

ADVANCE PRESS INFORMATION

The North at War

Special Exhibitions Gallery, 24 March 2005 – 8 January 2006

The North at War is the first major exhibition to examine the impact of both world wars on the North of England and will be one of the highlights in the 60th anniversary commemorations of the end of the Second World War.

The world wars of 1914-18 and 1939-45 made extraordinary demands on people living and working in the north of England. During the First World War British civilians in their homes were, for the first time, vulnerable to enemy attack. In response, the men of Britain flocked to join the armed forces and fight, while women took on the jobs the men had left vacant.

During the Second World War, Hitler's armed forces tried to bomb and starve the British people into submission. In his first speech as Prime Minister, Winston Churchill famously promised, 'nothing ... but blood, toil, tears and sweat', as the Nation galvanised itself for war. British industry, much of it in the north, was totally mobilized for the war effort. When he later toured major cities such as Liverpool and Manchester, Churchill described it as 'like going out ... onto the bridge of a fighting ship'.

War brings out extraordinary stories of courage, resilience, loss and determination and this is as true for Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and Hull as it is for London, Portsmouth, Southampton and Plymouth. **The North at War** brings together many of these northern stories for the first time, using film, photography, art and sound - and bringing back to the North many objects never exhibited before outside London.

The exhibition will reveal the stories of men, women and children living in the north of England during wartime. Focusing on the highs and the lows of the Home Front, **The North At War** begins by examining why the end of wars were celebrated with such enthusiasm and goes on to examine the feelings of loss and pain, the sense of threat endured, and finally the hopes and aspirations felt by many as war ends and peace begins.

Through an engaging mix of objects, personal stories and hands-on interactives **The North At War** will include amongst many other stories:

- **The German shelling of Scarborough and Whitby in December 1914**

At breakfast time on 16 December 1914 a German fleet scouting group unleashed a bombardment on the English North Sea ports of Hartlepool, West Hartlepool, Whitby and Scarborough on the North East coast. Around 1,150 shells fell, resulting in over 130 dead and almost 600 wounded. The two coastal defence batteries in Hartlepool responded, damaging three German ships, including the heavy cruiser, Blucher. The British press and public were outraged, blaming the Royal Navy for failing to prevent the raid – but the attack was seen as legitimate by the German Navy who considered both Hartlepool and Scarborough to be valid targets.

- **The Battle of Bamber Bridge**

American GIs - famously described as 'over-paid, over-sexed, over-fed and over here' – began arriving in Britain in January 1942. Welcomed by most, they brought with them nylon stockings, the jitterbug, and occasionally, trouble. On a summer's night in 1943, some black GIs got involved in an argument with white military police in the village of Bamber Bridge, near Preston in Lancashire. The incident – later christened The Battle of Bamber Bridge – happened as the local pub was closing. Bystanders, who sided with the black GIs, saw the argument escalate into violence as American military police opened fire, eventually killing one man and wounding four others. Order was not restored until 5 am the next morning

- **The Freckleton Tragedy**

Freckleton, a village near Preston in Lancashire, was the scene of the worst air accident in Britain during the Second World War. On 23 August 1944, 61 people – 38 of them children – were killed when a B-24 Liberator plane belonging to the United States Air Force left nearby Warton air base but crashed during a storm on the infants' wing of Freckleton Holy Trinity School. The wreckage also partly demolished three houses and a snack bar, as it crashed in flames along one of the village roads. American entertainer Bing Crosby visited a nearby hospital a few days later and sang songs to some of the surviving children.

- **The V-1 bombing raid on Oldham on Christmas Eve 1944**

The V-1, known as the Flying Bomb or Doodlebug, was the first modern guided missile used in wartime. Its characteristic buzzing sound caused considerable fear, and people would listen for the missile approaching, but then be relieved when it could be heard overhead as that meant it had actually passed them. If the engine noise cut out, it was time to take cover, as the unpowered missile was then on its terminal dive and about to explode. In the early hours of Christmas Eve 1944, German bombers flying over the North Sea launched V1 flying bombs, aiming them at Manchester. Most missed the city, and one landed at 5.50am on a terrace of houses in nearby Oldham. It killed 32 people, including some evacuees from London, and damaged hundreds of homes.

- **Armistice Day, VE (Victory in Europe) Day and VJ (Victory in Japan) Day celebrations**

Armistice Day was on 11 November 1918, commemorating the Armistice or peace treaty signed between the Allied forces and Germany, that formally marked the end of hostilities on the Western Front. This took effect at eleven o'clock in the morning – the “eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month”. In Blackburn, Lancashire services of thanksgiving in all the churches and chapels in the town were held that evening. Celebrations continued long into the night with fireworks, extra trams and full houses at the theatres and cinemas. Restrictions on lighting were relaxed and the market square clock was allowed to chime again. Schools were given a week's holiday and the Cotton Employers' Association unanimously closed all the mills for the next few days – one mill owner giving all his workers £1 each in celebration.

Victory in Europe Day was on 8 May 1945, the date when the Allies formally celebrated the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of Adolf Hitler's Reich. In Leeds, people danced in celebration on top of the lions in front of the Town Hall and five days later 2000 people took part in a victory parade.

However, many men were still fighting, or prisoners of war, in the Far East and it was not until Victory in Japan Day on 15 August 1945 that the whole nation could unite in celebration. At 9pm on VJ Day the King broadcast to his people: “The war is over ...”

- **POW Camps**

POW camps were sited all over the North of England during the Second World War – from Ambleside in the Lake District to Durham in the North East. The camps further north sometimes housed the more ardent Nazis and members of the Waffen SS and U-boat crews. Moota POW Camp 103 was opened in 1942 near Cockermouth in Cumbria. Accommodating 1000 prisoners, it was built, like many others, on wild moors. Prisoners were brought in via Liverpool docks to work on farms and help to feed Britain.

At the end of the war some POWs remained in England. Bert Trautmann, hailed as one of the greatest post-war goalkeepers and recently awarded an honorary OBE, was at Camp 50 at Ashton in Makerfield. A paratrooper in Hitler's army, he helped to build the roads around Manchester Airport and played in the camp's football team. After his release he stayed in Britain, joining Manchester City in 1949.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Imperial War Museum North

Open 7 days a week from 10am – 6pm (Nov to Feb 10am – 5pm) with free admission
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Imperial War Museum North, which opened to visitors on 5 July 2002, is one of the most talked-about new museums in the country and has already received over 820,000 visitors. It is on the banks of the Manchester Ship Canal in Trafford, in a spectacular award-winning building designed by the internationally renowned architect, Daniel Libeskind.

The Museum tells the story of how war has affected the lives of British and Commonwealth citizens since 1914. It is the 5th branch of the Imperial War Museum and the first outside the South East of England. Recent winner of a Silver Award for Visitor Attraction of the Year 2004 at the Excellence in England Awards, and recipient of a Special Commendation (second-only to First Prize) in the European Museum of the Year Awards 2004, the Museum has recently been a finalist in the prestigious RIBA Stirling Award.

The North At War is part of Their Past Your Future – a £10 million, 15-month programme of commemorative and educational events led by the Imperial War Museum to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, supported by the Big Lottery Fund.

Supported by

