



Johnny Cohen

President, Merseyside Jewish
Representative Council

Project returns to Liverpool to highlight Jewish efforts in war

AS Merseyside Jewish Representative Council president, I recently received an invitation to represent our community at Liverpool's Annual Service of Remembrance and Dedication later this month.

Liverpool is a proud city that supports its military families and heritage fiercely, and I will be proud to reflect on the lives of local heroes irrevocably changed, and remember the sacrifices made by those who were lost.

In fact, this year marks 100 years since the first Jewish veterans laid a wreath at The Cenotaph in Whitehall to honour and remember the thousands of Jewish servicemen and women who fought and served for our freedom.

In an era of rising anti-Semitism (and other racist incidents), and to coincide with the city's Armistice commemorations, it is wholly appropriate that the Museum of Liverpool has now specially invited a unique project to give a presentation in the museum about the contribution and sacrifice made by our local Jewish community during the Great War.

'British Jews in the First World War', established in 2016, started off recording just the lives of London Jews. In January, 2019, with National Lottery Heritage Fund support, the Northwest Project was launched under the auspices of the JLG, under the title 'We Were There Too' and two roadshows were held in Liverpool in 2019.

On Wednesday (2-4pm), the WWTT project returns to the Museum of Liverpool, to demonstrate its aim to capture, record and preserve the impact, experi-



HERO: Manchester-born Hyman Barnett Gadansky, who was a member of the Liverpool Pals. He died in combat on April 22, 1917 and is buried at Etaples Military cemetery, Pas de Calais, France

ence and contribution of local Jewish servicemen.

The project is based on a digital archive and interactive website (Jewsww.uk), to be a permanent record of the lives of Jewish men, women and families, 1914-1919, with details of their military and Home Front activities, ensuring that their stories are not lost for future generations.

The Great War had a profound

impact. Some 908,000 British and British Empire servicemen died in just over four years of conflict, including 13,726 from Merseyside.

Although Jews only made up a tiny fraction of the Empire's population, more than 50,000 enlisted and fought in the war, of whom 2,324 gave their lives, and 6,350 were wounded.

There were five Jewish recipients of Victoria Crosses and 1,533

won other awards.

"This record is a great one," concluded Winston Churchill, "and British Jews can look back with pride on the honourable part they played in winning the Great War."

The reality is that the role Jews played in Britain's First World War effort is not at all well-known, and it is hoped, and expected, that the digital project will help raise awareness.

Project director Rodney Ross told me: "The Jewish community played a very significant part in the First World War, and it is often overshadowed by the Second World War and its terrible events."

"This is a great opportunity for people across Merseyside to learn about, and commemorate, the important contribution which the Jewish community made to the war effort."

In addition to the thousands of Jews who served in the forces during the war, thousands more were involved with war work and support roles near to the battlefields and on the home front.

They were patriotic, grateful to the country that had given them a home and became willing recruits to the cause.

The WWTT website offers user-friendly access to a number of First World War archives, related to the Jewish experience of the war, including the digitised British Jewry Book of Honour.

More importantly, the site allows the creation of personal records to preserve individual stories.

It already contains more than 2,500 personal records of servicemen and women. However, a century on, first-hand knowledge has disappeared, and time is running out to preserve personal stories, photographs and other artefacts before they are lost forever.

So, if you think you have a family member with a First World War story to tell (whether engaged in the war, served as a nurse or a factory worker, raised a family, kept a business going, cared for a wounded son or husband, or experienced a wartime childhood) or you're interested to research a name in the British Jewry Book of Honour, on a Synagogue Memorial Board, a grave-stone or a host of other memorials, you can obtain help to find out more about them and build a personal record, or upload their story to ensure that their contribution to the war effort is not forgotten.

Each record can include photographs, letters, diaries and even 3D scans of medals and other items. There is also a yearzeit facility to honour their memory each year. Community engagement is a vital part of the project.

Another major part of the pro-

ject is education, aiming to ensure that both the present and future generations can fully appreciate the sacrifice made by the Jewish community during the Great War.

This includes visits to schools, where Rodney has been amazed by the lack of knowledge about the First World War, even to the extent of its dates.

In the course of preparing this article, I researched the website of The Kings Liverpool Regiment battalions during the First World War, more commonly known as the Liverpool Pals, and I learned that, when Lord Kitchener made an appeal for "the first 100,000" volunteers in August 1914, the 17th Lord Derby (later dubbed 'King of Lancashire') moved quickly to ensure that our city was at the forefront of the recruitment drive.

A notice was placed in the *Liverpool Echo* on August 27, 1914, under the header 'City Soldiers', urging all men interested in joining a battalion of comrades to report to the headquarters of the 5th Battalion on St Anne Street, Liverpool, on Friday, August 28.

The response was remarkable. Lord Derby addressed what he

'Fight for honour of Britain and the credit of Liverpool'

called "the great gathering" and said: "This should be a battalion of Pals, a battalion in which friends from the same office will fight shoulder to shoulder for the honour of Britain and the credit of Liverpool."

"I don't ask you to uphold Liverpool's honour: it would be an insult to think that you could do anything but that, but I do thank you from the bottom of my heart for coming here tonight and showing what is the spirit of Liverpool, a spirit that should spread through every city and town in the Kingdom."

"You have given a noble example in coming forward. You are certain to give a noble example on the field of battle."

Included among the thousands who gave their lives in the Liverpool Pals battalions, I found these names: Percy Braham, Gerald (Gershon) Blank, Jack Cohen, Samuel Jacobson Cohen (Leeds & London), Hyman Barnett Gadansky (Manchester), Abe Glassman, Harry Goldman (London), Samuel Jacobson, Sydney Wolfe Lipson, Sampson (Harry) Lipton (Lipman), Frank Morris (Moss), William Shyman (Manchester), Isaac Shifkin and Harry Zodikson.

"Our dead are never dead to us until we forget about them."



EXHIBITION: The We Were There Too project at Liverpool's Rex Cohen Court in 2019. Rodney Ross is pictured at the back

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