Duty Calls: The Country House in Time of War

15/03/2013

Duty Calls looks at the impact of various conflicts on nine of Yorkshire's major country houses, and the experiences of their occupants and wider communities, from the points of view of owners, servants, tenants and estate workers. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has awarded grants to 5 out of the 9 houses to deliver projects around this theme.

Duty came in forms, from domestic to national service: men were sent away to fight, women volunteered as nurses, houses and horses were requisitioned. The rise of aerial warfare meant danger from the skies, and the impact of death among loved ones and neighbours cut across social strata.

From March 2013 until October 2014, simultaneous interlinked exhibitions and programmes of events and activities will highlight and explore each house's own particular circumstances, collections and stories, chronicling how these estates and communities faced the hardships of war across three centuries.

Photographs, paintings, military memorabilia and a rich selection of letters, journals, and estate papers will form the basis of the displays and trails telling poignant stories of immense courage, loss, bereavement, support and dedication. Some houses focus on personal experiences of military combat, some on how war affected the use of the house itself and the running of the estate, or the lives of those left at home, community initiatives and war work, as well as the economic and social consequences of war in the aftermath.

Duty Calls will provide fascinating and unique insights into the important, and sometimes unexpected, roles played by country houses, and their diverse communities, in time of war.

Houses involved in Duty Calls are:

Beningbrough Hall, York (National Trust)
Requisitioned as a billet and mess for the Royal Canadian Air Force, Beningbrough focuses on poignant and amazing tales and histories of the men and women who stayed there during the Second World War. 1 March to 3 November 2013.

Brodsworth Hall, Doncaster (English Heritage)
Explores life on the estate in both world wars, from those leaving to serve abroad, to those at home supporting the war efforts. Includes letters from men in the trenches thanking a school girl for her knitting them garments. 29 March 2013 to September 2014.

Castle Howard, North Yorkshire
Generations of Howard sons went to fight overseas, but the impact of war was often more powerfully felt at home: bereavement and loss were shared by the Howard family, staff and tenants, many commemorated on war memorials in estate villages. 25 May to end 2014.

Fairfax House, York
Focuses on the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745 – and marks the 250th anniversary of Fairfax House. At the heart of this exhibition lies the rose, the most potent and evocative of Jacobite symbols, inspiring faith, courage and hope. 9 August to 31 December 2013.

Kiplin Hall, Richmond
Highlights the extraordinary Miss Bridget Talbot, Kiplin's last owner, who served with the Red Cross in the First World War, invented a torch for life-jackets that saved many lives in the Second World War, and oversaw Kiplin as a RAF maintenance unit. 29 March 2013 to 29 October 2014.

Lotherton Hall, Leeds
Traces the long history of Lotherton Hall and the Gascoigne family, from the American War of Independence to the Second World War, via Lotherton's use as a military hospital in the First World War. 22 March to 31 January 2014.

Newby Hall, Ripon
Reserved as a safe haven for the Royal family should the Royal Palaces come under attack, Newby's role in the Second World War was shrouded in secrecy and intrigue. The house had to be ready to receive the Royal party with just six hours' notice. From 29 March 2013.

Nostell Priory, Wakefield (National Trust)
Lives at home and away, for rich and poor, farmworker, landowner, tradesman or maid. Events and workshops to uncover the world of Nostell's people…and yours. From June 2013 to August 2014.

Sewerby Hall, Bridlington
Contrasts the experiences of the Lloyd Greame family and their estate workers during the First and Second World Wars: from being a country house estate, to being requisitioned as a convalescent home for RAF personnel. 23 March to 1 September 2013.

Yorkshire Country Houses Partnership website

Notes to editors

YCHP is a collaboration between partnership houses across Yorkshire and the University of York, dedicated to research into the history of these houses, investigating their architecture, landscapes, families, archives, collections and local communities.

Duty Calls follows hugely popular earlier joint exhibitions projects Maids and Mistresses (2004); and Work and Play (2007). Duty Calls is supported by Heritage Lottery Fund.

Further information

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