16,500 Conscientious Objectors records added to Lives of the First World War

For the first time, the most comprehensive record of Conscientious Objectors who did not want to fight in the First World War, will be made available to the public on IWM’s permanent digital memorial Lives of the First World War.

Lives of the First World War was launched in 2014 to mark the beginning of the First World War Centenary. Since its launch a year ago, over 7.6million life stories of the soldiers, nurses and airmen have been discovered, remembered and shared on Lives of the First World War. Over 67,000 people have contributed to date to this permanent digital memorial, uploading over 600,000 facts, photographs and personal stories.

So far, the majority of data sets in Lives of the First World War have been those who served in the Armed Forces, RAF and Navy. However, from 15 May (International Conscientious Objectors Day) the Pearce Register comprised of over 16,500 records of men who refused to go to war on religious, ethical, political or social grounds will be added to the website.

The register has been collated by Cyril Pearce, former Senior Lecturer at the University of Leeds, over the past 20 years. Pearce’s research has been sourced from documents, letters, images, tribunal records and diaries to provide the world’s most comprehensive list of First World War Conscientious Objectors.

Now Lives of the First World War needs the public to help complete these records by adding more information, from attributing facts, uploading photographs through to actively remembering the individuals who opposed active service on moral, religious and political grounds.

Stories such as the following will feature on the site (more information below):

- John Wilfred Harvey, a Quaker who served with the Friends’ Ambulance Unit in both France and Corsica
- William Harrison who was court-martialled and sentenced to hard labour in Wormwood Scrubs, he would not be freed until 1919.
- Joseph Alfred Pearson from New Brighton gave up his CO after brutal treatment at Birkenhead barracks, was sent to France and was killed outside Ypres.**

Cyril Pearce, Lecturer and owner of The Pearce Register says “I am delighted to be contributing The Pearce Register to IWM’s permanent digital memorial Lives of the First World War. Ahead of the centenary of Conscription I hope many more people will be able to contribute to the work I’ve already done and that thousands more will learn about this alternative history of the First World War.”

Diane Lees, IWM Director-General says, “IWM launched Lives of the First World War a year ago and since then we have added over seven and half million records. Now with the inclusion of The Pearce Register we can realise our vision to create a memorial to every man and woman who contributed to society during this conflict. We are grateful to Cyril for sharing his work with us and we hope many more people will contribute to the unique and fascinating life stories of the conscientious objectors who risked so much on principle, political or religious grounds.”
Dan Snow, Lives of the First World War Ambassador says, “The First World War touched the lives of so many millions of men, women and children stretching from the front line back to the coal mine. It shaped the lives of everyone. Sailors of the merchant navy, armament workers, horse wranglers, and countless other people played an enormous role. So too did those who refused to fight. They made very brave decisions to stand up to the politicians and generals, and reject their call to arms. Now the IWM is quite rightly putting Conscientious Objectors on its fantastic and ambitious Lives of the First World War. Their inclusion is vital if we’re to get a real snapshot of society as a whole.”

Ends

For further information, images and interviews please contact:

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Case Studies:

John Wilfred Harvey
D.O.B 16 February 1889
Previous occupation – University lecturer, Birmingham
- John was a Quaker working with the Friends’ Ambulance Unit in France and Belgium from November 1914 – 1915.
- He later served with the Relief Unit in Corsica, March 1916 — September 1917, and with the Ambulance Train No 16 in France, Feb 1918 — Jan 1919.

Whilst serving in Corsica he wrote this letter home expressing his distress at the thought of conscription:

‘April 10th 1916

Dear father,
I am writing to you a statement respecting my application for exemption under the military service act.

I apply total exemption from the provisions of the act. The ground of my claim is that of conscientious objection.

Though I am not prepared to affirm that taking of human life must in all circumstances be wrong I sincerely believe that the indiscriminate taking of human life inheritable to war is not only morally wrong but an offence against the will of God.’

William Harrison
William Harrison was a man of deep-seated spiritual principles: a lifelong vegetarian, teetotaller, pacifist and Christian. His conscience told him that the conflict was wrong.

He faced such hostility locally for his views that he moved to Bradford to join the No-Conscription Fellowship group which was opposed to compulsory recruitment.

He was arrested in March 1917, court-martialed and sentenced to hard labour in Wormwood Scrubs, London and Newcastle prisons.

He was not freed until April 1919.

In 1916 he told his local Military Service Tribunal: 'War inevitably means that the nations involved degenerate and become like brutes. This contention is supported by the facts of the present day. 'Love, mercy, pity, tenderness and forgiveness, things which our Master Jesus bids us practise, are all gone. I love my country too dearly to assist it in coming to such a deplorable state.'

Joseph Alfred Pearson

Joseph Pearson was a Baptist and member of the NCF (No-Conscription Fellowship) from New Brighton

Joseph was drafted into a combatant unit and disobeyed orders. At Birkenhead Barracks he was ill-treated, and forced to give up his conscientious objection to join the Cheshire Regiment.

During his service he was sent to France and killed outside Ypres on

After Joseph's death, his mother refused to accept his Next of Kin Memorial scroll and plaque but, in 1922, his father, Alfred Owen Pearson, accepted Joseph's medals.

Notes to Editors:

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.

About The Pearce Register of British WW1 Conscientious Objectors

This collection provides the details of around 18,000 individuals who refused conscription to the British armed services during the First World War on grounds of conscience - known as ‘Conscientious Objectors’. We are grateful to Cyril Pearce, former Senior Lecturer at the University of Leeds, for the kind donation of this data. Compiled over 20 years, the database delivers a great variety of facts and events about the lives of British conscientious objectors from WW1.

About Lives of the First World War

The total number of life stories available to search on the site now stands at 7,645,814 out of 8 million men and women who served. To date 115,861 life stories have been remembered on Lives of the First World War (as of 23 April).

- 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.
- 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 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 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 Greyson, Head of History and Professor of Twentieth Century History at Goldsmiths, 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, 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 mark the centenary by leading a vibrant, four year programme of cultural activities across the world.

For more information visit 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.