

'Away from the Western Front' Newsletter April 2018

This brief round-up is to show you where we are with the 'Away from the Western Front' project with a little less than a year to go. You can find out more at <https://awayfromthewesternfront.org/>.

National activities

- We have just launched our **Creative Writing Competition**, inviting poems and short stories on a theme connected with the First World War away from the Western Front. There are three age categories, 10 and under, 11-18 and over 18, and the deadline is 31 July 2018. Please publicise this for us – you can download a [flyer](#) from the website.
- Our **National Music Project** continues through 2018. We are inviting choirs and brass bands to perform our specially commissioned song 'No Parades', about the experience of West Indian soldiers in the First World War. All the details, scores and a demo track are [online](#).
- We are currently organising our **conference**. There will be talks from leading experts on the war away from the Western Front, and the regional projects will also have a chance to present their work to a national audience. The conference will take place in the week of 29.10.18-2.11.18, and we'll be choosing the date depending on speakers' availability.

Regional projects

There have been some very exciting activities over the past few months, with some of the regional projects now completed and some carrying on through this year. We are also starting up further regional activities at the moment, for completion later this year. As above, there is much more information on each project on the website; here are some highlights.

'Castle Drogo to Salonika'

One of our two projects in Devon, this is almost complete, with a centenary commemoration in January and a drama and music performance in March. Paula Clarke at the National Trust's Castle Drogo worked with Okehampton College, where a production was developed by GCSE drama students around the story of Castle Drogo stonemason William George Arcscott, who was killed in Salonika. 'A' level Music students composed a piece based on his life story, and 'A' level History students are currently working on an exhibition for Castle Drogo. The final part of the project is a film of the production, which will be completed shortly.



'Salonika Stories'



Also based in a National Trust property, Sandham Memorial Chapel near Newbury, this project is almost complete. There are two parts to it – an art exhibition and a film. The art exhibition broke new ground: working with artist Susan Francis, we linked up with Alabaré, a charity supporting homeless military veterans. They used a range of art techniques to explore the comparisons between their own experience and that of the soldiers who fought at Salonika a century ago. The parallels are

extraordinary, putting the First World War into a totally new perspective. A web page on the exhibition will be added in the next week or two. The film, produced in partnership with the Salonika Campaign Society, will be available very shortly. It will form part of the interpretation of Sandham Memorial Chapel.

'Horses in the Desert'

We are disappointed that this project was not able to go ahead as planned. However the story of horses, mules and donkeys is a very important one and we are currently developing a replacement project which will follow the story of one soldier and his horse from Gallipoli to Egypt, Palestine and France. We are actively looking for other stories about horses away from the Western Front so please let us know of any you have come across.

'From Islington to Egypt, Palestine and Syria'

Most of this project took place last summer, when young people in Islington worked with Rebecca Campbell-Gay at Islington Museum and Chocolate Films to produce three animations based on the experiences of the Finsbury Rifles in Egypt and Palestine, with a particular focus on the story of Jock Christie, VC. Spin-offs from the project included family animation days, under 5s workshops and an exhibition at the museum. You can see how the project went by watching some [filmed interviews](#) with the young people.



'Holy Lands'



This project run by Adam Murray at North Devon Museum finished in December. It involved several partners, in particular the Plough Arts Centre in Torrington, where the Youth Theatre Group developed a drama production following the story of local men who fought in Palestine. The particular focus of the project was how the men felt about going to the 'Holy Land', which they knew so well from Sunday School and Chapel. You can see a [film of the project](#) on the website.

'From Lancashire to Mesopotamia'

We are half way through this project. Secondary schools in Preston, Lancaster, Carnforth and Poulton-le-Fylde have been working with Owen Powell from Lancashire County Council's Heritage Learning Department and the Lancashire Infantry Museum in Preston. They have been researching the Mesopotamian Campaign, in which local regiments played a large part along with Indian Army troops. This term they will be creating a range of artwork based on their research. As part of the project we have linked up with the British Council to organise Skype calls with Iraqi schools, and are making use of the grant we received from the British Institute for the Study of Iraq to encourage Iraqis in Britain to contribute their own perspectives on the First World War and its legacy.



'The First World War – the Iranian Perspective'

Last year we worked with Kaveh Kalantari from the Iranian Association in London, where a group of volunteers researched the little-known story of how the First World War affected Persia (now Iran). They visited the Imperial War Museum, and we assisted them in producing a [timeline and a bibliographical study](#) related to the war in Persia. This year we are planning a seminar on the subject, to be hosted by the Iranian Association in west London.

'Health – the Hidden Enemy'

Our research project in partnership with Anne Samson at the Great War in Africa Association ended in October, on completion of the transcript of the [Pike Report](#) of 1918. This was a government inquiry into the appalling failings in medical systems which led to unacceptable casualty rates in the East Africa campaign. It has proved difficult to engage a British Army Medical Regiment to add a modern perspective on military medicine but we are still hopeful that we will be able to extend the health project during 2018.

Plans for further regional projects in 2018

We are planning to add at least two further projects this year and will let you know when plans are more developed and the changes to our original plans approved by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Website

The '[Away from the Western Front](#)' website is our main way of disseminating the project to a wider audience, so please highlight it in any of your publicity or other outputs. In addition to the information about the regional and national activities we have been adding new material to the site.

Campaigns

There are now short articles about the major campaigns away from the Western Front, especially those in which British troops were heavily involved. We have made use of our expert panel to ensure that the articles are accurate – indeed many have been written for us by panel members. The campaigns featured include Gallipoli, Salonika, Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt, Palestine, the Arab Revolt (just added), East Africa, the Senussi Campaign and China. More will be added during the year, including other campaigns in Africa, the Italian campaign and the Eastern Front. There are also articles on broader themes including the West Indian story and Colonialism.

Research

We have been able to publish stories of individual men and women who served away from the Western Front, and will continue to add to this during the rest of the project. The stories have been provided by family researchers, and give a very personal angle on the events. Four of the stories are about women so we have created a separate section of the website for these. We have been in discussion with the Imperial War Museum's 'Women's Work 100' project and hope to contribute to this during 2018. If you have local family researchers who would like to send us their 'AFTWF' stories, we would be happy to add them to the website: please ask them to contact us for more details.

Social media

Our day-to-day publicity mainly goes via Twitter, using @aftwf1418. Please make sure you are following us if you aren't already. We will retweet your relevant material as well, taking it to our worldwide network of followers.

Many thanks for all your support, and for the hard work which has made this project a success. We will be sending further newsletters during the year.

Robin Clutterbuck
National Coordinator
robin@awayfromthewesternfront.org

Lyn Edmonds
Project Director
lyn@awayfromthewesternfront.org