

Commemorations organised for The Centenary

By Chay Quinn

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Image: Katzenfee50

With the centenary of the end of the First World War fast approaching, commemorations of the armistice which ended the four years of conflict in 1918 are upon us. The University of York will be hosting three public lectures on events surrounding the conflict both on and off-campus.

The first lecture will take place in the Piazza Building on Campus East on 14 November, three days after The Centenary. It will focus on the discovery of letters from the wives and mothers of men who were missing or killed during the First World War. The talk will be led by Dr. Roisin Higgins of Teeside University.

The second lecture will be on the deadly "Spanish Flu" pandemic of 1918 which killed between 50- 100 million in the final months of the war. The epidemic, which claimed more lives than the global conflict that was concurrently raging, will be explored in relation to the personal stories of its victims. The lecture will be delivered by Catharine Arnold, a journalist and author, on 21 November.

The third and final lecture will be on the role of music in the AngloAmerican forces during the war. William Brooks, Patricia Hammond and Matt Redman will deliver the lecture in the National Centre for Early Music on Percy's Lane on, 27 November.

When asked about YUSU's plans to commemorate the Centenary, YUSU president James Durcan responded: "As is the normal practice, we support any student group wanting to put on events for any purpose they identify, and this results in hundred of events every term. This year there is a free event being hosted in the YUSU Lounge which is a performance piece "My Tender Trench", a play about life in

the trenches and the difficulties faced by a young soldier. In the lead up to the centenary, students will be able to purchase both red and white poppies from YUSU venues.”

In preparation for The Centenary, a York alumnus has made an interactive map which details the residence and stories of the fallen soldiers from York and the surrounding area. The map features 70 homes of 158 men from or with close connections to the St Lawrence’s parish who were killed in the 1914-1918 conflict.

The map was created by Iain Milne of York’s St. Lawrence Parish Church as part of their commemorations of The Centenary. When Nouse spoke to Iain about his motivations for creating the interactive map, the former History undergraduate spoke of his studies as a factor of the creation of this deeply personal resource: “When I was an undergraduate (BA History, York) I was quite struck with Marc Bloch’s stress on the importance of history as a study of people, and so, in a way I also found it a good and interesting way of re-examining what the War was like, freed from preconceptions”.

Iain created the map using sources from the ‘Lives of the First World War’ project at the Imperial War Museum and online record of the King’s Book of York Heroes, which currently resides in York Minster. He found difficulty in finding addresses of the fallen and ended up, he admitted with “information on many more men than I have an address for”.

When asked about his motivations for creating the map, Milne stated that the “enormous list of names [of the fallen] in church every week” inspired guilt in him that their youth was cut short and that he lived. This stirred a desire in Milne to “do something for them”. He also stated that he hoped the map would help people “reconnect” with the true meanings of loss and human cost in a way that has slipped out of memory. Ultimately, Iain wanted to “get beyond a long dry list of names to the humanity underneath.”

Nouse asked Iain if there were any particular stories that stood out to him, to which he responded: “Two I personally think of a lot are Richard Ferry and George Betts who both left mothers’ doors from each other in the terraced houses of Arthur Street – they joined different regiments, but transferred to be in the same regiment. It is only guesswork but I imagine that both they and their mothers knew each other. They were both killed in April 1917 in the trenches. One left a mother living in my house.”

The Centenary of the Armistice takes place on 11 November at 11am, marked with a two minutes’ silence nationwide, to remember the fallen from the conflict which claimed between 15 and 19 million lives.



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