

# Press Release

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## First World War website launched with public drop-in

A major new interactive website mapping the impact of the First World War on people across the North East will go live next week – and members of the public can find out more at a special drop-in session.

The Durham at War website ([www.durhamatwar.org.uk](http://www.durhamatwar.org.uk)), which will give the public online access to thousands of original documents, objects and fascinating real-life stories, will be launched on Wednesday, 10 September by broadcaster John Grundy.

Featuring large-scale maps of County Durham today and as it was between 1914 and 1918, the website will provide a base for volunteers to ‘pin’ information about people and events in locations from the River Tyne to the Tees a century ago.

Members of the public will be able to search archive, museum and archaeology collections and upload details of what they have discovered. They will also be able to publicise community events and activities commemorating the First World War.

Durham County Council was awarded £475,100 by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) earlier this year to set up the site, which is a partnership venture by Durham County Record Office, the council’s archaeology service and the DLI Museum and Durham Art Gallery.

It will be launched at County Hall, Durham, next week by Cllr John Robinson, the Chairman of Durham County Council; Ivor Crowther, Head of the HLF North East; and John Grundy, broadcaster and president of the County Durham History and Heritage Forum.

The launch will be followed by a public drop-in session at County Hall from 4pm to 8pm, when people can see how the website works and find out how they can get involved in its development.

Cllr Neil Foster, Durham County Council’s Cabinet member for economic regeneration, said: “This is a very exciting project that will give people unprecedented access to a wide range of original sources, enabling them to find out about the impact of the First World War on their community and possibly even their own family members.

**Continues...**

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“It’s a chance to share the stories we already know but also to discover the many as yet uncovered tales of real people from our area. Displaying the information on a map will make it easier to visualise the scale of the effects of the conflict on our industrial towns, mining villages and rural communities.

“I hope that people make the most of the opportunity to delve into the museum, library and archive collections as well as their cupboards at home to help us make the website a truly unique resource.”

Ivor Crowther, Head of the HLF North East, said: “The launch of the Durham at War website will, for the first time, give people the chance to explore and uncover their wartime history by piecing together archive material, objects and oral histories charting County Durham’s considerable contribution to the war effort. Involving hundreds of local volunteers, the website and all its associated activities, will help create a clear picture of the county’s wartime experience and produce a valuable and lasting resource for everyone.

“The HLF has awarded over £58m – to projects large and small – helping communities across the UK commemorate the First World War.”

The launch date for the website, 10 September, has been specifically chosen as it marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the day in 1914 that the first Durham Light Infantry (DLI) soldiers arrived in France.

The Durham at War website’s poppy logo is inspired by two fragile pressed poppies sent from the frontline by John Harkess, from Washington. John, who served with the Leeds Pals during the First World War, carefully wrote his initials and the names of several places where he had served on the delicate petals before sending them home to his wife Ann in 1917.

The website itself will include a special section containing the memoirs of Brigadier General Hubert Morant, the commanding officer of the 10<sup>th</sup> The Battalion DLI during the First World War. The two specially-bound volumes entitled ‘My experiences and impressions since the declaration of war’ and accompanying personal correspondence will form the basis of a community-led history of the battalion, which has also been funded by the HLF.

There will be a wide range of opportunities to participate in the development of the website and to explore the heritage collections in depth and over the coming months, Durham County Record Office will be working with the DLI Museum and Durham Art Gallery and the council’s archaeology service to sign up volunteers.

**ENDS**

**Notes to Editors:** Please find the following images attached:

- Poppy sent from the frontline by John Harkess

### **The Heritage Lottery Fund**

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) aims to make a lasting difference for heritage, people and communities across the UK and help build a resilient heritage economy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported over 36,000 projects with more than £6bn across the UK. [www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk).

To date, £58million in HLF grants has been awarded to projects across the UK so they can mark the Centenary and explore all aspects of First World War heritage that matters to them. Through its First World War: then and now programme, HLF is making at least £1million available per year for six years until 2019. It is providing 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. To find out how to apply for funding visit [www.hlf.org.uk/thenandnow](http://www.hlf.org.uk/thenandnow). If a group needs a grant of more than £10,000 for a First World War project, it can apply to HLF through its open programmes [www.hlf.org.uk/firstworldwar](http://www.hlf.org.uk/firstworldwar) #understandingww1