Plea for wartime memories of volunteer hospitals

31/07/2014

The project, Home Comforts: Red Cross Auxiliary Hospitals in the North Riding 1914-19, is aimed at collecting as much information as possible while memories of the period are still alive and memorabilia is still available.

County Councillor Chris Metcalfe, Executive Member for the Archives Service, said: “We are now marking the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War, so inevitably some material will already have been lost in the intervening 100 years.

“But we are hopeful that with the help of this support from the HLF, our team at the County Records Office will be able to rescue and record for posterity how the women of North Yorkshire threw themselves into the task of providing care and comfort for wounded soldiers.”

Some 1,500 nursing beds were provided at 32 locations in the North Riding, in properties ranging from schools and private houses to County Hall in Northallerton. More than 10,000 patients were treated in 1918 alone.

Properties and nursing care were provided on a voluntary basis, and local women from all levels of society took the lead in organising and sustaining the provision. As well as actually nursing injured soldiers, they engaged in a wide range of peripheral activities – from making plum jam to going onto the moors to collect sphagnum moss, which was used to dress wounds on the battlefield.

The project, which will be run by the County Records Office in partnership with the British Red Cross Society, has been awarded £9,800 from the HLF. The project team is appealing for documents, letters photographs, memorabilia or family stories connected with the hospitals, which will be used as the basis for talks, exhibitions, and a commemorative publication.

Fiona Spiers, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Yorkshire and the Humber, said: “The impact of the First World War was far reaching, touching and shaping every corner of the UK and beyond.

"The Heritage Lottery Fund has already invested more than £56million in projects – large and small – that are marking this global Centenary; with our new small grants programme, we are enabling even more communities like those involved in the Home Comforts project to explore the continuing legacy of this conflict and help local people in particular to broaden their understanding of how it has shaped our modern world.”

Notes to editors

UK Government Centenary plans

In June 2013, the Government set out its plans to mark the centenaries of the First World War commencing in 2014. These plans include a £35m refurbishment of the First World War galleries at the Imperial War Museum (IWM). The Government’s principal partners in the commemorations will be the HLF and the IWM, but will encompass support for a multitude of other initiatives, large and small, as they come together in the months and years to come.

Further information

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People with any material which might be of use to the project team are asked to contact: North Yorkshire County Record Office on tel: 01609 777 585 or email: archives@northyorks.gov.uk