




truce



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About Truce

The centenary of the outbreak of World War One resonates strongly in Pennine Lancashire communities, who sent off sons, brothers and fathers to fight in ill-fated battalions.



Truce investigated the lessons to be learned from history, taking the ceasefire of 1914 as its focus and reflecting on the significance of a moment of shared humanity one hundred years earlier. Working alongside libraries, local museums, heritage experts and artists, Mid Pennine Arts has built relationships with schools, junior league football teams, community and interfaith choirs, concert band members and individuals all sharing in an exciting partnership.

Truce was about the things that connect us: communal singing and songs, food, festivals, football, stories and home. It was about shared community and cultural activity, the traditions and activities that bring us closer together as human beings, and in particular how those shared activities helped bring about a moment of peace in a bloody and horrific war and the lessons we can learn from the Christmas truces.

Thousands of people participated in the project, tens of thousands watched or listened to choir performances or the serialisation of *Sgt Meredith's War* on BBC Radio Lancashire. This book captures some of the moments and memories of **Truce**.

Truce has been made possible by generous support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Lancashire County Council Arts Development Team, Granada Foundation and Hyndburn Homes and was supported by BBC Radio Lancashire (Up for Arts) and Accrington Stanley Football Club.

Foreword

Truce was a contemporary arts project that looked into the past. It used words and song and art and drama to explore something extraordinary that took place 100 years ago, spontaneously, on Christmas Eve on the Western Front.

Our project was a long time in the making. A full year before, we knew that we wanted to honour that mind blowing expression of spontaneous goodwill. But when lead artist Iain Broadley first came to us with his idea, none of us could have predicted quite how **Truce** would turn out.

Along the way, the project has accumulated its own heroes and champions. Driven by them, it has taken on a life of its own. Thanks are due to many such contributors, but especially to Janet Swan, inspiring leader of the inspired Truce Choir, and to the consummate performer who truly became Sgt Meredith.

Over two thousand people have taken an active part in **Truce**. Hundreds of thousands have listened on BBC Radio Lancashire. Thirteen hundred fans had a surprise encounter with **Truce** at Accrington Stanley, a few days before Christmas. Over a hundred young people will achieve an Arts Award through the project. And for many of us, *Silent Night* will never again be heard without a raising of those hairs on the back of the neck...

Truce has been made possible by Heritage Lottery Fund, and their generous support has been reinforced by other funders – Lancashire County Council, Hyndburn Homes, Granada Foundation. The project has drawn huge strength too from some brilliant, committed partners – LCC Arts Development team, BBC Radio Lancashire, and Accrington Stanley FC have each put their own mark upon it.

Taking part in **Truce**, for many people, has been a viscerally emotional experience. That, I think, is because it has felt so uncannily topical. Every day, relentlessly, on the news, we hear of terrible things happening, in Syria, Ukraine, Nigeria...

In 1914, those young men did something amazing. In the most catastrophic circumstances, they somehow found a spark of shared humanity across the divide. 100 years later, more than ever, we really need a touch of the spirit of **Truce**.

Nick Hunt
Creative Director
Mid Pennine Arts

Sgt Meredith's War



In partnership with Lancashire Museums Service and heritage performer John Meredith we commissioned a monologue based on letters and diary entries relating to the Christmas truces and life in the trenches on the Western Front.

Sgt Meredith became a significant presence in **Truce**, performing to children and adults and helping people to connect with and learn about WW1 from a fresh perspective.

Sgt Meredith's War was serialised on BBC Radio Lancashire in the five days before Christmas 2014.

120,000 listeners heard Sgt Meredith's War on BBC Radio Lancashire



There was a silence; then across No Man's Land one lone voice rang out, proud and clear and strong.

Christmas 1914 was some of the strangest days of my life. But nobody even thought for one moment that all those things would end up in an unofficial, and against regulations, truce breaking out across 27 miles of trenches.

On Christmas Day 1914 we climbed the ladders and jumped the bags and advanced into No Man's Land towards the enemy. But not one of us carried a rifle or a grenade. Our arms were full of cigarettes and mince pies and rum.

Extracts from
Sgt Meredith's War



A football match had broke out in No Man's Land, I say football match but they didn't have a ball, they were using a can of bully beef. Must have been about 100 a side! There were no goal posts, no lines, no referees, no nothing, just a load of lads having a kick about in the open air.

Extract from
Sgt Meredith's War

“I think Sgt Meredith is fantastic and so do many others. He was our mother, father, brother and friend when we were cold, alone and scared in those mud filled dug outs.”

“I got a bit overwhelmed and gave Sgt Meredith a hug - I do hope he didn't mind. He was fantastic.”

7,680 people connected with Truce online

Truce Choir

Led by Janet Swan, the Truce Choir began rehearsing in the summer of 2014 and was at the heart of the project. For some this was their first time singing in a choir or in public, whilst others were members of choirs from across the region.

Together they performed songs of reconciliation and reflection alongside rousing traditional WW1 songs, which both moved and engaged audiences.





“I’m still gobsmacked I can sing at all but to sing in a choir like that was just fabulous. I’m sure I didn’t get everything right but I certainly meant every word and sound that came out of my mouth. I was so moved singing ‘If I Had My Way’. I was wearing my dad’s badge from WW2 and he was a prisoner of war for four years in a slave labour camp so it was so special.”

“Being a part of the Truce Choir with Janet was a very moving experience. It also evoked a great sadness for our failure to learn lessons, but a hope and greater prayer for the future.”

“I’ve never, ever sung in a choir before, so this is a completely new experience for me. Each time we’ve done a rehearsal I think I’ve felt the emotion of it all even more.”





80 choir members committed to 25 hours of rehearsals and three performances

Rhyme of No Man's Land



On 29 November the choir, local school children, the East Lancashire Concert Band and Sgt Meredith performed to a packed house at St James Church in Accrington. The performance wove together songs, words and art to tell the story of Truce.



“My Mother wouldn’t shut up about it afterwards - she was singing along and she thought the actor was fantastic. The next day she was on the phone to my sister in America telling her all about it.”

“It was one of the best experiences of my life and one I will treasure. There was such an atmosphere of camaraderie amongst all participants and the audience that somehow reflected the spirit of peace, comradeship and shared humanity that the British and German soldiers demonstrated in such a wonderful and humbling way that Christmas of 1914.”





“At the interval everybody was given a food parcel, as though it had come from home, as if we were in the trenches. I swapped with someone who really wanted my Tunnocks Tea Cake, so I got an extra piece of Stollen in return. We were encouraged to do that and it really did happen actually.”





335 people experienced The Rhyme of No Man's Land

The Great People's Poppy

Artist Emma Blackburn had been commissioned by Up For Arts to make a mass participation textile piece, drawing contributions from hundreds of amateur crafters across the county. *The Great People's Poppy* was revealed to the public at *The Rhyme of No Man's Land* before touring Lancashire libraries.





5,300 people viewed The Great People's Poppy

Truce Football Tournament

On Saturday 13 December, five under 12s football teams competed for the *Truce Centenary Cup*. Players met with and learned from Sgt Meredith, took part in arts activities and played football. The standard of play was excellent, and the winners and runners up escorted the teams on to the pitch at the *Christmas Truce* event the following weekend at Accrington Stanley.



“My son’s telling everyone about what happened, I think Sgt Meredith got through to them.”

“**Truce** made me feel happy for all the soldiers who could have a break from fighting and play a game that both sides understood, football.”

“That’s one of the reasons why football’s the greatest sport, because you wouldn’t find them playing tennis would you?”



200 footballers, coaches and family members took part in the Truce Centenary Cup

Christmas Truce at Accrington Stanley

At Accrington Stanley's final home league game before Christmas, the choir, junior football teams, the East Lancashire Concert Band and volunteers brought the spirit of Truce to a contemporary football match.

The crowd were given commemorative programmes, treated to a choir performance and a half time ceremony where flags created by students from Hollins Technology College were presented to fans of each of the teams.





“The three events which brought everyone together were really effective and incredibly moving. At Accrington Stanley it was great to see such a wide cross section of the community engaged and the event worked really well in engaging people who might not have heard about this work.”

“To bring it in to the football stadiums and taking it to the people, I think it’s a very, very good idea.”

“I think singing in the church was amazing, acoustically and the beauty of it, but today with the atmosphere, the choir felt so much part of it they were cheering on the team as well as marking the truce.”





1,325 people remembered the Christmas truces at Accrington Stanley FC

Fan Photographs





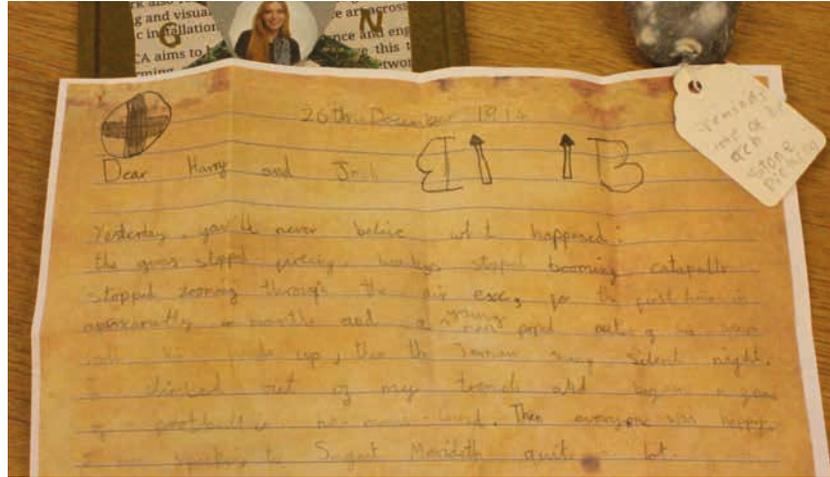




Schools Programme

During autumn and winter 2014/15, local primary and secondary schools took part in heritage learning sessions and arts activities. Beginning with a performance of *Sgt Meredith's War* and a Q&A session with the Sergeant, children and young people created powerful art works in response to their learning.





“We work with a group of 15 young people and they’ve been creating banners about the truce. What’s really surprised me is how the young people have really got behind something which to them is quite alien.”

“Everyone was united together and that is what **Truce** is about. It’s about sharing and being together.”

“I made my own Princess Mary tin and put things in it that would remind me of home if I was far away.”



283 students took part in 17 heritage learning and creative sessions

Truce Triptych





Following a period of research into the Christmas truces of 1914, Accrington based student photographer Cameron Procter created a contemporary photographic triptych using some of the moments of connection reported in diary entries and letters home as inspiration. The work was exhibited at three of the Truce events.

Over 7,200 people took part in Truce as audience or participants

Return to No Man's Land

In March 2015 we marked the end of the project with the event *Return to No Man's Land* at Accrington Library. The event brought together project partners, participants, their families and friends in an afternoon of reflection, sharing and celebration and acted as the premiere of the Truce documentary.





“Harry, aged 11, took part in the project as a junior league footballer. His grandma sang in the Truce Choir. Each were involved in the **Truce** project in their own way, but they came to the final celebration event together, Harry hanging out with his football buddies whilst his grandma sang. I love the portrait they had taken together with Sgt Meredith, it really sums up the intergenerational and community aspects of the project.”

“As a choir member I was grateful and privileged to be able to commemorate the events of 1914 and honour those who were at the Front. I found the experience emotional and heartening. I will carry its lessons forward in light of current local and international problems.”

“It was wonderful to participate in this event. The film showed all of the various strands, making me much more aware of the whole project and its impact. A little bit of humanity when sanity had gone missing, the truce seemed to mark the end of the beginning.”





165 people came together at Return to No Man's Land

Truce People







4,500 people visited the project's website

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- * Anne Ellwood
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is a Mid Pennine Arts project



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