

Jewish contribution to the Great War remembered

A digital archive which is becoming a permanent record of the lives of Jewish men, women and families, 1914-1918, with details of their military and Home Front activities has been launched in Manchester and Liverpool. The project, called We Were There Too, was introduced in London in 2016 and has been extended into the North West region thanks to a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

At launch ceremonies at King David High School in Manchester and Princess Road Synagogue in Liverpool, attended by The Mayor of Bury, many civic, military and religious leaders and members of the local communities, project senior consultant, Alan Fell introduced the digital platform. He explained how it will ensure that the stories of Jews from the region, who served the country in disproportionately high numbers, and their families, are enshrined in history for future generations.

Alan Fell explained how the project works. He said: "Volunteers from Jewish and non-Jewish schools, and informal education groups, will work with, and be trained alongside adult volunteers to develop the digital project and collect the materials that will be housed on the site. The findings will be interpreted imaginatively to attract, inform and educate visitors about the roles and sacrifices of British Jews."

A series of emotive readings by young people and members of the communities included poems by Jewish war poets Isaac Rosenberg and Siegfried Sassoon, was followed by a moving act of remembrance led by reserve Army Chaplain, Rabbi Ariel Abel. The citation relating to the VC awarded to Private Jack White, one of five won by Jewish officers and soldiers during the Great War, was read by his



Dignitaries remembering the Jewish soldiers of WWI

grandson, Robert Eden.

Colonel Martin Amlot, a former High Sheriff of Merseyside and commanding officer of 5/8 Bn King's Regiment (Manchester and Liverpool) said: "The event was most informative and educational. I was amazed at the disproportionately high number of Jews who volunteered to serve this country. This is a story that must be told."

We Were There Too provides an insight into Jewish life in Britain in the early part of the 20th century and gives the visitor easy access to a number of diverse research sources, brought together for the first time, for personal exploration. As the site develops, more collections of rare material will be added, further enriching the opportunity to explore the period.

"We were fascinated by the number of artefacts that people brought along to the launches, and the stories they had to tell," said Alan Fell. "We are now asking people to volunteer to help us maintain this important and valuable asset. Whatever your age, knowledge of the First World War, research experience or understanding of computers, if you think you have a family member who lived in Britain during the war, or are interested to research a name in the British Jewry Book of Honour, on a Synagogue Memorial Board, a gravestone or a host of other memorials, then we will help you to find out more about them and build a Personal Record."

The Lottery project's lead partner administering the project is the Jewish Lad's & Girls' Brigade (JLGB). Through the JLGB young

volunteers will be able to take part in project related Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Open College Network accreditation activities. Neil Martin, JLGB chief executive said: "We believe that it is important that young people are aware of the sacrifices made by former generations of Jews in the defence of Great Britain and we encourage them to start the journey of awareness by researching their own families."

"Huge numbers of members of the then Jewish Lad's Brigade answered the call to serve and over 500 officers and men were killed in action."

Volunteers are offered training in research, handling historical information, technology, project planning and communication and young people are particularly encouraged to participate.

Strategic partner to the project is AJEX The Jewish Military Association UK which represents Jewish veterans and serving members of HM Forces. National Chairman, Colonel Martin Newman reinforced his support. "We Were There Too reflects our own objectives of remembrance and education and we are delighted to support it. With increasing levels of anti-Semitism it is even more important that we demonstrate the price paid by British Jewry of the defence of our country."

In keeping with Jewish tradition, the site will also enable visitors to permanently memorialize their ancestors so that their passing can be commemorated annually.

We Were There Too is supported by a wide range of religious and secular Jewish organisations.

Further information is available by visiting www.jewsfww.uk or by email, alan@jewsfww.uk

Jewish weekly newspaper launch event Manchester 27th Nov 2018