

30 October 2019

## **War Widows' Quilt Commemorates the Lives and Loves of War's Forgotten Women**

From 7–11 November 2019, The Queen's House, Greenwich, will host the first ever exhibition of the War Widows' Quilt. Made from armed forces shirts by over ninety war widows and their family members, this beautiful and moving piece of art tells many individual stories of love, loss, and grief while also shining a light on the ongoing history of war widowhood in the UK.

The quilt, made in collaboration with arts company arthur+martha, is part of the War Widows' Stories project, led by Dr Nadine Muller (Senior Lecturer in English Literature & Cultural History, Liverpool John Moores University) and the War Widows' Association of Great Britain (WWA).

Commenting on the forthcoming exhibition, Dr Muller said: "We started work on the quilt exactly a year ago in this very same venue, and nobody could have predicted then what an impactful piece of art this would become. The War Widows' Quilt tells so many moving stories, shares so many cherished memories, and expresses so much grief as well as hope. It is a magnificent, important memorial."

Theresa Davidson, whose husband served in the Scots Guards and died in the Falklands in 1982, commented: "I feel such pride and real honour to share my love and grief. The love, grief, loss, and pain never leaves you. It is my own personal war!" Another war widow, Angela Evans, reflected on the profound effect that contributing to the quilt had on her: "It's from the heart. One day you have everything, then the next day you've got nothing. Somehow it helps to say something, to express it out loud."

Lead artist Lois Blackburn (arthur+martha) reflects on her work on the quilt: "Sewing together the pieces into a final quilt felt a giant responsibility, but one for which I remain very grateful. I selected fabrics that had been worn by the armed forces. I carefully took apart fifty military shirts to make patches and chose a patchwork technique that deliberately echoes the quilts made by British servicemen during the Crimean War."

Mrs Mary Moreland, WWA Chair, highlights the importance of this project for the Association, its members, and the wider war widows community: "The quilt and the project help the Association raise awareness of the challenges war widows face every day. Our voices are sadly still absent from most public institutions, including museums. We cannot tell the stories of war without the stories of those left behind."

The quilt helps address a significant gap in the public histories of war, says Sue Pritchard, Curator of Decorative Arts at The Queen's House: "The Queen's House has long been the site of female power and patronage. As such we actively seek opportunities to reveal the untold female narratives inherent in our collections. It is therefore wholly appropriate that we take this opportunity to commemorate the experiences of contemporary women within the wider context of conflict on land and at sea".

The exhibition will be marked with a special celebration event at The Queen's House on Friday, 8 November, 5–8PM. On Saturday, 9 November, artists Lois Blackburn and Phil Davenport will be hosting drop in embroidery sessions and guidance to the quilt.

War Widows' Stories is funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council, Arts Council England, the British Academy, and the Heritage Lottery Fund, and it is run in partnership with Royal Museums Greenwich, the National Memorial Arboretum, and Imperial War Museums.

**\*Ends\***

## CONTACT

For further information, images, articles, and interviews, please contact Dr Nadine Muller by email (n.muller@ljmu.ac.uk) or phone (07486 379476).

## PHOTO & FILMING OPPORTUNITIES

7–11 November 2019, The Queen's House, Greenwich.

9 Nov 2019, War Widows' Association Service of Remembrance, The Cenotaph, Whitehall.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

### Dr Nadine Muller

Nadine is Senior Lecturer in English Literature & Cultural History at Liverpool John Moores. She is a BBC New Generation Thinker. She has contributed to Remembrance features for BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* and BBC Radio Scotland's *Sunday Morning with Ricky Ross* and has presented programmes on the history of widowhood for BBC Radio 3's *The Essay* and *Free Thinking*.

### arthur+martha

As arthur+martha, Lois Blackburn and Philip Davenport have pioneered ways of working unique in arts and health. They use experimental writing and art to help self-expression, and work with communities who are often marginalised, including homeless people, older people, and those living with dementia. To have a voice and be heard is a powerful human need. By helping to achieve this arthur+martha boost people's wellbeing and promote understanding in wider society. Their project *The Homeless Library* launched at the Houses of Parliament and the Southbank in 2015–2017. *Stitching the Wars* saw exhibitions across Derbyshire in 2016–17 and won a Foundation Derbyshire Award. arthur+martha have also presented evidence to an Arts and Health All Party Round Table at the House of Lords in 2016 and helped launch a subsequent major report in 2017.

### War Widows' Association of Great Britain

The Association was formed in 1971 and today has around 3,000 members. The War Widows' Association is essentially a pressure group and exists to improve the conditions of War Widows and their dependants in Great Britain. Its work encompasses those who have suffered bereavement as a result of World War II and all conflicts since then including Iraq and Afghanistan. The WWA also represents those who have suffered the loss of their partner and in peacetime, when the death was attributable to their service life. The Prince of Wales is the WWA's patron. Its Vice President is the Rt. Hon. Viscount Younger of Leckie, and its President is Baroness Fookes, DBE, DL.

### The Queen's House / Royal Museums Greenwich

The 17th century **Queen's House**, designed by Inigo Jones, was the first Classical building in England – it is known for its perfectly proportioned Great Hall, original marble floor and beautiful Tulip staircase. Part of Royal Museums Greenwich, the Queen's House has Scheduled Monument status as it is a building of unique architectural importance and forms an important part of the UNESCO Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site. Visitors to the Queen's House can see highlights from the National Maritime Museum's fine art collection, including: famous portraits of Elizabeth I and James Duke of York; and exquisite examples of the work of the van de Veldes.

The Queen's House is part of **Royal Museums Greenwich** which also incorporates the National Maritime Museum, the Royal Observatory Greenwich and *Cutty Sark*. This unique collection of

museums and heritage buildings, which form a key part of the Maritime Greenwich UNESCO World Heritage Site, welcomes over two and a half million British and international visitors a year and is also a major centre of education and research. The mission of Royal Museums Greenwich is to enrich people's understanding of the sea, the exploration of space, and Britain's role in world history. For more information visit [www.rmg.co.uk](http://www.rmg.co.uk).

### **Arts & Humanities Research Council**

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funds world-class research in a wide range of subjects: ancient history, modern dance, archaeology, digital content, philosophy, English literature, design, the creative and performing arts, and many more. Each year the AHRC spends approximately £98m to fund research and postgraduate training often in collaboration with partners. The quality and range of research supported by this investment of public funds provide considerable economic, social and cultural benefits to the UK. The AHRC has more than 50 disciplines within its remit. Since receiving its Royal Charter in 2005, the AHRC has made a total of more than £700m of funding available for arts and humanities research.

### **Arts Council England**

We champion, develop and invest in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. We support activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Between 2018 and 2022, we will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country.

### **Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU)**

Liverpool John Moores University is one of the largest, most dynamic and forward-thinking universities in the UK, with a vibrant community of 23,000 students from over 100 countries world-wide, 2,400 staff and 250 degree courses. LJMU aims to be recognised as a pioneering modern civic university, delivering solutions to the challenges of the 21st century. The university's five-year vision is built around four key 'pillars' - to deliver excellence in education; impactful research and scholarship; enhanced civic and global engagement; and an outstanding student experience.