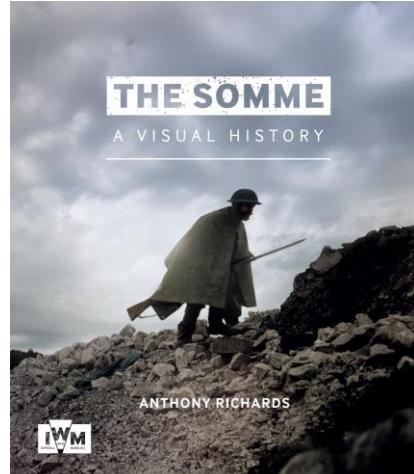


## The Somme: A Visual History

Published: 16 June 2016

*Here goes. I clamber out of the front of the deep trench by the scaling ladder and face my platoon. I am smoking a cigarette and superficially am serene and cheerful – at least, I hope I appear so. As I give the order to advance a sudden thought occurs to me: will they all obey? This is instantly answered in the affirmative, for they all climb out of the trench and the advance begins.*

Lieutenant William Colyer of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers, 1 July 1916



'This book brings the Somme to life in a fresh and engaging way'  
Author and historian Taylor Downing

**From photographs to artworks, film to posters, this new book explores the Battle of the Somme through the unrivalled collections of Imperial War Museums (IWM). Published to mark the centenary of the battle, the book offers a visual and accessible history of one of the defining moments of the First World War.**

This definitive guide explores the Battles' context, the planning that ensued for 'the big push', accounts of the infamous first day, the later stages of the Battle, all the way through to its legacy. Throughout Anthony Richards' detailed history, this book offers the rare chance to read the first-hand experiences of those who were there, taken from private diaries, personal letters and interviews in IWM's collections.

An extract from Major Walter Vignoles' diary tells of his excitement before going over the top, while the poignant last letter written by Captain Wilfred Nevill to his sister on the eve of the battle describes the intense artillery bombardment, and the widespread conviction that the imminent infantry assault would prove decisive. Nevill gave each of his platoons a football to kick into no man's land with a prize promised for the one that travelled the furthest. Nevill kicked the first ball but the prize was never collected; he was killed on 1 July.

Rarely seen photographs captured by the official war photographers at the front, vivid wartime posters and artworks showing the horrors and sheer scale of the battle are woven throughout the narrative of the book, illustrating it with the faces and images of the time.

The book also features a series of 'In Focus' essays, written by IWM experts exploring the impact of the Battle of the Somme on the mediums of Art, Film and Photography as well as the Pals Battalions who, having been encouraged to enlist by Lord Kitchener, had in many cases their first experiences

of combat during the battle.

### **Taylor Downing, historian and author of *Breakdown: The Crisis of Shell Shock on the***

**Somme** says 'This is a unique account of Britain's most famous battle. The book is full of the most brilliant images, including many little known photos but also much art work, engravings and posters of the time. The narrative comes from a forceful text by Anthony Richards supported by dozens of vivid quotations from original IWM sources like diaries, letters and journals. Richards is a great expert here and brings his knowledge of the IWM collections to bear with great effect. The extracts take the reader into the heart of the battle and give the whole book a powerful first hand quality. There are in addition essays by some renowned IWM curators on aspects like the film, official photographs and art produced during the battle. The book brings the Somme to life in a fresh and engaging way.'

### **Anthony Richards, Head of Documents and Sound, IWM**

Anthony Richards has worked at the Imperial War Museum for over twenty years, and since 2010 has been in his current role as Head of Documents and Sound. He has overseen the acquisition and cataloguing of documents relating to the personal experience of warfare from 1914 to present, as well as the museum's on-going oral history programme. Richards is a Modern History graduate from Queen Mary College, London, and holds an MA in Archives and Record Management from University College London. He has provided historical advice for television and radio productions, including the BAFTA-nominated ITV series *The Great War: The People's Story*, and is the author of *The Somme: A Visual History* (2016). He has also written extensively on military history since 1914 for popular publications, recently contributing to the Sunday Telegraph's *Inside the First World War* monthly supplements. Richards is the author of *In Their Own Words*, which is published by IWM in July 2016.

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#### Flers-Courcelette

Wounded British soldiers at a dressing station set up in the churchyard at Morlancourt, a village well behind the British lines located south of Albert. They can be seen holding German war trophies recovered from the battlefield.

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#### Thiepval and the Ancre

German Wire, Thiepval (William Orpen, 1917)

© IWM (Art.IWM ART 3006)



#### Recruiting for the Somme: The Pals Battalions

Recruitment drives tended to lay emphasis upon notions of comradeship and community in order to inspire men to enlist. This poster from 1915 makes it clear that the New Army would comprise men from all sorts of different backgrounds, united in a desire to serve their country.

© IWM (Art.IWM PST 0318)



#### Thiepval and the Ancre

A horse-drawn limber takes ammunition to the forward guns along the Lesboeufs Road, outside Flers, in November 1916 during the final stages of the Somme offensive. The weather had by this time made much of the battlefield a muddy and impassable morass.

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– Ends –

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#### Notes to Editors

##### IWM Publications

IWM Publishing produces books which draw on the unparalleled expertise and archives of the museum. Our list is distributed all over the world and includes exhibition books, collections-based titles, gift books and guides.

Upcoming titles for 2016:

*Firing on Fortress Europe: HMS Belfast at D-Day* tells the exhilarating story of Belfast's role during D-Day through the eyes of the ship's crew

*In Their Own Words* is a gripping, revealing and poignant collection of stories telling the First World War from the perspective of those who were there, using letters, diaries and memoirs from IWM's

unparalleled archives

*Secrets of Churchill's War Rooms* gives exclusive access to the Cabinet War Rooms with up-close photography and first-hand memories of the war leader

*The English and Their Country* brings back to life a quirky guide for overseas forces, with an account of English characteristics for confused guests

*Victory is in the Kitchen: Wartime Recipes* is fascinating collection of Second World War recipes from the archives of IWM, illustrated throughout with colour posters from the period

## 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](#).

## First World War Centenary

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

