New First World War programme opens in the West Midlands

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

HLF is making at least £1million 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.

Community groups including those from Staffordshire are helping to launch the scheme across the UK, by exploring what the legacy of the First World War means to them and sharing their stories and projects with others hoping to mark the Centenaries.

From researching the lives of soldiers from villages near Dudley who died in the conflict to restoring a war memorial at Leek, there are so many stories to be told the legacy of which continue to impact and shape the lives of our communities today.

Welcoming the launch of the programme at the House of Commons today, 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."

Reyahn King, Head of HLF West Midlands, 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 West Midlands 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 £12million 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 West Midlands Team at westmidlands@hlf.org.uk or 0121 616 6870.

Notes to editors

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

The Lost Sons of Wall Heath & Kingswinford
This community history project is researching the lives of soldiers from the Wall Heath and Kingswinford villages near Dudley who died in both the first and second world wars, such as brothers George and Edward Price. The volunteer-led Wall Heath & Kingswinford War Memorial Research Group has received a £13,200 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to run the project. Family histories will be researched through genealogy websites, local libraries, county records offices and appeals to the local community for information.

There will be regular displays and exhibitions and the plan is to create a permanent record of the lives of the fallen in a Remembrance Book and website, where local people will be able to learn about the area's military heritage but also wider 20th century social history.

Restoration of the Nicholson War Memorial
Sir Arthur and Lady Nicholson erected The Nicholson War Memorial in 1925 in memory of their son Lieutenant Basil Lee Nicholson, killed in action at Ypres in 1915. The men of Leek and surrounding districts who died in both the first and second world wars are also commemorated, and this project restored the memorial, which needed refurbishing.

A Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £178,000 meant that the old clock mechanism could be restored and is now on display at the memorial. The local community has benefitted from landscaping works and an information board about the memorial's history has also been installed. An exhibition about the Nicholson family was held in autumn 2012, which received over 6000 visits. Students from Staffordshire University produced an oral history dvd about the project.

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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