

# Glasgow University's Great War

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*Report to the Chancellor's Fund on the first six months, 1 October 2014*



“ With so many of our number under arms and away from us, it would be foolish to pretend that the spirit of studentdom has remained unaltered. Much of the zest has gone from our work, and much more from our play – the times have changed... ”

*-Glasgow University Magazine*



University  
of Glasgow



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## Introduction

Glasgow University's Great War, a research project led by Dr Tony Pollard, explores the experiences of the university community during the First World War. Over 4,000 members of the extended University of Glasgow community served in the war and 761 lost their lives. This includes students, academic, administrative and support staff, as well as many individuals who trained at the university's Officer Training Corps. The project is building upon the university's First World War Roll of Honour, an excellent online resource. The project will continue to document the lives of individuals who were impacted by the war, as well as reflecting more broadly upon the ways in which the First World War changed university life, from the experiences of female staff and students to the profound effects it had on professions like medicine. The project furthermore is interrogating the effects of institutional involvement in the military recruitment process, exploring alternative and dissident narratives, and unpacking key concepts of bravery and cowardice.

## Background

Students, staff, and alumni of the University played a wide range of roles in the First World War, from soldiers on active service to medics and ministry officials at home. The socio-political ramifications of the war were felt from the home front to the frontlines with direct impact upon the campus at Gilmorehill and the lives of the members of the University community. Throughout the war years, the University assembled a Roll of Service, collecting information and news clippings on members of the community on active service, compiling a Roll of Honour of those who died. The University's grand war memorial is its chapel. Designs for a new chapel were commissioned in spring of 1914, but the outbreak of war in August put a stop to the project. After the war, plans for a chapel were resurrected, but it was now envisioned as a fitting memorial for those from the University community who served and sacrificed during the war. The chapel was built in the 1920s by public subscription and officially opened in October 1929. The interior walls behind the altar feature panels inscribed with the names of alumni and staff who died in the conflict. In 2005 the University Archives digitised this Roll of Honour, creating an online searchable database that also included the names of nearly 4,000 more men and women who served and survived.

There is, therefore, a wonderful dataset generated at the time of the conflict, which has been expanded upon and curated by the University in the intervening decades. Glasgow University's Great War project is interrogating this data to find the deeper social significance of the University's war years, building up a picture of what life was like at the institution during the war and how the conflict helped to shape the University as it is today.

## Research

The initial Chancellor's Fund grant was confirmed in November 2013. The process of recruiting a Project Office commenced in December and the position started in March 2014. Since then the research conducted by Glasgow University's Great War Project has concentrated on two activities:

- Assessing resources for study in the University Archives
- Developing research strategies

A wide-ranging survey of First World War material in the archives has led to the identification of key collections, such as the records of the University Officers Training Corps and the personal papers of

staff and graduates such as Dr Honoria Keer, Professor Archibald Bowman, and Professor Sir William Macewen. The following themes have been surveyed and selected for further research in the next six months:

- The University OTC – particularly covering records of activity at camps
- University Calendar and Senate – signs of any influence on curriculum, particularly for the professions of medicine, engineering, and theology
- Student groups archives – especially SRC, student unions, student publications
- Press reporting of University activity – utilise albums of news cuttings



Figure 1 An example of some of the WWI-era records held in the University Archives

### Key output

While research is on-going and will result in formal peer-reviewed publications, including a book by the PI, Tony Pollard, the following interim research output has been generated:

- A First World War timeline that brings together international, national, regional, and university-specific events
- Précis on medics and medical training at the University of Glasgow
- Source guide for wartime issues of *Glasgow University Magazine*
- Data culled from the Roll of Honour, parsed for specific datasets like a breakdown of individuals serving with Commonwealth units
- Fresh interface for the online Roll of Honour that is more user-friendly and satisfies up-to-date University of Glasgow corporate identity and branding

The interrogation of data has led to notable new finds, for example, just over one quarter of the 4,500 individuals on the University's Roll of Service served in a medical unit during the First World War.

## Events

The project has been involved in the delivery of a number of high profile events over the past six months, highlighting the centrality of the University of Glasgow to the city of Glasgow, as well as emphasising the relevance of and interest in the project within university community and beyond.

### **Commonwealth Centenary Commemoration, 4 August 2014**

On Monday, 4 August the UK commemorated the centenary of its entry into the First World War. With the close of the Commonwealth Games just a day before, Glasgow became the locus of Commonwealth centenary commemoration. Following a memorial service in Glasgow Cathedral, officials, members of the armed forces, and dignitaries from around the Commonwealth attended a wreath-laying ceremony at the city's cenotaph in George Square and a reception in City Chambers.



**Figure 2** Students Jennifer Stewart, Katie McCrossan and Hugh Roberts, along with staff Jennifer Novotny and Tony Pollard meet the First Minister

The Great War Project was invited by the City of Glasgow's centenary project to be part of the City Chambers event. Three of our undergraduate student placements had the opportunity to share their expertise with Commonwealth dignitaries, including Prime Minister David Cameron, and First Ministers Alex Salmond, Peter Robinson, and Carwyn Jones.

### **Commemoration for Harry Sherwood Ranken VC, 25 September 2014**

On 25 September 2014 Glasgow University's Great War Project officially launched after a special commemoration service for the first war death of the university community: Capt Harry Sherwood Ranken, RAMC. Ranken graduated from the University of Glasgow MB ChB (with commendation) in 1905. He died of wounds on 25 September 1914 and was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross, the first Glasgow-born recipient of the award in the First World War.

The event hosted by the University of Glasgow was well attended, with nearly 200 staff, students, alumni, and members of the public in attendance. Key guests included Glasgow's Lord Provost, Sadie Docherty, and the descendants of Harry Ranken, including his grandnephew David Eynon and niece Betty Balfour. Never was the real-world impact of the work of the project made more clear than by the reactions of Ranken's family: the Great War Project's research is meaningful and performs real cultural work within today's modern population.



**Figure 3 Ranken's grandnephew, David Eynon, places a cross in the Garden of Remembrance**

As part of the commemorations, an alumna of the university who resides in France, Margaret Brohan, laid a wreath on Ranken's Commonwealth War Grave at Braine Cemetery. Afterwards she wrote to the project, stating:

[T]he sun was just peeping through the mist, the graveyard was silent except for a few birds chirping in the distant trees, so calm! But in my thoughts, I saw the soldiers in the cold, in the mud, in the trenches, the noise of shells falling, men shouting, men dying, the horrors of a hundred years ago! Today, they sleep peacefully under a row of white headstones. It was 12 o'clock, the *angelus* bells were ringing, life goes on...

Thus the work done so far is not only academically rigorous, challenging preconceived notions about the First World War and interrogating the experiences of the University of Glasgow community for a more nuanced understanding of life during 1914-18, but perhaps more importantly, the work resonates deeply with a range of individuals today.

### **WWI lighting project, 11 November 2014**

The project is currently working closely with the City of Glasgow and technicians from London-based company The Projection Studio to contribute content and archival material to Glasgow's special Remembrance Day event. This includes a light display that will be projected onto City Chambers. Not only have we consulted on scope and content of the presentation and contributed scans of archival images and documents, but we have put forward University of Glasgow students as voice actors to read out passages of letters and diaries.

### **In-reach and outreach**

Part of the remit of the project is to encourage engagement across university subjects and services, as well as the wider Glasgow community.

### **Interdisciplinary engagement**

The project is establishing an informal network of researchers whose work relates to the First World War era and fostering communication (and hopefully future collaboration) across colleges and schools. There has been an excellent response to an initial email survey of WWI-related research from the Colleges of Arts and Social Sciences, which has generated on-going correspondence with staff from a variety of subjects. In the next six months the survey will expand to include other colleges. This will result in the compilation of a publicly accessible WWI expert directory for the use of the wider academic community as well as popular media, the first draft of which is to be published in advance of Remembrance Day 2014.

Such internal network-building has already resulted in key relationships with staff in Theology and Religious Studies, History, Theatre, Film and Television Studies, and Urban Studies, working together to publicise events and encourage the recruitment of student internships, as well as resulting in the contribution of interdisciplinary content to the project blog. In addition, the project has supported colleagues, for example providing research to the Chaplaincy in advance of special services, and received support in turn from Estates and Buildings (creation of a memorial garden) and the Photographic Unit (on-going digitisation of WWI-related collections).

### **Student and volunteer placements**

In the first six months of the project we have worked with eleven undergraduate Club 21 student interns, one MSc Museum Studies postgraduate, and two non-student volunteers, supporting each of these individuals in undertaking archival research and continued professional development.

### **Undergraduate students**

Undergraduate students researched the biographies of international students during WWI. Three student placements, Jennifer Stewart, Hugh Roberts, and Katie McCrossan, accompanied Great War Project staff to the Commonwealth First World War Centenary wreath-laying in George Square, presenting their research to dignitaries and officials from around the Commonwealth, including the

First Ministers of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, the Prime Minister, and the Prince of Wales. In addition to this, Jennifer was interviewed about her placement with the University Archives by the media charity Fixers UK to give a young person's perspective on the First World War, which aired on STV. <http://www.fixers.org.uk/news/10619-11235/the-great-war-fix-on-stv.php>

News

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## The Great War Fix on STV

Posted On: 17th Sep 2014

Worried that not enough young people are interested in history, Jennifer Stewart from Glasgow wants to remind young people of how much they owe to the Great War.

This story will be broadcast on STV Glasgow's Riverside Show on Thursday 25th September 2014.

The 21-year-old wants to teach others about the impact of this significant battle and its repercussions.

'It's such a momentous moment in history,' explains Jennifer.

'Without the First World War you can argue that the Second World War wouldn't have happened.

'Women's positions would be different. We wouldn't have the same medical advances that we have now and technology wouldn't be the same.

'It created a completely different society.'

In the broadcast, Jennifer visits Glasgow University and tours the sites that played a part in the discussions





surrounding the years 1914-1918.

**Figure 4** Student placement Jennifer Stewart talks about her research to filmmakers

### **Postgraduate students**

A postgraduate student, Michael O'Brien, worked closely with project staff to plan and install a special exhibition on the University Officers Training Corps in the Memorial Chapel, using objects and documents from the Hunterian Museum and University Archives. This was in fulfilment of his dissertation placement as part of the HATII MSc in Museum Studies.





**Figure 5** MSc student Michael O'Brien installing an exhibition in the Chapel

### **Non-student volunteers**

Two members of the public have also been volunteering with the project: Jim McLarnon and Kate Gordon. Jim, a retired forensic technician, has been exploring continuity and change in the subject of Forensic Medicine from 1910-20, and looking into the wartime activities of Professor John Glaister and his son, John Glaister, Jr. Jim wrote a blog post about his work, which is available here:

<http://glasgowunigreatwar.wordpress.com/2014/09/17/from-forensic-medicine-to-the-western-front-the-papers-of-john-glaister-jr/>. Kate, who has a degree in Information Management, is

cataloguing collections like that of Archibald Bowman, a former member of staff who signed up at the outbreak of war and spent eight months as a POW in Germany, later returning to the university as Professor of Moral Philosophy. She also contributed a blog post, available here:

<http://glasgowunigreatwar.wordpress.com/2014/09/05/a-tale-of-two-bowmans/>

### **Community partnerships**

The Great War Project has been developing relationships with a variety of local groups, most notably Glasgow City Council's First World War commemoration group. We also have developed relationships with two secondary schools (Stewarts Melville and Govan High School) as a pilot programme to share research and information about mutual alumni / students, with the idea that this programme will be expanded to include additional key schools, like Clydebank High School, in the next six months.



**Figure 6** Students from Clydebank High School attend the commemoration event at the University of Glasgow on 25/9/2014

We have also partnered with organisations like the Friends of the Glasgow Necropolis to provide student placements to pursue mutually-beneficial research. We are currently recruiting students to work with other external organisations like the Royal Highland Fusiliers Museum and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. The project has been approached by other organisations for potential future collaboration.



Figure 7 Student placement Bethany Garry speaks to Tony Pollard about her research on war graves in the Glasgow Necropolis

## Media and social media

The Great War Project seeks to enhance the local, national, and global reach and reputation of the University of Glasgow not just through academic research and publication, but also through popular media and social media. Media interest in the project has been ongoing since the start of the centenary. Examples of features and interviews with project staff include the following:

- Bowditch, G. Lost angels of the First World War - Gardener unearths the stories of Scotland's brave lady medics. *Sunday Times*. 6/7/2014.
- Gillies, Connor. Hundreds Gather in Glasgow for WW1 Commemoration. *Radio Clyde News*. 4/8/2014.
- Live coverage of Commonwealth centenary commemorations. *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*. 4/8/2014.
- Nicoll, V. Service for city's first VC winner. *Evening Times*. 9/9/2014.
- Reporting Scotland. *BBC*. 24/9/2014
- University ceremony honours Victoria Cross soldier in First World War. *STV*. 24/9/2014
- First Glaswegian to be honoured with Victoria Cross remembered. *STV Glasgow*. 24/9/2014.
- Smith, K. VC winner was first of war dead from city university. *The Herald*. 30/9/2014

In addition to traditional print and television media, the project has a rapidly growing social media presence, as evidenced by a Twitter account that has grown from 100 followers in March 2014 to just under 1000 followers at the end of September 2014. The project has been tweeting the war, highlighting university wartime events and anniversaries, including the deaths of those on the Roll of Honour. A project blog was started in July 2014 as a way to disseminate on-going research to specialist and non-specialist audiences alike, garnering over 800 total views in the first three months and attracting contributions from project staff, students, volunteers, and staff from other subjects and services across the university.

## Further research

The Chancellor's Fund grant has enabled the support of a dedicated Project Officer at .8FTE, allowing Glasgow University's Great War to accomplish a large amount, resulting in a robust and effective project that compares favourably to other centenary commemoration and research projects both within the UK and beyond. Specifically, a dedicated Project Officer significantly increases the ability for Glasgow University's Great War to facilitate both in-reach and outreach via recruiting and supervising student placements, and liaising with external organisations and members of the public, in addition to supporting the PI by delivering specialist research.

The next six months will continue to build upon the work already done, most notably targeting the research themes previously discussed:

- The University OTC – particularly covering records of activity at camps
- University Calendar and Senate – signs of any influence on curriculum, particularly for the professions of medicine, engineering, and clerical
- Student groups archives – especially SRC, student unions, student publications
- Press reporting of University activity – utilise albums of news cuttings

Key partnerships will be expanded to include the Erskine hospitals. The University of Glasgow's connection to the Erskine hospitals (originally the Princess Louise Scottish Hospital for Limbless Sailors and Soldiers) dates to 1916 when the Regius Professor of Surgery, Sir William Macewen, helped found the institution and became its first Chief Surgeon.



**Figure 8** The manufacture of prosthetic limbs from the collection of Sir William Macewen held by the University Archives

Future event planning includes the organisation of three public talks on WWI themes to be held at the University of Glasgow, along with the beginning stages of the organisation of a major interdisciplinary conference for 2016 to look at the role of institutions (both commercial and higher education) in First World War, particularly regarding recruitment. More student-curated exhibitions are also envisioned, particularly an exhibition of material relating to the Scottish Women's Hospital

contributed jointly by the University Archives and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow for 2015, to be developed by a postgraduate student placement.

Finally, the project will continue to advance the goal of mapping the war by georeferencing the locations associated with individuals on the online Roll of Honour via Google Maps. This has been hampered by changes in technical support staff. Work on this aspect of the project has been delayed, but is still on-going.

The work completed to date as part of Glasgow University's Great War Project highlights the rich resources available and the potential for future research. Additional funding will be sought to expand the project over the next few years.