

BRITISH JEWS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR- *WE WERE THERE TOO*



EXHIBITION IN THE SYNAGOGUE FOYER AUGUST 2019

Twelve months ago **British Jewish in the First World War – *We Were There Too***, had just begun its work uncovering untold stories of Jewish Men and Women in the First World War from Manchester and the North West. Last week the project upload its 100th Personal Story onto the ***We Were There Too*** website, an achievement the project is very proud of. Personal Stories, especially those of local families, have a special significance, especially if it is a family you know or a street you may have walked down.

Our educational work has seen the project engage with over 750 children and young people in six schools, including King David Juniors, Bury and Whitfield JPS, North Cheshire JPS, Broughton JPS and Yesoiday Hatorah, Jewish Day School. We have delivered 15 events, from ***We Were There Too*** Roadshows and Lunch Clubs, to community events in Manchester Central Library and the Manchester Police Museum, engaging with people of all ages. The project has visited North and South Manchester venues, run a Roadshow in Southport and by the end of 2019 will have run events in Liverpool, St Annes and Blackpool.

As we approach Rosh Hashanah we reflect on the sacrifice made during the First World War by those servicemen who fought in the Third Battle of Ypres, otherwise known as Passchendaele. The battle took place from 31/07/1917 to 10/11/1917, and approximately 325 names can be found of men who died during this period. An article discussing this is available on the website at <https://www.jewsfww.uk/passchendaele.php>. Extrapolating dates for the Jewish New Year to Yom Kippur, September 30th to October 9th 2019, 38 British Jewish men were killed in the equivalent 10 days.

OBSERVANCE



For many of the British Jewish men fighting in the trenches, keeping true to their Jewish faith was of paramount importance to them, none more so than Jack Canton “Edie” from Brunswick Street, Cheetham in Manchester.

Edie Canton was a Staff Sergeant with the Royal Army Medical Corps, 142nd Field Ambulance. He was a member of the Jewish Lads Brigade and lost his life on July 14th 1916. He is buried at Carnoy Military Cemetery located at the Somme. Such was Edie devotion to his religion, he led Yom Kippur services for his fellow servicemen as can be read in the two extracts below.

Extract: Service on Yom Kippur in the Trenches, letter from Jack, published in the Jewish Chronicle, 22 October 1915

“I conducted the service, as regulated by you, in the special Prayer Book issued to all Jewish troops for Yom Kippur, at the termination of which they all deemed it a success. I'm afraid I didn't do so "great"

though - being an amateur Chazan for the first time in one's existence is not exactly as easy as it seems. After the service we all had a chat about old times, many of us having met before at the Tabernacle in Aldershot where the Rev. Mr Plaskow conducts the service on Shabbos.

It was quite good to talk over the old times. Many of us were still in England last year and were lucky enough to get passes to our homes for Rosh Hoshana and Yom Kippur. We dwelt on the elaborate dinners we had last year, before fasting, among our own people, but we jolly soon got off that subject, as it made our mouths "water" too much.

I know previous to fasting that I "dined" on some bread and cheese, but it doesn't do to grumble on active service. I made up for it when the fast was over. Went to a neighbouring cottage and bought some "cafe-en-lait," a couple of eggs etc, rather a "spread" in these days. But I'm afraid I have to get off the subject; all things come to an end and so did our gathering. As the day was rapidly weaning and many of the chaps had to get back to the trenches, so we bid each other "good luck" and "guten Yomtov," shook hands all round and all of us departed our various ways, taking with us memorise which I'm sure most of us will never forget of a pleasant, though earnest, Yom Kippur Service held on "active service" by British Jews serving in His Majesty's Army."

Jewish Chronicle In Memorium, 15 September 1916

The Rev. L. Cohen (Canton), of Manchester, father of the deceased soldier, has received the following letter from the Rev. M. Adler, S.C.F. "I was deeply grieved to learn of the death of your brave son. He was one of my most faithful boys, and I sympathise with all my heart with you. I shall never forget how he conducted the Yom Kippur Service for the local Jewish soldiers last year, and how delighted the men were with him. I saw his CO today, and he gave me full information of the manner of his death and place of burial. I know exactly where he lies and am arranging for a Jewish memorial to be erected. I need hardly add that he was held in the highest esteem in his unit, and was very popular. The burial service was read by a Jewish soldier who was with him at the time.

To read more about Jack Canton "Edie" got to <https://www.jewsfww.uk/jack-canton-1698.php>

There are many stories like Edie's on the ***We Were There Too*** website, so take a few minutes, go online and look at some of the stories, photographs and memorabilia. We have recorded a number of WHC members' family stories and we are sure there are more unheard stories waiting to be researched and uploaded. You are always welcome to call into our office downstairs in the Youth Centre and talk to the WWTT team.

Chag Sameach from the ***We Were There Too Team*** of Rodney, Nicki and Charlotte.

For more information gives us a call on 0161 767 8890 or go to <https://www.jewsfww.uk/the-project.php>