



LIVES OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 May 2014

IWM needs YOU to help build *Lives of the First World War*

Today (12 May 2014), Imperial War Museums (IWM) has launched [Lives of the First World War](#) and needs your help to tell the life stories of millions of people from across Britain and the Commonwealth who served in uniform and worked on the home front.

Over the course of the next five years, *Lives of the First World War*, delivered in partnership with DC Thomson Family History, will become the permanent digital memorial to over 8 million men and women. IWM is urging everyone to **discover** their First World War connections and **remember** and **share** these with the rest of the world online at www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org

Luke Smith, IWM's Digital Lead for the First World War Centenary said 'The launch of *Lives of the First World War* really is just the beginning. We need the public to help us piece together over 8 million life stories, so that we can remember these people now and in the future. Everybody can contribute to *Lives of the First World War*, whether they choose to simply remember someone online, upload a picture from their family album, share a story passed down through generations, or connect official records to build a full and factual picture of what happened to that person throughout the war. This is the start of a journey and we urge everyone to get involved.'

Dan Snow, *Lives of the First World War* Ambassador said; '*Lives of the First World War* will become an extraordinary online memorial - one of the most extraordinary war memorials ever. IWM has created *Lives of the First World War* and is now handing it over to us, the public. We need to make it happen by uploading information about our First World War ancestors, piecing together their stories, remembering them and saving this knowledge for future generations.'

Lives of the First World War has launched today with the records of those who served with the British Army overseas - over 4.5 million men and over 40,000 women. These include **Sister Martha Aitken** who served in the Territorial Force Nursing Service in Casualty Clearing Stations and Military Hospitals in France and Flanders, **Private Michael Lennon** who fought with the Royal Dublin Fusiliers at Gallipoli, **Albert Tatersall** one of many men from the North West to line up for the attack on the first day of the Battle of the Somme and **Thomas William Stratford** who served in China and Gallipoli before being wounded in France and discharged.*

However, many of those on *Lives of the First World War* are currently only names. We need the public to help identify them, piece together their stories and remember each and every one of them.

Over the coming months, millions of additional new records will be added to *Lives of the First World War* - from the Royal Flying Corp/Royal Air Force, the Royal Navy, the Canadian Expeditionary Force, the Australian and New Zealand Imperial Forces along with the records of almost 17,000 conscientious objectors. IWM is also seeking to include the Indian Army, Home Front workers and all others who made a contribution from across the British Empire.

Lives of the First World War will continue to evolve over the First World War Centenary and new functionality will be added so that people can easily share and discuss who they are remembering online.

Today, IWM is asking people everywhere 'who will you remember?'

www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org

**The following have been written with additional information taken from diaries and letters found in IWM's archive and family collections.*



**Mrs. Martha Withall – nee Sister Martha Aitken.
Territorial Force Nursing Service**

From the records found on *Lives of the First World War* we can see that Martha enlisted as a Staff Nurse in 1914, but later became a Sister. She wrote diaries through her active service in the First World War recording her enlistment in the Territorial Force Nursing Service to service in Casualty Clearing Stations and Military Hospitals in France and Flanders. These tell us something of her experiences during the First World War.

On 29 October 1914, Sister Martha Aitken wrote '*As I cannot write a proper letter home I'll collect all my information from day to day and write it down for others to read. Mobilised on 6 August, 1914....but did not go on duty until the first of the wounded arrived on the 15 September 1914. The sight of the poor wounded will always stay in my memory. I never realised the horrors of war until then. The sight of our brave men, 80 in all coming up the stairs...each one making light of his wounds and helping more wounded comrades. ...The number of stricken men seemed interminable. All had a cigarette smoking, all smiling, but very dirty unshaven faces. The strains of whistling were to be heard.*'

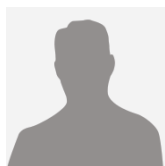
She later recalls '*A young private who was minus his double set of teeth said when his right arm and leg were wounded he was no use to fight and seeing one of the enemy making fun of some of his companions, he threw his false teeth at them. His only regret, though they had cost him 4/4, was that they were not much heavier.*'

On 27 November 1914, she writes *'On the sunny slope of the cemetery is ground set aside for our soldiers. Huge trenches are dug (6ft deep) and bodies lay side by side... As I looked I thought of how they had died. They fought side by side and now sleep side by side on the slope of the hill facing the Channel and the land which they left so shortly ago... Next to the British part was a solitary grave, recently made. A wreath of everlasting flowers with the Belgian colours twined around lay at the head, a card was attached with the words in English 'Peace now for a Belgian Refugee RIP.'*

In December 1917 Martha was Mentioned in Dispatches by Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig and awarded the Royal Red Cross in December 1919. After the war ended, Martha joined the Colonial Service and went to Kenya where she married Captain Tom Withall, who sadly died the following year. Mrs Whitehall remained in Kenya and continued nursing including matronage of a native hospital during the period of the Second World War.

Mrs Withall retired to Scotland in 1948 (she was born in Shetland) but later visited Australia, working for the Flying Doctor Service and made a brief return to Kenya during the Mau Mau emergency to be with an old friend. Martha died in Edinburgh in 1969 aged 87. Her diaries are held in IWM's archives.

Did someone from your family serve as a nurse in the First World War? Will you remember her today, 12 May – International Nurses Day – on www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org?



**Private Michael Lennon
Royal Dublin Fusiliers, Service #17189**

Private Michael Lennon served with the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. From the records found on *Lives of the First World War* we know that Michael enlisted in Nottingham and first served overseas on 13 May 1915.

Letters in IWM's collections, give an insight into Private Lennon's experiences on the battlefields of Gallipoli, as he writes to his brother Frank and his nephew little Frankie in Nottingham.

Upon his arrival on 30th May 1915, he wrote *'Well Frank, I suppose we are for it tomorrow, if we don't get shelled on the way... I can only hope that we have all the luck to come through the night and if I should get bowled out – well it can't be helped. I shall pack up to the place 'Where falls not rain, nor hail, nor any snow, and where the wind never blows loudly', but as I have said before, I am looking for something better than that and I shall see you again when the job is done.'*

On 1st June, Private Michael Lennon writes, on the back of a Walker, Harrison and Garthwaites biscuit card *'Still in the pink and a bit nearer to the shells that are flying about. Had a stroll to the top of the hill (and I don't mean Derby Road) this morning and could see the shots exchanged between the combatants, while the big guns are going every now and again. ...This is a wonderful place Frank, like a World's Fair, with all the men of different nationalities...I only hope that I come back to tell little Frankie all about it.'*

A letter written on June 4, from 'No 1 Trench' reads *'Came here last night and expect to make it to the big charge today, tonight or by Sunday at any rate, Naturally, I hope that nothing happens to me personally but I must realise that I am right up against it now.'*

In the last letter from Private Michael Lennon, written from Gallipoli on June 8th 1915 he notes *'Well, I am still very much alive and doing well. Went up to the firing line last Monday, stayed there about 10 hours and then was relieved by another regiment. The return journey was tremendously exciting, as we had to go down a passage which was almost perpendicular and was 70 or 80 feet from top to bottom, the shells flying above... One of the chaps who left Cork with us was bowled out, but I am hoping for something better than that.'*

Private Michael Lennon of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, died on 28 June, 1915 – exactly one year after the crisis that led to the outbreak of war. Today, he is commemorated on the Helles memorial in Turkey and his story remembered and shared on Lives of the First World War.

IWM would very much like to find a photograph for Private Michael Lennon; did your Great Grandfather serve with him? Do you have a photograph you can add to www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org?



**Albert Tattersall (seated on the left of the photograph)
Manchester Regiment, Service #3041**

From the records found on *Lives of the First World War* we can see that Albert was one of seven children born to a family from Moston, Manchester. He and his brothers John and Norman joined the 20 Battalion, Manchester Regiment, known as the 5th City Pals. Some of Albert's personal belongings are on display in the exhibition *From Street to Trench: A World War that Shaped a Region* at IWM North, including his ID tags, pocket bible and cigarette tin.

The three brothers arrived in France in December 1915. Six months later, Albert was the only one still involved in the fighting. John had been injured and Norman was serving behind the lines.

Albert Tattersall wrote home to his parents in December 1915, saying *'The trenches are in a rotten condition with water and mud, but I am not grumbling because war is hard at any time'*.

On 1 July 1916, Albert was one of many men from the North West to line up for the attack on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. He was wounded in the attack near Mametz. Two days later he died of his wounds, aged 23.

We would very much like to find stories and anecdotes about Albert; did your Great Grandfather serve with him? Share your stories at www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org



Thomas William Stratford
South Wales Borderers, Service #5555

Thomas, known as Tom, Stratford was the eldest of three brothers who all served during the First World War. He was a professional soldier who had volunteered in 1897.

After serving in South Africa and India, by the time war was declared Tom was a Sergeant serving in China with 2 Battalion, South Wales Borderers. There, alongside a Sikh regiment, he took part in the Japanese led attack on the German fort at Tsingtao in the autumn of 1914.

By 1915 the South Wales Borderers were in Gallipoli where Tom was wounded by an explosion. He recovered in time to re-join the battalion before they were sent to France. In May 1916 we believe he took part in a raid on the German position on Hawthorn Ridge that would later be destroyed in the first mine explosion on 1 July 1916 and become famous in the film *The Battle of the Somme*. He was severely wounded in the raid and returned to the UK to be discharged after almost 20 years of service. In 1917 he married and later had a daughter. Tom died in 1935.

Tom's brothers William fought with the Australian Light Horse in the Middle East and Edward with the Middlesex and London Regiments in Egypt and France. His sister Martha lost her fiancé Horace in the fighting near Jerusalem but later married Bill, who had served with the Canadians. This was a truly global conflict.

Martha kept the photos, postcards and letters from her brothers and friends until she moved to a nursing home. These fragments of the past, rescued from the rubbish, were one of the inspirations behind *Lives of the First World War*.

Do you have photos, postcards and letters that could inspire you to discover, remember and share your First World War connections online at www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org?

Further Quotes

Diane Lees, Director General of IWM said; 'IWM was established while the First World War was still being fought so that future generations would remember the toil and sacrifice of those who served and were impacted by the conflict that changed the world. Now that the First World War is outside living memory, it is more important than ever that we encourage today's generation to learn more about those men and women and their experiences from 1914-18. *Lives of the First World War* will be a fantastic platform for that throughout the centenary and will become a significant resource for future generations too.'

Annelies van den Belt, CEO of DC Thomson Family History said: 'We are proud that our collaboration with IWM has resulted in this important digital memorial to the men and women who contributed to the First World War. This is only the beginning for the website which will develop steadily over the coming months. We can't wait to see how members of the public will bring the pages alive with their own knowledge and mementoes.'

Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport said: 'This is a brilliant and very important project. One of the most potent ways of bringing that time alive in people's minds is to tell the story in terms of the individual people who contributed. *Lives of the First World War* uses the internet to do just that, creating a collection of images, stories and memories that will fascinate, educate and enlighten people for generations to come.'

Richard Grayson, Chair of IWM's Digital Projects Academic Advisory Group said: '*Lives of the First World War* offers an exceptional opportunity for the public and academics to work together in writing new histories of the war. The public will bring expertise and energy to the study of the war, and have much to contribute to uncovering lost histories, especially of local communities. Their work is also essential for constructing the 'big data' which we all need to be able to understand issues from the physical condition of soldiers to how much time was spent at the fighting front.'

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For further information and interviews

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Images are available via IWM's press extranet

To download images, visit:
<http://press.iwm.org.uk>
Username: First World War
Password: IWM/press

Please select *Lives of the First World War* on the left hand navigation.

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* launches with the records of those who served with the British Army overseas. Over the Centenary millions of additional records will be added as well as evolving site functionality, in response to the feedback and use by the public.
- *Lives of the First World War* is being delivered in partnership with DC Thomson Family History, whose other sites include findmypast, Genes Reunited, The British Newspaper Archive and Scotland's People.
- 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 not necessary to use the site at all unless visitors wish to research using premium data sets that currently exist behind pay walls or wish to access special features such as creating their own Communities. Visitors can support the permanent digital memorial and access premium genealogy research records by becoming 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*.

***Lives of the First World War* Academic Advisory Group**

Lives of the First World War is supported by a panel of experts convened by IWM to offer their advice on all Centenary Projects. The group is chaired by Professor Richard Grayson, Head of History and Professor of Twentieth Century History at Goldsmiths, University of London.

IWM's Academic Advisory Group for centenary digital projects

- Chair: Prof Richard Grayson Head of History & Professor of Twentieth Century History, Goldsmiths, University of London
- Dr Timothy Bowman Senior Lecturer in History, University of Kent
- Prof Mark Connelly Professor of Modern British Military History, University of Kent
- Catriona Crowe Head of Special Projects, National Archives of Ireland
- Dr Santanu Das Reader in English Literature, King's College London
- Prof Alison Fell Professor of French Cultural History, University of Leeds
- Prof Lorna Hughes Chair in Digital Collections, University of Wales
- Professor Alvin Jackson Richard Lodge Professor of History, University of Edinburgh
- Prof Keith Jeffery Professor of British History, Queen's University Belfast
- Prof Edgar Jones Professor of the History of Medicine and Psychiatry, Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London
- Dr Heather Jones Senior Lecturer in International History, London School of Economics
- Dr Chris Lintott Citizen Science Project Lead, Department of Physics, University of Oxford, and Director of 'Zooniverse' crowdsourcing project
- Dr Gethin Matthews Lecturer, College of Arts and Humanities, Swansea University
- Dr Helen McCartney Senior Lecturer in Defence Studies, King's College London
- Yvonne McEwen Director, Scotland's War 1914-1919, University of Edinburgh; Official Historian of the British Army Nursing Service
- Dr Jenny Macleod Lecturer in Twentieth Century History, University of Hull
- Prof Eunan O'Halpin Professor of Contemporary Irish History, Centre for Contemporary Irish History, Trinity College Dublin
- Dr Catriona Pennell Senior Lecturer in History, University of Exeter

- Dr Pierre Purseigle Senior Lecturer in Modern History, Centre for First World War Studies, University of Birmingham
- Prof Peter Simkins Visiting Lecturer, Department of History, University of Birmingham
- William Spencer Principal Military Specialist, The National Archives
- Nick Stanhope CEO, We Are What We Do
- Prof Hew Strachan Chichele Professor of the History of War, University of Oxford
- Dr Melissa Terras Director of UCL Centre for Digital Humanities, and Professor of Digital Humanities in the Department of Information Studies at University College London (UCL),
- Dr Dan Todman Senior Lecturer in History, Queen Mary, University of London

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, is transforming with new First World War Galleries and a new atrium with large object displays which will open in summer 2014 to mark the Centenary of the First World War (Please note IWM London is currently closed and will reopen on 19 July 2014). 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 of this global conflict by launching *Lives of the First World War* and leading the First World War Centenary Partnership, a vibrant, four year programme of cultural activities across the country, including the opening of brand new First World War Galleries at IWM London on 19 July 2014. For more information visit www.1914.org

DC Thomson Family History

DC Thomson Family History is a British-owned world leader in online family history, with a record of innovation. With 18 million registered users, it hosts over 1.8 billion genealogical records across its family of international brands which include household names like findmypast and Genes Reunited.

DC Thomson Family History also helps partners, such as The National Archives, the British Library and the Royal Archives, to digitise their collections.

