First World War centenary mapping project



Replica tank outside the Miners' Hall at Murton, County Durham in 1918. Image from Durham County Record Office

The project will link the archives, objects and sites that survive today and uncover new stories about local communities 100 years ago. It will also map the centenary commemorative events and projects taking place in each locality.

The Durham at War website launch is planned for September 2014 and the project runs from 2014 to the end of 2018. A single website will give online public access to archive, museum and archaeology collections relating to the combined geographical area of County Durham as it was in 1914-1918 and as it is today. Volunteers will be able to contribute to the website online.

The council's County Record Office, Durham Light Infantry Museum and Archaeology Service are leading a major volunteer programme over the next four and a half years to coincide with the First World War centenary commemoration. There will be many opportunities to participate and to explore heritage collections in depth. A combination of training sessions, workshops and themed research modules will help people to investigate new sources and make new connections between objects, records and the landscape around them. Many volunteers will be able to contribute to the project by working from home, either researching collections which are catalogued online, or processing information that is supplied to them in a digital format.

The new website will use good quality, large scale historic mapping as a base for volunteers to ‘pin’ information about local people, places and events a century ago. Contributors will be able to add details of items in community, private and public heritage collections and tell the stories behind them.

Displaying the information on a map will make it easier to visualise the impact of the war on Durham’s industrial towns, mining villages and the rural communities of the Durham Dales.

Organisers of centenary commemorative events and research projects between the River Tyne and Teesside / Teesdale will be able to promote their activities on a modern map layer on the website. There will be space to share visitor numbers and feedback with other organisers planning similar community-based activities.

Some outstanding First World War memoirs of the 10th Battalion Durham Light Infantry (DLI) will form a special feature on the new website. Currently there is no dedicated history of this, the first Kitchener battalion raised by the DLI in August 1914. The recently acquired memoirs of the commanding officer of the ‘Shiny Tenth’, Brigadier General Hubert Morant, will be made freely available online as the basis for a community-led history of the battalion. Anyone with an interest in this battalion and the men who served in it will be able to contribute to the online history.

A separate HLF project last year helped Durham County Record Office and Northumberland Archives to save important military and estate records for the North East region. The Morant family records, purchased at auction in June 2013, included two specially bound volumes entitled ‘My experiences and impressions since the declaration of war’. It is these First World War memoirs and accompanying personal correspondence that will form the centrepiece of the 10 DLI history project on the Durham at War website.

Cllr Neil Foster, Durham County Council’s Cabinet member for economic regeneration, said: “We’re delighted to have the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund for this important commemorative project. Everyone with a family connection or interest in County Durham will be able to use this website to ensure that the wartime experiences of its citizens 100 years ago are discovered, shared and remembered."

Roberta Blackman-Woods, MP for the City of Durham, said: “It is good that the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded Durham County Council a grant to develop the Durham at War project. The website will chart Durham’s immense contribution to the war effort as we commemorate all of those from the County who were sadly lost during the war. The project will be a helpful and important learning tool, and it will give people the chance to discover what life was like during the First World War and how County Durham was affected by it.”

Explaining the importance of the HLF support, Ivor Crowther, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North East, said: “The Durham at War website will piece together archive material, objects and oral histories charting County Durham’s immense contribution to the war effort. Hundreds of local volunteers will be able to submit information; plot places, names and dates to help build up a clear picture of the county’s wartime experience and create a valuable and lasting resource for everyone who wants to learn about one of the most defining events of the 20th century.”

Notes to editors

Durham County Council is made up of an elected assembly of 126 councillors accountable to over 513,000 people in County Durham. We are responsible for providing a wide range of public services to the people of the county.

Further information

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