'Pipers and Pipe Music of the Great War' project launched

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The Scottish Pipers' Association has received £7,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a project, Pipers and Pipe Music of the Great War. Led by volunteers, the project which was launched today at Erskine Hospital will focus on researching the lives of the pipers and the music they played and composed.

The piper playing his comrades into action is an iconic image of war through the ages. More than 2,500 pipers took part in the First World War. Of those, 500 were killed and 600 wounded. Their role was to entertain the troops in their brief leisure hours, lift their spirits and their feet on the long marches, inspire the men into battle and lament the fallen. Many new tunes were composed as pipers played their way across battlefields from France to the Middle East.

The project will bring to life the role of a First World War piper through real life stories - one Pipe Major described his pride in playing as his comrades marched in column past the commanding officer; another described trench warfare as "No life for a Pipe Major, living like a rat in a hole"; and another told of the long desert march to Jerusalem with burning heat during the day and freezing temperatures at night. It will also research tunes composed by pipers during the war such as Festubert, Delville Wood, The Battle of Arras, 9th Argylls at Ypres, Buzancy and The Seaforth Highlanders March to the Battle of Loos.

The stories of the pipers will be told and their music performed at a series of five concerts at the College of Piping in Glasgow. Each concert will involve young pipers as well as solo professionals and will be open to the general public with free admission.

Commenting on the award, Mathew Anderson, the Association's Pipe Major, who will be playing at the launch, said: "Many young pipers lost their lives during the Great War. I am proud to play at the launch of this project to honour their memory. We are thrilled to have received the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund and are confident the project will serve as a fitting memorial to all the pipers who served during the Great War."

Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland, said: "The First World War changed the face of modern history, touching the lives of everyone in this country and beyond. HLF is committed to this project which, through bringing to life the role of our brave pipers and the music they composed, will create a deeper understanding of the heritage of the conflict."

Steve Conway, Chief Executive of Erskine, said: "Pipers have played an important role in military history and we are delighted that this new project will mark their contribution. The First World War still holds great significance and is remembered with solemnity and respect; for Erskine, it has particular resonance as it marks the starting point of the charity's work with Scottish veterans. Our residents were delighted to be part of today's launch and their enjoyment of the piper's rousing performance was clear for all to see."

Notes to editors

About The Scottish Pipers' Association

The Scottish Pipers' Association was founded in 1920 with the objects of the study and practice of the music of the Great Highland Bagpipe, the banding together of the pipers of Scotland, and the fostering of the spirit of comradeship amongst them. There is monthly club nights when members play a few tunes and socialise. They run piping recitals and competitions for juveniles, adults, both amateur and professional and veterans aged 60 and over. Membership is open to anybody with an interest in listening to pipe music.

About Erskine

Erskine has been caring for Scotland's veterans since 1916; re-building shattered lives, restoring dignity and providing first-class care to ex-Service men and women. In the past year the charity has cared for 1,100 veterans. Erskine's core role is to provide nursing care for elderly veterans in five specialist homes across Scotland but the charity also offers support, housing and employment opportunities to veterans of all ages. The Charity relies on the generosity of its supporters to maintain its commitment to care for Scotland's veterans – without donations, it simply cannot continue its work.

Further information

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