



**EMBARGO: 00.01(GMT), Friday 1 July 2016**

## Imperial War Museums asks the public to share their Somme connection on *Lives of the First World War*

Imperial War Museums (IWM) is asking members of the public to discover, remember and share the lives of every man who fought in the Battle of the Somme, on the permanent digital memorial [Lives of the First World War](http://www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org) – [www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org](http://www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org)

A hundred years ago, at 7.30am on 1 July 1916, British troops climbed out of their trenches near the River Somme to advance across no man's land towards the German lines. The preliminary week-long bombardment saw over 1.5 million shells fired at the German positions in the hope of cutting through the enemy's barbed wire and destroying their trenches, yet as the night of 1 July drew to a close, over 19,240 British troops lay dead, with many more wounded.

### ***Lives of the First World War* remembers:**

- [The Donaldson brothers](#) who joined the Royal Irish Rifles on the outbreak of war and had consecutive service numbers. John, James and Samuel all died on 1 July 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme. Their bodies were never recovered and they are all commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing.
- [Reverend Ernest Courtenay Crosse](#) who was chaplain to the 8th and 9th Battalions of the Devonshire Regiment. The Battalion diary reports he *"was always up in the front line with the stretcher-bearers, helping the wounded"*. He was with his men on 1 July 1916 and on 2 July conducted burial services for 163 of his men, mostly victims of machine gun fire. The survivors of this initial attack put up their own rough wooden memorial to their fallen, inscribed with the words *'The Devonshires held this trench, the Devonshires hold it still'*.
- [Lieutenant Robert Stewart Smylie](#) was a Headmaster before the outbreak of war and enlisted in the war effort as he felt that in this way he could continue to offer guidance to the young men under his command. Robert was killed on 14 July 1916 while leading C Company of the 1st Royal Scot Fusiliers near Montauban; his shrapnel damaged wallet containing photographs of his wife and three children is now in the collections of Imperial War Museums.
- [Munitions Worker Charlotte Meade](#) was one of the half a million munition workers based on the home front, producing the much needed shells for this Battle. Lottie contracted TNT poisoning and sadly died on duty. Lottie left behind four young children and a husband, Frederick, who was serving in France when she died in July 1916. He was unable to come home to see her before she died.

**Anthony Richards, Head of Documents and Sound at Imperial War Museums and author of IWM's new book *The Somme: A Visual History*, said:** "No other moment comes as close to capturing the defining experience of the First World War for the British people as the Battle of the Somme. With its intense casualties and demonstration of the brutality of modern warfare, it continues to resonate with today's generations.

"What is most pertinent are the stories of those who took part – the fathers and sons who went to fight, the mothers who lost their children, and the men whose bodies were never recovered. It would be a fitting tribute to have all of those who gave their lives for the Somme remembered 100 years on."

Do you have a relative who fought at the Somme? Is there a name on your local war memorial you could discover more about? Help IWM to tell the stories of those who fought to remember them, and their sacrifice on [www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org](http://www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org)

## ENDS

For further information, images, interviews or audio interviews with Somme veterans please contact Faye Jackson in the IWM press office on [fjackson@iwm.org.uk](mailto:fjackson@iwm.org.uk) / 020 7416 5420.

### About the Battle of the Somme

The battle lasted 141 days and cost the lives of over a million men (on all sides). It marked a pivotal point in the war. War was now being waged on an unprecedented scale, affecting not only the lives of just the men at the front line, but also those at home.

### Case Studies \*

#### The Donaldson Brothers

<https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/community/3155>

- [Rifleman John Donaldson](#) British Army, Royal Irish Rifles, Service #13/18958
- [Rifleman Samuel Donaldson](#) British Army, Royal Irish Rifles, Service #13/18959
- [Rifleman James Donaldson](#) British Army, Royal Irish Rifles, Service #13/18960
  
- The Donaldson brothers were born in Comber in County Down, today Northern Ireland, to Mary and John Donaldson. Samuel, the eldest was born in 1895, John in 1890 and James in 1893. They had another two brothers and one sister.
- Before the war, the three brothers worked in a spinning mill.
- On the outbreak of war, they joined the Royal Irish Rifles. The three brothers had consecutive service numbers, suggesting they all enlisted at the same time.
- Samuel, John and James arrived in France in October 1915 and they took part in the Battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916. The brothers served with B Company of the 13th Battalion who attacked at Thiepval on the morning of 1 July 1916.
- The Unit War Diary for 1 July 1916 provides a sense of what the Donaldson brothers faced:  
*'From 5 to 6.30am the men had breakfast, with hot tea and a rum ration. They got out over the parapet about 15 minutes before zero time, 7.30am and laid down on the tape, they moved off a couple of minutes before time, so as to get within 150 yards of the German line before the barrage lifted. As soon as they were over the crest of the hill the German machine guns could be heard firing and the action was started.'*
- Sadly, all three brothers were killed in action on 1 July 1916, John aged 26, James aged 23 and Samuel aged 21. Their bodies were never recovered and so they are remembered on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme.

#### Temporary Chaplain to the Forces, Reverend Ernest Courtenay Crosse Army Chaplain's Department

<https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/lifestory/5328739>

- Ernest was born on 18 March 1887 in Horsham, Sussex. He was educated at Clifton College, and then studied at Balliol College at the University of Oxford. He then attended Ely Theological College and was ordained as a Church of England Chaplain.
- Ernest volunteered to join up as a Reverend and was posted to France in mid-1915. He joined the men of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Battalions of the Devonshire Regiment. The regimental history reports:  
*'It was at this time that the 8<sup>th</sup> had the good fortune to have the Reverend E.C. Crosse attached to it as Chaplain...he was always up in the front line with the stretcher-bearers, helping the wounded.'*

- Ernest was with the men when they attacked on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. The casualties of 1 July 1916 were the worst ever suffered by the British Army in a single day. On 2 July he conducted the burials of 163 of their men, mostly victims of machine gun fire. A wooden cross was put up at the time by the survivors of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Battalions of the Devonshire Regiment. The following words were carved on the wooden cross: *"The Devonshires held this trench, the Devonshires hold it still."*
- In his memoirs, Ernest recalls the effect of the presence of Padres on the men serving at the front during the First World War:
 

*'It was a great thing to think that the church was ready to go where the men had to. Quite apart from anything specific they might do, it is important to realise the significance of their presence on the battlefield. From a military point of view it was far from negligible, because they alone were not under orders to be there – and as such they could hardly fail to encourage the men, who had no option in the matter. From a religious point of view it showed to the men far better than any preaching could do, God's care for them. If a padre's presence was appreciated in the trenches at normal times, it was doubly so in those awful periods in the small hours of the morning waiting for the moment of attack.'*
- Ernest survived the war and moved to New Zealand where he became a school headmaster. In his later years he was the headmaster of Ardingly College in West Sussex, and held this post from 1933 to 1946.
- Ernest passed away in 1955, at the age of 68.

### **Lieutenant Robert Stewart Smylie Royal Scots Fusiliers**

<https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/lifestory/4180163>

- Robert was 40 years old at the start of the war, making him a relatively old recruit. He served as a Lieutenant in the Royal Scots Fusiliers, arriving on the Western Front in September 1915.
- Robert was born in King's Norton, Worcestershire, in 1874. Prior to the war, he was a teacher and then headmaster at Sudbury Grammar school, where he taught English, Latin and Maths. He also ran a cadet force at the school and saw many of his students go into military careers.
- Robert married Beatrice Mary Comfort in 1903 and together they had three children – Mary ('Molly'), Elizabeth ('Bids') and Patrick. Whilst serving with the army in November 1915, Robert wrote a poem entitled 'My Three Kids', which contains the poignant lines:
 

*"And when this long war is done, we shall have some glorious fun Moll and Bids and little son, my three kids."*
- Tragically Robert was not able to fulfil his promise, as he was killed in action during the Battle of the Somme.
- One of Robert's Captains, Frank Greenwood wrote to his wife after his death:
 

*"I was with the late Captain Smylie when he met with his unfortunate end and he made me promise that if I returned home I would write you stating 'that his last thoughts were of you. He died happy doing his duty'. It may be of comfort to you to know that his end was painless and sudden ... I would like to take this opportunity of stating how we appreciated serving under a perfect gentleman and a thorough sportsman"*.
- Robert died at Longueval Ridge on 14 July 1916, and his personal effects were sent home to his wife and children – these are now part of IWM collections, his shrapnel damaged wallet, with pictures of his wife and children are on display in IWM London's First World War Galleries.

### **Munitions Worker Charlotte (Lottie) Meade**

<https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/lifestory/7662317>

- Lottie Meade was born Charlotte Hudson in 1891. In 1905 she married Frederick George Meade and the couple went on to have five children together, four sons, one of whom died in infancy and a daughter Elizabeth.
- By 1911 Lottie was working in a Calendar Hand Laundry, but during the war she went to work in a munitions factory. Her husband Frederick served in the Bedfordshire Regiment in France.

- Lottie was aged 25 when she died of disease of the liver, heart and kidney as a result of TNT poisoning, leaving behind four young children.
- Her husband Frederick enlisted on 28 August 1914 in the Middlesex Regiment, later serving in the Bedfordshire Regiment.
- Frederick served on Mudros from February 1916 and was stationed in France from June 1916. Between June and July of that year he was hospitalised for scabies, influenza and myalgia.
- Frederick was unable to make it home in time to see Lottie before she died on 11 October 1916 in Kensington Infirmary, London.
- In 1917 he was placed into reserve due to continuing medical problems, working in a munitions factory in Britain before being discharged in 1919 as unfit for service.
- In 1920 Lottie's widower Frederick remarried Annie Meade, nee Brinckley who had been widowed when her husband Walter Dale was killed during the Battle of the Somme. Together Frederick and Annie had a son Robert.
- Lottie and Frederick's children found themselves living in a house with nine children all under the age of 12.
- After Lottie's death, Frederick donated her photograph to the Imperial War Museums Women's Work Collection, he stated that:
  - “She died whilst working on munitions caused by working on INJ which caused her death leaving behind 4 little children. Ages 1 year and 6 months 3 5 and 7 years of age whilst myself was serving in France and got home to late to see her alive”.
- He poignantly asked if one of the two images could be sent back so he could keep it:
  - “I am forwarding on 2 of her photos which are only old ones but I can have a fresh one took of her so would you kindly let me know which one you would like of her please return her photos has I have not got any more to get a photo from”

## Notes to Editors

- The Imperial War Museum was founded in 1917 when the First World War was still being fought to ensure that future generations would understand the toil and sacrifice of those who participated in the conflict.
- Over the Centenary (2014-2018) *Lives of the First World War* will grow to become the permanent digital memorial, accessible to millions of people regardless of their location.
- *Lives of the First World War* will be maintained and preserved by IWM beyond the centenary as a research tool for future generations.
- *Lives of the First World War* is being delivered in partnership findmypast Ltd.
- It is **free** to discover, remember and share information on *Lives of the First World War*, including uploading pictures and adding family stories.
- Subscription is only necessary if visitors wish to research using premium data sets that currently exist behind pay walls, or if they want to access special features such as creating their own Communities.
- To support the permanent digital memorial and access premium genealogy research records visitors can become a Friend of *Lives of the First World War* for £6 per month or £50 a year.

**Imperial War Museums is not seeking original copies of letters, photographs or diaries. We encourage people to keep these in family collections for future generations and to upload and share their digital images on *Lives of the First World War*.**

## IWM

IWM (Imperial War Museums) tells the story of people who have lived, fought and died in conflicts involving Britain and the Commonwealth since the First World War. Our unique Collections, made up of the everyday and the exceptional, reveal stories of people, places, ideas and events. Using these, we tell vivid personal stories and create powerful physical experiences across our five museums that reflect the realities of war as both a destructive and creative force. We challenge people to look at conflict from different perspectives, enriching their understanding of the causes, course and consequences of war and its impact on people's lives.

IWM's five branches attract over 2 million visitors each year. [IWM London](#), our flagship branch, marks the Centenary of the First World War with new permanent First World War Galleries and a new Atrium with iconic large object displays. Our other branches are [IWM North](#), housed in an iconic award-winning building designed by Daniel Libeskind; [IWM Duxford](#), a world-renowned aviation museum and Britain's best preserved wartime airfield; [Churchill War Rooms](#), housed in Churchill's secret headquarters below Whitehall; and the Second World War cruiser [HMS Belfast](#).

### **About the First World War Centenary**

2014 - 2018 marks the centenary of the First World War, a landmark anniversary for Britain and the world. IWM is marking the centenary by leading a vibrant, four year programme of cultural activities across the world including. For more information visit [www.1914.org](http://www.1914.org)

### **About Findmypast**

Findmypast (previously DC Thomson Family History) is a British-owned world leader in online genealogy. It has an unrivalled record of online innovation in the field of family history and 18 million registered users across its family of online brands, which includes Mocavo, Genes Reunited, The British Newspaper Archive amongst others.

Its lead brand, also called Findmypast, is a searchable online archive of over two billion family history records, from parish records and censuses to migration records, military collections, historical newspapers and lots more. For members around the world, the site is a crucial resource for building family trees and doing detailed historical research.

In April 2003 Findmypast was the first to provide access to the complete birth, marriage, and death indexes for England & Wales, winning the Queen's Award for Innovation. Since that time, the company has digitised records from across the globe, including major collections from Britain, Ireland, Australia, and the United States.