Remarkable First World War story of Mabel Stobart



Dorset County Museum is proud to announce an exciting new exhibition of national and international interest. ***Mabel Stobart: A Dorset Woman at War*** will open at the museum on Saturday 31 May 2014 to mark the centenary of the start of the First World War. The exhibition, which has been funded by a £9,700 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), focusses on the story of one remarkable Dorset woman, Mabel St Clair Stobart, whose team of female medical volunteers cared for the Serbian people under extraordinary circumstances during the retreat of the Serbian army in 1915.

Culture Secretary Maria Miller who is leading the Government First World War Centenary programme said: "Women rose to the challenge during the First World War, often defying cultural and social barriers to achieve quite incredible things at the front and back at home.

"We cannot allow women like Mabel Stobart to be forgotten. Her story of thrilling endeavour, bravery and service has never been more important for a generation of girls who often feel judged more on their looks than character. Through this grant we pay our respects to this remarkable Dorset woman and hope her spirit will spur others on to great things."

In contrast to many commemorative exhibitions taking place in 2014, *A Dorset Woman at War* celebrates the achievements of one little-recognised but redoubtable woman. At the heart of the exhibition are a collection of 30 powerful black and white photographs taken of Mabel Stobart and her team of volunteers at their training base in

Studland, Dorset, their field camp and dressing stations behind the front line in Serbia, and the relentless 800 mile journey through snow-covered mountains to the Albanian coast. On the ten-week march they were accompanied by one hundred thousand soldiers and many thousands of civilian refugees fleeing their villages before they fell to pursuing enemy troops, just a few miles behind.

Already in her mid-fifties, Stobart had travelled to Serbia in 1915 with female doctors and nurses whom she had recruited and trained to help the war effort. Her story is exceptional, not only for the adventures she experienced - in 1914 she had been arrested by the Germans in Belgium and sentenced to be shot as a spy - but because she was motivated by bettering the lot of women. A supporter of the Suffragist movement, Stobart believed that women should earn the vote by demonstrating that they were as valuable to society as men. She led her mission to Serbia in the face of opposition from another famous Dorset figure, Sir Frederick Treves, who felt there was no place for women on the field of battle.

In addition to the photographic collection, the exhibition will also feature many items from the museum's own collections together with loans from the Imperial War Museum, Salisbury and Poole Museums, and private collections. These will include medals, Stobart's uniform and her field dressing kit and other personal items which have been made available by her family.

Peter Down, Chairman of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society said: "The exhibition highlights the difficulties and prejudice confronting women anxious to serve their country in 1914, the plight of the Serbian people in 1915 and the extraordinary courage and leadership of Mabel Stobart, a woman who has been almost forgotten today."

Notes to editors

This exhibition was made possible by the generosity of HLF South West, the Imperial War Museum, the Mansel-Pleydell Trust, Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum, Poole Museum, the Red Cross and Mabel Stobart's family. *Mabel Stobart: A Dorset Woman at War* opens at Dorset County Museum on Saturday 31 May 2014 and runs until 15 November 2014. Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society. Company registered in England No. 3362107. Registered Charity No. 1062400

Further information

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