

# Pembrokeshire's young people explore the First World War through soldier's poignant handwritten letters

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Narberth Museum has worked with Narberth Youth Theatre to produce the drama

The 'Letters from the Front: Learning from the past' project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), has explored the impact the First World War made on the Pembrokeshire town of Narberth, using as its focus a collection of letters written by local soldiers - among them, William Bowen Stephens.

To really bring the letters to life, Narberth Museum has worked with Narberth Youth Theatre on a special production, linking memories of the First World War with experiences in more recent conflicts. In the drama, the letters are juxtaposed with a reading of Owen Sheers's *Pink Mist*, a verse drama which explores the psychological and physical after-effects of Afghanistan on three young soldiers. The museum wanted to make these wartime experiences more relevant and really bring home the realities and repercussions of war on communities large and small, home and abroad.

Holly Gillard, 14, played a leading role in the Youth Theatre's performance, and thought the drama helped make the letters very real for everyone involved: "Because I took part in creating and

performing 'The Pals' Battalion', I empathised with the young soldiers more and understood how the war affected them not only at the time, but throughout the rest of their lives.”

Supported by HLF, the project is one of many featuring today at a special event at the Senedd in Cardiff, where visitors will be encouraged to consider new ideas for activities to help them mark the Centenary milestones of the First World War.

Pauline Griffiths from Narberth Museum explains how the project first came about: “Narberth Museum holds a fascinating collection of First World War letters written by one of the town’s former soldiers, William Bowen Stephens. He writes of his experiences at the Front, his view of the First World War and his hopes for the future – and it’s not always easy reading.

“Letters from his fellow combatants after his death testify to their great friendship and the high esteem in which he was held, painting a sometimes all too vivid picture of life during the war. These are now all on display along with other First World War artefacts that were previously in storage.”

The Heritage Lottery Fund has supported a variety of projects throughout Wales and the UK that commemorate the First World War, with 63 projects being awarded a grant in Wales so far.

Due to its success, HLF has made an additional £4million available for communities looking to explore, conserve and share their local First World War stories and connections. Grants are available from £3,000 to £10,000 from the First World War: then and now programme, particularly those looking to explore the Somme in 2016.

Richard Bellamy, Head of the HLF in Wales, explains: “The demand for National Lottery funding for projects that help communities to explore and share the heritage of the First World War has been overwhelming. As we can see from this excellent project at Narberth Museum, we know that there is huge interest in marking the Centenary and exploring that heritage and stories in new and different ways.

“However, there are still more stories to tell, many of which have never been told or have been forgotten over the years. Some of these are thought-provoking and inspiring, some are uncomfortable and create debate. We want to encourage communities to explore these stories. The additional funding we have announced will help even more people to get involved and explore a greater range of stories that ultimately give us a better appreciation of how the war shaped the world we live in today.”

Narberth Museum’s ‘Letters from the Front: Learning from the past’ project is just one of the many groups that have been able to explore the heritage of the First World War thanks to this funding, but there are plenty of stories still to uncover. More information about how to apply is available on the [First World War: Then and Now grant programme page](#).

## **Further information**

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