

National Memory – Local Stories video segment transcript:
Adam Love-Rodgers, Learning Officer
National Museum of Flight and National War Museum, National Museums
Scotland, on First World War Collection Objects used in the workshops

Love-Rodgers:

We have quite strong handling collections, which relate to the First World War. The one at the National War Museum relates to the experience of Scottish soldiers in the trenches, and the one at the National Museum of Flight relates to new technologies both of which are curriculum areas. But one of the other things that we wanted to bring into this project was the kilt, in the sense that, after 1745 it had become actually an illegal item but by the First World War it was a sort of symbol of honor and there were lots of people who weren't traditionally Highlanders who wore the kilt and it was this sort of kilt as a symbol of Scottish Military Tradition.

As the project progressed, however, we allowed the participants to borrow from other areas of what they saw in the Museums and the recruitment posters became very popular. One of the things the students picked up very quickly was the gap between what was shown on the recruitment posters – spotless kilts, people marching through Edinburgh in a slightly historic setting, and the reality of the First World War – as they'd seen from the handling collections where we're looking at objects like entrenching tools, where people have had to dig the hole they lived in, essentially, gas masks, helmets.

At the National Museum of Flight, it was the flying clothing, because it was essentially long leather coats and leather caps. It looks like fashion clothing might look now, but this was sort of cutting edge technology at the time.

At the National War Museum, it was the objects relating to the trenches. One of the students later expressed that actually being able to get your hands on the real things that had been in the trenches that people might have had to use, went beyond what she had learnt about the First World War in school. And that was very satisfying for us, of course.

What the young people will really take away from this is the idea of going back to objects and primary sources to look at history. They obviously have the experience of learning from secondary sources within the classroom and there's a little bit of primary source work done with, for instance, photographs, but I think this has really opened their eyes to the idea that you can dig down into a deeper truth by going back to the original objects. Also a different kind of truth, rather than looking at the big political picture, you can get a far more personal sense, from looking at objects that were used at the time and I think that's what they will take away from this project.