

Holy Lands

Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon

Project Evaluation

April 2017 – February 2018

Project Summary

In partnership with the Away from the Western Front, The Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon (MBND) hosted the Holy Lands project. The project sought to raise awareness of and commemorate the involvement of the 16th Battalion, Devonshire Regiment (incorporating the Royal North Devon Yeomanry) in the Sinai and Palestine campaign during the First World War.

Between April 2017 and February 2018 MBND worked with several partners to research the poignant Battle of El Foka, (03/12/1917) where the regiment suffered over three hundred casualties, collating soldier's records, casualty lists and eye witness reports of the campaign.

The Plough Arts Centre partnership was conceived as a way of working with a high quality youth theatre group that included children from similar villages and towns to those of the soldiers involved. The theatre juniors (8-12 yrs) used the research together with the war diaries of Sgt H.P. Crocker and Lt Cpl H.C. Algar (from the museum collections) as inspiration to produce a dramatic performance. Viewing MBND's Royal North Devon Yeomanry objects and focusing on the soldier's religious 'low-church' backgrounds the juniors then explored the potential emotional conflict they felt fighting in the 'Holy Lands'.

The research and the performance formed an exhibition and film that was shown at MBND from November 2017 to February 2018. The 'Holy Lands' film was then shown at Langtree Parish Hall, added to the museum's WW1 gallery interactive and put online. The feedback received from the research, performance and events informs the content of this document.

Process

Research partners and creative practitioners with a known track record of excellence were invited to participate in this project. Using the long-term research of museum volunteer Brian Barrow on the Devonshire Regiment, MBND started to compile a list of casualties from the Battle of El Foka. Joy Cann (museum researcher) then reviewed the collection war diaries for religious background and thoughts.

Two project partners, North Devon Athenaeum and Langtree Local History Group (LLHG), then augmented this initial research. The Athenaeum drew on their archives to collate soldier's eyewitness reports sent back from Palestine. This alongside a visit to The Keep military museum in Dorset provided improved research to give a clearer picture of who was present at the Battle of El Foka. Langtree Local History Group collated research on local WW1 soldiers and visited the museum to inspire further research into the Bible Christian and Methodist backgrounds of Langtree soldiers.



Langtree Local History Group researching and viewing Yeomanry objects on a visit to the museum

Recruiting filmmaker Jess Pearson to document the project, staff from MBND and LLHG paid a visit to view the Beaford Arts Old Archive started by photographer James Ravilious. During the filming project partners were interviewed and gave their thoughts on the project and research. The Old Archive gave valuable photographic insight into how the soldiers' villages and towns looked and how the inhabitants worshipped a hundred years ago.



Pictured: Sophie McCormack (Beaford Arts), Jess Pearson (Filmmaker), Margaret Knapman (LLHG) and Joy Cann (museum researcher)

Compiling the research so far, MBND supplied this as a resource to the theatre juniors at the Plough Arts Centre. The research was supplemented with a talk and object handling session that contained original items owned by the Devonshire soldiers to inspire and inform participants.



Adam Murray (Learning Officer) and Joy Cann (Researcher) presenting the Yeomanry objects

Throughout the autumn term the theatre juniors learnt valuable film-making skills and developed the

performance using the Royal North Devon Yeomanry war diaries. During these workshops MBND coordinated a talk from Dave Clinch, a North Devon Sunrise associate and active member of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.



Holy Lands rehearsals at the Plough Arts Centre

In the course of this session we were able to organize a live Skype interview with Hebron International Resources Network. Talking with young Palestinian students from the country where the battle took place, the theatre juniors were able to gain a greater understanding of the project's religious context and insight into the reality of living in modern day Palestine.



Skype call with Tameem Tamimi and Hisham Qawasmeh

In early November the final performance was filmed and edited. During this time MBND's 'Holy Lands' exhibition opened to the public including Sgt. Crocker's war diaries and personal items loaned

from the Crocker family. A private view for all the project partners was then organized at MBND to celebrate the project but also commemorate the 100-year anniversary of the Battle of El Foka.



Holy Lands Exhibition 11th November to 22nd February

During the lead up to the exhibition opening the museum coordinated a talk from Gareth Davies with the help of project coordinator Robin Clutterbuck. Part of the Army's Op REFLECT programme, designed to mark the centenary of the First World War and the British army's participation, Gareth is a reservist soldier and a specialist in the Palestine campaign. The presentation included Gareth's

personal knowledge of the Palestine battlefields, the Devonshire Regiment's military campaign and personal experiences of Palestine as a soldier stationed there.



Gareth Davies pictured second right

Attending the talk were a group of soldiers from the Royal Wessex Yeomanry, D Squadron. The modern day equivalent of the Royal North Devon Yeomanry, the group's presence was particularly relevant as their predecessors had fought and won the Battle of Beersheba a day before. In a post talk discussion it also provided the museum staff and researchers who were present with an insight to soldier's modern day pressures and experiences.

'I am grateful that, through Away From The Western Front, I was asked to give my talk at Barnstaple Museum...it was good to have a mixed and engaging audience.'

(Gareth Davies)



MBND preview film screening



Langtree Parish Hall screening

In December the film was put on permanent display in the museum's WW1 gallery and on our YouTube channel. An important aspect of the project was to show the film in Langtree Parish Hall hosted by the local history group. This event in January 2018 was open to the public and returned the project back to a previous congregation of the Bible Christian movement and the home of Pte. Rodney Ayre who died at El Foka. The evening included the film and talks from national project coordinator Robin Clutterbuck and learning and access officer Adam Murray.

Quantitative Results

Category	Sub Category	Numbers
Museum project staff inc. volunteers		6
Project partner researchers and community group volunteers		19
Creative practitioners		3
The Plough Arts Centre theatre juniors	No of young people involved in performance	26
	Age of young people	
	7	1
	8	6
	9	8
	10	4
	11	5
	12	1
	14	1
	Gender	
	Male	8

	Female	18

	Hometown	
	Barnstaple	1
	Bideford	4
	Torrington	7
	Beaford	2
	Winkleigh	2
	Kingscott	1
	Buckland Brewer	1
	Hatherleigh	1
	Petrockstowe	1
	Northam	1
	Dolton	1
	Peters Marland	1
	Morchard Bishop	1
	Monkleigh	1
	Unanswered	1
Exhibition Visitors		6,818
Museum Private View		42
Langtree Film Screening		10
Online YouTube views	(As of February 2018)	119

Objectives and Outcomes

Knowledge and Understanding

Taking part in the Away from the Western Front project gave MBND the opportunity to explore and research the Devonshire Regiment's part in the Sinai and Palestine campaign. War dairies in the collections that had previously proved valuable were approached from a religious angle focusing on the soldiers' time in Palestine.

Using our long serving volunteer Brian Barrow's research, project researchers were able to review the Royal North Devon Yeomanry collection for related objects and clues to further material. The following key outcomes are the result of this project research.

- L Cpl Herbert Algar and Sgt Horace Crocker's diaries were transcribed into a searchable digital document with search terms such as religion and military objectives for future accessibility.
- Working with North Devon Athenaeum and The Keep military museum in Dorset we were able to build a much clearer picture of the Devonshire Regiment's military actions during the First World War. This led to revealing relevant 16th Battalion and religious background material within our collections and informing object choices to loan for the 'Holy Lands' exhibition.
- With renewed regimental material, museum and partner researchers were able to discover and update the list of Devon soldiers in the 16th Battalion and present at the Battle of El Foka. This included Thomas Cork of the labour corps and Ernest Bishop honored on the war memorial in his hometown of Port Isaac, Cornwall.
- Researching the Bible Christian and Methodist movements with the help of Langtree local history group led to several key finds. Researcher Joy Cann discovered Samuel Crocker's (brother to Sgt Crocker) personally inscribed bible still present in Highampton church where they prayed before leaving for war. This bible has since been kindly donated to the museum's collections.
- Loaning Sgt Crocker's items for the exhibition has renewed our relationship with the Crocker family. Through recent interaction we have discovered and been able record additional relevant items. There has also been discussion of future donation and recording oral histories for the museum's digital collections.

The resulting outcomes have provided the museum collections and staff with an enriched documentation and understanding of the Royal North Devon Yeomanry's part in the First World War.

'By researching some of the local men who were involved in the campaign it helped me to better understand the modern history of Palestine and the First World War's impact in today's world.'
(Athenaeum partner evaluation)

A key objective for the performance project was for the participants to become aware of the local history of their towns and villages a hundred years ago and gain an understanding of Palestine's history up to the present day. The majority of young people involved in the Plough theatre juniors said that they had gained new local and global knowledge as part of the project.

At the beginning of the project the young people were asked to fill out a questionnaire and say what they knew about the First World War and Palestine. The majority stated that they didn't know about the First World War beyond the trenches and a few mistakenly referenced Hitler as the cause of the First World War.

Regarding Palestine they all answered no to any knowledge beforehand apart from its geographical location. Their local knowledge and understanding of international issues changed considerably after the end of the project, with participants drawing references to the soldiers who were from similar villages to themselves:

'I knew they were religious but it surprised me how much'

'It's made me think more about soldiers and their background'

'We found out that the war spread far and wide and also took part in Palestine where Jesus had been'

This new knowledge was also reflected in comments recorded from the participants' parents:

'It has made me more aware of what the local men went through 100 years ago'

'How...it was for men coming from farming backgrounds to the war with death around them'

'It has changed my knowledge about the war'

Another insightful and valuable part to the theatre juniors' understanding particularly on international history and issues was a live Skype talk. Two Palestinian students Tameem Tamimi and Hisham Qawasmeh spoke to the group from Palestine and it was this that sparked insightful comments in the participants' group on how they had changed after learning about Palestine and its history:

'I see all the soldiers differently now'

'I understand their beliefs better'

Development of Skills

During the Holy Lands project the museum used its existing regimental volunteers as well as a researcher to review the Yeomanry collections and study the war diaries. Skills gained and enhanced during this time include:

- Researching museum collections and documentation

- Online research including Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Imperial War Museum archives and local parish history pages.
- Transcribing and digitising war diaries
- Facilitating object handling workshops for young people
- Field research

Our war diaries researcher felt particularly strongly that she had gained valuable skills not only researching the diaries but taking part in object handling with the young people at the Plough Arts Centre:

'...engaging with them in a spontaneous and previously unexplored, unrehearsed way was mind blowing for me and a very new, enjoyable and effective experience for the young people. Their individual response was way beyond anything I could have imagined.'

(Museum researcher evaluation)

Another skills element to the project was the development of the theatre juniors' soft skills and film-making skills. A popular part of the performance process, many students referred to this in their feedback. Some of the newly learnt skills mentioned, included:

- Learning to be confident
- Acting different emotions
- Teamwork
- Performing in front of a camera
- Patience in rehearsals

After the private preview of the Holy Lands film at the museum, many parents of participants remarked on how their children had benefited from the project. This quote was written in response to a question on how the project had changed her child:

(She realised) *'...the hard work that goes into filming and making a project work'*

Attitudes, Values and Enjoyment

Changes in the researchers and performance participants' attitudes and values have been hugely evident throughout the Holy Lands project. One of the museum researchers formed a personal connection to the war diaries of Sgt H.P. Crocker and conducted her own out-of-hours research resulting in the museum obtaining original objects to add to the Yeomanry collection. In her evaluation she remarked:

'On another level meeting relatives of the war Diarist was extraordinary, visiting his Church and finding personal, signed Prayer books was almost a spiritual "meant to happen" moment. These have now been

deposited in the Museum! Sharing the feelings, respect and admiration that I had formed from spending weeks immersed in these Diaries, was clearly an emotional and unexpected experience for the Soldiers relative, and a sincere, unique privilege for me.'
(Museum researcher evaluation)

Creating the performance, the Plough Arts Centre director remarked on the theatre junior's changes in thinking. Particular reflection on reading the religious thoughts of local soldiers in juxtaposition with talking to teenagers in modern day Palestine were evident in the participant's feedback:

'It was such an eye opening experience for our Junior Youth Theatre to be involved in The Holy Lands project. The project offered so much to them such as learning about history, locality, equality and performance. They were inspired by factual happenings, their knowledge on Palestine was expanded through research and Skype connections with young people in Palestine'

(Plough Arts Centre director and project coordinator)

'It has helped me want to find out about people around the world'

'It has made me more kind and brave'

(Performance group participants)

Comments by film-screening attendees and exhibition visitors echoed that the project and film had provoked emotional responses and curiosity:

'I was deeply moved by the children in the film trying to portray what the soldiers would have felt like'
(Langtree film screening attendee)

'We will certainly research more, we recognize a number of familiar Devonshire names amongst the soldiers'
(Film preview attendee)

Inspiration and Creativity

Working with film-maker Jess Pearson and The Plough Arts Centre afforded us a great starting point to take the research and war diaries into the creative realm of performance. The performance and film have provided the museum with not only a documentation of the project but an inspirational bringing to life of the Royal North Devon Yeomanry during the First World War.

Feedback from the performance coordinator cited the access to the museum objects and war diaries as prompting real feelings of empathy and compassion within the theatre juniors' performance. One participant in the performance who played a key character wrote:

'I felt like I had a connection with H.P. Crocker'

(Performance group participant)

Many participants brought their families to view the Holy Lands exhibition and interest in the religious side to the project has provoked further research into the chaplains mentioned in both war diaries used for the project. This quote was left during January 2018 in the exhibition visitor book:

'Holy Lands production/exhibition was (a)...most moving portrayal and brought home realities of the First World War'

(Visitor book comment)

Organisational Outcomes

A particularly positive outcome for the museum was an improved working relationship between the project partners involved. Joint research collated from the museum volunteers, North Devon Athenaeum and Langtree local history group has led to a more informed collection, a network of expertise and discussion of future projects.

In addition a renewed dialogue between the museum and Beaford Arts, whose collections both hold James Ravilious' photographs, benefitted both organisation's project work and has led to discussion of Beaford Arts having a digital portal in the museums new social history gallery.

'We found that working with the Museum on the Holy Lands project enabled us to explore new ways to use our Old Beaford Archive resources as both research materials and inspiration for creative responses. It also helped us to reach new audiences and brought some excellent exposure to our Archive activity overall. These outcomes were made possible by working closely with the Museum and their outreach department who were proactive in seeking opportunities for linking our work, and this positive experience has prepared the way for further projects and collaborations between our organisations.'

(Beaford Arts project coordinator)

Challenges and Conclusion

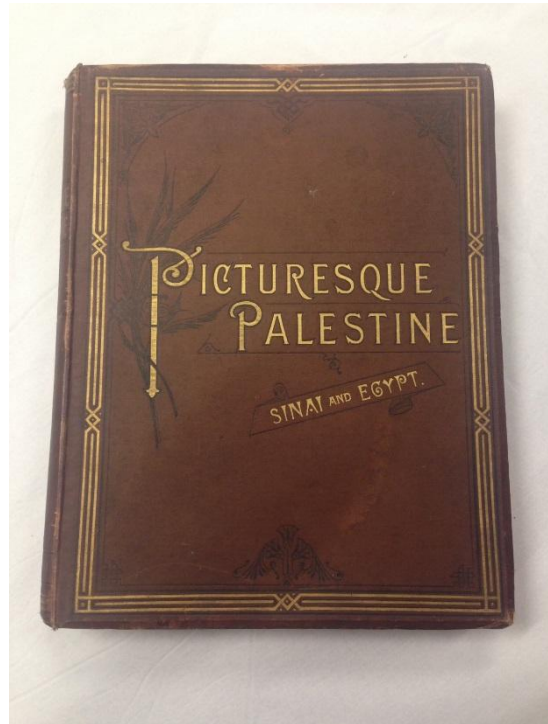
Changes in learning staff at the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon meant the Holy Lands project had a shorter timeframe to coordinate and produce. This meant the research aspect was limited for use in the filming and project events such as the film screenings took place later in 2017. However considering the scale of the project within such a short time many remarkable aims came to fruition including fitting the project into The Plough Arts Centre programme at short notice, coordinating a live Skype link up with Palestine and loaning items from the Crocker family for the exhibition.

In conclusion, carrying out the research, performance and film for the Holy Lands project has been a hugely rewarding experience for the museum, its volunteers and the local community. As reflected in

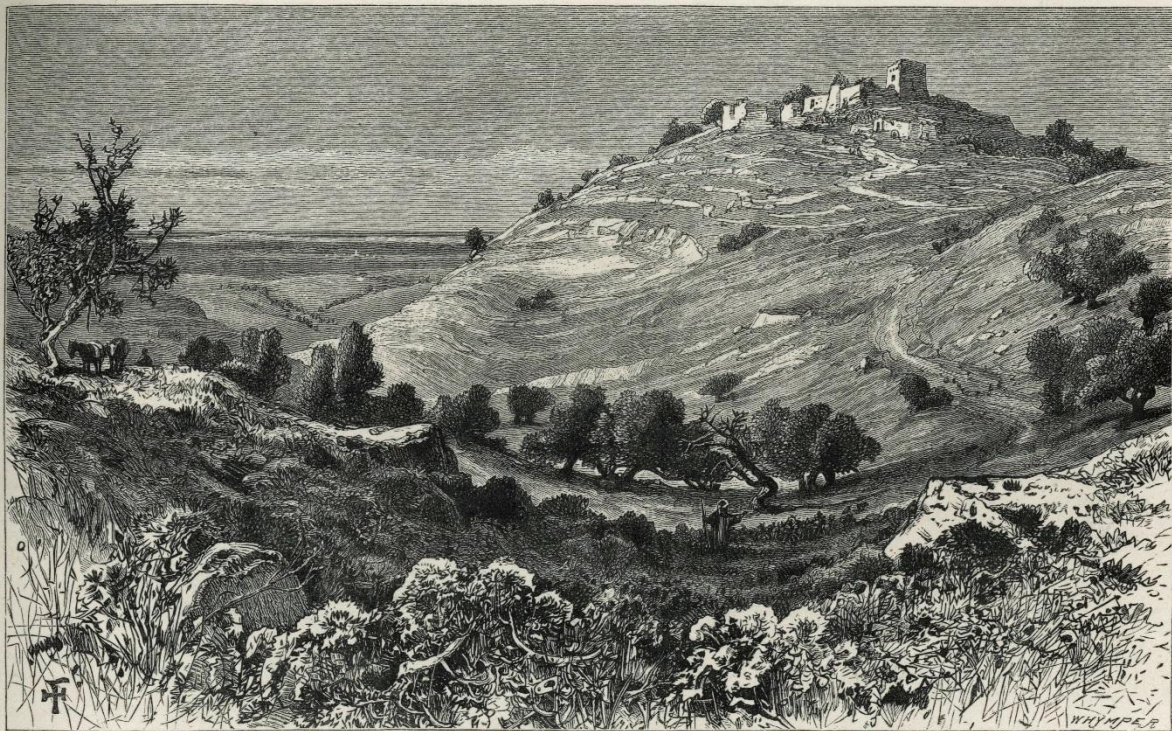
personal feedback and visitor numbers, the project has enriched the First World War gallery, provided a fuller background to our Yeomanry collections and brought this overlooked part of the First World War and North Devon into the spotlight. Wonderfully, the project has provided the museum with new objects, a school resource pack that will be downloadable on our new museum website (summer launch) and avenues into further research regarding the Devonshire Regiment's time in Palestine as well as the role of the chaplains in the First World War.

'Brilliant project, very proud my son was involved. Thank you for the opportunity'

(Parent of performance participant)**New objects and research added to the museum collections**

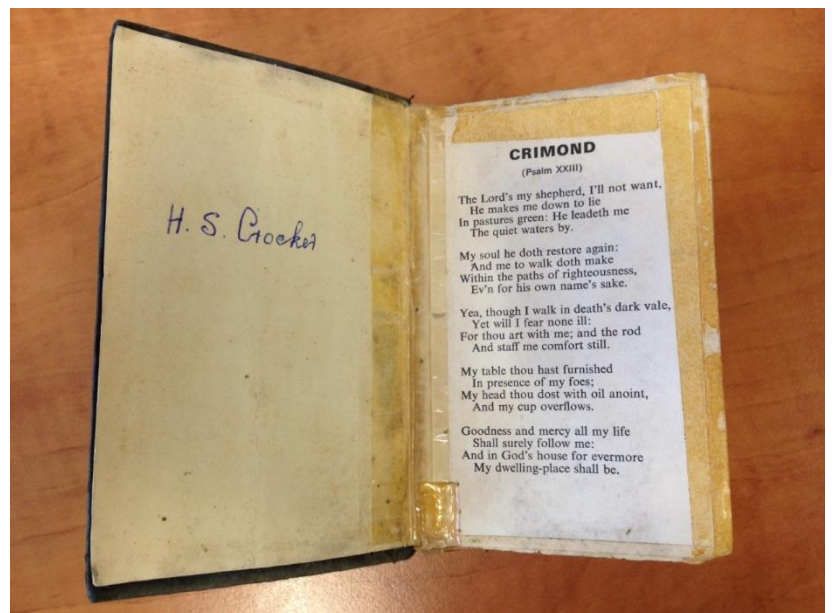
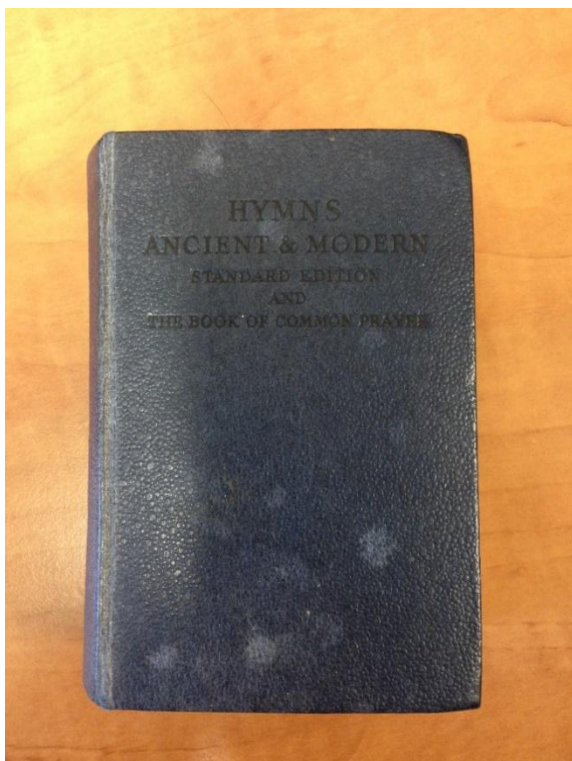


'Picturesque Palestine' by Charles William Wilson



BEIT-'UR-EL-FOKA, ON THE SITE OF UPPER BETH-HORON.
In the distance the sandy line of coast and the Mediterranean Sea.

Detail of Beit Ur El Foka in 1800s.



Sgt. Crocker's brothers bible (Samuel Crocker) discovered in Highampton Church. Joy Cann (project researcher shows the bible to Marilyn Tolly, Crocker's granddaughter)



Devonshire recruitment pamphlet added to the virtual collections



Photos added to the virtual collections

Church Hut built by the Devonshire Regiment in Egypt

Newly discovered research of soldiers present at the Battle of El Foka

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
<i>CORK.</i>	<i>R.O. Deron Yeo</i>	<i>Pte</i>	<i>2411</i>
<i>Thomas. E.</i>	<i>Lab Corps.</i>		<i>549475</i>
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks
<i>VICTORY</i>	<i>LC/101 B 203</i>	<i>20615</i>	<i>Died 19.3.19.</i>
<i>BRITISH</i>			
<i>15 STAR</i>	<i>LC/122. C</i>	<i>34/3</i>	
Theatre of War first served in		<i>26. Balkans.</i>	
Date of entry therein		<i>23.9.15</i>	

K. 1380.

Thomas Cork, Labour Corps



Ernest Bishop (buried Port Issac), died at El Foka