

Common Cause: Commonwealth Scots and the Great War



In 1913 **James Richardson** emigrated with his family from Bellshill to Vancouver. A year later Britain declared war on Germany. James became Piper James Richardson of the 16th (Canadian Scottish) Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force. By 1916 he was at piping the battalion forward from the Regina Trench at the Battle of the Somme.

Piper Richardson's bagpipes are one of many moving exhibits displayed in a new exhibition at the [National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh](#). He had helped to evacuate casualties from the field then returned when he realised he'd left his pipes behind. He was not seen again. The pipes were eventually recovered and for many years kept in a Perthshire school – until research tied them to the Canadian Scottish. They are now on loan from the **British Columbia State Legislature**.

In the centenary year of World War One, *Common Cause* tells the stories of Scots from Commonwealth countries who served their homeland. Memorabilia, fundraising posters, paintings, sculpture, films and photographs – and even a well-preserved antelope – help to show how objects can reflect plural identities and profound experiences of war.

Long before 1914, military service was one of the ways in which Scottish emigrants demonstrated their affinity with Scotland. Military units with Scottish traditions were as much a part of the emigrant social scene in Commonwealth countries as St Andrew's societies and Burns' clubs, and part-time regiments were constituted forces of the British Empire. Displays of military dress, regimental titles and insignia,

together with the bagpiping tradition, were all conspicuous displays of Scottish identity. Exhibits from this era include a sporran from the Transvaal Scottish Regiment – and a doublet from the **Liverpool** Scottish (formed in 1900), for Scots identity was just as important to those who had moved south of the border. Scottish regiments were also part of the Scottish social networks in **London**, and in 1914 similar groups began to recruit in **Newcastle** and **Manchester**.

In 1914 thousands of Scots emigrants (and those of Scottish descent) joined the armed forces of their new countries – **Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa**. Most sailed for Europe; the 1st Battalion Transvaal Scottish, however, sailed from Cape Town for the campaign in German SW Africa (Namibia.) Many Scots in the **United States** also sailed home to join the British Armed Forces; in 1918 they were joined by Scots in the American Expeditionary Force. In her memoir, *Testament of Youth*, Vera Brittain recalls the tall, healthy American soldiers entering the War, ‘so god-like, so magnificent, so splendidly unimpaired in comparison with the tired, nerve-wracked men of the British Army...they seemed Tommies in heaven.’





The exhibition includes many recruitment and propaganda posters, urging men to join up and applauding the contributions of each country. **Newfoundland** – a British colony until 1949 – proudly states that it alone has donated £20,000 to the war effort. In 1915 the Newfoundland Regiment became the first non-Scottish unit to garrison Edinburgh Castle, and the province's war service is still a treasured memory of its unique identity.

Perhaps the centrepiece of *Common Cause* is **Nancy**. Nancy, a springbok doe, was the mascot of the 4th South African infantry (also known as the South African Scottish), having been presented by a well-wisher. The soldiers marched to war in kilts and bonnets, but took Nancy with them to the Western Front as a symbol of their dual identity. She survived all three years on the Front, dying two weeks after the end of the War. She was given a military funeral and then stuffed, mounted and returned to South Africa, where she was presented to Scots-born Sir William Dalrymple, a mine owner who had

helped to found the battalion. She now resides in the **Distong National Museum of Military History**, where I'm sure the sight of her has brightened up many a school trip.

Australia and New Zealand are also represented; the New Zealand Cross awarded to **Cornet Angus Smith** is displayed, as is the Victoria Cross awarded to **Private James Crichton** (2nd Battalion Auckland Regiment) who served at Gallipoli and later on the Western Front. Crichton was an Ulster Scot, born in Ireland. His family migrated to Scotland, he worked as a miner in West Lothian, joined the British army and served in the South African War, then worked as a cable-layer in Canada and Australia before settling in New Zealand.

Wallace Anderson's grandparents all emigrated to Australia in the mid 19th century. He left his art teaching job to volunteer for overseas service with the Australian Imperial Force and was wounded in France in 1917. After the war he became a highly acclaimed sculptor and contributed important works of art to the Australian War Memorial and other monuments: his 1933 bronze sculpture *Defence of ANZAC*, showing two soldiers at Gallipoli, is exhibited here.

The *kukri* or traditional knife of **Lieutenant JF Russell** is one of the exhibits showcasing the contribution of the **10th Gurkha Rifles**. Lieutenant Russell was killed in action.

Chaplains have always played an important part in military life. The **Reverend DC Lusk**, born in Uddingston, had been a chaplain at Oxford before joining the London Scottish. Twice decorated for gallantry with the Military Cross, he returned to Oxford after the war and later became a parish priest in Edinburgh. Lusk's portable communion set is a poignant reminder of his duties in the field.

Victory in the war was followed by economic depression in the UK. Hardship and disillusionment led to greater emigration, especially to the USA and Canada; many sailed on *RMS Aquitania*, a model of which is included in the exhibition.

Common Cause is a fascinating and thought-provoking

exhibition, and one that helps to inform us all about events that were as real to our grandparents as 9/11 or Afghanistan are to us, whilst also demonstrating the loyalty of Scots throughout the world to their homeland .

The exhibition, which will run until 12th October 2014, has been curated by **Dr Stuart Allan**, Principal Curator of Scottish Late Modern Collections at the National Museums of Scotland.

The Museum is open 10am-5pm daily and admission is free. The National Museums will offer a programme of related events and activities throughout the centenary year. The **National War Museum** in **Edinburgh Castle** is hosting another exhibition, *Next of Kin*, until March 2015, after which the exhibition will tour several museums across Scotland.