty Stephenson, for example, volunteered at the age of 18, and was given the job of taking relatives to visit the men who were too seriously wounded to be transported back to Britain. She was killed in France in an air raid, at the age of 21.’

And the YMCA’s work was an international effort: volunteers came from Canada, India, the US and Australia, as well as Britain. US President Woodrow Wilson said that 90% of pastoral services provided to the American troops during the First World War were provided by the YMCA. The government of South Africa also paid tribute, donating 400 acres on the shores of Lake Windermere, which the YMCA still uses as an outdoor activities centre.

‘The YMCA provided services to friend and foe alike,’ says Ken Montgomery. ‘It was ecumenical, and it didn’t proselytise. It was very much about providing practical support, and not just praying. With the professionalisation of services, and the expansion in what the State provides, you probably wouldn’t get anything like it today.’
At the end of 2014 approaches, it’s clear that already a rich new ‘citizen history’ of the First World War is emerging across the United Kingdom. From Penryn in Cornwall to Whalsay in the Shetland Islands, there is a great surge of activity to uncover the stories of those who served, at home and abroad, and the impact of the war on people’s lives, and to share these stories, not only locally through talks and exhibitions, but more widely online and through social media. Through telling the stories in art, poetry and drama there is also reflection on the meaning of the war and its resonance with the world today.

At the Heritage Lottery Fund we are pleased to be able to fund a wide range of Centenary projects, each contributing to this national picture. There are large projects of international significance, such as the new galleries at the Imperial War Museum in London and the restoration of HMS Caroline, and there are small projects in community groups and youth clubs, local history societies, disability and faith groups, residents’ associations, Royal British Legion branches, and more. Since we first promoted the funding opportunities in 2011, we have funded more than 800 projects, with 550 of them starting since January this year when the Centenary really took hold in the public consciousness.

Among the partners who are helping to realise our ambitions for the Centenary is the Arts and Humanities Research Council and through it the many researchers who are actively engaged in co-creating this citizen history. This collaboration builds on the unique opportunity offered to groups in our programme ‘All our Stories’ in 2012 to work with researchers in a range of disciplines from archaeology to digital media. Over 150 organisations connected, mostly for the first time, with researchers to explore their heritage, learn new skills, and create new knowledge together. Among the significant benefits were researchers helping groups ask deeper questions and confront challenges, and a greater appreciation in communities that their heritage had value and they could tell their stories with confidence and pride.

At HLF we’re looking forward to the five Engagement Centres working with a wide range of projects, particularly those funded under our small grants programme ‘First World War: then and now’, whose name is significant for our approach. We want our funding to contribute to creating greater understanding of the First World War and its impact on the peoples that make up our diverse society today, and we seek to encourage a broad range of perspectives and interpretations, something the Centres are well placed to support. Projects will be challenged to look beyond the obvious; bust a few myths; think global, not just local. And, based on the experience of All our Stories, they will have enriching experiences that can even change lives.

It’s early days for the Centres, but already Professor Maggie Andrews of Voices of War and Peace is working with a number of groups, including LARC Development Trust in Leominster on ‘Food Scarcity’, which aims to celebrate the achievements of the agricultural home front, including the Women’s Land Army. Lower Oldpark Community Association in Belfast, which is working to ‘enthusi [sic] local residents to engage with their history and how Belfast was affected by the war’, will offer a course, ‘Belfast before the storm’, with Living Legacies 1914-1918 at Queen’s University. Dr Brad Beaven of Gateways to the First World War, a guest curator with ‘Lest We Forget’ in Portsmouth, is supporting ‘Morley 1914’ – a member of The Preservative Party, Leeds Museum’s young people’s group, in conversation with visitors about sharing stories using social media.

groups researching local history, but also as he writes on the website ‘choirs singing war songs for our “sound showers” in the exhibition’.

Many other researchers are also supporting HLF projects. The University of Southampton is working with the Fovant Badges Society on the history of the regimental badges carved into the chalk downs above the village of Fovant. In Stirling, ‘Practice at Plean’ is investigating a system of practice trenches and contributing technical information to reconstructions with Glasgow University. Institutions with rich archival collections are making them available to a wider audience. In Leeds ‘Morley 1914’ is introducing local people to the renowned Liddle Collection, and Cardiff University is creating schools resources around the cartoons of J.M. Staniforth.

It’s important to us to evaluate our Centenary activity and to demonstrate through it the value of heritage in society. We are working with the Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University on a quantitative and qualitative study, collecting data about, and testimony from, all the projects we’re funding and from a sample of the general public participating in activities. In October, Historypin will be launching the First World War Centenary hub, in partnership with HLF, AHRC and others – a place to share heritage material online, and to record the wealth of Centenary activity taking place across the UK. All this material will, we hope, be useful for researchers of the future looking at anniversaries as well as the First World War itself.

The Centenary is already bringing organisations together to explore our shared histories and to create new knowledge. The Heritage Lottery Fund has made a commitment to funding First World War projects throughout the Centenary and we look forward to seeing many more successful collaborations between HLF-funded projects and researchers across the country in the years to 2018.

For further information: www.hlf.org.uk

Karen Brookfield of the Heritage Lottery Fund looks at how public and academic histories are being connected through a range of exciting initiatives.
THE GERMAN NAVAL THREAT

AHRC-funded research has challenged widely-held assumptions about the build-up to the First World War, writes Carrie Dunn
Historians have long accepted the idea that the expansion of German maritime power was the dominant factor in British naval policy before the First World War. More recently a few have argued that Admiral Sir John Fisher, the First Sea Lord at the time, was more concerned with threats of global cruiser warfare from rival empires such as France and Russia rather than the menace of a big battle fleet that was quietly increasing across the North Sea.

Now an AHRC-supported project has provided an alternative argument. Dr Matthew Seligmann of Brunel University London argues that German schemes for commerce warfare drove British naval policy for over a decade before 1914.

He shows in his book ‘The Royal Navy and the German Threat 1901-1914’ that Germany was assessed as a major threat to Britain at that time not because of its growing battle fleet, but because the British Admiralty (rightly) believed that Germany’s naval planners intended to arm their country’s fast merchant vessels and send them out to attack British trade ships in the manner of the privateers of old.

Dr Seligmann says that he stumbled upon the topic largely by accident after his previous book on British intelligence in Berlin prior to the First World War. ‘In that, I argued that actually Britain was extremely well informed about what Germany was doing in terms of military and naval policy, and therefore the decision for war in 1914 was a largely rational one,’ he explains. ‘I then put forward the view that Germany was very much at the forefront of British admiralty thinking in the crucial period from around 1901 to 1905, which didn’t strike me as tremendously controversial when I wrote it, but it turns out this is an extremely contested idea.’

He began to explore the idea a little further, expanding it into a major research project, and assessing the Admiralty’s paperwork prior to the First World War. ‘I started looking at the origins of the battle cruiser – or large armoured cruisers as they were then called – and quickly discovered, much to my surprise, that these ships seemed to have been built very much with hunting German armed liners in mind,’ he says.

He points to the doomed Lusitania, torpedoed and sunk by a German u-boat, as an example of the substantive Admiralty response. It had been built with the aim of being used in war as an armed merchant cruiser, and was listed as an auxiliary war ship – just like its sister ship the Mauretania.

So Seligmann followed an extensive paper trail through the Admiralty papers, and organised them in chronological rather than file order. This was an immense feat, almost like putting

‘The whole thing just told a story that had never been told.’

HMS Dreadnought, May 1912
together a jigsaw, because the Admiralty have kept only two per cent of the registered papers they generate, meaning that there is a very remote chance of a complete set of documentation on any topic being retained.

So instead of accepting the gaps in the archive, Seligmann looked at it from another angle. ‘The only way round this sometimes is thinking about who they would have corresponded with. On armed liners, they corresponded with just about everyone. So there were papers about this in the Foreign Office files, the Colonial Office files, the Cabinet Office files, the Treasury files, and so on, and then there also seemed to be quite a lot that people had taken away and kept in their private papers,’ he explains.

‘The whole thing just told a story that had never been told. Nobody would have put this together, as it was so widely scattered, but an enormous amount survived in different places, and there were very few gaps in the story once I’d done all the dredging.’

And once he’d got that information together, he went one step further. ‘Because I can read German I thought it’d be interesting to go and see what the Germans were actually doing, so I went to the German archive to look at their papers, and so I was able in the end to map out what Britain was doing with what Germany was doing, and compare and contrast the two,’ he says.

‘What I was able to do was work out what the Germans were actually doing, and what their policies were, and then map it against the secret intelligence Britain had on what we thought they were doing, which was in many ways close and in many ways wrong. You wouldn’t call it an intelligence failure; it was a success, albeit with the standard problem that you tend to see what you’re looking for and assume your opponent is going to do that which you’re most worried about, which isn’t always the case.’

This threat to British seaborne commerce was so serious, Seligmann argues, that the leadership of the Royal Navy, including First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill spent twelve years trying to work out how best to counter it.

‘Churchill pushed the policy of creating a global intelligence network on German raiding and re-routing British shipping – that was up and running by the time the war began, and it was an important network in both wars, stemming from this particular threat,’ says Seligmann.

Unsurprisingly, research this groundbreaking has created a bit of a stir in the field, with Seligmann admitting that his work is ‘unpalatable’ to those historians who have long held the view that those who think Germany played a crucial role in shaping British policy before the First World War are simply using hindsight.

‘The arguments have become fierce as other people have entered the fray,’ Seligmann admits. ‘The old angle is being scrutinised and found wanting. Those stuck in aspic with their ideas don’t find my work to their tastes at all. I guess, without wanting to make a pun of it, this book has become a flagship for a new way of looking at naval history before the First World War.’
An AHRC research project has been exploring how commonly-held perspectives on the First World War have largely been shaped in our schools. Carrie Dunn investigates

The importance of the First World War in public discourse has been emphasised as centenary commemorations continue – and debates blaze around how it should be taught in the classroom.

Some have expressed a concern that World War One was glossed over or used to put forward a particular political viewpoint, worrying that TV comedies such as Blackadder Goes Forth were presented to students as fact.

Such fears, however, are rather unfounded, according to a new exploratory project funded by the AHRC as part of its Care for the Future theme. ‘The First World War in the Classroom: Teaching and the Construction of Cultural Memory’ was a study led by Dr Catriona Pennell of the University of Exeter and Dr Ann-Marie Einhaus of the University of Northumbria, and another project under the AHRC’s Care for the Future theme, designed to establish how the First World War is taught within history and English literature.

Pennell and Einhaus have known each other for some years, and had often discussed what they believed was a misperception that the First World War was ‘mistaught’ in schools through a reliance on the canonical poetry of writers such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon.

Their shared background and interest in outreach work, building bridges between schools and universities, led to the development of this project, working with teachers of history and English to see what material they deliver and how they deliver it.

‘We wanted to see how a major historical moment was being taught in the present, and what that meant for the future in terms of understanding the construction of memory of the war, 100 years after the event,’ explains Dr Pennell.

‘It’s a contemporary issue, there are misperceptions about how the war is taught, but no-one’s bothered to ask teachers themselves in a sustained and methodologically focused way, and that’s what we wanted to try and do – give teachers a voice, but in a rigorous and research-based way.’

Such a broad topic required a carefully plotted exploratory project, which Pennell describes as ‘simply dipping our toes in the water’. Across nine months, the team conducted a national survey of the way World War One is taught in secondary schools and further education in England, allowing for coherence in looking at the same curriculum. They also organised two workshops as well as three regional focus groups, in Exeter, Newcastle and London.

Simon Kinder from Gresham’s School in Norfolk, then the head of history but now deputy head, was involved from the outset as the school thought it was important for them to maintain and improve their teaching in the subject.

‘We definitely wanted to look at the First World War again as an institution,’ he explains. ‘Our school lost 108 pupils and three members of staff in the First World War, and we wanted to make sure this was an opportunity to look at it afresh.’

‘I was struck by responses to the question “What topics do you teach?”’ says Pennell. ‘The top three answers were the trenches, the origins and causes of the war, and the Western Front. I am a historian and concerned about that, because it suggests quite a limited view. Where is the war in Africa or the Ottoman Empire? Origins and causes are important, and I understand why that’s popular – it’s key to understand causation as a historical process, and the outbreak of the First World War is

‘Where is the war in Africa or the Ottoman Empire? I’d have liked to see more diversity.’
a neat topic and an important one. But I think I’d have liked to see more diversity within the curriculum.’

What is particularly interesting for Pennell, though, was that teachers agreed with her, and said that they wanted to teach more diverse elements relating to the war.

‘They felt frustrated by the limitations of what’s on offer to teach, but they have to teach it because when it comes down to exams, if they haven’t taught it, their students are going to be disadvantaged and their league tables are going to suffer,’ she says.

Pennell is hugely complimentary of the teachers she worked with during the project.

‘We found a huge degree of dedication from our participants,’ she says. ‘Of course, they were self-selecting – it’s unlikely that a teacher who is not passionate about World War One would bother to take part – but they had a commitment to this subject which meant they engaged with the subject in the classroom and in their leisure time, on trips and reading. They’re constantly thinking about the best ways to teach it.’

Those assertions that teachers are happy to show television sitcoms and present them as factual accounts of the war are completely false, according to Pennell.

‘Something like Blackadder Goes Forth is used as a window into deeper, more critical discussions, not evidence,’ she says. ‘Unguided viewing of television programmes in the classroom would get you an Ofsted failure immediately. Teachers know how to use material.’

Schools are also gathering and interrogating their own material now as a teaching and learning experience, leading directly from the project.

‘We’ve now set up a database which is running between 2014 and 2018, with students doing the research,’ says Kinder. ‘They’re going to put together a historical database of all our pupils that fought and use that as a community resource as well. That’s a direct result of our involvement in this; the final product will become part of our classroom teaching of the First World War.’

Pennell is realistic enough to know that this is the first stage of what could be much more detailed research, but wants the report to act as a call to action, encouraging exam boards and schools to broaden their horizons.

‘If exam boards could diversify their specifications, the teachers will teach that, and students will benefit,’ she says. ‘And secondary education would really benefit from increased interdisciplinary work. English teachers would benefit from liaising with history departments to do cross-curricular work, enabling poems to be given historical context, and allowing the poems to be used as historical sources. It would allow the poetry to be contextualised and allow history to be illuminated by first-hand experience.’

Kinder for one hopes the project continues and develops further, allowing for dialogue between schools and encouraging further input from the academy.

‘The joy of this for me was how the process went on,’ he admits. ‘It’s been one of the most inspiring things I’ve ever been involved in.’

For further information, please go to: http://ww1intheclassroom.exeter.ac.uk
The Scottish experience of the First World War and its aftermath was different, in many ways, from that of the rest of Britain. Among other things, it was in Scotland that Britain probably came closest to having its own version of the Russian Revolution, writes Matt Shinn.
Red Clydeside
Billy Kenefick is Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Dundee. As he points out, ‘Scotland in many ways was highly patriotic in the First World War: some 63% of eligible men in Dundee were in uniform, for example – that’s a very high proportion. And the “tank campaign” to raise money for the war effort in 1917/18, which involved battle-scarred tanks touring towns and cities to drum up sales of War Bonds and Savings Certificates, saw several Scottish cities vying to outdo each other. Dundee raised £4.5 million in one week.’

Yet several Scottish cities were also leading centres of the anti-war movement, with many of them having anti-conscription fellowships. Scottish cities also saw significant industrial and civil unrest, during and immediately after the war. The Independent Labour Party in Scotland grew from 3,000 members to 10,000 by war’s end – a rate of growth that wasn’t replicated elsewhere in Britain. And ironically perhaps it was Glasgow, seen by many as the second city of the British Empire, which became the focus of political radicalism, and effectively found itself under martial law during what became known as the Red Clydeside era.

Glasgow and the surrounding area was home to a significant amount of heavy industry, but many factory and shipyard workers lived in conditions of extreme poverty. During the war, the government introduced a number of laws that were met with hostility by the trade unions, while at the same time, living and working conditions became worse. This led to a campaign for a 40-hour week, and other improvements in working conditions.

Then on 31 January 1919, a huge rally was held in George Square in the centre of Glasgow, organised by the trade unions. The gathering turned into a riot, and the Red Flag was raised by the crowd. Barely a year after the Russian Revolution, the government in Westminster panicked: fearing a Bolshevik-style insurrection on the streets of Britain, they sent troops and tanks into the city to quell the unrest, making sure that the troops weren’t Glaswegian (the local regiment was locked inside its barracks), and that few of them were veterans of the war, lest they prove too sympathetic to the aims of the protestors.

Poetry and rare finds
Another Scottish location that is famously associated with the First World War is the Craiglockhart Military Hospital in Edinburgh, where officers suffering from shell shock were treated with ‘talking cures’ and other newly developed therapies (enlisted men were subjected to altogether less enlightened regimes, in other locations), and where the poets Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon first met, inspiring each other to write some of the poetry that continues to shape the view of the war that so many of us have.

Alistair McCleery is Professor of Literature and Culture at Edinburgh Napier University, which now includes the old Craiglockhart buildings, as well as housing the specialist archive of materials relating to Owen, Sassoon and others – the War Poets’ Collection. The Craiglockhart site is still home to a rare form of moss, found in Northern France, which presumably arrived on soldiers’ boots.

‘With the War Poets being an important part of the school curriculum,’ says Alistair McCleery, ‘we get a lot of school groups making visits to the campus. World War One at Home has led to the creation of learning resource packs that we can give to them: it’s a lasting legacy of the project.’

And according to Alistair McCleery, the summer roadshows that have been organised as part of the World War One at Home project, including one in Dundee, have been ‘like the TV programmes Cash in the Attic, or the Antiques Roadshow.’ Among the original material that has come to light, as members of the public have brought it in, has been ‘the concert programme from Craiglockhart during the war: the evening’s festivities described in the programme, and put on by the patients, began with the national anthems of the Allies, including Russia’s old Tsarist anthem. Another person at the roadshow came forward with rare copies of The Hydra, the magazine produced by patients at Craiglockhart, which Wilfred Owen edited, and which features the first appearance of his poetry in print.

‘Scotland in many ways was highly patriotic.’
The real Miss Jean Brodies

According to Alistair McCleery, the World War One at Home project has helped draw attention to some Scottish writers who should be better-known, including the Dundee poet Joseph Lee, and Christine Orr, whose novel, The Glorious Thing, describes ‘ordinary lives during an extraordinary time.’ But then, ‘this was an experience that engulfed everyone. The First World War wasn’t a remote conflict, like the Boer War – no-one could escape its effects.’

The Morningside area of Edinburgh, for example, used to be famous for its spinsters – real-life Miss Jean Brodies. ‘But behind the type is a sad reality – so many women were forced to turn to the teaching profession after their fiancés were killed. You need an empathetic imagination, to picture what life must have been like for them, in the Twenties. The life that was mapped out for them, all gone.’

A diaspora in reverse

Other distinctive elements of the Scottish experience of the First World War include the sense of martial tradition. ‘The kilted soldier really was the poster boy of Empire,’ says Derek Patrick, Lecturer in History at the University of Dundee. The exploits of Scottish regiments in conflicts like the Peninsular, Crimea and Boer Wars, had cemented the place of the Scottish soldier in Britain’s consciousness. ‘National, religious and military traditions all came together. It says something about Scotland as a nation. Military achievements helped Scots identify with the imperial project – the Scots saw themselves as Empire-builders, and as defenders of the Empire in adversity.’

There was also what amounted to a ‘diaspora in reverse’ during the First World War, with first or second-generation Scots returning from Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand, to fight in Europe, either with Scottish divisions, or in kilted South African or Canadian regiments.

And this story of the movement of Scottish soldiers around the world led to some interesting cases of cultural cross-over. The famous Scottish regiment the Black Watch, for example, had a long association with the Indian subcontinent, and its second and fourth battalions served with Indian divisions during the War. Several Indian regiments incorporated pipe bands and tartans, while long periods stationed in India rubbed off on Scottish soldiers, affecting their language (military slang of the period is full of words of Indian origin, including ‘pukka’, ‘cushy’ and ‘doolally’, which blended with the Franglais slang popularised by men of the New Army) and their taste in food – curry was offered by army cooks from influence of the Indian army, and introduced more widely as a result of the War. The newspapers in Dundee, a city whose jute trade was closely linked with India, used to delight in showing photos of Scottish soldiers rubbing shoulders with troops of many different nationalities, knowing that their readers would find them interesting.

Commemoration in Scotland

The Great War Dundee Commemorative Project aims to co-ordinate a city-wide approach to the centenary commemoration of the First World War, bringing the local community together with Dundee’s museums, archives, libraries, universities, schools and businesses, through a programme of activities that encourage the broadest possible public participation and collective reminiscence. These activities include the opening of a hundred-year-old time capsule, located in Royal Mail’s Dundee East Delivery Office, which is thought to contain a large number of letters from soldiers on various First World War battle fronts, and photographs of Dundee men and women, as well as stamps and coins from the time. The aim is for events in Dundee to serve as a focus for a specifically Scottish commemoration of the war.

Scotland has a particular culture of remembrance, too. According to Billy Kenefick, that can be seen in the cathedral-like Scottish National War Memorial in Edinburgh: ‘there was a sense that the Cenotaph in Whitehall wasn’t good enough – there was a national desire to commemorate Scottish soldiers in their own way, to see them as fighting the war for Scotland as well as for Britain. But then, Robert the Bruce had been used on recruiting posters, while others used to say “we cannot allow the sons of the rose, the leek and the shamrock to get ahead of the sons of the thistle”.

For further information, please go to: www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01nhwgx
BEYOND THE TRENCHES RESEARCHING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

JOHN EDGAR BELL
CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR

It matters not how straight the gate, how charged with punishment the scroll, I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.’
(Enscription by Henderson of York and Smith of Leicester, conscientious objects, Richmond Castle cell, 24th June 1916)

This exhibition relates to my current research on commemoration, memory and subjectivity in the representation and interpretation of visual narratives, writes Sonja Andrew. The images displayed are part of a project exploring the influence of content, cloth and context on viewer perceptions of textiles.

The textiles were developed to create a visual narrative about the experiences of John Edgar Bell, a Quaker and conscientious objector in World War One who was imprisoned for refusing to fight. His family moved home due to abuse from their community, as graffiti and crosses were scrawled on their door. His health deteriorated and in the last year of the war he agreed to take part in non-combatant service, but the physical and mental scars of his prison experiences stayed with him and his family for many years. There was much lingering resentment towards conscientious objectors and their families in the post war period. John could no longer work as a skilled engineer and had great difficulty getting employment, as no one wanted to work with a ‘conchie’. The crosses on their home continued to single them out in their new community, where so many men had been lost to war. By World War Two his daughter had married. Her husband was in a reserved occupation and again she faced social condemnation, as both her father and her husband had not fought.

The textile panels are based on the family at the start of the war, the imprisonment of the objector, and the hostility towards the objector’s family that continued into World War Two and beyond. The panels were located in galleries, museums, churches and corporate spaces to collate viewer responses to the textiles in different contexts, examining the impact of collective cultural understanding and the projection of personal memory on interpretations of the work.

These photographs show inscriptions and drawings from conscientious objectors’ cells at Richmond Castle, visual work undertaken to construct the image-based narrative and details from the textile installations.

Textile trials for ‘The Ties That Bind (I)’

After several stages working digitally and on paper, the work progressed to textile experiments incorporating digital printing, stitch, heat transfer printing, screen printing and hand painting with reactive dyes. Specific images were incorporated alongside portrait photographs to communicate the objector’s story. The first triptych particularly featured crossed out medals to connote lack of bravery, stamps to denote the period (and suggest ‘for king and country’) and white feathers as symbols of cowardice.

Panel one detail

140 people were surveyed about their interpretations of ‘The Ties That Bind (II)’. The ship predominantly signified war to viewers, but this image was also interpreted as migration. The hands predominantly signified hope and prayer.

Sketch book page and family photographs

Family and war photographs formed the first components for visual experimentation to convey John Edgar Bell’s story. Tentative narrative relationships between photographic images and other visual signifiers such as colour and mark were explored.

INTERNATIONAL CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS DAY

International Conscientious Objectors Day is marked around the world each year on May 15th. In July 2011 the European Court of Human Rights ruled that ‘states must respect the right to conscientious objection as part of their obligation to respect the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion’, bringing European law in line with international human rights standards.
**Digital development: Richmond lock image**

Specific imagery had to be incorporated to build a framework of visual encoding within the textiles to test at different sites. This involved considering the communicative function of individual signifiers (images, textures and colours), the readings generated when several signifiers were brought together, and the overall meaning created when groups of signifiers were combined within a composition. The lock was incorporated to connote imprisonment and a key added in later visual experiments to reinforce this reading but also suggest potential for release.

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**Richmond cell walls: drawings**

The Richmond visit provided insight into the conditions of imprisonment for conscientious objectors in WW1 and WW2. Covered with drawings of family, supportive phrases and religious texts and symbols, the cell walls are testimony to the faith of the imprisoned men.

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**Image of Harriet Bell (wife) with barbed wire**

Commutation tests (Barthes, 1967) were an integral part of the design process, identifying the characteristics and differences of individual signifiers within a paradigm or syntagym and defining their significance. Applying this within the textile practice involved changing a visual signifier (e.g. image or colour) and examining if this altered the meaning of the elements it was grouped with. Existing signifiers were also rearranged into new configurations to determine if different meanings were created.

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**THE AHRC IMAGE GALLERY**

The AHRC’s Image Gallery was launched in 2013 to showcase the work and talents of the arts and humanities research community and to celebrate the role of the image in the arts and humanities. An open call for proposals to exhibit ‘virtual exhibitions’ in the gallery attracted nearly 150 applications from which 12 were chosen. Sonja Andrew’s exhibition commemorating the life of John Edgar Bell, conscientious objector, was one of those chosen.

Dr. Sonja Andrew is a Lecturer in Design and Programme Director for the Master of Research in Materials and Surface Design at Manchester University. Crossing the disciplines of design, semiotics and narratology, her main research interests focus on textile semantics and communication.

For further information: [www.ahrc.ac.uk/gallery](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/gallery)
Collaboration between a community group and academics is uncovering an important but neglected aspect of First World War history, writes Matt Shinn

**CITIZEN HISTORIANS**

**SIKHS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

The First World War wasn’t just about white soldiers fighting in the trenches of France and Belgium. To begin with, every sixth British soldier serving during the war was from the Indian subcontinent. In total, nearly one and a half million volunteers from pre-partition India served in the British ranks: the British Indian Army was as large as the forces from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa combined.

Indian soldiers also served on many of the more distant fronts in the conflict, from North Africa to Mesopotamia – not just in Europe. But the role of Indian troops in the Great War has largely been overlooked.

**The one percent**

Among the community groups which are seeking to change this is the UK Punjab Heritage Association (UKPHA), a charity which is dedicated to preserving the cultural heritage of the Sikhs and the Punjab, and which aims to commemorate the remarkable but forgotten contribution of Sikh soldiers in the First World War, as well as recording the experiences of the families that they left behind.

Although they accounted for less than one percent of the population of British India at the time, Sikhs made up nearly twenty percent of the British Indian Army at the outbreak of hostilities. With Sikh military traditions being integral to the faith, the British Army looked especially to the Punjab for recruitment. Yet few now are aware of the important role of Sikh soldiers in the Great War, especially in the early months of the fighting on the Western Front, when they were instrumental in halting the German advance.

As the first part of a three-year project, an exhibition, Empire, Faith and War: the Sikhs and World War One, is being held at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the exhibition tells the story of how a small community played a disproportionately important role in the Great War.

As UKPHA Chair Amandeep Madra says: ‘the non-white Empire’s efforts have largely been forgotten, and their heroism and sacrifices omitted from mainstream narratives, or left as somewhat forlorn footnotes of history. By telling the Sikh story we want to change that, and remind the world of this wider, undervalued contribution of the non-white British Empire. This is British history, and a story that helps explain much about modern Britain.’

But why was the role of Sikh troops, and Indian troops more generally, forgotten in the first place? As UKPHA team member Harbakhsh Grewal makes clear, it was not given the pensions they were due. ‘The non-white Empire’s efforts have largely been forgotten, and their heroism and sacrifices omitted from mainstream narratives, or left as somewhat forlorn footnotes of history. By telling the Sikh story we want to change that, and remind the world of this wider, undervalued contribution of the non-white British Empire. This is British history, and a story that helps explain much about modern Britain.’

‘One visitor pointed to one of the soldiers in the background, and said “that’s my dad”’

Memorial in Brighton, on the site where many Indian soldiers were cremated, and much positive press and PR. But then ‘the Indian independence movement wiped away other memories. Some soldiers had gone to war with the expectation that proving themselves in war would lead to greater independence. But very soon their actions were being omitted from Indian histories. And in many cases, veterans were not given the pensions they were due.’

In the case of the Sikhs, in particular, relations with the British changed very soon after the end of the war, with the Amritsar massacre of peaceful demonstrators in 1919 – an act which took place not just in Amritsar, the spiritual centre of the Sikh faith, but also during Baisakhi, the main Sikh festival. But even in India, according to Harbakhsh Grewal, enough time has now passed since the struggle for independence for the role of Indian soldiers in World War One to begin to be acknowledged.

As the Empire, Faith and War project continues, it will involve building up a database of soldiers’ and families’ stories, with members of the Sikh community being encouraged to become ‘citizen historians’, discovering more about their own ancestors who fought. ‘That is one reason why the exhibition is taking place at the beginning of the project,’ says Harbakhsh Grewal. ‘This is partly about engaging people with their own history.’

**Founding myths**

And as the project develops, UKPHA is exploring, with the World War One Engagement Centre at Nottingham University, ways in which academic expertise can help it become more effective. The Centre for Hidden Histories:
‘Every sixth British soldier serving during the war was from the Indian subcontinent’

Community, Commemoration and the First World War works with many different community groups, to find more inclusive ways of commemorating the First World War, and to broaden understanding of the war as a global conflict.

Among the expertise that the Nottingham Centre is offering UKPHA is that of its computer scientists, who specialise in developing and using new technologies to capture oral histories. The researchers at the Centre have experience in developing guides, to ensure that the stories that are collected are of a high quality, so that the online database becomes a useful research resource for the future. Academics within Nottingham University’s School of Education are also able to help UKPHA make the educational material that is being produced, as part of the project, more engaging and useable for schools.

Mike Noble is Community Liaison Officer at the Centre for Hidden Histories. For him, ‘this is an opportunity to learn about how the war has been repurposed by different groups. In some countries, such as Canada and Australia, the First World War has become a founding myth of nationhood, a bit like Agincourt for the English. It has become a national epic: a story of adversity through which a sovereign nation was born. For other groups, though, the story of the Great War is a contested history: something that has been brushed under the carpet. Through the projects that we work on, we can help to get it out in the open.’

And already the UKPHA project has had some unexpected results, according to Harbakhsh Grewal. ‘One visitor to our exhibition looked at the photo that we use on the main exhibition poster – of Sikh soldiers marching through the streets of Paris in 1916, and being given flowers. He pointed to one of the soldiers in the background, and said “that’s my dad”.’

For further information, please go to: http://hiddenhistoriesww1.ac.uk/

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Centre for Hidden Histories

Staffed by a consortium of academics from the universities of Nottingham, Derby and Nottingham Trent, the Centre for Hidden Histories has a particular interest in the themes of migration and displacement, the experience of ‘others’ from countries and regions within Europe, Asia and the Commonwealth, the impact and subsequent legacies of the war on diverse communities within Britain, remembrance and commemoration, and identity and faith.
A LAND FIT FOR HEROES

Doctoral research is overturning assumptions about the patriotism of the working class, writes Iain Aitch

The centenary of the start of World War I has brought with it a fair amount of debate about the reasons for war and the treatment of those who fought in the trenches. Some have questioned the war poets’ view, while others have sought to protest what they see as the glorifying of the ‘war to end all wars’.

Away from the controversies, research into some of the untold stories around World War One has been taking place. But this was not the usual collection of tales of derring-do or unexpected moments of humanity. Instead, the work that came out of an AHRC-funded Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) between the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) and the Manchester-based People’s History Museum explored a major piece of working class and labour history that had almost been forgotten about.

PhD student David Swift’s research on Patriotic labour in the era of the Great War revealed surprising results that showed how history can be re-written over time with the attitudes of a more modern era. Swift used the resources of the People’s History Museum to dust off the story of an almost wholesale support for the war effort from the trades unions and the burgeoning labour movement of the day.

‘It was something that was led by the larger unions that represented navvies, railway workers and dockers,’ says Swift of the union support for the war effort, which helped to shape the battalions based around workplaces. ‘It is interesting that, at that time, the unions were considered to be a conservative element of the labour movement in terms of social economic policies. The Socialist Society complained about the power of their block vote then, which saw radical socialist ideas voted down by the unions.’

Swift believes that a modern view of the labour movement and war, especially coloured by the Falklands War, has painted it as a largely anti-war body. But its enthusiasm for the war effort in 1914 was almost unanimous. ‘The idea that if you are going to be on the left then you should be internationalist in scope and a pacifist is a rather recent convention,’ says Swift. ‘Labour leaders made speeches about internationalists, but it was not something that they took seriously. It is a very racist period, so even the anti-war left are showing how degrading the war was by saying that allowing West Indian or West African soldiers to kill Germans show how terrible it all is. Being left wing economically and believing in social justice sat far easier with nationalism, patriotism and even racism than it does today, when it obviously does not do so at all.’

Sorting through around 16,000 documents from the Workers’ War Emergency National Committee at the museum, Swift found a complex picture emerging. Although he did find a left united in the war effort, even when some were critical of the reasons for it and the Government of the day. He also found sizeable pockets of working class conservatism in the East End of London, the south and places like Liverpool.

‘The labour movement said “we cannot abandon our country, no matter how much we hate the ruling classes”,’ says Swift. ‘This was a general agreement across the left wing that was really important. There was talk of the unions breaking from the Labour Party at the time, as Labour was seen as being too contaminated with middle class socialists and radicals who were too soft on Germany. But Labour’s support of the war meant this did not happen. So they survived the war intact and emerged rather united.’

This broad unity helped the Labour Party to establish itself as a major party, taking the unions, the co-operative movement and many feminists with them. By 1922 they were the second party and in 1929 emerged with most seats in the Commons under Ramsay MacDonald.

Nick Mansfield, who is Swift’s PhD supervisor at UCLAN, was director of the People’s History Museum for 21 years, so knows its archives well. However, even he was surprised by the scale of some of Swift’s findings, as well as how the consensus had been blurred.
by time. ‘There were a quarter-of-a-million trade unionists volunteered by December 2014,’ says Mansfield. ‘Local and regional trade union leaders actually did the recruiting. 200,000 miners and 200,000 farm workers joined up. Labour historians tend to look at things such as conscientious objectors, but there were only 16,500, with only about a quarter of those objecting on political grounds. They had to stop the miners volunteering, as they needed some to keep the coal going.’

Mansfield is pleased that the collection held by the museum was such an important resource in Swift’s research and that the PhD student has been able to interpret that for wider public use, with work from the pair forming a large part of the basis for an exhibition. A Land Fit For Heroes: War and the Working Class 1914-1918, opened in May 2014 and will continue until February 2015.

‘This actually gives students experience in the nitty gritty of putting on an exhibition,’ says Mansfield. ‘The show is achieving very high academic standards. This shows the huge change in the role of women, trade unions and the Labour Party, with profound consequences. I think it moves this on from the lowest common denominator you sometimes get with a lot of commemoration, about how all these poor people from a particular part of society had a terrible time. The fact that 95% of the trade union members were patriotic meant that they achieved a place in the political system they would not have done otherwise.’

Both Mansfield and People’s History Museum curator Chris Burgess point to the importance of papers belonging to Navvies Union leader John Ward in the story of this period of patriotic left wingers. Ward worked closely with Lord Kitchener and raised numerous battalions from his membership. ‘It would have been impossible for the museum to go through all of these boxes of papers,’ says Burgess. ‘So we got a really good historical depth from this CDA. We didn’t want to do the classic trenches and battles for our exhibition. We wanted to talk about how the war really was popular and we wanted to show the agency of working class people who, at least at the start of the war, believed in what they were fighting for.’

David Swift says that his research findings have shocked many of those in the Labour Party and the trade union movement, who largely believed that their forebears were against the war. Although this period of labour movement patriotism could provide inspiration for those in the Labour Party looking for ‘blue Labour’ and other conservative demographics they wish to appeal to.

‘There is a real surfeit of left wing Nigel Farages and Boris Johnsons during the war period,’ says Swift. ‘You get a lot of bombastic left-wing equivalents who also love a pint. So you get London dock strike leader Ben Tillett who loved to gamble, drink and smoke. The opposite of the Methodist and Baptist, liberal teetotters who were Labour Party leaders at the time. He was just one of many working class men who were great speakers, left wing but also loved the football.’

A Land Fit For Heroes: War and the Working Class 1914-1918 continues until February 2015.

www.phm.org.uk/whatson/a-land-fit-for-heroes-war-and-the-working-class-1914-1918/
Events are taking place across Leeds to mark the centenary of the First World War thanks to an AHRC-funded project, writes Carrie Dunn

EXPLORING THE LEGACIES OF WAR

Legacies of War’ is the umbrella name for three strands of work exploring the First World War, all supported by the AHRC: the initial titular project, which was followed by Leeds Stories of the Great War, and then Discovering First World War Heritage. Led by Professor Alison Fell of the University of Leeds, academics with research interests in different aspects of the First World War have collaborated with community groups around the area to explore what happened during the war and its long-term consequences.

The team have also been helping to coordinate a series of events and activities that are taking place across the city now and over the next four years in a variety of venues, commemorating different aspects of the First World War. ‘There are six core academic members of the team,’ explains Fell. ‘We’re not military historians, but we had a desire to do something beyond the trenches, something home front-based, and also something that had the potential for European comparison because a lot of us work primarily outside of Britain.’

Fell’s particular interest lies in the work themed ‘Yorkshire and the Great War’, looking at different elements of the war’s impact on the city and the county more broadly. ‘I’ve learnt a lot – there are aspects of World War One I genuinely knew nothing about,’ she admits. ‘I’ve got to know a lot more about British history – I’m primarily in French studies, so that was probably inevitable, but for me it’s been really interesting.’

Fell’s involvement with community projects has also led her to reflect upon her own research interests and practices as a cultural historian. One of the most significant, she feels, was a link-up with local young people exploring records of refugees relocating to Leeds during the war. ‘One of the projects that has been most closely linked to my own research is about Belgian refugees into the city, and I was working with two secondary schools and with some university students on it,’ she says. ‘I did some research in the archives in Brussels, and I helped some of the schoolchildren and their teachers and the students do some research in the local archives, so we were trying to get both perspectives – the people in Leeds and the Belgians coming.’

She began to notice that the young people were approaching the source materials in very different ways, looking for very different things to her.

‘The Legacies of War team have made such a massive difference to me’
‘That was really interesting!’ she exclaims. ‘I was interested in the experience of mothers with their children, and in education; and what they were interested in was crime and romance, mainly! A lot of them were interested in fitting in as a teenager in a new culture. They didn’t have the background knowledge that a historian would if they’d been researching this stuff, but they did have their own life experience, so to help them answer the questions they were asking, I looked at different sources than I might have normally.

‘I’d just never thought about how they might approach the sources. That interaction was really fulfilling.’

It has also been a hugely positive experience for the community groups working with Fell and her colleagues, such as the Friends of Lawnswood Cemetery, who have been involved with Legacies of War from the very beginning.

The cemetery opened in 1875 and features four memorials and several buildings that have been listed for historical preservation – but it is also of significance to those interested in World War One, with 138 burials, a war graves plot and two screen walls recording names of war dead.

Founder Andrea Hetherington and her group work towards the upkeep of the cemetery and also offer guided walks. Since becoming involved with the project they have also had the opportunity to work with academics on various pieces of research, and Hetherington feels that personally the relationship has been invaluable.

‘The Legacies of War team have made such a massive difference to me,’ she says. ‘When I started to work with them, I’d just been made redundant and was at quite a low ebb. My background is in law but now I’m doing lectures and guided walks and I’m writing a book at the moment. They’ve been really helpful and enthusiastic and it’s led off in all kinds of directions for me.’

As well as the successful research outcomes, Fell feels Legacies of War is also proving to be an opportunity for personal professional development in external communications and marketing – an area that individual academics may often neglect while working within their institutions.

‘I realised at an early stage, for these projects to work and to reach into different parts of the community that a university wouldn’t normally work with requires skills that academics often don’t have,’ she says. ‘We had a project officer from an outreach background – she was absolutely vital. There’s a skills deficit in academia in terms of trying to understand how you would get people to trust what you’re doing, and deal with all the paperwork, like risk assessments, so academics can be confident to go and work with community groups. The AHRC has been doing this via the Connected Communities programme, and now we’re all working to learn new skills.’

And she would urge other universities to overcome their reservations and look into the possibility of doing similar work with local groups. ‘When we had the first meeting, there was a lot of anxiety around the newness of the project,’ she confirms. ‘There were questions like, “Is it going to allow us to do research our bosses are going to like? Is it going to be REF-able?”

‘But there’s a lot of knowledge out there, and it does all feed in. And it has given validity – because it’s an AHRC grant – to something that we wouldn’t normally have time to do. I’ve found it really valuable.’
Nick Evans is Lecturer in Diaspora History at the Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery and Emancipation, University of Hull. For him, one of the previously overlooked things that the World War One at Home project has helped to uncover is a story of mass migration.

‘Up to the outbreak of war, Britain had been an increasingly isolated island nation,’ he says. ‘But the influx of Belgian refugees in the first four months of the war was bigger than any other wave of immigration in British history. And more people moved between and within parts of the British Empire than they had ever done previously.’

‘A third of the Tommies weren’t white, and many of them had travelled great distances to reach the front lines.’ As Nick Evans says, ‘we tend to think of the First World War as involving home regiments just hopping over to France from the South East of England. But even some of the British regiments – those from Scotland, for example – had already travelled hundreds of miles, before they embarked for the Western Front. And soldiers were often treated as aliens in the places where they were stationed. ‘One Scot, based in Lincolnshire, even put an ad in the local paper in Skegness, saying “I’m not foreign – I’m from the Western Isles of Scotland.”’

The threat of invasion
The reason why Scottish regiments had travelled down to Lincolnshire, and were stationed there, was to counter the threat of invasion. This is another ‘forgotten story,’ according to Nick Evans: the fact that Scottish troops were kept near the eastern coast of Britain, protecting the home front in the early years of the war, is a good example of what the World War One at Home project has been able to unearth.

‘There’s hardly anything in the archive about this,’ says Nick Evans. ‘We wouldn’t have known much about it without going to local sources.’

Indeed, the entire East coast can be seen as a front line in the war, and it is clear that the threat of invasion was taken very seriously: ‘in Skegness, instructions were even provided on what to do when the Germans invaded.’ The bombardment of Scarborough by German warships, meanwhile, was described in the press as a ‘failed invasion.’ Once the German army had captured Ostend in Belgium in October 1914, says Nick Evans, ‘we really were next.’

Popular prejudice
The World War One at Home project has also revealed real patterns of prejudice. Hull saw the most serious anti-German riots in the country, especially after Zeppelin raids on the city, in which civilians were killed (according to Nick Evans, ‘often what we think of as aspects of the Second World War – air raid shelters in British cities, for example – were also there in the First World War’). Many Jewish people who had settled in East Yorkshire, and had been the subject of prejudice before the war, now also found themselves targeted because of their German-sounding surnames.
Street shrines

Urban areas in East Yorkshire also saw the formation of many so-called Pals battalions, in which men who had enlisted together in local recruiting drives were able to serve alongside their friends, neighbours and work colleagues. What this meant, though, was that entire communities could be devastated in a single battle. A sign of the way that towns and districts could be changed forever is the shrine in Sharp Street in Hull, which commemorated the men from the surrounding area who were killed serving with the Hull Pals. An impromptu affair made of wood, the shrine is now lost, but surviving photos show how the grief of local communities could be given visual expression.

The war of the little ships

Robb Robinson is a Lecturer at the Maritime Historical Studies Centre, University of Hull. ‘When you think about the maritime dimension to the First World War,’ he says, ‘most people think about the big battleships, and the Battle of Jutland. But the maritime war also involved many hundreds of small trawlers, with fishermen clearing mines and attacking German vessels.’ The Western Front didn’t really end in Flanders, in other words: ‘it continued right up the East coast of Britain. This is another aspect of the war which is very much under-explored: the war at sea as it was carried on month after month, by armed trawlers.’

A shipyard in Beverley was the centre of the production of trawlers for the North Sea fleet: one such vessel, the Viola, was requisitioned by the Admiralty to become one of the first ships to use depth charges, and during the course of the war it was involved in the sinking of U-boats. ‘Go round the world now,’ says Robb Robinson, ‘and you can still find the bones, the wreckage of these trawlers.’ Having been involved also in the Falklands War, the Viola, for example, is now in South Georgia.

The coastal communities of East Yorkshire made a significant contribution to the trawler fleet. ‘I come from a fishing family myself,’ says Robb Robinson – ‘my grandfather worked on minesweeping duties in the First World War.’ Up and down the East coast of Britain, this was an aspect of the war that many thousands of people were involved in, directly or indirectly.

But it’s the little details in the stories, which the World War One at Home has unearthed, which for Robb Robinson give the project its particular power. The fact that the wife of the Viola’s skipper, for example, was involved in collecting sphagnum moss in the Shetlands during the war, for use as surgical dressings (other dressings, developed by Hull-based Smith and Nephew, helped the company to grow into the multinational manufacturer of medical equipment that it is today).

‘We forget how close we were to the conflict in France and Belgium, and how the prospect of invasion must have loomed in people’s minds.’

For further information, please go to: www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01nhwgx

Robb Robinson. 'The maritime war involved many hundreds of small trawlers, with fishermen clearing mines and attacking German vessels.'
‘Comics were an important piece of popular culture, overlooked by historians.’

THE FRONT-LINE
FUNNIES

A major research project is telling the story of the two World Wars through an unlikely but important and up to now largely overlooked medium, writes Matt Shinn

‘Two bristle-haired Tommies are sitting in a shell hole, while explosions fill the sky above them. We don’t know exactly what has just passed between them, but one turns to the other and says ‘Well, if you knows of a better ‘ole, go to it.’

The cartoon, featuring the anti-hero Old Bill, was by the British humourist Bruce Bairnsfather. It was to become the most famous cartoon of the First World War. And work of its kind can give us an at-a-glance appreciation of what people at the time of the Great War were thinking. If it’s a comic strip that will also provide a sense of story that is a valuable record, according to Jane Chapman, Professor of Communications at Lincoln University.

The AHRC-supported project that Jane Chapman has been working on, Comics and World Wars: a Cultural Record, began with the idea that comics were an important piece of popular culture that had been overlooked by historians. ‘Many academics have been interested in the mainstream press only,’ she says. ‘And within newspapers, they’ve tended to overlook the apparently marginal things – the cartoons and the adverts, both of which can tell you a lot.’ The project is intended to bring back into public understanding the heritage of comics and cartoons produced at the time of the First World War, and to shed light on the attitudes that they demonstrate. And in some cases, to recuperate much of this material that has been forgotten – it’s mouldering away in collections, and it’s not usually been written about.

Vulgar caricatures

The graphic art produced during the First World War is of many different kinds. An exhibition at the Cartoon Museum, which the AHRC has supported as part of the Comics and World Wars project, brings together over 300 images, many on loan from the Cambridge University Library War Reserve collection, the biggest store of war-related ephemera in the world. They range from humorous cartoons from newspapers and magazines, to cigarette cards and cartoon maps, and colourful comic postcards by the likes of William Heath Robinson and Donald McGill (who would go on to become the ‘king of the saucy seaside postcard’).
Top: Hark! Hark! The Dogs do Bark. Artist unknown. Published by G.W. Bacon 1914.

Below L to R: German poster: Seppl’s war report. I’m doing well, it is quite warm.

Young Man, I hope you came by all those things honestly? Donald McGill, 1917

Now come along, Firing line or Factory line? Artist unknown c. 1915-18
‘The further from home a soldier was, the more mellow their attention to the enemy.’

Then there are the trench publications that were produced by serving soldiers for their own entertainment, some of which featured cartoons. The ‘Comics and the World Wars’ research project has found 800 editions, with some 200-odd examples of multi-panel cartoons. Bruce Bairnsfather himself started out drawing cartoons for soldiers’ publications, and his jokey style was copied by others as the grumbling but steadfast Old Bill became the face of the long-suffering Tommy in the trenches, and hugely popular among the men at the front. Bairnsfather’s work was criticised in Parliament as ‘vulgar caricatures of our heroes’, but the Old Bill cartoons were reproduced on plates and cards, and even inspired stage shows and films.

The work in the Cartoon Museum exhibition – Never Again! World War I in Cartoon and Comic Art – also covers a huge range of subjects, with depictions of life in the trenches, themes from popular songs, and air raids. Women’s war work, suffragettes and conscientious objectors all featured frequently in cartoons and comic strips of the time. And as Jane Chapman says, around the time of the First World War cartoons and comic strips weren’t always conservative in their underlying message: political organisations – including trade unions and suffrage groups – also used them to try to bring about change. ‘The Labour movement for example used the cartoon image of the gullible worker, forever being taken in by the system, and a victim of capitalism and recruitment propaganda.’

Then there are the ‘hate cartoons’ that demonise the Germans, often making great play of the German spiked helmet, and showing the Hun as a spider, gorilla or monster. The Kaiser was always a popular subject – ‘how ugly, incompetent, feeble or Satanic do you want to make him?’ But there were still boundaries – one Australian cartoon of a bayoneted Kaiser was turned down for publication. And there are other depictions of the enemy, by the likes of Heath Robinson and Haselden, that acknowledge the humanity that was shared by both sides. ‘The soldiers themselves often portrayed the Germans with a degree of empathy,’ says Jane Chapman, ‘seeing them as just doing their job, as the allies were. The further from home a soldier was, and the longer they had been away, the more mellow their attitude in writing became towards the enemy.’

The serious business of the comic

The First World War marks an important point in the evolution of the comic strip. There had been strips before the war, but they were aimed at children: it was in the Great War that adults began to take an interest in the strip format. And cartoons became a hugely important publication medium during the conflict, as they weren’t subjected to the same kinds of censorship as print. At the same time, the adult market for cartoons was developing because of the need for propaganda, and simple forms of communication and entertainment. The recognisable idiom of the comic strip, including many of its conventions (such as speech bubbles), was being formed.

The cartoons from the First World War also give visual form to important aspects of the conflict. Among soldiers themselves, for example, the figure of the anti-hero was very popular, but this could contrast sharply with depictions in the British press of soldiers as heroes, further reinforcing the belief among many at the front that people at home didn’t understand the reality of the war.

Finally, a hundred years after the First World War, cartoons can also provide a means of reaching out to a more general audience, and interesting them in the history of the conflict. As Cartoon Museum curator Anita O’Brien puts it, ‘cartoons and comic strips give us a different way of approaching the war, and the feelings that people had about it. We’re like a bridge between the knowledge that academics have and a public who may not be easy to reach: many of the people who come to the Cartoon Museum would not go to other museums. Cartoons and comic strips are a marginal artform – they’re never seen as high art – but they have tendrils that reach out to a lot of aspects of the period. They can introduce subjects visually that people might not initially want to read about: they’re a great way in.’

Further information: www.lincoln.ac.uk/home/research/researchshowcase/comicsandtheworldwars/

To watch an AHRC film on the project, please go to: www.ahrc.ac.uk/News-and-Events/Watch-and-Listen/Pages/Comics-and-World-Wars-A-Cultural-Record.aspx
Old ideas of the transformative effects of the First World War on gender and sexuality are brushed aside thanks to research supported by the AHRC, reports Carrie Dunn.

A focus for Laura Doan’s research is women whose lives and behaviours might now be interpreted as ‘lesbian’ but were not identified as such at the time. Her new book – ‘Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women’s Experience of Modern War, 1914-18’ – draws attention to the fluidity and interconnectedness of sexuality and gender in the early years of the 20th century as well as the limits of categories of sexual identity.

Professor at Manchester University, she began looking at the topic after her previous research on women’s fashion in the 1920s and the development of a lesbian culture.

‘As I began to do a lot of research and extend my ideas, I started to worry that I thought I knew more about these women and how they understood themselves than was possible at the time,’ says Professor Doan. ‘It was proclaimed that during World War One, all men became more like soldiers, and women became more like men: hyperbolic, of course, but I use that as a starting point to talk about anxieties about gender roles.

‘People like to say the war obliterated Victorian gender norms. What I say is that’s not a very good way to think about it. Instead, I suggest it stretched the meanings of gender. I talk about the elasticity of gender. It’s like a rubber band, it stretches, it gets flabby, it’s not a complete rethinking.’

Doan suggests that the idea that the First World War was sexually liberating is a rather simplistic one. ‘If you read some textbooks on the social and cultural history of the war, it is very common to come across references that World War One was a liberating moment for homosexual cultures, and that the war created homosocial communities, communities of men and communities of women, and it gave women a lot of freedom, and this led to unprecedented levels of experimentation, also promiscuity, and a greater concern about morals,’ she says.

However, she takes pains to point out that gender and sexuality as we understand it in the 21st century were often completely alien concepts 100 years ago.

‘I began to realise that the way we go about thinking about sexuality in the past needs to be rethought, because what I discovered is people then did not think at all about sexuality in the way we think about it now,’ she explains. ‘That was my big discovery. Today it’s second nature for us to imagine that people think of themselves as a certain something, and that there are these categories [of sexual orientation]. Almost no-one makes sense of sexuality like that in the First World War. If we really want to understand what’s happening to sexuality in the early part of the 20th century, we have to make that whole world strange to ourselves.’

Doan’s efforts to do that – what she describes as installing ‘a circuitry of a totally different way of thought’ – were assisted by the award of an AHRC fellowship, giving her time to complete her research and her book.

She suggests that people do not begin to identify their sexual orientation in terms familiar to us today until the middle and later decades of the twentieth century.

That means that during the First World War, there was little understanding or acknowledgement of homosexuality or ‘Gender and sexuality as we understand it in the 21st century were often completely alien concepts 100 years ago.’
homosexual activity. If a woman gave the slightest indication that they knew anything about sex or sexuality, she was already ‘tainted’ as ‘immoral’ by that very admission.

The war, then, Doan argues, was not the sexually liberating event that some have perceived it to be. ‘That discourse is confined to elite and bohemian artistic cultures, such as the Bloomsbury group, or people who’ve gone to public school, but ordinary people would never think of that,’ she says. ‘They might think that person seems a bit odd or eccentric or maybe immoral.’

This theme of sexuality being understood as ‘immoral’ runs throughout Doan’s research. ‘During the First World War, for women to even acknowledge that they understood anything about sexuality, that troubled their respectability,’ says Doan. ‘If a woman was accused of anything [such as what we now term as lesbianism], for her to even acknowledge that she understands the thing she’s being accused of already taints her, especially in the middle and upper middle classes.’

One of the case studies Doan focuses on is Violet Douglas-Pennant, head of the Women’s RAF, who was ordered to step down from her post without being given a reason.

‘It’s often understood in LGBT history that she was accused of being a lesbian,’ says Doan. ‘In 1918, when she was fired, all she knew was that someone had said she was “an immoral woman”. That was never acknowledged [by the Air Ministry or by Douglas-Pennant] – that would have troubled her respectability.’

Doan looked through the ministry’s private papers to find out whether any of the officials had written down what had been said about Douglas-Pennant. ‘When I was in the archives in Glasgow, I opened up an envelope and out came all these white feathers, sent to the Air Minister to goad him to come clean about why he had really fired Douglas-Pennant,’ she recalls. ‘The feathers were waltzing around the archive room as I tried to grab at them, and it felt like a neat little metaphor for the research. If I knew for sure what she was I could have just grabbed that feather and put it right into my chapter, but every time I tried to reach the feather it floated away. That’s how history works. It’s not a thing I can hold in my hand.’

For further information, please go to: www.manchester.ac.uk/research/Laura.doan/research

‘I began to realise that the way we go about thinking about sexuality in the past needs to be rethought.’
HEROES IN STONE AND BRONZE

The effect of the First World War on British figure sculpture was enormous, not least because it led to hundreds of commissions for statues of servicemen, to be included on war memorials. And the way that those servicemen were depicted was to have a lasting impact, writes Matt Shinn.

Jonathan Black is a Senior Research Fellow in History of Art at Dorich House Museum, Kingston University. Through a Fellowship funded by the AHRC, he has produced a book and accompanying exhibitions on the work of the British sculptor Ivor Roberts-Jones, best known for his statues, dotted around Whitehall, of Clement Attlee, Viscount Slim and Viscount Alanbrooke, as well as that of Winston Churchill in Parliament Square, which was famously given a grass Mohican by anti-capitalist protestors. Roberts-Jones also produced a statue of Rupert Brooke, now in Rugby, Warwickshire, which shows the poet (in Jonathan Black’s words) as a ‘barefoot hippy neo-pagan,’ before he enlisted (see page 66).

Though he was born too late to have taken part in the Great War, Roberts-Jones was working in the tradition of sculptors who had seen active military service (he himself had fought in the Burma Campaign in the Second World War). And he was working specifically within an idiom that developed around the end of the First World War: ‘he was the last of his kind,’ says Jonathan Black. ‘The last in a tradition of great icon-makers that goes back to the Great War: the last creator of images of heroes.’

Soldier-artists

As Roberts-Jones himself was aware, he was part of a very particular lineage – of sculptors who had been soldiers themselves, before they turned to depicting men in uniform. Sculptors like William Reid Dick and Gilbert Ledward (who designed the Guards Memorial in Horse Guards Parade), both of whom fought in the First World War.

And above all, for Roberts-Jones this was the tradition of Charles Sargeant Jagger, who created some of the best-known memorials of the Great War, and had a direct influence on Roberts-Jones’s work. Roberts-Jones’s Viscount Slim, for example, has been seen as being very similar in pose to the figure of the shell-carryer on Jagger’s Royal Artillery Memorial at Hyde Park Corner, which (having served in the Royal Artillery himself) Roberts-Jones would have known well.

Jagger won the Military Cross for bravery (‘not the sort of thing expected of artists, then or now’). He was a tough character – a working-class Yorkshireman who was given a commission as a second lieutenant in the Artists’ Rifles, which bestowed on him the dubious status of being a ‘temporary gentleman.’ At one point, having been wounded in the arm, he pleaded successfully not to have it amputated, a decision on which his subsequent career depended.

Jagger’s own taste was for work that didn’t shy away from the business of fighting. When he was commissioned to produce the Great Western Railway War Memorial in Paddington station, for example, the figure that was chosen by his patrons was that of a soldier reading a letter. As Jonathan Black says, the importance of the mail is an often-overlooked aspect of the war, with the delivery of post from home contributing much to the cohesion of the British army: ‘I myself had a great uncle who fought in northern Italy in the First World War. He was sent an Eccles cake, posted two days before, that his platoon devoured under shell fire – it was still moist.’ The Great Western Railway committee
Jagger was able to bring to art the bite of war’s reality

‘Jagger was able to bring to art the bite of war’s reality’
wanted something quite elegiac and soft-focus for their memorial, and so they chose the statue of the reading soldier. Yet Jagger himself had preferred other, tougher-looking figures – in Jonathan Black’s phrase, statues of ‘terminator Tommies.’

But then, Jagger had a personal investment in works such as the Royal Artillery Memorial. As Jonathan Black says, ‘as a soldier himself, the howitzers he depicted were the last word in force, strength and protection for him. Brickbats came Jagger’s way from the Bloomsbury group for the way that he depicted the war and the participants in it, but they didn’t do the fighting: as time went on, Jagger became irritated by the increasingly dominant view of the war, put about by people who hadn’t been in harm’s way.’

**The end of heroism**

Like Jagger and the others, then, Roberts-Jones was a sculptor who had been at the sharp end. And for Roberts-Jones, it was Jagger’s brand of realism, above all, which was influential. Jagger doesn’t use stock types, but bases his figures on individuals, making them distinct, even though they are representing a great mass of people. They are portraits on one level, in other words, meaning that his work doesn’t fall prey to sentimentalism. As Jonathan Black says, ‘Britain doesn’t really have the equivalent of a George Grosz or Otto Dix – the German painters who reflected the brutal realities of war in paint. The closest we come is in our figure sculpture. As a result of their experiences, sculptors such as Jagger were able to bring to art the bite of war’s reality.’

‘Roberts-Jones was the last of a generation who saw action, and then made sculpture. It’s entirely different today, when artists go to art school and are discovered while they are still in their twenties. Most of the Great War memorial artists began their careers later, in many cases when they were in their thirties: they’d had other experiences – including first-hand experience of combat.’

But since the Sixties at least, such a form of representation as Jagger’s has not been possible, says Jonathan Black. ‘The Blackadder view of the First World War applies visually, too. We may struggle to admit the idea of heroism in a doubting age, but that was not the case in the Twenties, when the British public passionately identified with the Tommies.’

The work of the soldier-sculptors after the First World War is based on a vision of ‘a credible, down-to-earth, realistic heroism, while there was still room to admit that heroism exists.’
WORLD WAR ONE AT HOME
THE NORTH WEST

RIOTS, MUSIC HALLS AND SPIRITUALISTS

The World War One at Home researchers in the North West have uncovered stories of spiritualism, disorder and the power of music hall propaganda, writes Matt Shinn.

Location is everything in the First World War,' says Mike Benbough-Jackson, Senior Lecturer in History at Liverpool John Moore’s University. ‘Your experience of the war could be completely different from someone else’s, depending on your locality. And nowhere bears this out better than the North West’.

If you’d spent the war in Liverpool, for example, you would have been in a maritime trading city, with a major Imperial role. And you might well have known some of the many Liverpudlians who were on board Cunard’s liner Lusitania, which was making for Liverpool when she was sunk by German U-boats in May 1915. Though the sinking itself is well-known, being one of the triggers for the United States entering the war, what is less well-known is that this event sparked a series of anti-German riots in Liverpool and Tranmere, with attacks on shops – and not just German-owned shops, but Chinese-owned ones too. A dark chapter in the city’s history, which few now are aware of.

As a major centre for the importation of animals, millions of which were used in the war effort – including the real-life War Horses – Birkenhead was also the centre of efforts by the animal charity the Blue Cross to bring the concept of animal rights to the fore.

Moths to a flame
The role of the music hall was also particularly important in the North West, with its large working-class urban populations. As Mike Benbough-Jackson points out, ‘music hall can be seen as just another of the channels for exercising pressure on men to enlist, drawing them like moths to a flame’. The World War One at Home project has featured the story of one such recruit, Percy Morter, who went to a show at the Palace Theatre, Manchester, where the renowned female drag artiste Vesta Tilley was recruiting for the army. The star placed her hand on Percy’s shoulder and encouraged him to take the King’s shilling: he joined the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, and died on the Somme the following year. And yet at the same time, the music halls could be much more than just propaganda tools – ‘they also included dramas featuring soldiers leaving, the loss of loved ones, and weeping widows’.

Mediums and hoaxers
The North West was also a particular focus for another phenomenon that was seen throughout the UK during the First World War: the growth of Spiritualism, as recently bereaved wives and parents tried to contact the spirits of dead servicemen.

‘The North West featured a very wide range of people who claimed that they could communicate with lost loved-ones,’ says Mike Benbough-Jackson, ‘from sombre Spiritualist churches for the august and scientifically-minded, Arthur Conan-Doyle types, through to crystal ball-gazers on the Blackpool seafront. I was struck by the extent, though, to which magistrates and the local police throughout
'The best-selling book about the First World War was *All Quiet on the Western Front* – which is about a German soldier.'
LINKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Connected Communities
The AHRC is leading on Connected Communities, a cross-Council programme designed to help us understand the changing nature of communities in their historical and cultural contexts and the role of communities in sustaining and enhancing our quality of life.

The programme seeks not only to connect research on communities, but to connect communities with research, bringing together community-engaged research across a number of core themes, including community health and wellbeing, community creativity, prosperity and regeneration, community values and participation, sustainable community environments, places and spaces, and community cultures, diversity, cohesion, exclusion, and conflict.

For further information, please go to: www.connected-communities.org

Care for the Future
‘Care for the Future: Thinking Forward through the Past’ affords an opportunity for researchers in the arts and humanities to generate new novel understandings of the relationship between the past and the future, and the challenges and opportunities of the present through a temporally-inflected lens.

Importantly, it offers academic researchers in these fields the opportunity to facilitate and activate collaborations with partners including those outside higher education institutions in the cultural and creative sectors both in the UK and internationally.

For further information, please go to: www.ahrc.ac.uk

Engagement Centres
http://hiddenhistorieswwi.ac.uk
www.livinglegacies1914-18.ac.uk
www.herts.ac.uk/everyday-lives-in-war/every-day-lives-in-war
www.kent.ac.uk/ww1
www.voicesofwarandpeace.org

World War One at Home
www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01nhwgx

Imperial War Museum
www.iwm.org.uk

First World War Centenary Partnership
www.iwm.org.uk/corporate/projects-partnerships/first-world-war-centenary-partnership

Beyond the Trenches blog
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