

truce



The Rhyme of No Man's Land

Songs and words remembering the 1914 Christmas Truce

St James' Church, Accrington
Saturday 29 November 2014

The Christmas Truce

The assassination of heir to the Austrian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo on 29 June 1914 sparked a rapid sequence of events which led to the outbreak of World War One. In early August, Germany swept past Luxembourg and Belgium on their way into France and at first made rapid progress. The Allies and Germans tried a series of outflanking movements which eventually led to a battle line – the Western Front. Soldiers dug trenches and erected barbed wire to hold their positions: the nightmare that was to become ‘trench warfare’ had begun.

In places the trenches were just yards apart and the proximity of the enemies allowed men to shout out to their opponents. After a particularly heavy barrage of missiles or bullets, the soldiers might shout out “Missed” or “Left a bit”. This black humour was to be the start of a ‘conversation’ between troops that would hasten the onset of a Christmas truce. On Christmas Eve the temperature dropped and a sharp frost enveloped the landscape, creating a ‘white Christmas’. Germans celebrate Christmas on 24 December more than they do on the day itself, and on the Western Front on Christmas Eve, German soldiers sang carols and placed Christmas trees lit with lanterns above the trenches.

Messages began to be shouted between the trenches. The following day, British and German soldiers met in no man's land and exchanged gifts, took photographs and some played impromptu games of football. They also buried casualties and repaired trenches and dugouts. After Boxing Day, meetings in no man's land dwindled out.

The truce was not observed everywhere along the Front. Some officers were unhappy at the truce and worried that it would undermine fighting spirit. After 1914, the High Commands on both sides tried to prevent any truces on a similar scale happening again. Despite this, there were some isolated incidents of soldiers holding brief truces later in the war, and not only at Christmas, but nothing on the scale of 1914.

The truce symbolises human spirit, a wonderful example of humanity during one of man's darkest hours.

(With thanks to www.christmastruce.co.uk and www.iwm.org.uk)

Welcome

The East Lancashire Concert Band is playing a medley of World War One tunes to greet your arrival. We will greatly appreciate your applause this evening, but please save it for the interval and the end. Thank you.

Programme

The Rhyme of No Man's Land - a poem by Lester Simpson

*And that's the rhyme of no man's land
Grey and Khaki hand in hand
To stop the lust for other's land
Not to hate, but understand
So conflict is forever banned*

While Shepherds Watched

Pentonville (tune traditional in Sheffield for generations)

This arrangement may not be familiar to you as it is the *West Gallery* version, often sung now in pubs especially in South Yorkshire.

It's 1916 and we meet Sgt Meredith

It is his job to get the replacements through the last tricky bit of their journey to the front line. He is a war weary, but sage like fatherly figure, he cares about the welfare of the young recruits who must now take up the line. Sgt Meredith is a grizzled survivor of the British Expeditionary Force and came out to Flanders, as he calls it, in 1914. **He was with his battalion, the 1st East Lancashire, on the same piece of ground at Christmas 1914...**

Never Mind

No matter how cruel the war it never managed to inhibit man's ability to find humour and encouragement in song. **Please join us in singing this example.**

*If the sergeant steals your rum, never mind,
If the sergeant steals your rum, never mind;
Though he's just a blinking sot,
Let him take the bleeding lot,
If the sergeant steals your rum, never mind.*

Programme

*If old Jerry shells your trench, never mind,
If old Jerry shells your trench, never mind;
Though the sandbags bust and fly,
You have only once to die,
When old Jerry shells your trench, never mind.*

*If you get stuck in the mire, never mind,
If you get stuck in the mire, never mind,
Though the light's as broad as day,
When you're dead, they stop your pay,
If you get stuck in the mire, never mind.*

Sgt Meredith outlines a typical day, ending with staying awake at night to keep listening for the enemy...

When This Blasted War is Over

From *Oh What a Lovely War*: EMI Publishing

To the tune of *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*. **Please sing along.**

*When this blasted war is over oh how happy I shall be,
When I get my civvy clothes on, no more soldiering for me.
No more church parades on Sunday,
No more asking for a pass.
I shall tell the sergeant-major to stick his passes up his ...*

*When this blasted war is over oh how happy I shall be,
When I get my civvy clothes on, no more soldiering for me.
I shall sound my own reveille,
I shall make my own tattoo.
No more NCOs to curse me,
No more bleeding army stew.*



Programme

*NCOs will all be navvies,
Privates drive in motor cars,
NCOs will smoke their woodbines,
Privates puff their big cigars.
No more standing-to in trenches, only one more church parade,
No more shivering on the fire step,
No more Tickler's marmalade.*

Sgt Meredith talks about how quiet the Christmas of 1914 was, and how it put them on edge, worried that they might die at Christmas...

...and then they heard singing

Silent Night

Franz Gruber (*arr Peter Hunt*)

Sung in German and English as occurred in Flanders in 1914.

Tipperary

And then the British sang... **Please sing along.**

*It's a long way to Tipperary, it's a long way to go.
It's a long way to Tipperary, to the sweetest girl I know!
Goodbye Piccadilly, farewell Leicester Square!
It's a long long way to Tipperary, but my heart's right there.*

INTERVAL

During the interval we invite you to collect your 'food parcel from home' from the back of the room. The contents vary, so you may wish to swap items with friends, or perhaps strangers...

Programme

No-Man's Land

Written by the pupils of Spring Hill Primary, aided by Steve Brown, especially for *Truce*.

Letter from 1914

A letter, sent to home from the Front, by Signalmen G L Blease.

Sgt Meredith talks about burying the dead...

Only Remembered

Original by Ira D Sankey and H Bonar (*additional words by John Tams*).
This arrangement 2004 by Mr Ian Hague from Coope, Boyes and Simpson
You may recognize this song from the stage production of *War Horse*.

Peace on Earth

Jim Boyes. Voice Publishing

*The songs rang out from either side between the lines
Enchantment held the battlefield at Christmas time
No Eastern Kings came bearing gifts to celebrate a birth
But in the midst of conflict there was Peace on Earth*

*Then enemy found enemy to their surprise
No savagery, no enmity behind their eyes
Then all was salutation and joy and mirth
And for an instant there existed Peace on Earth*



Programme

*The seeds of peace lay buried 'neath the plains of war
But like a Christmas rose they blossomed by the score
The seeds of peace are with us still, for those who know their
worth*

And we can all remember and bring Peace on Earth

*Throughout the world wherever present conflicts be
Although divided there can still be unity
Your friend could be your enemy, by an accident of birth
And through humanity there can be Peace on Earth*

*Like silences at the armistice, like poppies on the tide
Like tears of joy when differences are reconciled
Like Christmas 1914, out in No Man's Land
So join with us in celebrating Kerstbestand**

*Flemish for *Christmas Truce*

Sgt Meredith talks about food...

The Boars Head Carol

Traditional

Sgt Meredith talks about the Indian troops...

Lab pe a ti

Men from all over South Asia answered the allies call and joined the troops at the Front. This is a song of hope from that region, sung in Urdu.

Translation: *That which I desire comes to my lips*

In the form of a prayer

Light a candle

For hope in my heart

Sgt Meredith talks about how one day we may all be able to live in peace...

Programme

Reconciliation

Ron Kavana, arranged by Barry Coope

Sgt Meredith talks about unsoldierly behaviour...

Harry Patch song – *If I Had My Way*

Polly Bolton

If I had my way, I would lock all leaders in a room and make them fight it out. Then there'd be no need for lads like me to go to war.

Henry John 'Harry' Patch, the last surviving soldier known to have fought in the trenches of WW1, died aged 111 in July 2009.

Sgt Meredith - After all the action...

Spring 1919

Jim Boyes. Arr Coope, Boyes and Simpson (*adapted by Janet Russell*)

*In Flanders' fields the poppies grow as part of every season
Through winter's blast the wounds still show as if there was a
reason
To show the world that hid in pain, that spring will come and come
again
But underneath the scars remain and will for generations*

The longest night of darkest dreams heralds the new tomorrow

Thank you for being part of *Truce* by joining us this evening.

"Altogether we had a great day with our enemies, and parted with much hand-shaking and mutual goodwill."

Percy Jones of the Queen's Westminster Regiment

With grateful thanks to:

The members of the *Truce* Choir

Janet Swan (member of Natural Voice Practitioner Network) – Main Choir Leader

John Meredith – Sgt Meredith

Olwyn Pearce & David Burbidge – Choir Leaders

East Lancashire Concert Band

Spring Hill Primary School Choir - Led by Steve Brown

Ruqaiyah Talib, Misbah Khan & Leina Kameron (Hollins Technology College Students) – Readings

Emma Blackburn (*Up for Arts*) – *The Great People's Poppy*

Cameron Procter - Photographs

Hollins Students (with Iain Broadley, Cath Ford & Cameron Procter) – Banners

Gill Brailey and the Lancashire County Council Heritage Learning Team

Waqar Ahmed (Hollins) & Carvel Lonsdale (Spring Hill)

Accrington Library

Reverend Ian Enticott and the St James' Church congregation

...and everyone else that contributed to this event.

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Heritage Lottery Fund

Lancashire County Council Arts Development Team

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Hyndburn Homes

BBC Radio Lancashire

Accrington Stanley Football Club

FOR MID PENNINE ARTS

Cath Ford

Melanie Diggle

Nick Hunt

Volunteers: Eoin Gallagher, Dominique Dunand Clarke, Sophie Skellern & Janet Clunie

The *Rhyme of No Man's Land* is presented in partnership with *Up for Arts* (a joint project between LCC Arts Development Team, BBC Radio Lancashire and Voluntary Arts England).

Artworks

Banners

Following learning sessions with John (Sgt) Meredith, pupils at Hollins Technology College worked with artists Iain Broadley, Cath Ford and Cameron Procter to create artwork in response to their learning about the Christmas truces. This artwork has been used to create the banners hanging in the church today.

Photographs

Blackburn based photography student Cameron Procter researched letters and objects that were sent from the Front. The photographs displayed here today show his response to these personal artefacts.

The Great People's Poppy

To mark the centenary of the outbreak of World War One, artist Emma Blackburn, in partnership with *Up for Arts*, called on the talented knitters, makers and fabric manipulators of the county to contribute to a collective memorial poppy. These individual handcrafted poppies were united by Emma to create the art installation *The Great People's Poppy*.

Makers were asked to send in a red, white or purple poppy and to include text in its design, which could be a personal message to honour a member of their family who fought in the Great War, or words of support to people whose lives have been affected by war.

We are very privileged to host its inaugural display here today as part of this event. Visit the website for further information: www.thegreatpeoplespoppy.tumblr.com

This work will tour the county over the coming months. TGPP will be available for loan across Lancashire. If your group would like to host it, please contact Helen Randle via email: helen.randle3@bbc.co.uk.



The *Truce* Project

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.

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

Truce has been investigating the lessons to be learned from history. 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.

We've taken the ceasefire of 1914 as the project's focus as it symbolises a moment of shared humanity. *Truce* is about the things that connect us. It's about communal singing and songs, football, stories and home. It's 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 Truce.

Forthcoming events:

- **13 December at Hollins Technical College - Junior League *Truce* Tournament** – eight local teams taking part in a friendly tournament for a special commemorative cup.
- **20 December at Accrington Stanley FC – *Christmas Truce*** - special performances and events before, during and after Stanley's last home match before Christmas. Including the *Truce* choir, presentation of the *Truce* tournament cup and the East Lancashire Concert Band.

Visit our website for more information:

www.midpenninearts.org.uk/truce

"It was a curious scene - a lovely moonlit (Christmas) night, the German trenches with small lights on them, and the men on both sides gathered in groups on the parapets. It is weird to think that tomorrow night we shall be at it again. If one gets through this show it will be a Christmas time to live in one's memory."

Captain R Armes of the 1st North Staffordshire regiment



Truce is a Mid Pennine Arts project.
Visit our website for more information:
www.midpenninearts.org.uk/truce
or call us on: (01282) 421986

