

PRESS RELEASE

World War One 1914 -1918

Digitising pictures, letters and memories for the 100th anniversary

Press conference invitation

Museum of Lancashire, Stanley Street, Preston, PR1 4YP
Tel: 01772 534075

Thursday, March 1, 2012

10.30am – 12pm

Do you have a box hidden deep in the attic or under the bed that holds your great grandfather's diaries? Maybe a letter from the front line? Or a photo taken at the time? Is there a special story behind it?

If so, we want to see it.

We are building the first ever online European archive of private memorabilia from WW1 in time for the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of war – and we need your help to do this.

Today we are urging people to root out memorabilia from 1914-1918 to bring along to the Museum of Lancashire in Preston, on **Saturday March 10** – one of the first in a series of WW1 Family History Roadshows that will be visiting Luxembourg, Ireland, Slovenia, Denmark and Belgium during 2012.

We anticipate that it will be the first time many of these items have ever been seen outside the family – creating a new and exciting source of material for historians, schools, genealogists and cultural organisations in their interpretation of how the war affected the lives of ordinary people.

We want families to tell us about their keepsakes, who they belonged to and why they are so important to them - and we will save those memories in our archive www.europeana1914-1918.eu/

Europeana 1914-1918 brings together a partnership of libraries, museums, academic and cultural institutions, which in the UK includes the British Library, Oxford University, JISC, and Lancashire County Council.

On roadshow days, historians and experts will be available to talk about the significance of the finds - while our staff will professionally digitise and upload them to the website.

And if you are unable to attend the event, you can scan or digitally photograph your own material and upload it on the website www.europeana1914-1918.eu/.

As the centenary approaches, it is vital we preserve these precious documents for future generations. Digitisation saves them from being lost or thrown away – and it allows the information to be incorporated into apps for smartphones and tablets that will bring history alive for people in contemporary ways.

In 2011, more than 25,000 digital images were recorded from nine family history roadshows held in major cities across Germany. These included: unpublished diaries, hand-drawn maps, portraits, sketches and photographs recording life under fire and on the home front.

Stephen Bull, curator of military history and archaeology at the Museum of Lancashire, said: "As the centenary of 1914 and WW1 approaches, it is more important than ever that we save these items. It tells us what life was like for the ordinary people of Lancashire – the soldiers, their families and the workers back home who kept the country going.

"We are hoping people will bring in anything from that period, be it a family photo, a love letter, some sort of document or object. It doesn't matter if they don't know the background behind it, once it's online then it's likely people will be able to fill in some of those gaps.

"And while experts scan these precious items, visitors can use the opportunity to enjoy our museum with its replica WW1 trench, meet costumed re-enactors and experience at first hand

some of the sights, smells and sounds from a conflict that affected the everyday lives of virtually all Europeans.”

Jill Cousins, Europeana’s executive director, said: “Memorabilia and stories are kept by families for a while, but after a century their significance starts to fade.

“That’s why our online archive, which is collecting material from across Europe in a series of roadshows, is so important.

“The Preston event will give people the opportunity to share their memories, photos and diaries with future generations, while learning about the sacrifices their ancestors made.”

Jamie Andrews, head of English and Drama at the British Library, said he was delighted to be involved in the project.

“We’re already set to digitise more than 400,000 items from national libraries in eight European countries with our Europeana Collections 1914-1918 project,” he said.

“Add to this unseen material from people’s own homes and we will have a truly rounded picture of the impact of the war on families from all the different communities involved.”

Stuart Lee, director of Computing Systems and Services at Oxford University, said: “We’re thrilled to be part of this project. We pioneered this idea of collecting the memories of the community online - and concentrating on an individual town like Preston will give us a wonderful opportunity to assess the lasting legacy of the war in the regions.”

The roadshows are funded in the UK by JISC, which promotes IT innovation in higher education.

Stuart Dempster, programme director at JISC, said: “These roadshows will give universities, colleges, museums, galleries, archives, libraries, the creative industries and schools the opportunity to work together with the public to create new and exciting ways of considering the historical, political and social legacy of the war through innovative digital technologies.”

Contact:

For further information, sample images and to confirm attendance at the press conference, please contact: Jackie Storer on 07710 070270 or jackie.storer@bl.uk

Notes for editors:

Europeana is Europe’s digital library, archive and museum. It launched its 1914-1918 family history project in Germany in 2011 to collect memorabilia and family stories from combat and the home front. Nine family history roadshows were held in major cities across the country and so far we’ve recorded 25,000 digital images. These include: unpublished diaries, hand-drawn maps, portraits, sketches and photographs recording life under fire and on the home front. The project is being rolled out across 10 countries in Europe to create a unique pan-European virtual archive of WW1.

www.europeana1914-1918.eu

Oxford University began the initiative when it asked people across Britain to bring family letters, photographs and keepsakes from the war to be digitised in 2006. The success of the idea - which became the Great War Archive - encouraged Europeana 1914-1918 to roll out the scheme in Germany in 2011, and across Luxembourg, the UK, Ireland, Slovenia, Denmark and Belgium in 2012. Oxford University continues to lead the project in terms of digital, training and cataloguing expertise during roadshow events across Europe.

<http://www.thegreatwararchive.blogspot.com/>

The British Library is a lead player in Europeana Collections 1914-1918 – a three year project to digitise more than 400,000 items from national libraries in eight countries across Europe that found themselves on different sides of the conflict. The Library is also sending curatorial and cataloguing staff to the roadshow event to work alongside Oxford University colleagues in Preston.

<http://www.europeana-collections-1914-1918.eu/>

The Museum of Lancashire, which boasts a WW1 trench and a treasure trove of military history memorabilia, was reopened in November, last year, following a £1.7m refurbishment. In addition to a new entrance, cash from Lancashire County Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund paid for eight new interactive collections covering Roman times, the Iron Age and Edwardian England. Admission is free for the first 12 months.

<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/acs/sites/museums/venues/mol/index.asp?siteid=3860&pageid=16500&e=e>

JISC inspires UK colleges and universities in the innovative use of digital technologies, helping to maintain the UK's position as a global leader in education. JISC's work for the commemoration is focused on giving students, teachers and researchers in higher and further education access to a wealth of unique and authoritative digital resources that can be used and re-used to inspire research and teaching. This event will potentially 'unlock' resources of huge educational potential which have previously been kept in the nation's attics and drawers, so that we can increase our insight around the war and its legacy. <http://jiscww1.jiscinvolve.org/wp/>

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