

YOUR COMMUNITY NEEDS YOU

Elaine Bermitz finds out more about the Manchester branch of the We Were There Too Project.

Following last year's First World War centenary commemorations, JLGB London and Jewish Military Association UK began a project called We Were There Too to record the contribution made by the Jewish community to the conflict.

We may all know of a relative or family friend who joined the war effort, as around 20% of all British Jews served between 1914 and 1918 – almost double the percentage of those contributing from the general population. Though most of the men were fighters, many of the women were nurses or ambulance drivers, while others worked in munitions factories or took over essential work when men were required to fight. Launched in London in 2016, the website has attracted around 88,000 visitors, and 119,000 individual visits have been made.

Now assisted by The Pears Foundation and the Heritage Lottery Fund North West, it has a dedicated Manchester team in Whitefield, overseen by Rodney Ross, an experienced youth leader, Nicki Davis, project administrator and researcher Charlotte Clare.

Jewish people across the north are now invited visit the website to find all the people who were posted and find their histories from where they joined up, their service records, whether they were awarded medals, crosses or citations for bravery and any other details as well as links to family members who also served. This is an entirely digital archive which, when completed, will go into the national archives, preserving the Jewish contribution to the UK's defence for future generations.

Charlotte Clare, the project researcher has already found some interesting stories, like the cousin of the French officer Dreyfus, who is buried in Southern Cemetery. He owned a

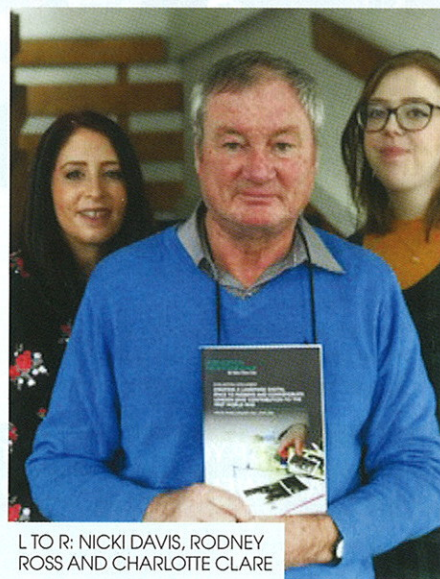
munitions factory supplying TNT for the war effort which sadly exploded, killing him and 50 others. Or the five brothers from the same family, who were all killed. You can read the story of author Louis Golding who, being unfit for active service, joined the ambulance division, surviving the war to write *Magnolia Street*, a popular novel about life in the Jewish area of Hightown in the 1920s. Among the many women, Ethel Esther Hassan stands out an example of devoted service.

So many stories, are left unrecorded, but researcher Charlotte says she and the team are keen to help as many people as possible to record their relatives' details and scan and share pictures. She asks people to telephone the team with any information they want to share.

Project manager Rodney Ross is delighted with the interest shown so far: "We first presented the roadshow to the public in Liverpool and Manchester in November last year and there was an immediate response.

"Since then the website has grown, receiving up to 1,000 hits per week. We have visited schools and youth organisations in Manchester and have several future bookings with schools." He says: "One of the most effective ways of reaching younger children is to ask them to imagine what it would be like to be a soldier who has had no family and get them to write to them while they were in the trenches."

Anyone can take part in the remembrance project and search for their relatives' details or, sadly, why and how they died. If successful they can request notices of the exact Jewish anniversary of death, to have the opportunity to keep their memory alive by keeping their *yahrzeit*. Such is the power of the website; it



L TO R: NICKI DAVIS, RODNEY ROSS AND CHARLOTTE CLARE

seems that it really doesn't matter how little you know about your relative. So much can be traced for you, that a picture, their name and an idea of where they joined up should be enough.

With a small amount of effort, you can access a world of knowledge about the First World War, learning about those who died, those who lived through it and the effect of its aftermath on our community.

Visit Jewsfww.uk for North West area or email claire@jewsfww.uk or nicki@jewsfww.uk. Alternatively, you can speak to the team on 0161 767 8890.



WE WERE THERE TOO LAUNCHES AT KING DAVID HIGH SCHOOL.