

Archaeologists at the dig site

For two weeks from Monday 10 August, a live archaeological dig will be uncovering the lost military training ground and barracks of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, hidden beneath our feet. The Dig – open to visit for free between 10am to 4pm daily - is part of Doncaster 1914-18, a four-year centenary project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). It is aiming to build a picture of Doncaster's First World War history and legacy. Visitors can even learn how to become archaeologists themselves during Dig Open Days on Saturday 15 and 22 August.

"Doncaster was one of Yorkshire's largest training areas during World War One," explains Jude Holland, Project Manager for Doncaster 1914-18. "After Lord Kitchener's famous call, 4,000 local men volunteered for the military. The number of King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry battalions trebled, as men from across the West Riding of Yorkshire, from all walks of life and no previous experience of warfare, volunteered for service. The British Army was concerned about the standard of training for new recruits, so this was a real focus for them. Our dig focuses on the area behind St Peter-in-Chains Church where a roller skating rink was built in 1909. The rink was commandeered for use as a billet for soldiers, and hundreds of new recruits received their training here before going off to the frontlines. After the War, the skating rink was converted into Scarbrough Barracks to provide better training facilities and encourage Doncaster men to join the 5th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. We still know very little about the lives of these soldiers and as the First World War passes out of living memory, it's so important that we discover as much as we can, to keep our connection to the people of our past, whose lives shaped the people we are today."

Every day (apart from Sunday when the Dig is closed), visitors will be able to witness a team of archaeologists in the trenches, seeking personal belongings and the traces of buildings, to reveal new stories about Doncaster's First World War years; they will also be able to handle original artefacts uncovered during the excavations. On Saturday 15 and 22 August, visitors will be able to meet the experts during special Open Days with tours of the trenches, or even become archaeologists themselves in family-friendly 'Dig Pits'. The Great War on Tour Roadshow be also be at the Open Days, with opportunities to try out wartime costumes and crafts, or to share First World War stories and bring along photographs and memorabilia to be added to a new online archive.

[quote=Jude Holland, Project Manager]"We still know very little about the lives of these soldiers and as the First World War passes out of living memory, it's so important that we discover as much as we can."[/quote]

"The history books might tell us about the generals of the First World War, but archaeology tells us about the real working people, and more importantly how their lives were lived," explains Dr Glyn Davies of ArcHeritage, the archaeologists running the excavations. "Amongst the debris they left behind in the landscape for us to find, are objects that give us a personal and physical connection to the lives of the people who took part in these events. The men who were here 100 years ago were people like us – workers, teenagers, footballers, friends – and they left behind objects that we'd find familiar, with all of their wear and tear. But these people also demonstrated unimaginable bravery – two members of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry were awarded the Victoria Cross in the first month of fighting; maybe they were people from this training ground. The First World War was a defining point in the history of our world, a time that shaped lives in modern Britain – archaeology provides a tangible link, history that we can touch."

Bill Mordue, Cabinet Member for Business, Skills, Tourism and Culture, said: "The archaeological dig is another engaging event from the Doncaster 1914-18 project that will give people the opportunity to gain a fascinating insight into Doncaster's past and to reflect on life in the borough during the First World War. I'm sure the dig will attract a great deal of attention over the summer and it'll be fascinating to see what finds are uncovered over the next few weeks."

The Live Archaeology Dig: Uncover Doncaster's First World War is open to visit behind St Peter-in-Chains Church, Doncaster, DN1 2AA between 10 – 22 August 2015 (excluding Sunday) from 10am to 4pm, with Open Days between 10am and 4pm on Saturday 15 and 22 August. For more information, visit the Doncaster 1914-18 website.

Notes to editors

ArcHeritage is part of the York Archaeological Trust, an independent charity, and one of the most highly respected archaeological organizations in the UK. The Doncaster 1914-18 Dig team will also include volunteers from the Doncaster area. Follow ArcHeritage on Twitter.

Generously supported with a grant of more than £900,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) during the four-year project, Doncaster 1914-18 will feature an ever-changing programme of events and exhibitions, with future years uncovering the diverse experiences of Doncaster people on the Home Front, including women's experiences of war, Doncaster's role in the Battle of the Somme, Doncaster's Royal Flying Corps and Airfield, the role of the local countryside and country houses, and the Armistice.

Futher information

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