

Staffordshire Regiment Museum

Friends Newsletter Issue 2 2020



A few words from our chairman

Well we didn't see that coming did we? If someone had told me six months ago that I would be playing Scrabble, remotely over Skype with my 88 year old mother whilst wearing head phones, I would have said "What?" But it shows that in extraordinary times we all do extraordinary things.

We have all been touched by loss in recent months, some closer than others and we have all been amazed by the commitment, bravery and fortitude of so many working for the greater good of society. It's also been heart-warming to see those in our small museum community come together to support each other and the whole museum family. Small things like creating a Facebook group, organizing a zoom meeting, researching plans for the way forwards, or just contacting and asking about others. Events have certainly made us stronger and in many ways closer as a team. Financially, things for the museum are sure to remain difficult for some time to come, but the trustees are digging into those rainy day reserves, whilst planning for future growth and I know that the friends will be working harder than ever to ensure that the museum remains fit to fight another day.

I am sorry that we have not been able to hold our friends AGM, or other planned meetings as yet this year, but I am sure you agree that the health of our members is paramount. The friend's officials are putting measures in place, to ensure that you are kept informed and all have their say. We will keep you updated as these come to fruition.

Nick Williams

VICTORY SPECIAL



Plans are being made to reopen the SRM as covid restrictions ease.

The Trustees intend to bring staff back to work in July, to coincide with an intense month of maintenance, prior to the museum opening to the public in a safe way on the 1st August.

There is an aspiration to hold a 1940's Victory event over the weekend of 6th September, which will start with an outdoor cinema night showing of A Bridge Too Far on the Friday night.

The museum team are stressing that all plans are dependant on government advice and guidelines. So please keep a close eye on the museum web site and social media for the latest developments.

WATCHMAN GRENADIER

The Mercians have paid tribute to our Mascot, by naming their early March training exercise Watchman.

A (Grenadier) Company deployed to Swynnerton Training Area, a small yet complex area, on Exercise WATCHMAN GRENADIER; a Platoon level exercise. On arrival it was straight onto the area, practicing key patrol skills and formations as a platoon, before occupying individual platoon harbours to begin Battle Prep for the evening's operations. That evening, each platoon was assigned an objective, each with its own complexities, with 1 Platoon's objective being an underground bunker and 2 Platoon's a fortified compound. Assaults completed swiftly and precisely, both platoons withdrew to their harbours for some well earned rest.

A rude wakeup call from the enemy forced a fighting withdrawal that led into that day's rotation of lessons to refresh the lessons of 9 months training in Estonia. That evening, both platoons were to conduct sequential raids onto the area's specific OBUA training facility; a challenging, maze-like interior. Again, the Grenadiers assaulted with swift precision, clearing the complex objective quickly and efficiently. The cohesion and slick drills of a company fresh from a 9 month deployment was on full display. The final tactical action of the exercise was a Platoon advance to contact over multiple kilometres of complex terrain culminating with a contested obstacle crossing.



The final day kicked off with a fascinating brief on regimental history from the Staffordshire Regiment Museum, as well as the formal retirement of Colour Sgt Watchman V from public duties, and the promotion of Watchman VI to LCpl. This was a perfect set up for the section competition which involved a 2km tab, followed by a 1km stretcher race and finishing with a dash to the finish through the obstacle course. This marked the end of the week's training before falling out for a hard-earned weekend. An excellent week throughout which certainly tested the platoons and set the standard for future exercises and operations in the coming year.



Disease!

Chairman of our Museum Trustees and the last commanding officer of the Staffordshire Regiment Brigadier Retired, Jim Tanner has an avid interest in Military History and in particular the history of the regiment. He has produced books on varied subjects and you may well have seen him presenting a short film used as part of the museums display about the actions at Riqueval Bridge on the St Quentin Canal, in October 1918.



Here Jim has presents an article about the history of the regiment that has a particular resonance to our present taxing times.

BRITISH ARMY CAMPAIGNING IN THE 18TH CENTURY

In these unusual times when a new disease is having such a major effect on the lives of all of us it is worth looking back at conditions that were all too common once upon a time. Disease pays no respect to rank or privilege and in the days when far more soldiers died on campaign of a whole range of diseases than ever suffered from bullet or cannonball, the Windward and Leeward Islands of the West Indies, with their deadly climate and challenging terrain, were in a league of their own. Some of the ghastliness is highlighted in an illuminating book published recently: By Fire and

Bayonet – Grey's West Indies Campaign of 1794 by Steve Brown.

The Staffordshire Regiment's two earliest antecedents – the 38th and the 64th – got to know the West Indies all too well. We are pretty familiar with the story of the 38th and their sojourn, initially as Lillingston's Regiment, in the West Indies from 1707 to 1764. This was the longest any regiment of the British Army served overseas and the Holland Patch was worn behind the Stafford Knot, for the South Staffords from 1935, in recognition of the buff holland cloth used to make up the soldiers' uniforms. The 38th won their first two battle honours at GUADELOUPE in 1759 and MARTINIQUE in 1762, although these were not awarded until 1909! The 64th, who had gone out to Martinique at the end of 1758, were also awarded GUADELOUPE 1759.



Steve Brown's book focuses on the 1794 campaign against Revolutionary France, with whom war broke out the previous year. The islands of the West Indies were of major economic significance at the time and thus received much military attention. The campaign of 1794 was relatively appointed for the time but Whitehall's lack of clear objectives and little appreciation of the resources required doomed the expedition once France reacted to the British attack. Interestingly both the 38th (1st Staffordshire) and the 64th (2nd

Staffordshire) were involved from the outset. Both regiments were in Ireland when the expedition was put together. The bulk of the 64th would find themselves in Lieutenant General Sir Charles Grey's command, in the 2nd Brigade under Major General Thomas Dundas. The 64th's flank companies – the grenadier and light companies – were, throughout, 'battalioned' in the 3rd Grenadiers and 3rd Light Infantry respectively. Only the flank companies of the 38th embarked, being battalioned in similar fashion in the 2nd Grenadiers and 2nd Light Infantry. This was normal business at the time, the pick of regiments being taken away to form 'elite' battalions while on campaign and causing great frustrations to their parent commanding officers. The centre companies of the 38th were in fact sent off (with the newly raised 80th (Staffordshire Volunteers)) on the Duke of York's disastrous Flanders' Campaign of 1794-95, and then to the West Indies!

Inadequately manned and inadequately supplied as Grey's expedition was, it fought hard and well to secure Tobago, Martinique, Saint Lucia and Guadeloupe. Grey was a good general at a time when such men were not particularly common. 'No-Flint' Grey had earned his fine reputation in the American War of Independence when, in 1777 at Paoli, he had ordered his men to remove the flints from their muskets and attack at night with the bayonet to achieve surprise. The 2nd Battalion of Light Infantry, which included the light company of the 64th, led the assault.

For Grey's campaign in the West Indies the 64th were awarded the battle honour MARTINIQUE 1794, an honour denied to those regiments whose flank companies did so much to secure the islands. The cost was considerable. The establishment of an infantry regiment at that time was set at 442. In September 1793 at Monkstown in Ireland the strength of the regiment is recorded as 32 sergeants, 30 corporals, 12 drummers and 306

privates and soon after two further companies were added to bring the regiment to war establishment. We do not know how many men the 64th embarked with from Spithead that November but on disembarkation at Barbados in February 1794 just 150 men and eight officers of the centre companies were fit for duty, 274 being recorded as sick. And this was before the rigours of the campaign and the onset of the sickly season were to take their toll.



The Attack on Fort Louis, Martinique, 1794.

By the end of it all the 64th were shown as having just 47 men fit for duty on Martinique, with 232 sick and still hanging on to life. In those few months of campaign, of an original force of some 7,000 men, just 92 soldiers were killed in action while around 5,000 died from disease, mostly Yellow Fever. The numbers included the commanding officer of the 64th, Major Compton, and Lieutenant Colonel Richard Buckeridge of the 64th who commanded the 3rd Battalion of Grenadiers. In all, ten officers of the 64th lost their lives, all to sickness. The flank companies of the 38th fared no better. Of their eight officers, one was killed – Captain John Mackewan, commanding the Grenadier Company at a fight at Fort Mathilde on Martinique – and four died of fever. But it is interesting to note that Mackewan's successor in the field, Lieutenant Frederick Philipse Robinson of the 38th, survived to become one of Wellington's generals in the Spanish

Peninsula and the oldest living soldier in the British service when he died in 1852, aged 88.

1794 was not the worst year for deaths from disease either. It is reckoned that in the years 1793 to 1798 around 19,000 men died, with 545 lost through desertion and 4,100 discharged due to sickness. If Jamaica and San Domingo are included, plus foreign troops in British pay, the total losses for the whole of the West Indies in this same period come to an appalling 50,000. They have no known graves.

DISEASE! A CENTURY AND MORE LATER

Of course, by the early decades of the 20th Century so much more was known about the causes of killer diseases and how to prevent them. Sanitation had a marked effect on the ability of armies to survive the rigours of campaign and, while the absence of antibiotics still meant that infection of wounds was a big killer in the Great War, soldiers no longer died in swathes from Yellow Fever, Cholera, Typhus or Malaria.

There are some fascinating and unique documents in the Museum archive. One such bears the title: 2nd Battalion The South Staffordshire Regiment – Diary of the Move to and Service in Palestine, August 1929 to October 1930. In 1927 the Battalion was en route to Shanghai from England but was diverted instead to Malta. There they played host to the 1st Battalion, on its way home from the Sudan. It was from Malta that the 80th – the 1st and 2nd South Staffords long called themselves by their old regimental numbers – was rushed to Palestine where sectarian violence had again erupted. The diary is an extraordinarily detailed account of the period, but that is not the issue here. It contains an amusing and charming exchange between Battalion Headquarters ('CENTREA' and identified as 'JB.171' in code) and B Company, then at Nablea and El Afule in central Palestine.

The subject is anti-malarial prophylaxis. B Company was informed that, as it lay within a potential malarial area, prophylactic quinine was to be taken "in fifteen grain doses every alternate night until further orders". B Company was to indent for its quinine to 2nd Battalion The Green Howards, with whom they were working.

On receipt of the order both Nablea (or Nableer) and the Officer Commanding B Company at El Afule responded to JB.171., thus:

To Johnny Beer. From (thine) Nableer. Reference your 171:

Yes Dear!

Until from you I further hear,

Quinnine parade shall be held here:

And tho' the damned stuff makes me queer,

Orders must be obeyed, I fear;

And do

I'll wash it down with beer,

And pray

I'll not get Malar-eer.

I note you'll send the poison here,

And sign myself, (with love and cheer)

Yours prophylactic'ly,

NABLEER.

And:

To J.A.B. From O.C. "B". Reference your 171; I see,

Till further orders come from me,

Quinnine parade held here must be,

And tho' the damned stuff queer makes me,

Orders, I fear, obeyed must be,

And so

I'll wash it down with tea,

And pray

I'll not get Malar-ee.

I note the stuff required by me, By the Green
Howards, supplied will be;

And sign myself, (most lovingly)

Your ever sleepy,

O.C. "B".

Friends on Facebook

Digital technology has helped members of the friends group stay connected during the lockdown by using a new group on facebook. As the government restrictions took hold and the museum closed its doors, friends' secretary Juliet Davis took up the challenge of keeping in touch with members by creating a bespoke facebook group.



Juliet says, *I wanted to do something to help people stay in touch during a time when it was obvious real life contact was going to be difficult. Not all the members of the friends have been able to join, and we have worked hard to keep in touch with them by other means.*

But those that are on Facebook have shared amusing and interesting stories, these range from what people have been up to, through to amusing anecdotes and pictures that all helped to keep the mood light. The group was intended to keep in touch with the friends during the lockdown, but it would be good if we could carry on and get more people involved as life starts to return to normal.

Frustration

Is exactly what friends vehicle lead Don Higham felt when we found that Covid 19 was going to prevent him carrying on with his work on the museums' display vehicles. Demonstrating a typical lack of concern for his own safety, here he outlines how recent months changed his plans.

Just as the warmer weather was coming the dreaded lurgi demanded 'Clear off, I'm in charge!'. I am now going to be three plus months behind schedule. Now I have reached 80, that's important to me, I can't help wondering how much longer am I going to remain fit enough to be able to carry on doing this. Up to now, I consider myself lucky.

There were some small things I brought home to do, as shown on our Facebook Site, now they are done I have taken the opportunity to paint my Land Rover, plus a few other jobs about the house and car too boring to mention.



At least, I had the stuff which had been waiting in the corners of my garage. Also the paint (yet another shade of green) so I could crack on with it. I wouldn't say I am a compulsive hoarder but I am one for keeping things which may be useful, some of which have been an asset when working on the museums' vehicles.



Strange thing was no sooner had I completed the painting, I discovered the old girl had a serious engine fault which might have been developing for some time. Nothing for it, off with the cylinder head, probably a blown gasket causing the coolant (water to you and me) to all end up in the sump. Oil and water don't mix very well. Fortunately being in the Land Rover Series One Club, I was able to obtain a new top engine gasket set quite easily. When did I last have to do this, nearly 30 years ago I thought, so shouldn't complain, although I have yet to finish the rebuild with engine parts still sitting on the bench.



As I write this it's now the first of May and there is still no let up in lock down. During WW Two Mr Churchill talked about 'Broad Sunlit Uplands', I think we would all like to see those again.....



Well good news Don, those uplands are in view, and we hope to see you back on those vehicles in July. Anyone who can lend a hand with a military vehicle paint brush is invited to give Don a shout.

Series One Land Rover



The Land Rover entered production in 1948 with what has later been termed the Series I. This was launched at the Amsterdam Motor Show. It had been designed for farm and light industrial use, with a steel box-section chassis and an aluminium body.

The British Army used series Land Rovers in large numbers (and continues to use the modern Defender versions). The Army had tested the 80-inch (2.03 m) series-I Land Rover almost as soon as it was launched in 1948. At that time, the Army was more interested in developing a specially designed military utility 4x4 (the Austin Champ). However, the Champ proved too complex, costly, heavy and unreliable in battlefield conditions so the Army looked to the Land Rover.

The MOD started ordering Land Rovers in batches of 50 from late 1949. However by the mid 1950's those Batch orders had grown to 200 at a time.

Museum Zooming

Museum Director Dani Pritchard has been helping members of the museum team stay in touch during locked down times by hosting virtual meetings over the internet using the Zoom meetings platform. Many “attending” these meetings were relatively new to the internet and were virgins in the world of web cams and mute buttons.

Dani said, *I deliberately didn't set any sort of agenda for the meetings as I wanted to make them an informal opportunity for everyone to stay in touch, chat and see each other. At times this resulted in a bit of a free for all, with everyone talking at once, but on the whole it worked and I think it lifted people's spirits, it certainly did mine.*

Behind the scenes Dani has also been working to keep in touch with those on the team who don't have internet access and her efforts have been appreciated by all concerned.

Mine looks bigger than yours

Friends chairman Nick Williams, gives us an insight into how he's been filling some of his time during lock down.

With the museum closed and travel restrictions preventing any visits to other military museums, I have had to work to get my military history fix. Early on I had to console myself with Youtube videos of the tank museum curator David Willey giving informative lectures from his back garden. These are on esoteric subjects ranging from the intimate details of camouflage, to helmets and even petrol cans. No, honestly, they are interesting, even Mrs Williams started watching one (*Mrs W rolls her eyes*) and I would recommend them to anyone especially those trying to bring their knowledge a little closer to that of our museum experts.

Lucky for Mrs W, the restrictions were relaxed a little, giving me the chance to hot cycle it further afield to explore local military sights. I made my way to Fradley just north of Lichfield, to seek out the remains of the WW2 airfield located there.

I knew of its presence but had never taken the time to explore between the industrialisation that took over the site in the 1960's. Top of my search list was a twin of the pill box bunker displayed at our museum, which I knew had come from the airfield.



I eventually found said twin overlooking the Coventry canal on the edge of the airfield. Although neglected as it is, covered in undergrowth, and without all the set dressing, I initially thought that ours was much bigger. It made me realise just what a lot of work had been put in by the museum volunteers to give the museum's exhibit that “in service” look. These bunkers were built for airfield defense and would, in effect have formed part of the Trent stop line in the event of an invasion.





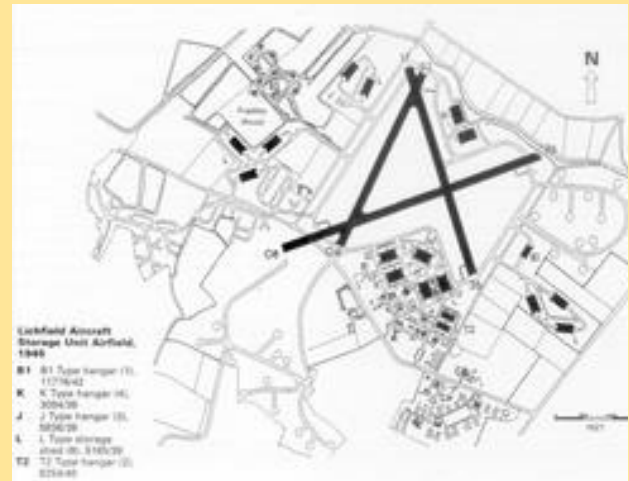
A few aircraft hangers have survived no doubt due to making ideal warehousing, but most of the WW2 buildings have gone. The internet suggests that much could still be seen in the 1970s and I did notice what appeared to be a communal air raid shelter, but couldn't get close enough to confirm that.



There is a memorial to those who served and I suspect there is more to see if proper site access were obtained. It just goes to show you don't need to go far too get a fresh history fix and there is always a story behind the story. May be we ought to have a museum day out there? Don't roll those eyes again Mrs W.....



RAF Lichfield



RAF Lichfield, known locally as Fradley Aerodrome, was constructed from mid 1939 to 1940. The airfield was set out in the usual triangular pattern with two runways 1 km in length and a main runway of 1.46 km.

Initially, it operated as a maintenance site, being home to the No. 51 Maintenance Unit from August 1940. Manufacturers sent newly built aircraft to Fradley to carry out any modifications before delivery to squadrons.

Operational bombing missions were flown from Lichfield in 1942-43, including the 1,000-bomber raid on Cologne in May 1942. After 1943 most sorties were 'Nickel' raids, the dropping of propaganda leaflets over German cities coupled with occasional bombing of French airfields occupied by German Forces. The unit was disbanded in June 1945 with the last flying training detail being flown on 22 June.

After the war, large numbers of aircraft were broken up on site and many aircraft were prepared before being sold to the air forces of other countries. The unit remained active until the closure of the airfield in 1958.

Know who you are working with

Juliet Davies, our friends' secretary has been particularly busy during the period of lock down, keeping in touch with members of the group, dealing with friends' administration as well as volunteering to support the NHS. She has also taken time to give us an insight on her life and how she came to be part of our museum team.



Hello everyone, I have been invited by Nick to say a few words for the Newsletter. I was born in Sutton Coldfield where I lived with Mum, Dad, Sister and Brother till the travel bug got hold of me at 19 when I left home to work as a Travel Rep in Europe. I loved my job always on the move, spending time in Spain, France, Austria and the old Yugoslavia. I moved back home in 1992 and started working for a Shipping Company in Birmingham City Centre. I met my Husband Richard and got married in 1996, two years later I was full time Mum to Lucy and Tom.

I was involved with the School PTA, running discos, Christmas Fayres & Summer Fete's. My children were very sporty so weekends were soon taken up by Football, Swimming, Netball, Cricket,

and Hockey and of course all the training sessions in the week.

When Lucy and Tom had both left for University I was left with a lot of time on my hands, so looked for something to fill the gap. A search on the Do-it.org website led me to the SRM who were looking for Volunteers for the Front of House and Gift Shop. After meeting with Volunteer co-ordinator Steve, he suggested I should join the Education Team. I was very apprehensive at first, as I have no teaching experience. I spent a few months shadowing the Education Team on the school visits, learning the ropes. Every team member had their very own individual style of presentation, I definitely use something from each of them now in my Trench Tours. I was given a WW1 Nurses uniform and began taking part in the School Visits.

Five years later I am still part of the Education Team, we take school tours during term time and hold Discovery Days and Open Days in the holidays. I have met some of the most interesting people in the last five years, but best of all they are now my friends.

I still have the travel bug! My husband and I like to explore, we have recently visited Cambodia, Thailand, Australia and India.

I would say to any visitors reading this if you have enjoyed your visit and you have some spare time, come and join us.

The good old days

Education team volunteer Lyn Williams tells us about a recent discovery that made her reflect on good and bad times.

I was sorting through my wardrobe whilst locked down, when I found a small note in a pocket that took me straight back to the museums' Christmas event last December.

Together with Sue I had created a 1940 Christmas parlour in the museum library, yes you have to use some imagination, but it seemed to go down well with visitors. Sue had a great display of period items from the home and was doing an amazing job of entertaining visiting children with puppet shows and homemade games. I had a display of a home cooked Christmas Dinner using wartime rations and recipes.

A six year old visited our parlour with his proud grandad. This was the lad's first visit to a museum and he was clearly loving seeing all things army. As I recall grandad was an ex-soldier and was revelling in his grandson's enthusiasm.

The boy handed me a note on which he had drawn a picture and written a message of thanks to "the army". It was that note that I pulled out of my pin-afore pocket and it made me think about those good and bad old days of the early 1940's and how people coped with the hardships and enjoyed the little pleasures of the time. I also thought about the good old days of just few months ago and about how things have changed in 2020. Then about these being the good old days for that little boy in the years to come, when hopefully he will be bringing his own family to a museum like ours.

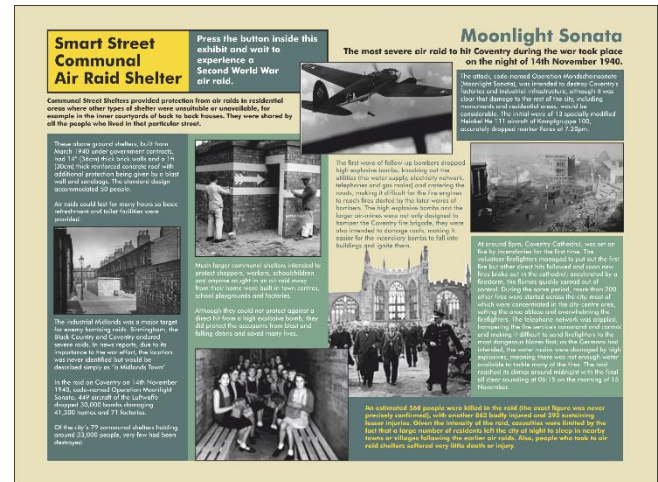
Ok, I have had my little ramble, but I think what I am trying to say is that recent world events make you appreciate what you do have, all those lovely little things and that to a large extent "The good old days" are a state of mind. The picture?

Well here it is:-



Signs of the times

As a result of visitor feedback, some time ago the friends agreed to fund information signs to be added to some of the WW2 exhibits in the museums' home front area. Members of our group took the opportunity presented by lock down to research and pull together the information and photographs needed. And it was decided to initially order signs for the Smart Street shelter and WVS Canteen.

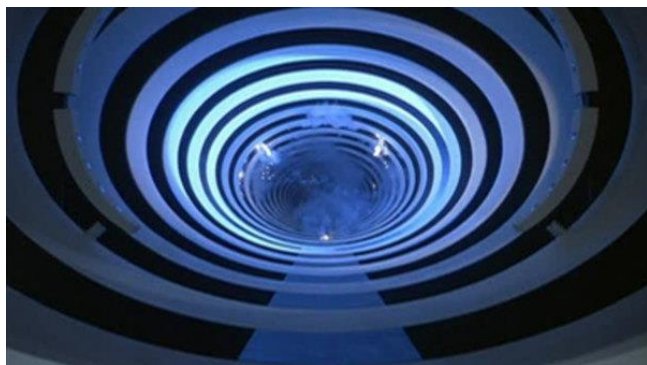


The job of creating the artwork and producing the 4ft by 3ft signs was handed over to local company Alpha Print and Graphics of Tamworth, who have also created us two new poster type signs intended to brighten up dig for victory garden. The project was overseen by our friends group who are in the process of researching further signs for the pill box, Anderson shelters and project UXB areas.



Friends Chairman Nick Williams says “*Andy at Alpha Graphics has produced two very good signs which provide visitors with information setting our exhibits in context. It was particularly pleasing to be able to link the past directly to the present by referring to the role of the RVS during the Covid 19 crisis.*”

Project Time Tour



Construction of our latest friends’ project, “Project UXB”, has had to go on hold in recent months. But friends’ education team lead Hillary Hinks has been busy during lock down and here she tells us about plans to adapt part of the museum’s work to cope with a new normal.

Like so many email ‘conversations’ of recent weeks, the main topic was, ‘How will we adapt to the new guidelines?’

The volunteers of the museum’s education team were no different, and, when a new project was suggested by Dani, ideas were soon flowing. “Project Time Tour” was up and running!

Realising guided tours of the site were not always going to be feasible, we recognised a self-guide leaflet would be very useful for visitors when we re-open, and something we could continue to use in the future. The trench is our first focus and, if this is successful, we hope to move on to the WW2 exhibits in Smart Street. Other ideas to improve the visitors’ experience are being researched and we are excited by the prospect of once again welcoming the public to the museum.

We’ll be asking for help with Project Time Tour so watch this space!

The big come back

As you will have seen from reading the whole of this newsletter there are many opportunities to help the museum get back into fully running order after its forced extended closure. Much of the work requires travel to the museum site, but there is still a lot that could be done remotely from home.

However, the staff are keen to stress that it’s now more important than ever that site access and support is managed over the coming months. So, if you can help, please keep an eye on social media. Look out for updates and feel free to contact the museum.

If you are working on or visiting the site please take time to follow the guidance, as there will be some detail changes to the way things work.





**YOUR MUSEUM
NEEDS YOU!**

Tempted to become a volunteer at the Staffordshire Regiment Museum, or to join the friends group?

There are so many ways to get involved, and your skills are sure to be of use no matter what they are. You can put in as much time and commitment into the museum as you want, as they say every little helps. Clearly a lot of work is done on site at Whittington, but it's also possible to do research, administration, and promotional work remotely or from home.

If you want to volunteer or just talk about options pop into the museum or contact-
Steve Hemming Museum Attendant on Attendant@staffordshireregimentmuseum.com
Or Juliet Davies Friends Secretary on FriendsSecretary@Yahoo.com

