New First World War programme opens in the South West

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Today, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is launching First World War: then and now, a £6m small grants programme to help communities mark the Centenary of the First World War.

HLF is making at least £1m available per year for six years until 2019. It will provide grants between £3,000 and £10,000 enabling communities and groups right across the UK to explore, conserve and share their First World War heritage and deepen their understanding of the impact of the conflict.

Helping to launch the scheme at the House of Commons today, a community group from the Wylye Valley in Wiltshire joined others from across the UK currently exploring what the legacy of the First World War means to them to share stories and welcome the news for future projects hoping to mark the Centenaries.

Wiltshire's Wylye Valley was transformed in 1914 when six miles of army training camps were set up. At the time, the largest village had only 50 inhabitants, and it had to cope with an influx of 24,000 trainee soldiers. Systematic research by local community group The Codford Local History Society will how examine the legacy of the camps on local people, medical services, politics, sport, recreation and crime.

Barbara Saunt, Chair of the Wylye Valley 1914 project, said: "Sixteen members of the Wylye Valley 1914 Project committee are studying the economic and social impact that the arrival of thousands of Kitchener's Volunteers, between August 1914 and April 1915, had on the very rural community in our part of the Wylye Valley, Wiltshire. The original inspiration to investigate the conditions of those times came from the 'war diary' kept by the Rev'd E. Steward, rector of the parish of Boyton, Wiltshire, which has revealed a fascinating and important insight into local day-to-day life during the war."

Dr Andrew Murrison, MP for South West Wiltshire, and also the The Prime Minister's special representative for the Centenary Commemoration of the First World War, said: "The Codford Local History Society's project will explore for the first time the sheer scale and impact of the conflict on this remote rural Wiltshire community – which had a tiny local population before War broke out. With the Heritage Lottery Fund money now being made available in the lead up to the centenaries, we hope that many more communities will be able to explore the impact the First World War had on them."

Welcoming the launch of First World War: then and now Culture Secretary of State, Maria Miller, said: "It is completely right that we mark the centenary of the First World War with a national programme capturing our national spirit and saying something about who we are as a people. But what we do also needs to help create an enduring cultural and educational legacy for communities. The HLF grant programme announced today will play a big part in this, and builds on the substantial investment they have already made towards the Centenary."

Sebastian Faulks CBE, broadcaster, novelist, author of Birdsong and member of the Government's First World War Centenary advisory group, said: "HLF's First World War small grants programme is an opportunity for every street, town or village to make sure they remember the cataclysmic events of a hundred years ago. It is a chance to learn and to commemorate in whatever way they choose."

Nerys Watts, Head of HLF South West, 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’s new programme will enable communities in the South West to explore the continuing legacy of this war and help young people in particular to broaden their understanding of how it has influenced our modern world.”

Successful projects will include:

- researching, identifying and recording local heritage;
- creating a community archive or collection;
- developing new interpretation of heritage through exhibitions, trails, smartphone apps etc;
- researching, writing and performing creative material based on heritage sources; and
- The new programme can also provide funding for the conservation of war memorials.

If a grant of more than £10,000 is needed for a First World War project, applicants can apply to HLF through its open programmes. HLF has already invested £12m in projects – large and small – that will mark the Centenary of First World War.

If you have a project idea to mark the Centenary, an online application pack is available on the programme page or contact the HLF South West Team at southwest@hlf.org.uk. or 01392 223 950.

Notes to editors

Examples of HLF funded First World War projects in the South West:

Wylye Valley in 1914 – Codford, Wylye Valley, Wiltshire
Wiltshire’s Wylye Valley was transformed in 1914 when six miles of army training camps were set up. This heritage project, by the Codford Local History Society, helped by a £18,800 grant, is discovering how the valley, whose largest village had only 50 inhabitants, coped with an influx of 24,000 trainee soldiers. For the first time systematic research will explain how the presence of the camps impacted on local people, medical services, politics, sport, recreation and crime.

Documents and old photographs are being traced and a website established. As the project continues there will be downloadable heritage trail leaflets. The wealth of information gathered will also enable a local exhibition, a series of events, and activity days to be held. Parts of the exhibition will in due course be donated to the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre as a permanent record of this hitherto overlooked story.

Redmarley War Memorial conservation - Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire
A war memorial has stood at the centre of Redmarley since 1920 in remembrance of the 22 local men who gave their lives in the First World War and four killed in the Second. Assisted by a £5,600 grant Redmarley Parish Council has arranged for the memorial to be restored following frost damage suffered during recent winters, cleaned and the names repainted.

The loss of so many lives in a small village would have had a huge impact. The children of the local primary academy have been learning about the two world wars which has brought to their attention the meaning of the war memorial and knowledge about the men named on it. They have done some art work, written poems and took part in a village community remembrance lunch on 15 March 2013. A special Remembrance Day Service will be held this year and further commemorative events will take place during 2014.

WWI Avonmouth and Shirehampton – Bristol

During the First World War Avonmouth and Shirehampton made a significant contribution to the national war effort. Avonmouth was an important dockyard with many troops and munitions passing through the town on their way to the Front. Neighbouring Shirehampton was the site of one of the largest remount depots that supplied the required horses and mules for the war effort. There are no visible remains of this heritage in the area although horseshoes are often dug up in local gardens.

Local Learning CIC, supported by a £9,900 grant, will uncover this overlooked history using both archaeological digs and document research. In partnership with the University of Bristol Local Learning have already gathered some valuable stories at community events. The project will result in an exhibition and online information including recorded interviews with the relatives of people who were connected with the remount depot, docks or munitions industry. Local Learning together with The Bristol Old Vic will also be working with Year 6 at Avonmouth Primary School to create their own Bristol War Horses play as part of the English Heritage 'Heritage Schools' programme.

UK Government Centenary plans

In October 2012, the Prime Minister set out the Government's 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 Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the Heritage Lottery Fund 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.

Speaking at the Imperial War Museum in October, Prime Minister David Cameron, said: "A truly national commemoration cannot just be about national initiatives and government action. It needs to be local too...Let's get out there and make this centenary a truly national moment in every community in our land."

Further information

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