

Unsung Jewish heroes being remembered

Project discovers stories of community who gave their lives in Great War

IN the spring of 1917 as British forces led a huge assault on German defences near the French city of Arras, a young sapper, Marks Simonovitch, was a long way from the industrial sprawl of his Manchester home.

Born in Strangeways on June 9, 1894, Marks joined the Royal Engineers in February 1917 and was immediately sent to the Western Front.

Three weeks into the bloody battle of Arras, amid the Artois mud, and just three months after he enlisted, Marks was struck by a bullet to shoulder and seriously wounded.

His injuries led to him being rescued from the battlefield and sent to St Thomas Military Hospital in London.

Following the war he settled in Prestwich where he married his love Rachel Levy and had two children Alex and Doreen, later changing his surname to Simons.

His incredible story has now been added to an extraordinary online database immortalising the contribution of the Jewish community to the First World War.

The We Were There Too project represents a permanent record of the lives of Jewish men, women and families between 1914 and 1918, and details their military service and efforts on the home front.

Since its launch in the North West last year dozens of photographs, documents and artefacts have been compiled and digitised, bringing to light the stories of unsung heroes from some of the globe's darkest days.

Rodney Ross, We Were There Too project manager, said: "Since the project was launched we have unearthed 100 stories from the North West. The progress we have made is superb and it is just expanding all the time."

"When I started out I felt I knew something about the First World War but I soon realised I know nothing."

"Using the website you can read about the lives of ordinary people. Hardly any of their histories are recorded but they are just as important, and we are very proud that we can unearth these stories and put them up."

Marks's past has been added to the collection thanks to his daughter Doreen Jacobs, from



LEARNING: Bury and Whitefield Jewish Primary School pupils in a We Were There Too project workshop



HERO: Photograph of Marks Simons in a hand stitched photo frame. Image courtesy of the We Were There Too project

By Brad Marshall
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Whitefield, who has kept her father's original documents for decades in the same wallet he used during the Great War.

Among the documents are not only his service papers and certificates, but also his prayer book, distributed to all Jewish soldiers and sailors, and his pay book.

Mr Ross said: "It's absolutely

incredible that she had all these documents."

"We are really pleased when we can share these stories."

Among the other heroes added to the database with a connection to the borough is Adler Baritz, who was born in Prestwich in 1896.

The only son of six children to David and Leah Baritz, Adler signed up at the outbreak of war in 1914.

He rose to the rank of corporal for his service in the Pembroke

Yeomanry and South Wales Borderers, but died of wounds sustained in France in April 1917.

Also from Prestwich was Tobias Rosenthal who served as a gunner in the Royal Garrison Artillery and survived the war.

After a bout of illness Tobias was transported back to England and died from pneumonia at Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex, in November 1918, leaving a widow and two young children.

A more unusual story is that of Henry Theodore Dreschfeld who, although born in Chorlton in 1866, was buried in Whitefield Jewish Cemetery.

A father of six and husband to Jessie née Frankenburg, Henry was dentist and active member of Manchester Jewish community, serving as president of the Jewish Operatic Society and on the committee of the Jewish Board of Guardians for over 20 years, as well as playing rugby and boxing and being an active member of the Jewish Lads' Brigade.

He was older than usual when he enlisted in the Manchester Regiment in 1895 as a dental surgeon and rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Just six months into the First World War he died in February 1915 through complications from an appendectomy.

We Were There Too is also working to share these stories with people young and old across the community by visiting schools.

For more information visit: www.jewsffw.uk