

Belgian refugees in Birtley, 1915

Funding to explore Birtley's Belgian connection and tell the story of Thomas Kenny VC has brought investment in First World War projects to over £1m in the North East.

Projects awarded through HLF's First World War: Then and Now programme and made possible by National Lottery players, have seen communities across the region come together to uncover new perspectives, tell untold stories and create innovative ways for people to engage with their area's First World War heritage.

Birtley: The Belgian Connection

St Joseph's Junior School in Birtley, Tyne and Wear has been awarded £10,000 for a project called Birtley: The Belgian Connection. More than 6,000 Belgian refugees lived in Elisabethville, a self-contained village which grew around the munitions factory in which they worked and even had its own hospital and Belgian police force. Year five pupils will delve into archives and work with the Birtley History Group to explore their lives and the events which led to them arriving in the area during the First World War.

Beyond Praise: Thomas Kenny VC

Wheatley Hill History Club in County Durham has been awarded £10,000 for their project Beyond Praise: Thomas Kenny VC. Private Thomas Kenny was awarded a Victoria Cross for his bravery in rescuing Lieutenant Phillip Brown in no man's land in 1915. Since installing a commemorative plaque last year the group is set to share the men's story with a wider range of people. The project will explore their different backgrounds (Kenny was a Durham pitman while Brown was an Oxford Graduate) and look at what happened to Kenny when he returned home and the impact it had on his community.

[quote= Ivor Crowther, Head of HLF North East] "Our £1m investment has all been made possible by National Lottery players and we are keen to support even more projects, so if you have an idea please do get in touch." [/quote]

Helping communities remember the First World War

Ivor Crowther, Head of HLF North East, said: "Communities across the North East have put an incredible amount of hard work and dedication into exploring new perspectives, revealing untold local stories and creating a meaningful legacy of the region's heritage of the First World War.

"Our £1m investment has all been made possible by National Lottery players and we are keen to support even more projects, so if you have an idea please do get in touch."

Funding is still available and applications are welcome from not-for-profit groups, including those who would like to reapply following a successful HLF supported project.