



The Fusilier Museum

WARWICK

Newsletter | June 2026



To be free or not to be free – that is the question!

It is the aim of any accredited museum is to be as accessible and inclusive as possible. This may be in the programme being offered, how it is presented, and how physical and intellectual barriers to its access are overcome or limited. One common barrier, and one facing visitors to the Fusilier Museum Warwick, is the charge for admission. The decision to do so is not taken lightly; there is a financial reality that costs of staffing and accommodation need to be covered. But is there a way in which the museum can be free at the point of entry and still raise a comparable income from other sources? During May, the trustees agreed that the museum could offer free admission on the Easter weekend and two May bank holidays. The results in visitor numbers saw a 300% increase on previous years. The income generated through donations and shop purchases for these free days is still being analysed, but it is likely that this experiment in free admission will be tried again during the summer to determine which direction the museum may go in. Whatever the outcome, the need to raise money through museum visits will be essential so that the Fusilier Museum Warwick can keep preserving collections and telling the regiment's stories for future generations.

A successful Family History Day

On the 2nd April, the museum hosted a successful family history event with contributions from museum staff and volunteers, regimental enthusiasts Paul Jaques and Dave Vaux and our colleagues at Warwickshire County Record Office. The different presentations and displays provided illuminating insight into how to do family history research on military records and the wonderful stories they can reveal.

'Trench Talks' – a new series of short YouTube videos on the collection

With the help of museum volunteers Jess, Martin and Graham, the museum is producing a series of short films exploring the stories behind specific objects in the displays. Martin and Graham's natural and informative chats provide fascinating and entertaining insight into museum collections. To check these out go to: Fusilier Museum Warwick - YouTube Several more are currently under production.

Improving expertise on the use of the MODES museum database

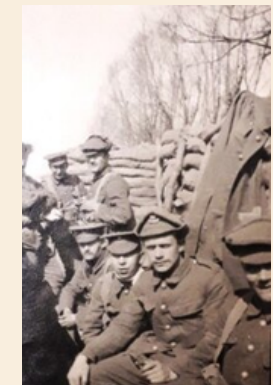
During May, staff have been attending a few free on-line training courses offered by the National Army Museum (NAM) on the MODES database. This database is used by at least 800 museums in the UK including the Fusilier Museum Warwick. Like any computer software, MODES has the power to do a lot more things than the average user tends to use. These advanced training courses showed that it possible to add images, films and sound files to individual object entries as well update multiple records in one go. A lot to take in, but we will be looking to greatly improve the quality and usefulness of our MODES records. An effective database lies at the core of how we manage the collections and make them accessible.

Somme 110 – volunteer teamwork!

Three of our museum volunteers are currently working on a new temporary exhibition project. 'Faces of the Somme' which commemorates the 110th anniversary of one of the most significant campaigns of the First World War. Barclay has been surveying through the museum's WW1 war diaries to uncover soldier's stories, Graham, sourcing objects in the collection linked to the Somme Offensive and Anne using official war diaries to pick out the movements of the different battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Together, they are creating a vivid and detailed picture of soldiers of the regiment to form a fitting memorial to this great conflict. The exhibition opens on the 1st July – 110 years to the day when the Somme offensive started.



So, Graham, these two truncheons here, used in warfare,



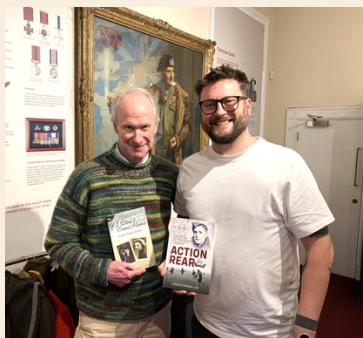
NEWS BULLETIN

In this newsletter: an overview of the museum's summer talks and new Somme exhibition, and an article analysing the significance of the military jackets held in our collection by Sophia Harberd.



2026 Summer Programme

In this issue we look at the museum's summer programme. These include a very special D-Day event on Saturday 6th June and an exhibition and talks programme marking the 110th anniversary of the Somme, one of most devastating conflicts of the First World War.



Exhibition: Faces From The Somme - Stories From The Royal Warwickshire Regiment in 1916

1st July – 2nd December 2026. (Admission included in museum ticket).

To mark the 110th anniversary of the Somme Offensive, the museum will present individual stories of soldiers of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment displayed through many diary entries, photos and objects. The exhibition will show the uniform and equipment of rival combatants, the fate of the regiment on 1st July 1916 - the bloodiest day in British Army history - the individual journeys of soldiers and officers who served during the conflict and the aftermath of the Somme. Rather than tell a comprehensive story of the Somme Offensive, this exhibition hopes to reveal some of the human stories hidden behind the startling statistics of injuries and fatalities in the conflict.



Talks event: Voices From Normandy 1944 – The Royal Warwickshire Regiment

6th June 2026, 11am -3pm, Alderson House, Warwick

A very special historical commemoration marking the 82nd anniversary of the 1944 D-Day landings in Normandy and the western liberation of Europe. Lead by Chris Cox, author of *Action Rear*, a history of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in Normandy 1944, various family members both young and old will explore the accounts of relations who served in the Normandy campaign. This event will also be supported by re-enactors from the Royal Warwickshire Regiment Reenactors group, dressed and equipped as soldiers of the Normandy landings. For more details go to the museum website: <https://fusiliermuseumwarwick.com>



Talks event: The Battle of the Somme 1916, Revisited

4th July 2026, 11am – 3pm, Alderson House, Warwick

To support the Somme 110 exhibition, we have two major talks events looking at this major historic conflict in a new light. The first of these on the 4th July will be led by historian Gary Sheffield who will revisit the Somme and its significance within the Great War. This will be followed by Alan Reed, an experienced battlefield guide, who will take us on an exploration of the physical landscape of the Somme 1916. Finally, Paul Jaques and David Vaux will present a highly visual talk on the Royal Warwickshire Regiment at the Somme illustrated with original artefacts and images. To book go to: <https://fusiliermuseumwarwick.com>

Two Jackets, Two Stories: Reading Military Dress in the Fusilier Collection

by museum volunteer, Sophia Harberd

From Napoleonic-era scarlet cloth to a First World War service dress cut open in an emergency, these objects show how textiles hold history in their fibres.

The costume collection at the Fusilier Museum, Warwick contains a rich range of military dress, reflecting both the changing appearance of uniform and the lived realities behind it. Historic garments are often among the most revealing objects in a museum collection, as they preserve not only design and construction, but also signs of wear, damage, alteration, and survival. The two jackets discussed here, separated by a century and markedly different in appearance, offer an excellent example of how military textiles can illuminate both individual stories and wider historical contexts.

Our first khaki service dress jacket is immediately striking for the damage it bears: the cut sleeve, tear across the back, and exposed inner layers mark it as an object that retains direct evidence of wartime use and injury. The jacket is recorded as having belonged to Bernard “Monty” Montgomery, later Field Marshal Montgomery of Alamein, and as having been worn by Captain C. T. Tomes when he was wounded at Ypres in 1915. The combination of notable provenance and visible physical evidence makes it one of the most compelling textile objects in the collection.

Most notable is the damage to the sleeve and upper back. At first glance, the cut sleeve might be mistaken for evidence of the loss of a limb, but this was not the case. Instead, the fabric was cut away by a surgeon in order to gain swift access to a gunshot wound to the arm, while the damage across the back is thought to have been caused by shrapnel. Together, these features form an important part of the jacket’s significance, the fabric itself preserving a thread of connection between the present and Captain Tomes’s personal experience at Ypres.

In preserving this connection to Captain Tomes’s experience, the jacket also opens onto the wider history of Ypres in 1915 – one of the most intense and costly theatres of the First World War.

Fighting in and around the city was marked by severe casualties,

harsh conditions, and the grinding realities of trench warfare on the Western Front. This jacket was part of a uniform of practical working dress and equipment worn in physically demanding and often dangerous circumstances, becoming a tangible reminder of the lived realities of wartime service.

The damage also offers an unusual opportunity to examine the jacket’s construction. The exposed areas reveal not only the wool outer cloth, but also the internal layers that gave the garment its shape and resilience. These details reflect the practical demands placed on military uniform in active service. In most surviving garments these constructional details remain hidden, but here the damage has inadvertently exposed features that are rarely so clearly visible.

There is a pronounced contrast between the garment’s torn and battle-marked condition and the fact that it has, at some stage, been dry cleaned. Today, its care relies on careful preventive measures: minimal handling, support from a padded hanger shaped to the correct size, and the use of a protective cover to guard against dust and snagging. Adequate space on storage rails is also essential, helping to prevent creasing, abrasion, and further strain to weakened areas. Photography and clear labelling support both cataloguing and access, reducing the need for repeated handling or unnecessary exposure to light.



From a collections perspective, the jacket's significance also rests in the marks it still bears. Cataloguing and preservation aim to record, stabilise, and protect that evidence, rather than return the object to an artificial condition of completeness. In textile collections, damage can hold important historical meaning, revealing how a garment was worn and the circumstances through which it passed. Preserving such traces allows the object to remain legible both as a garment and as a historical document.



Where the First World War service dress jacket is compelling for the damage it bears, this earlier piece stands out for its remarkable state of preservation. Recorded in the museum's collections as a scarlet coatee to an officer of the 5th Warwick Local Militia, dating from 1809 to 1814, it survives with exceptional clarity of colour and form. The rich scarlet cloth, set against yellow facings, still conveys the bold visual language of early nineteenth-century military dress. For an object of this age, its condition is extraordinary.

Even in storage, removed from the movement and ceremony for which it was designed, the coatee retains a strong sense of presence. Wider evidence for Warwickshire militia dress helps place it in context, with the county militia recorded by 1800 as wearing red with yellow facings, while later sources for the period confirm yellow facings and silver metal for officers.

In the closing years of the Napoleonic Wars, locally raised militia units formed an important part of Britain's domestic defence structure. Material in the museum's reference collection notes that Warwickshire's earlier volunteer corps were replaced in 1809 by five battalions of local militia, which continued until 1814. In wartime, such forces supported home defence and helped release regular army units for service elsewhere, while also assisting civil authorities at a time before the development of modern policing. For some men of socially prominent background, militia officer appointments carried attractions beyond military duty. Uniform and rank brought visible prestige, social authority, and a status that extended well beyond parade or drill. A coatee such as this would have been worn not only in training and mobilisation, but also in the wider social life of the period, including occasions such as church and parties, where appearance and rank remained closely bound together.

Closer examination reveals the coatee's condition in more detail – minor insect damage, areas of general staining, fading to the cuffs, and stress at the shoulder seam all speak to its age and long history. Its scale is perhaps most surprising by modern standards. So petite is the garment that it does not fit even a child mannequin, and would require a custom-made support for safe display. Its proportions offer a vivid reminder that average body size in the early nineteenth century differed from that of today, while also bringing its original wearer more sharply into view.

The contrast between the vivid yellow collar and the more muted facings and cuffs raises useful questions about the coatee's history of use and storage. Uneven fading in historic textiles can arise from a range of causes, including light exposure, differences in dye stability, wear, handling, or earlier environmental conditions, and without technical analysis it is not possible to attribute that change to any single factor with certainty. From a conservation perspective, the coatee now requires careful preventive care, including proper support in storage, protection from dust and unnecessary light exposure, and minimal handling, with photography and clear cataloguing records helping to reduce the need for repeated access.



Set beside the service dress jacket worn by Captain C. T. Tomes, this coatee offers a quieter, but no less powerful form of evidence. One survives marked by war and urgent intervention; the other through the long endurance of cloth, colour, and tailoring. Together, they show how military garments can outlive their original moment and continue to speak through the stories held in their threads. Both have moved far beyond their original function, becoming material witnesses not only to military service, but also to the care and stewardship that have shaped their survival. Without museum collections, many of these material connections to the past would be lost. Through cataloguing, preservation, and research, museums such as the Fusilier Museum keep such histories visible rather than allowing them to fade silently from view.