The Fusilier Museum

WARWICK

E-Newsletter - December 2024

MUSEUM NEWS

LOOKING TO 2025



November and December are traditionally quieter months in the museum's calendar, although between the many volunteer projects going on, special group visits, outreach programmes in schools and the Christmas Tree Festival at St. Mary's I am not convinced this is necessarily the case! However, the focus of activity in this period has moved from public-facing delivery more to reflection on how the year has gone and planning for the programmes and activities in the year to come.

One area where the museum has really progressed this year has been in its temporary exhibition programme. This has been partly due to the commemoration of two key anniversaries in 2024 – D Day 80 and the 350th anniversary of the Warwickshire Regiment's foundation - which we hope we did justice to through exhibitions and associated events. The biggest surprise of the year was the regimental embroidery exhibition which launched in early 2024. This attracted new audiences to the museum and garnered positive comment from regular visitors and produced a 30% increase in visitors to the museum from the same period in 2023.



For next year, therefore, it is imperative that we offer a broad range of temporary exhibitions to enhance the core offer of the museum. To that end, staff and volunteers have been doing research in preparation for three temporary exhibitions next year surveying the archives and the museum collections for relevant material. The three exhibitions, we hope, will promise something of interest for a wide arrange of audiences while at the same time fulfil the museum's core mission to educate people about the Warwickshire Regiment, its history and people.

The first exhibition opening February 2025 will explore the relationship between soldiers and food from army rations to soldiers and prisoners-of-war accounts of how they experienced feast or famine, as well as the lavish ceremony of the officers' mess hall banquets. The second exhibition, launched to coincide with VE80, will look at the regiment in the final year of World War Two with the key personalities and stories that emerge. Finally, to coincide with the beginning of the summer holiday but running on into the autumn, is an exhibition on Football and War. This explores the stories of the professional footballers who joined the regiment, the place football played both on the frontline and in the training of reserve soldiers, football competitions and trophies won and the stories around football on the Homefront which included the rehabilitation of injured soldiers from the combat zones and the growth of women ammunition factory teams. More details about the exhibitions can be found below and each will be supported by events where acknowledged experts will provide insight into the lives of soldiers of the Royal Warwickshire regiment against the backdrop of wider historical events. We hope 2025 is going to be a great year for visitor experience and that you will want to be part of it.



–Chris Kirby, General Manager

www.fusiliermuseumwarwick.com

CURRENT PROJECTS

The museum manages different projects that will both enhance the access to the collections, promote the Regiment's story and provide opportunities to generate funding essential to the organisation's future.

Textile Conservation Project





The Museum Development Midlands (MDM) funded conservation project on the museum's embroidery collection is well underway. Many conservation materials have arrived, and textile conservator Victoria Allan is leading a series of workshops to instruct six volunteers and staff to develop the skills to improve the care of this delicate but important collection. The first three workshops have focussed on the preparation and mounting of large Victorian embroideries probably done by soldiers of the regiment while based in India.

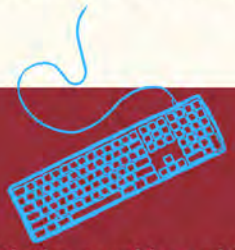
These embroideries had been rolled and stored in boxes or framed a long time ago with their cotton backing nailed into a wood frame. In either case, the embroideries have been vulnerable to damage – in the case of the framed works from rusty nails and warped frames and for the rolled works, the increased brittleness of threads under stress.

Victoria's solution has been to mount these embroideries on cloth-lined Correx panels – a material that is non-reactive, light and rigid. The process of creating the mounted boards is quite painstaking involving the covering the boards in washed calico material and sewing the edges to provide a perfect surface to mount the vacuumed and stretched-out embroidery which are sewn into place....

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Virtual Exhibitions Project



The museum is in the early stages of discuss with its sister Fusilier Museum at Bury about a joint initiative working with a digital designer to bring temporary exhibitions on-line. The premise of the project is that the considerable amount of research and content development that is done to launch temporary exhibitions disappears into a file or the bin when those shows close. In some cases, like the museum's D Day 80 exhibition, many of the objects on display are borrowed from private lenders and are returned at the end of the exhibition, never to be seen in public again.

The project objective is to capture the key content of the temporary exhibitions that both museums produce - images, text, video etc. to create a coherent on-line resource that can have long term user benefit after the actual exhibition itself has long closed and been dispersed. Ultimately, a project of this nature will need some substantial investment to take off, but for now the two fusilier museums are undertaking a feasibility study with the designer to look at how it might work. Watch this space for further news!

If you can donate funds to help the Fusilier Museum Warwick. please donate and make a difference - https://bit.ly/42gfULs

CURRENT PROJECTS

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Textile Conservation Project

Continued



The result is to produce a display of the embroidery looking at it best without creases or folds, that is easy to handle, store and display.

This work will take well into the next year to complete but will transform the way this collection is managed.

Other areas of work will include the rolling of larger textiles onto rollers and eventually also large flags (currently folded and boxed) which will be placed onto big rollers and specially mounted either onto a wall or shelving. Workshops into the New Year will train staff and volunteers into best techniques for all this work.



The final workshops will look at general techniques for best safeguarding the care of textiles and these will also include the handling of the museum's large costume collection.

We are extremely grateful to Museum Development Midlands (MDM) for making all this possible. Once the project has been completed in 2025, we will planning a new exhibition for the following year to show this fascinating collection at its very best.



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Object of the Month:

Museum volunteer Graham Roberts explores World War One Silk Postcards from the collection and elsewhere.



The museum recently had a very popular exhibition on embroidery, included in this were some exhibits of World War One embroidered silk postcards.

The embroidered silk postcard was a common souvenir of the First World War. They were very popular with British soldiers who often sent or brought them home. Many have survived and they can now be found and displayed in many private postcard collections, Regimental museums, online auction sites, Antique fairs and centres and amongst family memorabilia.

Although millions of these postcards were produced between 1914-1918, they had first been available in France and Switzerland in the late 1890s and sent as sentimental greetings in France. The British companies of Stevens and Grant began manufacturing them in Coventry in around 1903.

During the early part of the war most postcards manufactured during this period were hand made by Belgian refugees and women living in towns near the front lines both in France and Belgium. They saw this as an opportunity to make money by using their embroidery skills to produce these beautiful souvenirs for soldiers and a small cottage industry began. These homesick servicemen bought and sent these cards along with messages to their dear ones back home. Depending on the design, an embroidered silk postcard could cost a soldier around one shilling or the equivalent of a day's pay.

The postcards were sold in thin paper envelopes but were seldom sent through the post as they were too fragile. Usually, they were sent in a separate envelope accompanied by a written letter to home. Many postcards are found blank, although some did have written messages on the reverse. The silk design is hand-embroidered in coloured thread with a surrounding frame of embossed paper which holds the piece of silk in place. The designs on the cards were generally patriotic or sentimental with such wording examples as "To the Dear Ones at Home", "Forever Yours", "Merry Xmas", "Right is Might".



Some cards were created with a pocket in which a tiny, printed card could be found. Some of these cards were illustrated by prolific artists such as Raphael Kirchner and Xavier Sager. Occasionally a small silk handkerchief was inserted instead of a card.



As the war progressed and the demand for these cards grew, this small cottage industry began to employ the use of machines to produce images en-masse. The designs were repeat embroidered on long strips of silk mesh. Once completed, they were sent to factories in cities such as Paris for finishing. There, they were cut into individual pieces and mounted onto postcards. Later card designs featured photographs of Allied leaders and cap badge insignia of individual regiments. It is thought that there were over 400 different designs or images.



A set of 66 cards known as the FLAME SERIES were produced as early as 1914 by French company E Deffrene of 7 Rue Montmartre Paris and depicted such scenes as an historic French or Belgian church or cathedral in flames after being bombarded. This series has now become quite collectable.

Once received at home many of these cards became treasured souvenirs and may have been the last item sent from the front lines. Some were framed or had a photo inserted of a loved one who never returned home.

These postcards with their delicate craftsmanship concealed the appalling conditions endured by soldiers living in the trenches and protected their loved ones back home from the reality of a brutal war.



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VISITOR NEWS







October Half-Term

The culmination of a month of events commemorating the 350th anniversary of the Warwickshire Regiment was the '350 Years of Living History' event on Saturday 26th October. We were joined by no less than five re-enactors from the Royal Warwickshire Regiment Living History Group dressed in uniforms and kit from World War One, World War Two, the 1960s and Northern Ireland in the 1980s. The museum is grateful to the time the reenactors gave to share their knowledge and demonstrate living examples of soldiers of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and Royal Regiment of Fusiliers through the 20th Century. One young man and his mother was particularly impressed with the experience they received at the event and wrote us a fantastic review on TripAdvisor. This was what part of it said:

'We had a wonderful morning at the Fusilier Museum. We planned to go today as it was the 350th anniversary of the founding of the regiment and I'd read there would be people in dress. It did not disappoint. The staff were both knowledgeable and friendly (even letting us put our bags in their office!). They looked after my 8 year old son, showing him a new costume that had just been made, getting him the correct hat to match and encouraging him in the crafts area.....

Across the hall, we were very lucky to see a number of men who had come for the anniversary, dressed through the ages. It was so lovely to see youngsters also involved in this hobby, spending their Saturday talking to visitors to the museum.....The actual museum is small but perfectly formed...'

School Assemblies on Remembrance at Myton School

As part of their commitment to Remembrance Day, Myton Secondary School and Sixth Form invited the museum to put on a series of assemblies about the importance of remembrance using examples linked to the Warwickshire Regiment. With the help of museum volunteers Barclay and Graham, we put on six assemblies covering Years 7, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 13, in total over 1,400 students. The assemblies included a vivid scene setting of the experiences of a WW1 soldier by Barclay and the telling of the story of Victoria Cross winner William Amey (while dressed in WW1 uniform) with examples of how he has been subsequently remembered.

The story was brought up to date with a discussion about the remembrance of soldiers from Afghanistan and the poem 'In Helmand's Fields'. The response from the school was very positive. The Head of the History Department told us that: 'Students really enjoyed the links to local history and found speakers engaging. Teachers felt this helped develop understanding of the importance of remembrance and support other aspects (form sessions and Myton Remembers services).'We hope to do more outreach work of this nature with schools during 2025.

CREATIVE CORNER

Creative writing linked to the Regiment.







A poem about the Third Division which had been on display in the D Day 80 exhibition, 'Ashore We Stumbled' inspired a member of a local poetry group, Ron Betts, to submit a work he had written on the anniversary of the end of the Great War.

A CENTURY LESSON – "Fall Again"

100 YEARS HAVE PASSED FOR US TO LEARN
YET STILL TO WAR, SOME YEARN AND YEARN
SOLDIERS STILL FALL OR LIVE AN INJURED LIFE - FALL AGAIN!
TRYING TO UPHOLD A MORAL STANCE
POLITICIAN'S ROAR – ADVANCE, ADVANCE
SOLDIERS STILL FALL OR LIVE AN INJURED LIFE - FALL AGAIN!

WEAPONS AND MUNITIONS MADE AND SOLD
LEADERS JUSTIFY AND OFFER REWARDS - BOLD!
SOLDIERS STILL FALL OR LIVE AN INJURED LIFE - FALL AGAIN!
HISTORY HAS FLOWN AND FLOWN
WINDS OF CHANGE HAVE BLOWN
100 YEARS HAVE PASSED FOR US TO LEARN

Ron Betts 11- 11 - 2018

If you have a piece of creative writing related in some way to the history of the Warwickshire Regiment that you would to share with the e-newsletter readership, please contact general.manager@fusiliermuseumwarwick.com

MUSEUM EVENTS FOR 2025

Here is a brief overview of the temporary exhibition programme for 2025. These will be supported by a range of events including themed family activities during the holiday periods. Remember to save the dates in your diary!





V80





Rations & Cookers – 200 Years of Food in the British Army

15th February – 26th April 2025

This exhibition will explore the changing nature of military food and technology over time from army issued rations, soldier and prisoner-of-war accounts of their experience of food, and the ceremony associated with banquets in the officers' mess hall. Comparisons will be made between the experiences of soldiers two hundred years ago and one hundred years ago, to the rations and food technology used by Fusiliers in the modern British Army.

Victory 80 – The Royal Warwickshire Regiment and the End of World War Two

3rd May – 12th July 2025

As part of the international commemoration to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of WW2 in Europe and later the surrender of Japan, this exhibition will explore the activities of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in 1945 including the individual stories of some of its soldiers. Using a wide range of objects, photos and documents, the regiment's role in war will be assessed as well as the legacy it created.

Victory 80 Event Day



10th May, Warwick Courthouse

A series of expert speakers led by well-known military historian Peter Hart, will explore the role of the Royal Warwickshire in the last stages of World War Two. Tickets for this catered event will shortly be on sale through Eventbrite.

War & Football – How 'the beautiful game' played out in the lives of the Regiment



26th July–1st November 2025

This exhibition will explore the different roles football has played in soldiers' lives: the stories of the professional footballers who joined the regiment, the place football played both on the frontline and in the training of reserve soldiers, football competitions and trophies won and the stories around football on the Homefront including its role in the rehabilitation of injured soldiers returned from combat zones and in the rise of the women ammunition factory worker teams.