

Castle Drogo to Salonika
Castle Drogo, National Trust
Project Evaluation
April 2017 – August 2018

Project Summary

Built between 1911 and 1931, the castle was the vision of Julius Drewe, founder of the Home and Colonial Stores. Designed by renowned English architect Sir Edwin Lutyens and made of granite, Drogo is reminiscent of a medieval castle but is in fact a very modern building. The First World War had a significant impact on the original build, with many stonemasons and labourers enlisting, actively encouraged by Julius Drewe and John C Walker (Clerk of Works). Julius Drewe's 3 sons – Adrian, Basil and Cedric - were also involved in combat.

There is a significant archive at Castle Drogo including photographs and letters detailing the development of the war and the impact it had on the family, the workers and the building. There is also a team of research volunteers who have unearthed other relevant information including newspaper articles and announcements relating to the First World War. This project focusses on the story of one man – William George Arscott. He was one of the labourers at Drogo when it was being built, and was involved in the extended campaign in Greece in the Salonika area (now Thessaloniki). He died aged 24 on 29th January 1918 and is buried at Sarigol Military Cemetery, Kriston.

The Castle Drogo team (led by the Community Engagement Officer and House and Collections Manager) worked in partnership with Okehampton College to develop a series of creative pieces to illustrate the impact of the First World War on Castle Drogo - the people and the place itself. Specifically, we explored the impact of the campaigns in Salonika and Near East and how those stories connect back to the castle which was being built on Dartmoor at the same time and the people locally.

Process

In March 2017 Paula Clarke, the Community Engagement Officer for the National Trust at Castle Drogo, had an initial meeting with Val Berry, Head of Expressive Arts at Okehampton College, to start exploring the different possibilities and directions the project could take. This was then discussed at the Expressive Arts team meeting where several of the teaching staff indicated that they were keen to get involved.

Whilst this was taking place at the college, Paula Clarke also met with the Castle Drogo Research group to update them on plans and to start shaping the research that the group will undertake. This coincided with the offer of a visit from Mr Vivian John from the Salonika Campaign Society, which came via the Away From the Western Front project team. On the visit Vivian John met with Paula Clarke, Robin Clutterbuck and 2 members of the Castle Drogo Research team; David Spencer and Erica Williamson. He then shared significant information about the campaign in Salonika and the war records of William George Arscott.



Castle Drogo staff and volunteers meeting with Vivian John from Salonika Campaign Society and Robin Clutterbuck.

The information from the Salonika Campaign Society was hugely helpful in furthering the level of knowledge at Castle Drogo and helped to direct further research by the volunteer team. It also proved to be significant in the development of the students' creative pieces.

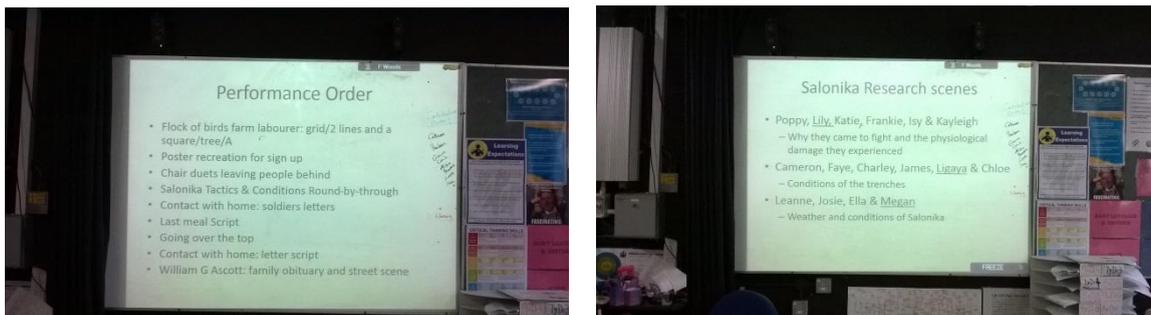
The project started to develop quickly from September 2017 when Paula Clarke made multiple visits to the college to meet with the students. This involved:

- Presenting at 2 x assemblies – sharing the outline of the project with the college students
- Supporting 2 x year 10 drama lessons – introducing the project to the year 10 GCSE drama students and sharing the information and research currently available
- Helping at 2 x A-level music workshops – introducing the project to the A-level music students and sharing everything known about William George Arcscott.



Paula Clarke with the A-level music students.

The music and drama teachers used the research and stories about Salonika and William George Arscott to help teach the students about devising techniques in music and drama.



Planning the order of the performance.

During a follow-up visit to the college to see progress, Paula Clarke also had an initial meeting with John Sherlock, the Head of History, about how his A-level students could be involved and it was agreed that they would create a digital presentation which could then be displayed at Castle Drogo to share the information with visitors.

In January 2018, Paula Clarke visited the college once again to meet with the teaching staff involved and Robin Clutterbuck. All aspects of the project were moving forward well and the music composition was completed. It was then agreed that the final composition would be played at a local First World War event which was taking place on the centenary of William George Arscott’s death – 29 January 2018.

Final planning and preparation work included a visit by members of the research team to the college to share final research. The dramatic piece was then ready to be performed on-site at Castle Drogo and it took place on Friday 9 March 2018 in the Chapel and was followed by another performance at the college.

Quantitative Results

Category	Sub Category	Numbers
National Trust staff and volunteers involved		8
Students involved from partner college	No of young people involved in performance	2 A-level history students 4 A-level music students 45 GCSE drama students
Subject teachers		4
Specialists	Salonika Campaign Society	1
	Recording and filming	2
Performance audience	Castle Drogo	28
	Okehampton College	Approx. 80
Exhibition visitors over 5 week period		Conservative estimate of 1000 people.
On-line film views		

Objectives and Outcomes - Knowledge and Understanding

Aim - Increased knowledge and understanding of heritage (specifically, the impact of First World War on Castle Drogo and Dartmoor community)

Taking part in the Away From the Western Front project gave the Castle Drogo team and Okehampton College students the opportunity to explore and research the story of a young man from a small village in Dartmoor and the journey he went on during the war. It also highlighted the significant impact the war had on this very rural area and the building of Castle Drogo. The access we were given to the research and information from the Salonika Campaign Society was priceless and the insight that the students brought to the stories was both moving and went in a direction which was not anticipated.

The following key outcomes are the result of this project research.

- A much clearer understanding, insight and knowledge of the story of William George Arscott; including his war record and conditions in Salonika.
- An alternative viewpoint regarding the difficulties people had when deciding whether to enlist and the significance of travelling so far from home.

[We learnt about] *'the true Salonika conditions.* [We also learnt about] *William's life as an ordinary boy, gone to a vicious place as a brave soldier.'*
(Okehampton Student feedback)

Development of Skills

Aim - Development of personal skills and capabilities for the young people involved

During the 'Castle Drogo to Salonika' project, the focus was on using research and stories as inspiration for young people and to provide creative stimulus. The Castle Drogo team worked closely with the History and Expressive Arts team at Okehampton College to enable the students to access this archive. Skills gained and enhanced during this time include:

- Developing devising techniques and use of different performance styles as a tool for sharing factual information.
- Researching skills including online research (Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Imperial War Museum archives etc).
- Creating a factual presentation which is engaging for a wide variety of members of the general public.
- Understanding of performing at a heritage site which is grade 1 listed.
- Creating a musical composition which tells a very specific story.

The student evaluation highlighted the sense of ownership the students had about the project and how much it has built confidence:

'It improved my confidence in performing, but changed how I perceived war from a 'heroic act' to a 'horrific action'.'
'I have a feeling of reassurance and a feeling of professionalism; it was a wonderful experience and I have gone away very happy surrounded by brilliant people.' (Okehampton College Drama students)

One of the students went on to complete a week of work experience at Castle Drogo following this project.



A still from the final film of the Chapel performance

Inspiration and Creativity

Aim - Using the unique location and stories of Castle Drogo as inspiration to create pieces of work

The story of Castle Drogo and William George Arscott gave a very small framework for the students to work within. However, through their research and conversations, they took the story in a direction which wasn't anticipated.

The music students managed to tell the story of William George through their composition. The small details of his life really came through. For the history students, their presentation gave the context and backdrop for William George's story by sharing what the campaign in Salonika was really like. The focus for the drama students was on the feeling of isolation from being taken away from loved ones and the difficult decision on whether to enlist.

- *I felt a great sense of community and teamwork whilst being involved. I also felt that there was a lot of freedom over the devising which was really enjoyable. (student)*
- *It's easy to forget how young people are affected by the theme of conflict. I loved seeing how seriously they were taking their work. (audience member)*

Organisational Outcomes

An unexpected positive outcome has been the use of the short film of the project and the history students' presentation as part of a pop-up exhibition in the Chapel. This has been exceedingly well received by members of the public visiting Castle Drogo and staff and volunteers. The combination of the setting, the story of William George and the way the young people have shared the story has proved to be very moving. Visitors have been seen wiping tears away and have commented on the impact of young people sharing their interpretation of the story.

One Castle Drogo volunteer said *'I would like to congratulate you on the exhibition in the Chapel. It is truly lovely'*.

A visitor commented *'It is very moving to see how the young people were taken by the story'*.

Challenges and Conclusion

The 'Castle Drogo to Salonika' project has been hugely successful but it has been challenging at times. Working with a large and very busy college can be difficult as there are so many pressures and priorities to balance. Even though staff from Okehampton College were keen and enthusiastic, it often took quite a bit of liaising to arrange dates to meet and catch up with students. The start of the project was also delayed due to the lead teacher having some personal leave following a bereavement which had an impact on timescales.

Predicted time commitments were significantly below reality with the Community Engagement Officer investing a lot more time in the project than originally envisaged. However, the time was worth investing as the end product was of a high quality. The project has been a hugely rewarding experience for Castle Drogo, staff and volunteers and the young people involved. As reflected above, the project has enriched the First World War story of Castle Drogo, provided a fuller background to the story of William George Arscott and given local young people the opportunity to connect with and engage with the lesser known campaign in Salonika.



The exhibition and film on display in the Chapel, summer 2018

Paula Clarke, September 2018