

Dear Friends,

In this letter I hope to give you a brief resumé of all that the Friends have organised and achieved in the last twelve months. It does not seem like a year ago that we were concluding our Remembrance of the centenary of the First World War. The Museum team over those four years had brought some inspiring and thought-provoking exhibitions and events to Balhousie, many of them with financial support from the Friends. The last WW1 event that we donated funds to was the special exhibition 'There But Not There'.



over the past four years have sparked a keen interest in military history. The

Friends donations for the last twelve months have been focused on building on that interest, particularly amongst the younger generation. To that end we have made a significant donation to the Museum to assist with the cost of maintaining a full time Learning and Education officer. This ensures that, during term time, the Museum can run a comprehensive programme for school visits. There is nothing more heartening in a military museum than to hear it full of the voices of enthusiastic school children bringing the pictures and stories in their textbooks to life through the artefacts in the Museum and letters and diaries from the archive. The act of Learning through engagement also continues during half terms and holidays with Black Watch Explorer Club activities and many drop-in craft events run by the Learning and Education Officer and his volunteers.

**Donation £9500**

In September 2017 we gave the Museum a donation to set up a Travel Bursary Fund to assist schools with the cost of getting children to the museum. This was a huge success and enabled schools from outside the Perth area to discover

the great opportunity for learning that Balhousie offers. We have made a further donation to this fund to promote learning.

**Donation £1000**

The Special Exhibition 'Sporting Soldiers' gave an insight into a different side of life in The Black Watch. Keeping fit was not just about route marching and assault courses. *'The importance of team sports in army life cannot be underestimated. Replicating the ethos of team spirit and resilience so vital to serving soldiers, sport was also a source of recreation and respite'*. This exhibition highlighted the sporting prowess of many generations as they played, amongst other things, hockey, football, and golf not to mention the really brave who took to an Olympic Bobsleigh.

This picture from the exhibition is of The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Football Team with the Durand Cup, India 1899. Many of the largest pieces of silver to be found in the Museum's collection are sporting trophies.



**Donation £398**

There is always something dull but essential that needs to be paid for and this year it was a replacement microphone to accompany the audio-visual system in the café. Vital for the lecture programme.

**Donation £484**

The lecture programme has continued apace. Although it is now The Black Watch Castle and Museum that host and gain financially from these events, they are still organised and presented by the Friends Events Committee in support of the Museum. The last major WW1 battle lecture we had looking at a specific event was *'The First Battle of the Atlantic'* given by Prof Phillips O'Brien of St Andrews University. This lecture was not just about U Boats sinking ships. Prof O'Brien talked extensively about the whole process of getting fleets to sea, which countries were producing enough steel to keep their fleets viable, the tactics developed by captains to protect their vessels and the advantages of the convoy system. It was a truly fascinating hour

which had the audience spell bound. As the centenary of WWI came to an end, Dr Mike Taylor gave a lecture entitled '1918: The End Game' in which he explained how near defeat in the Spring had turned to victory by Autumn. As always Dr Taylor's summing up of the years events was comprehensive and enlightening. We had looked at many of the key events of that year individually but to have them all linked together made sense of what we had learnt and gave an understanding of how the battles of the Great War had ultimately resulted in victory. The end of the war was recorded in many different ways and with very mixed emotions for both those on the Western Front and their families at home. In January, Dr Norman Watson brought in some of his extensive and remarkable collection of unpublished letters from 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918. In his lecture entitled 'In their own words: Original letters from the 1918 Armistice' Dr Watson explained how these letters record the way in which events played out on the day the Great War ended. The talk gave a very moving insight into the emotions and personal experiences of that day.

The last four years have sparked an interest in researching the military service of forebears for many people, a process that can be extremely frustrating. With the 'How to trace a soldier' lecture, Museums archivist, Richard Hunter, explained the way to set about this and the main facilities and websites that are available. Richard included some amusing anecdotes about the rewards, perils and pitfalls of pursuing the service career of your ancestors. Not every one's military ancestors were at the sharp end of conflict. Historian Andrew Robertshaw gave an absolutely fascinating lecture entitled 'Mud Blood and Bandages: The RAMC on the Western Front', it was full of interesting insights that you simply never think about. We all have images of the medics saving lives, but who has ever thought about the process of moving the injured back from the medical post, how you ensure the stretchers are at the front line and who empties the slop buckets!

In May, Fiona Connah, the Assistant Curator at the Museum, gave a very interesting lecture on 'British Military Medals'. The Museum has a very extensive collection of medals and Fiona is extremely knowledgeable about them. She had brought some particularly unusual medals for us to look at and learn about their history. Of all the items that our ancestors accumulated over their military service the one thing that is consistently

kept by families are medals; they are a small insight into a career of service and sacrifice. The medals in this picture are part of the Sid Lunn medal collection on display in the museum. Another side of military life that lives on through the ages is music. In July, Nicky Small and Syd House of PlaidSong entertained us with 'Enlist, Bonnie Laddie!': Songs of the Scottish Soldier Across the Centuries' Nicky told us the history of each song before she and Syd then sang them, it was a wonderful evening of history and music which the audience thoroughly enjoyed and at times joined in.



Most of the lecturers that come to the Museum are experienced speakers. However, in March we had a debut speaker. David Robertson is a PhD student whose subject is 'Great Escapes: MI9 and Second World War Escapes'. David had never given a lecture before, but you would not have known it. He knew his subject intimately and gave an extremely interesting and well delivered lecture that his audience thoroughly enjoyed. He had also brought along some wonderful clothes worn by escapees with pockets made of silk with maps printed on and buttons that contained compasses. This lecture was a taste of what we have lined up for the future as this Autumn marks 80 years since the start of WWII. The future lecture programme will be built around the major events of that war as we reach each 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We start with Prof Evan Mawdsley and 'World War II: Hitler's War?' on the 10<sup>th</sup> December.

The Cocktail Party has long been an annual fixture in the Friends diary. However, in recent years we have seen a reduction in numbers and as only 10% of the Friends attended this year's event, we feel it is time to ring the changes. In future we will hold a slightly lower key drinks party and include a museum centric event with it.

This has been a busy year for the Friends and as ever we could not achieve what we do with out those on the Management and Events Committees who give so much of their time and expertise. We are also extremely grateful to the staff and volunteers at Balhousie who give us so much assistance. But most of all we could do none of this without you, our members, so thank you for all the support you give us.

Sarah Riddell-Webster  
Chairwoman

