

First World War exhibition at the National War Museum



An exhibition called Next of Kin curated to combine private mementos and official memorabilia from the First World War presents a picture of Scotland around a hundred years ago. The National War Museum will display the exhibition from 18 April 2014.

The exhibition will run at the National War Museum until March 2015, before going on tour to eight venues around Scotland – Dumfries and Galloway, Ayrshire, the Borders, South Lanarkshire, Grampian, Perth, the Highlands and Orkney – thanks to support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and The Scottish Government.

Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland, said:-“Objects which were once kept as a way of remembering individual loved ones have been brought together so we can all remember the impact the war had on families and communities across Scotland. As it travels the country, people will have the opportunity to add their own story to this exhibition making sure that their heritage is safeguarded for future generations while giving us a deeper understanding of the conflict.”

The First World War separated millions of people worldwide from their families and homes. The impact of the conflict was felt by families and communities in every part of Scotland as individuals served in the war in different ways.

For those who experienced the conflict first-hand, keeping objects was a way of remembering this extraordinary period in their lives. Families coped with the absence and loss of their

loved ones by keeping objects as a way of remembering.

The exhibition will look in detail at eight individual stories which both typify and illustrate the wider themes and impact of the War on servicemen and women and their families back home in Scotland.

Objects include postcards and letters, photographs, medals and memorial plaques.

One such story is that of Seaforth Highlander George Buchanan, from Bathgate, who was killed in action aged 27 on 25 September 1915. That was the first day of the Battle of Loos, and Buchanan was among the first of many thousands of casualties in a costly battle in which Scottish infantry battalions made up around half of the British assault force. The exhibition will show a photograph of Buchannan in uniform, along with his service medals, the last letter home he wrote, just over two weeks before his death, the letter from the battalion chaplain to his mother confirming his death and the memorial plaque sent to his next of kin by the Government after the War.

As the exhibition tours, the host venues will develop additional content using their own objects and stories related to their respective local areas. The results of these additional contributions will be captured and preserved in the exhibition displays and an online resource. There will also be an associated training programme to develop new skills among the participating organisations, as well as a learning resource and associated events programme held at each venue. The full list of partner organisations and touring venues is as follows:

- Dumfries Museum, Dumfries & Galloway Council
- Rozelle House, South Ayrshire Council
- Hawick Museum, Scottish Borders Council
- Low Parks Museum, Hamilton, South Lanarkshire Leisure

and Culture

- Grampian Transport Museum, Alford, Aberdeenshire.
- Inverness Museum and Art Gallery, Highlife Highland
- Swanson Gallery, Thurso, Highlife Highland
- Perth Museum & Art Gallery (in partnership with the Black Watch), Perth & Kinross Council
- The Orkney Museum, Orkney Islands Council.

Dr Stuart Allan, Principal Curator of Scottish History, said:
-“This exhibition commemorates and illustrates the impact of the First World War on many thousands of Scots both in service and back home in Scotland. It is also a vivid illustration of the fact that objects, whether they’re in a museum, or in someone’s attic or drawer, are not just ‘things’. They can tell us a great deal, both about the stories of the individuals they were immediately associated with and also the times in which they lived.”

The exhibition is one of several activities in National Museums Scotland’s programme as part of wider national and international commemorations led by the First World War Centenary Partnership.