

Exploring the stories of the wounded

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Conservation intern Louise Stewart cleaning a gas mask for the exhibition

As the Centenary of the First World War progresses, a new National Lottery funded project at the Science Museum is exploring the important stories of those who were wounded during the conflict.

The Wounded is a major exhibition that examines the unprecedented medical challenges faced not just on the battlefield but in the years and decades after the First World War. It opens in 2016 and will be told partly through the experiences of those involved.

The exhibition will feature around 100 objects to help us tell this story. These will include gas masks, artificial limbs and pioneering blood transfusion equipment, as well as intimate and personal items such as the protective amulets carried by soldiers onto the battlefield.

Many of these objects were retrieved directly from the battlefield and physically bear witness to life on the front line. While this means that they can evoke a powerful emotional connection with the visitor, their fragility, wear and decay pose major problems for the curator.

A key component of the Wounded project is to carefully conserve all potential display items – and many reserve objects – through the recruitment of a conservation intern, Louise Stewart. Louise has recently completed her one-year internship, delivering the difficult and technical conservation work on these objects so that while retaining their battle-worn appearance they are also now stabilised for the future.

Among her many object challenges was a rolled, crumpled hot-water bottle that was part of a field surgical pannier. Louise researched a type of heat treatment, previously only briefly written about by textiles conservators at the Victoria and Albert Museum, to unfold and reshape the hot-water bottle. This pioneering approach will be the subject of an article in *Icon News* in September 2015.

Louise has also benefited from specialist training and professional development during her internship.

She said: "Over the course of this year I have had the chance to improve my skills with practical work and with many training opportunities. I have also been able to contribute to a fascinating project and have very much enjoyed doing so."

The Wounded exhibition will open in Summer 2016.

To join the conversation on Twitter please follow the hashtag [#understandingWW1](https://twitter.com/understandingWW1).