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Clitheroe Food Festival
National Honey Week

The Imperial War Museum North viewed from Salford Quays although the car park entrance is from the rear. Picture by Jason Lawton.



THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM NORTH – The National Museum in Our Region

By Andrew Harris

War is the culmination of the aggression, stupidity and nobility of the human race. The popular media tend to focus on the last of these but only a museum can depict all three in a way that leaves everyone with a clear perception which doesn't involve endless study. War is nasty, dirty and horrible but fascinates many.

Arguably the 1916 Battle of the Somme was the greatest example of these features of war. Contrary to many myths it was not driven by heartless generals just to gain a few miles of territory but to take pressure off the French who were in danger of losing Verdun – their fortress town which guards northern France, The Somme was actually 13 battles fought over 20 weeks. It was muddy. It was murderous. It was hell. On the first day alone the British Army suffered 57,000 casualties – 70% of the number of soldiers in our Regular Army today! One third of these casualties died. After 20 weeks the British Army prevailed but more than a million men had been killed or wounded on both sides. It was so horrific that it was thought to be the war to end all wars. It wasn't.

Nowadays we talk about coping mechanisms but how on earth did anybody cope with trench warfare when life was so miserable and cheap? One answer was provided by Captain Bruce Bairnsfather who saw humour in everything however

awful. He produced cartoons 150 of which were published 60 years later on behalf of the Royal British Legion as 'Fragments from France'. The most famous is the iconic 'Well, if you knows of a better 'ole, go to it' as reproduced on these pages by kind permission of the Bruce Bairnsfather Society on behalf of the 2017 Estate of Barbara Bruce Littlejohn – BB's daughter who died in 2013.

The scale of losses at the Somme prompted the creation of the Imperial War Museum in London the following year – 100 years ago. There was a national desire and need to commemorate these losses. Perhaps some felt that depicting the horrors of war might help to avoid future conflict. History records that it didn't – but this might not apply for all time.

Museums can record, commemorate and educate. The more that people understand the realities of war and remember war the more likely they are to avoid the mistakes of the past. History does repeat itself although events take a different form just to fool us.

The Imperial War Museum North was opened 85 years after the launch of the Imperial War Museum in London. It is not a war museum of the north but the national War Museum in the north. IWM Director-General Diane Lees oversees it as well as the IWM London, the former RAF Duxford, the



Churchill War Rooms in Whitehall and the World War 2 cruiser HMS Belfast in the pool of London.

The Imperial War Museum North is amazing. Now 15 years old it has many strengths –

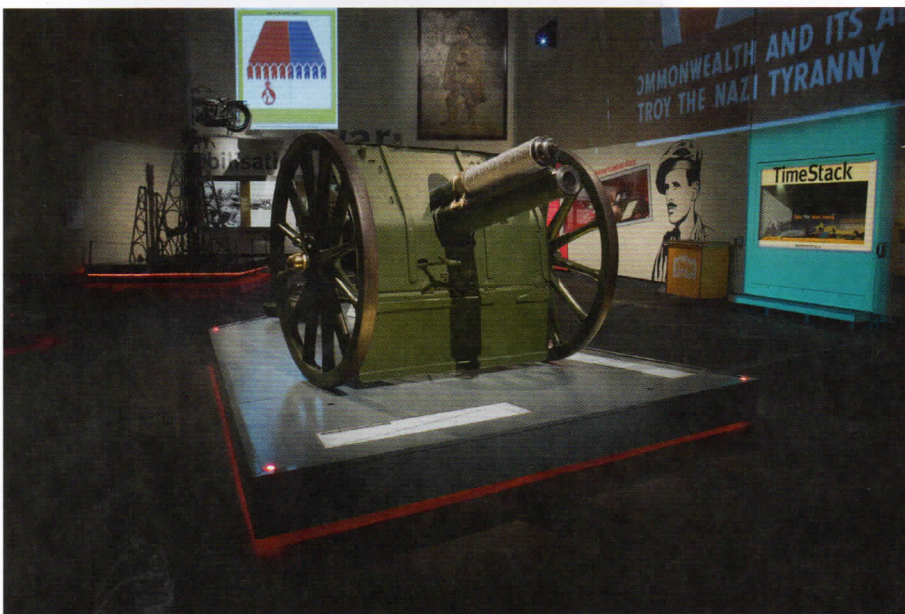
- The building is dramatic and unique. It depicts a world fractured by war on land, sea and in the air. It was designed by the acclaimed international architect Daniel Libeskind who is said to have been inspired by how a dropped teapot shattered into pieces. It aims to unsettle and disorientate visitors not least by the floor which changes level by 8 feet. The holocaust features at the lowest point which is fitting as the holocaust was surely the lowest point reached by humanity.

- The displays follow a time-line from World War 1 – formerly The Great War - through World War 2 and other conflicts to the present day. Strangely, the involvement of the UK in all the major wars was caused by loftier motives than imperialism which is ‘extending a country’s power and



“Well, if you knows of a better 'ole, go to it.”

TOP: A haunting look from a British soldier on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. ABOVE LEFT: The Somme became a hellish sea of mud. Supplying the front with ammunition.



ABOVE: The IWM North reception is welcoming with a café and shop. **LEFT:** This field gun fired the first British salvo in WW1. A crew member was killed later and the damage to the gun can be seen.

Imperial War Museum North is not. Your columnist has felt the pressure pulse of explosions and found that the use of encompassing sound in the museum creates a roughly similar effect. It is clever and realistic but safe.

- The Museum invite visits by groups and schools and offer incentives. Bookings are available for self-guided visits by pupils that are suitable for Key Stages 1 and above and Holocaust teaching sessions suitable for Years 9 and above. There are also STEM resources available for Key Stages 3 & 4. The museum has invested in a new online booking system which is available now or shortly. Teaching new generations about the realities of war must surely be a priority. They are entitled to know.

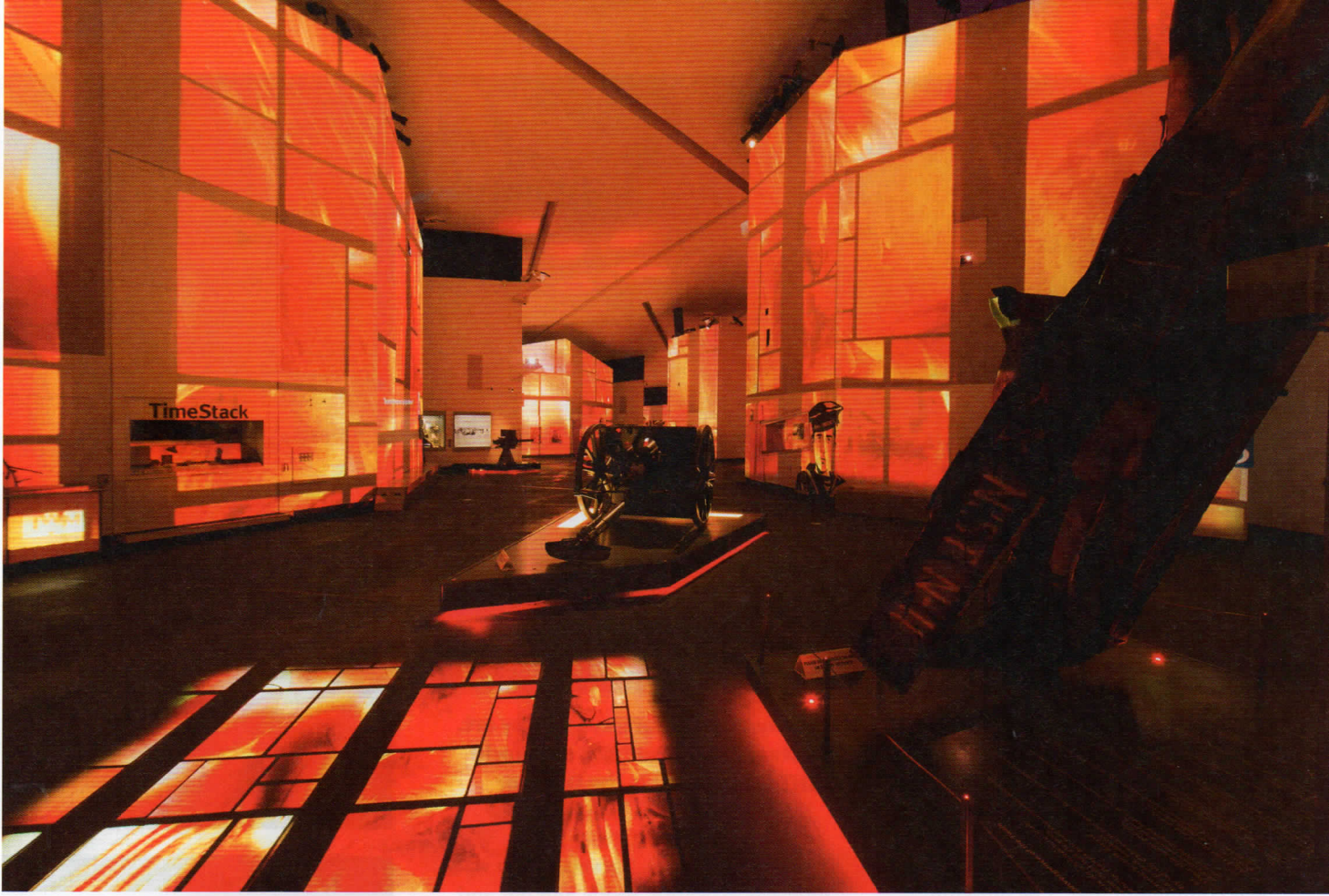
- Special Exhibitions provide a focus on different perspectives and conflicts. Until the 1st January 2018 the museum is presenting 'Wyndham Lewis: *Life, Art, War*' which is the largest UK

influence through colonization'. It is ironic that by this stage in the history of our country both major wars were caused by the attempts of others to colonize Europe. In view of the support provided by the dominions and the former empire it is perhaps more of a commonwealth war museum?

- IWM North has a way of making people and their experiences more real by displaying items which they used

and handled. Such personal possessions and equipment bring to life – so far as possible – the impact that wartime duty and fear had on ordinary people like you and me. It feeds your imagination if you let it.

- There are film displays every hour on the hour. They surround the visitor with the experience and ferocity of war. The audio visual effects used may alarm some but it is easy to be bland and the



retrospective of his work since he was commissioned as an official war artist in 1917 - 100 years ago. The exhibition deploys key themes including The Man of the World, Beyond Action and Reaction, the Enemy, Self-Condemed and Sea Mists. Although entry to the Imperial War Museum North – but not car parking – is free admission to

Special Exhibitions is not. The cost is £8 per adult with concessions for the young and elderly. For tickets visit www.iwm.org.uk/wyndhamlewis

Since opening in 2002 IWM North has been awarded almost 40 awards as well as being recognised 4 times by the Visit England Tourism Awards for Excellence as being one of the country's

top four Large Visitor Attractions. It attracted about 100,000 visits in year one but now attracts more than 250,000 visits a year – and more than 300,000

TOP: The interior of IWM North is impressive and haunting. ABOVE: A Battery Shelled' – Wyndham Lewis portraying war by art.



ABOVE: Returning to the Trenches' – CRW Nevinson also portrays war by art. BELOW RIGHT: Conflict continues: mangled steel recovered from the World Trade Center after 9/11 in 2001. BELOW RIGHT: Diane Lees is the Director General of all 5 IWM locations.

in 2016 when the Battle of the Somme was commemorated. The museum overlooks Salford Quays and is located in Trafford Park where employment increased in year one of World War 2 from 50,000 to 75,000. It boosted exports and produced no fewer than 34,000 merlin engines which powered Spitfire fighters and Lancaster bombers which were vital to the war effort. Because of this Trafford Park attracted the attention of the Luftwaffe and the area suffered many casualties and much damage to factories and warehouses. The role of Trafford Park in both world wars was seen as a reason to locate the Imperial War Museum North in the area.

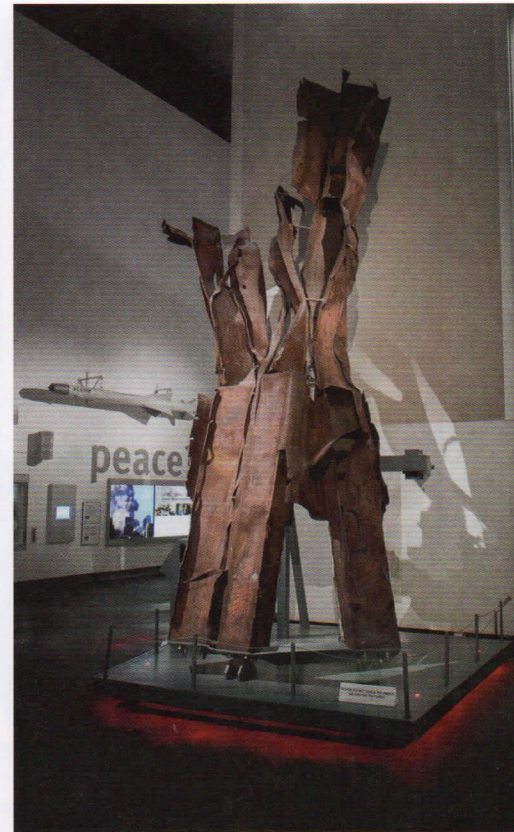
What of the future? The museum is planning a challenging exhibition about the conflict in Syria to be staged from February 2018. Later that year sees the 100th anniversary of the end of World War 1 which culminates on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. Plans are clearly ambitious for such a special occasion but little can be announced at this stage. What is known is that some of the ceramic poppies which adorned the Tower of London on the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of World War 1 will feature. To follow progress visit www.iwm.org.uk and go to Imperial War Museum North. It offers ways of keeping in touch.

Tributes to the museum are telling. They are many and varied -

- 'IWM North is a revelation. It is intensely evocative, inside and out and the contents are extraordinary'
- 'Visit it and your idea of a museum will be blown away'
- 'There is nothing remotely like it in Britain'
- 'One of the most impressive buildings in Europe. Its continually changing, dynamic exhibitions are always worth investigating. The Big Picture Shows are an immensely moving experience which really bring the past back to life'.

Apart from Christmas time the Imperial War Museum North is open 10-5 daily but you are advised to visit www.iwm.org.uk to check and for news about events. Entry is free but parking is not. In 2020 the museum will have its own stop on the new Trafford Line of the Metrolink. In the meantime the museum can be reached via the nearest Metrolink stop at Media City. The A5081 access road from M60 Junction 9 is affected by work to construct the new tramline so museum visitors need to allow a little extra time if using that route.

Visiting the Imperial War Museum North is a total experience. It leaves you moved, informed and thoughtful. If you visit no other museum in your life you must visit this one. It is our history which was successful but costly.



Andrew Harris – www.andrewharris.co.uk – gratefully acknowledges the help provided by IWM North Press & PR Manager Angela Kirk in support of this article. Illustrations are courtesy of IWM North unless otherwise attributed. Pictures of the museum reception and entry plinth are by your columnist.

