Science Museum exhibition opens to commemorate



A stretcher specially designed for the twists and turns of narrow, muddy trenches, 1916 Science Museum

With the start of the Battle of the Somme being commemorated on 1 July, Wounded, the Science Museum's latest exhibition, is a timely reminder of this momentous battle and the challenges it presented to the medical profession.

This exhibition displays remarkable objects from the Science Museum's First World War medical collection, illustrating the stories of the wounded and those who cared for them. It's an insight into the battlefield strategies and practices used to keep soldiers alive and move them to safety. It also starts to tell the stories of what happened when the wounded returned home and faced rehabilitation for both physical and mental wounds.

Among the items on display are an early blood transfusion kit, a narrow stretcher designed for the trenches, artificial limbs and eyes and a field surgeon's pannier, which looks deceptively like a picnic basket.

[quote=Stewart Emmens, exhibition curator]"Visitors to Wounded will also have a rare opportunity to see important art works from the period that help us understand the experience of the soldiers."[/quote]

Wounded also acknowledges the similarities with the medial challenges faced today, both through the experiences of the wounded and in their treatment and care. Among those helping to develop the exhibition were six veterans who were diagnosed with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) after serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. They shared their experiences to help the exhibition show a real understanding of the impact war can have on the mental health of service

personnel.

Stuart Hobley, Head of HLF, London, said: “It can be difficult for us to appreciate the experience presented by life in the trenches; whilst there was extraordinary challenge, there was also real innovation, especially in relation to treatment and care of soldiers. 100 years on, and with support from Lottery players, we can now understand this better. This free exhibition at the Science Museum is testament to the stories of surviving British soldiers as well as the lives of those who cared for them and to the pioneering leaps in medical technology, some of which still form the basis of techniques used today.”

Exhibition curator Stewart Emmens said: “The Science Museum’s First World War medical collections provide a fascinating insight into the way medical practices and technologies were adapted to cope with the unprecedented scale of and severity of wounding between 1914 and 1918. Visitors to Wounded will also have a rare opportunity to see important art works from the period that help us understand the experience of the soldiers.”

How to get involved

Wounded: Conflict, Casualties and Care is a free exhibition and opens to the public on 29 June. It was funded with a £100,000 grant from the HLF’s Our Heritage programme.



Conservation intern Louise Stewart cleaning a gas mask for the exhibition

Exploring the stories of the wounded