Northampton secures lottery funding for First World War project

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The 18-month long project commemorates the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War and explores the legacy of the conflict on the town.

The project, called ‘Conflict and Community – Northampton’s Response to the First World War’, is an exciting project for the two venues as it represents the first time they have worked together to plan and deliver such a large scale community venture. The project will see an exciting assortment of arts and cultural events staged in the town that will help people learn about the history of Northampton during the war.

The First World War changed the world and left an indelible imprint on the national consciousness that should not be forgotten. There is little research or published material about Northampton home front during the war that this project aims to set right. Through connecting with local people the project hopes to capture and record second generation memories before they are lost.

Key themes to be explored are the home front, the shoe making industry which was boosted by the war, a reduced male workforce, the role of women including women’s liberation and the vote, conscientious objectors, rationing, propaganda, civilian casualties and what life was like after the war.

The stories of local men who served our country will also be told. Many of them served in the Northamptonshire Regiment and Northamptonshire Yeomanry. The loss of lives, particularly the large number who died in the battles of Auber’s Ridge and Gallipoli, had a massive impact on the borough of Northampton. Through personal accounts, letters home, family memories and information from the Northamptonshire Regimental Association and Northamptonshire Yeomanry Association, the project hopes to bring people’s First World War stories to life.

Activities, which run until mid-2015, start this month and will include theatre productions and film screenings at Royal & Derngate, talks, workshops, a big family day on 30 August, activity days, researching family history sessions and an extraordinary exhibition opening at Northampton Museum and Art Gallery in August, dubbed *A Shoe Maker Goes to War*. Royal & Derngate’s world premiere production of *Regeneration* based on Pat Barker’s First World War novel, will link to the exhibition and there will be special late night openings for audiences.

Members of the public, secondary and primary schools, theatre groups and other community groups are being encouraged to take part in the project and associated events and share any stories they may have.

The information and personal stories uncovered during the project will preserve people’s stories for posterity and provide an invaluable resource for the town that documents the true impact of the First World War. The findings will be available as an online resource and will appear in a History Press book being published to commemorative the First World War, called Great War Towns. Two new pieces of theatre will also be created as a result of the stories and oral history gathered.

Councillor Brandon Eldred, Northampton Borough Council cabinet member for community engagement, said: “We have some wonderful events planned for 2014 to commemorate the war as well as other significant anniversaries for the town. It is great to get this lottery funding as this is a fantastic addition to what is already a packed programme.”

Dani Parr, Royal & Derngate’s associate director, commented: “It’s exciting to be working closely with Northampton Museum and Art Gallery on a really exciting and innovative programme of events and activities. We’ll be getting the community involved in so many ways, working with people of all ages, to explore how the First World War affected the lives of the people in Northamptonshire, and make sure those memories live on.”

Vanessa Harbar, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East Midlands, added: “This is an exciting project that will engage lots of local people and volunteers in telling Northampton’s story within the national commemoration of First World War centenary. This project marks part of more than £47million the Heritage Lottery Fund has now awarded to over 450 projects commemorating this momentous conflict. We are delighted to play our part in making this project possible."

Note to editors

Conflict and Community – Northampton’s Response to the First World War is presented by Northampton Borough Council’s museum service and Royal & Derngate, and is supported by Northamptonshire Regimental Association and Northamptonshire Yeomanry Association. The project is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Conflict and Community event highlights:

- **Regeneration – Friday 29 August to Saturday 20 September.** A world premiere production of Pat Barker’s Regeneration at Royal & Derngate, adapted by Nicholas Wright in co-production with The Touring Consortium Theatre Company. Set at Craiglockhart War Hospital, Scotland, in 1917, the play follows poet and soldier Siegfried Sassoon who has been institutionalised in an attempt to undermine his public disapproval of the war. His Army Psychiatrist, Dr William Rivers, is tasked with returning shell-shocked officers to the trenches, yet has become tormented by the morality of what is being done in the name of medicine. Reminding us that some of the most intimate of friendships are borne from the most brutal of conflicts, Regeneration is a compellingly compassionate look at a nihilistic war and the devastating effect it had on a generation of young men.
- **A Shoemaker Goes to War – 2 August to 9 November**. A major exhibition that tells the stories of those who stayed behind in Northampton working on the home front and of those who went to war, many of them would be wearing Northampton made boots and would have served in the Northamptonshire Regiment and Northamptonshire Yeomanry. The loss of lives, particularly the large number who died in the battles of Auber’s Ridge and Gallipoli, had a massive impact on the borough of Northampton. Through personal accounts, letters home and family memories and military memorabilia, this exhibition aims to bring the people of Northampton’s WWI stories to life.
- **Family Day, 30 August**. A family day with events happening at Royal & Derngate, Northampton Museum and Art Gallery and on Guildhall Road, which will be closed for the day. Activities will include threatre, arts and crafts activities, street performances, music and workshops.
- **Northamptonshire Regiment and Northamptonshire Yeomanry events** – Dates to be announced. Abington Park Museum is home to the Regimental Collection, which traces the history of the county regiment from its formation in 1741 to its amalgamation in 1960. Items include uniforms, prints, pictures, silver, medals and other items of regimental significance. These family history events are an opportunity to find out more.

Further information

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