

The Duke of Cambridge visiting the new First World War Galleries

To mark the start of the Centenary of the First World War, Imperial War Museum (IWM) London is opening new, permanent First World War Galleries. Visitors can discover the story of the war through the eyes of people in Britain and its empire, both on the home front and the fighting fronts. They will see how the war started, why it continued, how the Allies won and its global impact.

The ground-breaking new First World War Galleries are part of the wider transformation of IWM London which includes a newly configured atrium with iconic large object displays and a number of new exhibitions, public spaces, shops and cafes. This £40million transformation has been made possible with the support of a number of funders, sponsors, trusts, foundations and individuals, including a grant of £6.5m from the Heritage Lottery Fund and £5m from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Drawing on IWM's First World War collections, the richest and most comprehensive in the world, visitors will see over 1,300 objects on display, many of which have never been seen before. They range from weapons, uniforms and equipment to diaries and letters, keepsakes and trinkets, photographs, film and art.

Diane Lees, Director-General of IWM says: "Each of the objects on display will give a voice to the people who created them, used them or cared for them and reveal stories not only of destruction, suffering and loss, but also endurance and innovation, duty and devotion, comradeship and love. Visitors will see what life was like at the front, and experience the sights and sounds of a recreated 'trench', with the Sopwith Camel fighter plane and Mark V tank looming above them.

They will learn of the terrible strain the war placed on people and communities and will be able to consider some of the questions and choices, ordinary and extraordinary, that people of Britain and its former empire had to face in this first ‘total war’.”

Stepping into the galleries, presented with three large ship models, visitors will be introduced to Britain at the turn of the 20th century, a maritime power dependent upon its empire, seaborne trade and the mighty Royal Navy to protect that trade. They will then see how tensions and rivalries were developing in Europe, and crucially, as the crisis of summer 1914 led to war, why Britain felt it had to fight.

In Shock, as visitors hear the scream of shrapnel shells they will come face to face with a French 75mm field gun, which contributed to the deaths of a million men in just four months of fighting in 1914. They will see objects on display for the first time from the Christmas Truce, including a button from a German tunic that was given to a British soldier as a souvenir.

On the Western Front, trench warfare takes the fighting below ground, as armies try to escape the murderous hails of shrapnel and bullets. In Deadlock trench signs, such as ‘Hellfire Corner’ and ‘Piccadilly Circus’ helping soldiers navigate the complex network of trenches, are shown alongside objects telling the stories of innovations in trench warfare; from the geophones used to detect the enemy in mineshafts beneath the trenches, through to a hollowed out fake tree which became a camouflaged look out post in no man’s land.

Drawing on IWM’s rich poster collection, Your Country Needs You focuses on the campaign to recruitment a ‘New Army’. Visitors will see a doll of Field Marshal Lord Kitchener, figurehead of the recruitment campaign; letters from an adoring fan asking him to marry her, and a letter from nine-year-old Alfie Knight pleading to allow him to enlist as he “can ride jolley [sic] quick on my bicycle and…am a good shot with a revolver.”

World War, where visitors can explore the war at sea and campaigns in the Middle East, Africa and Gallipoli, is dominated by the naval gun from HMS Chester at which young Jack Cornwell VC was mortally wounded in the Battle of Jutland. In Feeding the Front, visitors will be required to ‘make’ food, boots and shells through large, digital animations at an interactive Supply Line table over four metres long, which shows the unprecedented scale of production required on the home front to keep the troops fed and fighting.

At the centre of the galleries with the towering 9.2 inch Howitzer gun ‘Mother’ on display, Total War will explore the Battle of the Somme, the five-month long costly battle that started in July 1916 and marked a pivotal point in the war. The scale of casualties is represented through a chilling map showing the numbers of British and Empire temporary graves in just one sector of the battlefield, and a Union Jack used by a regimental chaplain to conduct burials on the Somme. Visitors will also be able to watch the original 1916 documentary film of the battle - in its entirety and for the first time with the original musical accompaniment.

Life at the Front will look at what life was like for the troops in and behind the trenches; how they coped with hardship, discomfort and loss, what they ate, how they entertained themselves with plays, vegetable shows and sports days, and the souvenirs they collected such as a scrap of wallpaper pulled off the walls of a German trench.

Visitors will then walk through a ‘trench’ – one of the highlights of the galleries – with a Sopwith Camel fighter plane swooping low overhead and a Mark V tank looming above. Projected silhouettes of soldiers and a soundscape will evoke the drudgery, discomfort, danger and comradeship which characterised the experience of a British ‘Tommy’ on the Western Front, from a sudden thunderstorm to a gas attack.

At All Costs explores how a total war on the battlefields, meant a total war on the home front as women stepped into roles in factories, hospitals, transport and agriculture and even children helped the war effort, as shown by a jumper belonging to a Sea Scout coastwatcher who looked out for German spies. Visitors will also learn how Britain came under enemy air attack, how, during the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, it faced rebellion on its own streets and how Germany's fateful decision to launch a campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare ultimately brought the USA into the war on the side of the Allies.

In 1917, as the war raged on, visitors will discover in Machines against Men how the armies of Britain and its empire looked to new technology and tactics to win the war. The area will feature the stories of two famous air aces, British Major James McCudden VC and the German 'Red Baron', Manfred von Richtofen, and fragments from the planes in which they met their deaths will be on display. It will also look at how, even as communications technology became more advanced, animals were still used to send battlefield messages with a collar worn by a messenger dog as well as a pigeon message book. Before focusing on the iconic mud clotted battle of The Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele), where visitors will see how the efforts of photographers and war artists to record the shattered landscapes of the Western Front, created an indelible impression of what the war looked like.

The terrible strains that people endured will be explored in Breaking Down through objects such as Siegfried Sassoon's letter protesting at the continuation of war and items of German clothing made out of paper as the British naval blockade contributed to a severe lack of resources, hunger and even starvation.

Finally in Seizing Victory the dramatic story of 1918 will be told. Visitors will see how after almost another year of war, from near defeat, allied forces were able to defeat Germany and its allies. The galleries conclude in War Without End, showing how the war changed the world forever, from the enormous human cost, the new world order that emerged, the indelible changes which the war had on British society and the Empire, through to the commemoration and remembrance as people looked back ten years after the war.

Professor David Stevenson, (London School of Economics) and Historical Advisor to IWM says, 'The remarkable new 1914-1918 galleries at IWM London will be one of the highlights and most enduring legacies of the First World War centenary. They integrate text, artefacts, and audio-visual material into a compelling total presentation that – while properly focusing on the experience of Britain and its empire – is global in scope. Though taking full account of the latest historical research, they leave it open to the visitor to gather the essential information and to draw their own conclusions about the outbreak, development, and impact of that terrible conflict."

Professor David Reynolds (Cambridge University), author of 'The Long Shadow: The Great War and the Twentieth Century' and Historical Advisor to IWM says: "IWM London is presenting 1914-18 afresh for a twenty first century audience. These impressive new galleries illuminate the soldiers' experiences but they also get us out of the trenches to understand the lives of women and children on the home front and the larger international story of a British world at war. They also offer a chance to ponder the hard questions about why Britain fought and what was gained by all the sacrifices."

Dr Dan Todman (Queen Mary University of London) and Historical Advisor to IWM says: "The transformation of the First World War galleries at IWM London is a really important marker for the centenary of the war. These galleries really do represent the cutting edge both in museum design and in historical scholarship. The galleries not only tell the story of the war, they explain how and why things happened, and they show what the war meant to people at the time. Visitors are brought face-to-face with objects that make clear both the industrial effort and the human impact of the conflict: they will leave understanding the war, and its significance to the modern world, in a new way."

Dame Jenny Abramsky, Chair of Heritage Lottery Fund, says: “The Heritage Lottery Fund is proud to have invested in the transformation of these inspiring new gallery spaces. The First World War was an extraordinary turning point in our history and these impressive galleries will help remind us all – young and old - of the relevance of the war on us all today. HLF has already awarded more than £56million to a great variety of fascinating projects both big and small that are helping people and communities all over the UK to explore and learn about the impact of the First World War.”

Notes to editors:

IWM London has undergone a £40 million (approximate figure) major transformation, which includes the building of new First World War Galleries and new Atrium thanks to support from the Heritage Lottery Fund; Department for Culture, Media and Sport; Pears Foundation; Waste Recycling Environmental Ltd; DCMS / Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund; as well as support from the IWM Foundation, chaired by Lord Rothermere, which has received gifts from Peter Harrison Heritage Foundation; Garfield Weston Foundation; Lord Rothermere; Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC; Westfield; The Duke of Westminster Foundation; Wolfson Foundation; Foyle Foundation; Clore Duffield Foundation; Kirby Laing Foundation; Bernard Sunley Charitable Foundation; The Reuben Foundation and The Sackler Trust. Additional support has been received from other philanthropic donations, trusts and foundations as well as corporate partners, IWM Friends, and members of the public.

About the First World War Galleries:

- Designer: Casson Mann
- When the project began: In 2010
- Access: They are free and are suitable for all ages
- Area: Cover an area of over 1000m2
- Number of objects and digital displays: They will feature over 1,300 objects alongside 60 digital displays including interactive and immersive spaces, encouraging visitors to explore a range of themes and challenge their perceptions of the conflict
- Reflection Spaces: There will be two atmospheric reflection spaces, each centred on an object, where visitors will be encouraged to pause and think about some of the most difficult aspects of the war, including the act of killing and the fear of being killed
- Countries Featured: They focus on the stories of Britain and the former empire. Countries which feature include Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India and the forces and fronts in the Middle East and Northern Africa
- Historical Research: The narrative of the exhibition has drawn from the huge advances made in the historical study of the First World War in recent years, and has been created in consultation with an advisory board composed of leading British historians
- Family Visitors: The Galleries will include family-friendly hands on interactives, such as our recruitment wall where you can try-on and explore uniforms, as well as objects with special family captions, written by IWM’s Youth Panel, allowing families to explore various themes and objects
- The 14 chapters which the Galleries will be made up of are: Hope and Glory, An Inevitable War, Shock, Your Country Needs You, Deadlock, World War, Feeding the Front, Total War - The Somme, At All Costs, Life at the Front, Machines Against Men, Breaking Down, Seizing Victory, War Without End

The First World War Galleries Book

The First World War Galleries – published to mark the Centenary will be available from 17 July 2014. The book, written by curator, Paul Cornish, draws on the unparalleled expertise, archives and collections of IWM. Fully illustrated with

objects from IWM's unparalleled collections the book presents events as they happened, with words written or spoken within hours, days or weeks of the events they describe. Through these voices and objects – emotive, immediate, and sometimes surprising – the story of the war is told from a compelling new perspective, allowing us to both understand and reflect upon the landmark conflict that still shapes our lives today. Paperback £20. Hardback £35.

Events

- 16 Sept - In Conversation with Kate Adie: The Legacy of Women in the First World War
- 21 Oct - Is Art a True Picture of War? - with BBC Arts Editor, Will Gompertz
- 4 Nov - First World War: Poems from the Front – with John Simpson and poetry readings
- 19 Nov - Why Soldiers Fight: From the First World War to Afghanistan Prices: Adult £12; Concession £10; IWM Friends £10 Times: 7pm – 9.30pm (Doors at 6.30pm)

Also opening from 19 July 2014:

- IWM's transformed atrium – after a major redevelopment, the new atrium designed by Foster + Partners will be revealed. It will tell the story of conflict from the First World War to the present day through new large object displays Witnesses to War, Turning Points: 1939 – 1945, Peace and Security: 1945 – 2014 and Curiosities of War
- Truth and Memory: British Art of the First World War the largest and first major retrospective of British First World War art for almost 100 years featuring over 110 artworks
- IWM Contemporary: Mark Neville showcases photographs and three films giving a different and arrestingly intimate perspective on British troops and their daily encounters with Afghan people
- All of IWM's other exhibitions will reopen with the museum including; A Family in Wartime, Secret War, The Holocaust Exhibition, and The Lord Ashcroft Gallery: Extraordinary Heroes and Horrible Histories: Spies

Further information

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