



Men of the 13th Battalion Durham Light Infantry waiting in trenches prior to their attack towards Veldhoek, Battle of Menin Ridge Road, 20 September 1917



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Finding the North East's First World War Trench Art



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Trench art made by Sapper E Southgate, Royal Engineers, whilst he was manning an underground telephone exchange in the Ypres district during the First World War.



Trench art is the recycled stuff of war. It comprises a vast array of objects composed of war material that has been transformed into other, usually non-lethal, items, functional or decorative.

This project aims to establish how much trench art exists in the



North East of England, creating a database of all known items. While the original makers and

owners have passed away, the centenary of WW1 presents an excellent opportunity to research how trench art has acted as a means of commemorating the war and remembering its participants.

We are particularly interested in locating around 30 items for which we can establish a family narrative and biography. They would be at the centre of a virtual and mobile museum to be made available to schools and communities across the North East.



1. Copper bracelet/napkin ring inscribed Ypres 1917. (J Wade)
2. © IWM (Q 1625) Dump of 15" howitzer shells near Ypres, 1916. Royal Marine Artillery. (Imperial war Museum)
3. © IWM (Q 4415) Soldier checking Mills bombs at the entrance to his dugout. (Imperial War Museum)
4. Australian War Memorial RELAWM14155. Trench art clock: Sapper S K Pearl, 5 Field Company Engineers, AIF.
5. Paper knife with cartridge case fired over the grave of Lt Peyton, RN, died on active service 4 Nov 1918. (J Gordon-Cumming)

Typically, pieces are made from empty rifle or artillery shell-cases and can range from cigarette lighters to candlesticks and table bells, the final product being limited only by the ingenuity, skills and resources available to the maker. Some items were



even made from discarded animal bones and army biscuits! The Mills

bombs being prepared here might have been destined for an alternative artistic life.

More skilled personnel, perhaps with greater access to material and tools, could produce intricate and complex artefacts such as this alarm clock made by Sapper Pearl of the



Australian Imperial Force, incorporating pieces of Allied and German munitions and regimental insignia.

Central to our investigations will be an artefact-centred interview methodology, pioneered by Newcastle University, with the present owners at the very heart of our research.



If you own trench art and would like to have it recorded as part of this unique project please visit our website at:

www.beamish.org.uk/ww1-trench-art

or contact us by email at:

trenchart@ncl.ac.uk