Childrens' poetry offers moving insight into life



One of the young poets reading at Yarm1914 festival

Young poets have released a book of their work exploring what life was like on the Home Front and the Western Front during the First World War.

Never Forget, a treasure trove of poetry produced by pupils aged 10 and 11 from primary schools in the North East of England, was unveiled at the Yarm1914 Festival.

Pupils worked with local writer Dr Maureen Almond to creatively interpret local stories.

She said: “My aim with this project was to encourage the children to realise that the First World War was not merely a historic event but a real life lived by their ancestors. I wanted the children to think about the impact of war on ordinary people. We looked at the time, not just from the point of view of soldiers but also from family members left at home, from animals who served and even from weapons and uniforms plus of course from talking poppies and the famous Dead Man's Penny.”

The festival was part of a project, funded by HLF and Arts Council England, devoted to commemorating the lives of the men from Yarm who fought in the conflict and the effect war it had on local people.

Children read their poems at the event watched by proud parents and members of the community.

John Rhodes and Peter Monck of the Yarm1914 Commemorative Group said: “We are always amazed by the insight displayed by our young people. The children read the extracts from 'Never Forget' with clarity and maturity. They made the festival an event to be remembered and cherished. When we set off on this project, we never imagined that it would develop into such a wonderful tribute to our fallen."

One hard-hitting poem describes the experience of someone who has lost their grandson while another is from the perspective of a soldier who is missing their loved ones.

My Grandson

By Thomas Haggas, Levendale Primary School

This morning I received a Dead Man’s Penny
Cold, hard and as heavy as my heart
My beautiful grandson: dead at eighteen
I’m seventy and still here –
Wishing he was with me.
I will tell everyone about this happy and proud
Sad and angry day – tell them
How he helped us win.

Hanging On

By James Sweeting, Yarm Primary School

Nervous
Maybe I’ll die
I’ll hang onto my photo
Pretend I’m hugging all of you
Miss you

This is one of over 1,200 projects exploring the First World War made possible by money raised by National Lottery players. Read more about these projects in our Understanding the First World War feature.

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