

The surgical ward at St John Ambulance hospital in Etaples

The moving testimonial of a St John Ambulance nurse who volunteered to save soldiers' lives during the First World War is soon to be given a new life in digital format, as part of a project funded by the HLF.

The Museum of the Order of St John has today received £69,400 from the HLF to tell the story of Veronica Nisbet, a Voluntary Aid Detachment Nurse who served at the St John Ambulance Brigade Hospital in Étaples, northern France during the First World War.

Working in collaboration with staff at the museum, St John Ambulance Cadets (aged between 10 and 18) will learn new skills as they explore the charity's wartime heritage and create an interactive learning resource based upon Veronica's memories.

Once complete in September 2015 (the hundredth anniversary of the first convoy of patients arriving at the Hospital in Étaples), the learning resource will be made available in the museum as well as online to commemorate the 45,000 St John volunteers who, by the end of the First World War, had answered the call for Voluntary Aid to support the Armed Services. Additionally, the funding received will enable the museum to increase public access to the fascinating First World War materials in its St John Archive including diaries, photographs and official correspondence with the War Office.

Commenting on the award, Hannah Agass, Learning and Access Officer at the museum said; “We are delighted to have received this grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund which will enable us to commemorate the work of thousands of St John Ambulance men and women who offered their support to the armed services during the Great War. Veronica’s scrapbook provides a moving insight into everyday life in a theatre of war and offers and a unique opportunity for St John Ambulance Cadets to learn more about the wartime legacy of the charity they volunteer for.”

Sue Bowers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London, 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 has already invested more than £57million in projects – large and small – that are marking this Centenary. Volunteers taking part in this project will have the unique opportunity to see the conflict through the eyes of their wartime counterparts and create a digital legacy to preserve the memories of those who fought their own battle to return servicemen to health and home to their families.”

Notes to editors

About the St John Ambulance Bridge Hospital in Étaples
The St John Ambulance Brigade Hospital in Étaples, was arguably the most significant initiative of the British Order of St John during the 20th century. Over the course of the conflict, the hospital received 35,000 patients. It was staffed and maintained principally at the Order’s expense, a unique and unprecedented achievement by a voluntary organisation. Through cartoons, sketches and photographs, Veronica Nisbet’s scrapbook captures the hospital’s endeavours to heal and care for the sick and wounded, from a very personal and often humorous perspective, working for the Order’s principle: ‘in the service of humanity’.

About the Museum of the Order of St John
The museum tells the fascinating story of the Order of St John from its origins in eleventh century Jerusalem, through to its role today with St John Ambulance and the St John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem. The museum occupies two sites in Clerkenwell: St John’s Gate, which dates from 1504; and the Priory Church of St John with its surviving twelfth century Crypt. It is free to visit and is open Monday to Saturday, 10am to 5pm. For more information, please see the Museum of The Order of St John website.

About St John Ambulance
As the nation's leading first aid charity, St John Ambulance believes that nobody should die because they needed first aid and didn't get it. Yet every year thousands of people die in situations where first aid could have given them a chance to live. St John Ambulance teaches people first aid so that they can be the difference. For more information visit the St John Ambulance website.

Further information

For more information contact Hannah Agass, Learning and Access Officer at the Museum of the Order of St John on 020 7324 4005 or email hannah.agass@sja.org.uk