BIRMINGHAM
FIRST WORLD WAR TOUR

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LOTTERY FUNDED
When Britain declared war in 1914 few people in Birmingham could have foreseen the impact it would have on the city.

Around 150,000 Birmingham men served in the armed forces during the conflict. Many of them joined the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, the three local battalions of which were known as the ‘Birmingham Pals’. Pals regiments were so-called because prior to the introduction of conscription in 1916 local men were encouraged to volunteer in groups with their friends.

By the time of the Armistice in 1918 the war had claimed the lives of 12,320 Birmingham servicemen with a further 35,000 wounded. Many were permanently disabled and so were never able to return to their pre-war livelihoods, leaving their families without their main breadwinner.
Birmingham was a major centre for munitions manufacture during the war.

The city produced three of the iconic weapons used throughout the war by the British and Imperial forces: the ‘Mills Bomb’ hand grenade, the Lee Enfield Rifle, and the Lewis Machine Gun. The latter were both manufactured by the Birmingham Small Arms Company (BSA) in enormous numbers – at its peak the firm was producing 10,000 rifles and 2,000 machine guns per week.

Numerous local companies were involved in the production of munitions including Kynoch’s Munitions in Witton, the National Shell Factory at Washwood Heath, the Mills Munitions Factory in Newtown, the Birmingham Metal and Munitions Company at Adderley Park in Saltley, the Austin Motor Company at Longbridge, the Birmingham Small Arms company (BSA) factories in Small Heath, Sparkbrook and Redditch, and the Kings Norton Metal Company ammunition works (where the most dangerous processes were carried out in temporary buildings on the marshes).

At the peak of the war effort 18,000 people were working at the Kynoch factory in Witton. Many of these were women, known locally as “Kynoch’s Angels”, who took over the places vacated by enlisted men. Visitors were astonished how well the women adapted to unfamiliar tasks and how quickly they worked to achieve optimum output.
BIRMINGHAM FIRST WORLD WAR CITY TOUR MAP

KEY
1. Council House & Victoria Square
2. Birmingham Town Hall
3. Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery
4. Bell Edison Telephone Building
5. The Jewellery Quarter, Caroline Street
6. Hudsons Whistles, Barr Street
7. The Museum of the Jewellery Quarter
8. Warstone Lane and Key Hill Cemeteries
9. Hall of Memory

Please note: this map is an approximate guide to the relative sites listed within this publication and is not drawn to scale.
COUNCIL HOUSE & VICTORIA SQUARE

Created in 1901, Victoria Square was (and still is) the city’s main public gathering space and focal point for major events. It was packed with people when war was declared in September 1914 and also on 11th November 1918 as news of the Armistice spread.

In January 1918 a tank was displayed in Victoria Square as part of ‘Tank Bank Week’. It was greeted with great fanfare, with civic dignitaries and local celebrities delivering speeches to encourage people to buy War bonds to fund the war effort. Birmingham raised over £6.5m as part of ‘Tank Bank Week’.

The Council House contains a number of memorials to council employees who were killed during the conflict. In the Council House reception there is also a plaque commemorating the 4,000 Belgian refugees who made their homes in Birmingham following the invasion of their country in 1914.
Designed by Joseph Hansom and Edward Welch and opened in 1834, Birmingham Town Hall was the city’s first public concert hall and auditorium. It was the venue for numerous meetings and speeches during the First World War. Speakers included Neville Chamberlain, then the city’s Lord Mayor and later Prime Minister of the country.

In November 1916 the suffragette Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst (above) spoke at the Town Hall.

During the First World War she suspended her suffragette activities and strongly promoted the war effort. She toured the country at meetings, persuading those who had not enlisted to sign up. White feathers were given out by her supporters to those men not in uniform.

The Town Hall also hosted numerous musical performances. One of the most popular tunes during the war was ‘It’s a long way to Tipperary’ which was co-written by local songwriter Harry Williams.
Opened in 1885, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery acted as a special recruiting office for the Birmingham Pals Battalions in 1914. Today the Museum is home to a range of collections related to the First World War.

On the museum’s main staircase is the Birmingham artist Joseph Southall’s fresco, New Street 1914 (right). Southall was a Quaker and a pacifist and his fresco (which was actually painted in 1915-16) deliberately harks back to a prosperous, peaceful pre-war city.

The Birmingham: its people its history exhibition galleries also feature a large number of objects, photographs and other documents which give an insight into its citizens’ experiences of the war.
The Bell Edison Telephone Building was the Midland headquarters of the air raid warning system.

In January 1915, Chief Constable Rafter announced that if the city was attacked, certain factory whistles and hooters would be used as sirens. The signal was to be four short notes and one very prolonged note. In the event of the siren being sounded the public were advised to leave the streets and shelter in cellars or under their stairs, and to extinguish any domestic lighting.

Despite being a key strategic target for German Zeppelin air-raids, Birmingham escaped any damage thanks to its implementing a partial black-out in November 1914.

Although not popular with residents this proved to be extremely effective. On the night of 31 January 1916 Zeppelins were unable to locate Birmingham in the dark so bombed the glowing Black Country foundries instead.
In 1914, the Birmingham Jewellery trade was one of the most important industries in the city, employing an estimated 70,000 people.

The First World War dealt a severe blow to the trade. The supply of precious metals was hampered by government embargoes, and demand for jewellery fell as the middle-classes were squeezed by war taxes. Young men from the jewellery factories enlisted in their droves, creating a massive shortage of skilled labour.

Despite all of the problems, the war created a new market in the form of patriotic goods.

Many companies switched to producing military equipment. The historic firm of Deakin & Francis moved from the production of cufflinks and fine jewellery to making swords and bayonets. They even manufactured an ingenious trench lighter, designed to shield the flame, so that soldiers could light a cigarette without being spotted by enemy snipers.
Hudson’s whistles have been made in Birmingham since 1870 and the company is still going strong today. They moved into their factory on Barr Street in the Jewellery Quarter in 1909.

The company’s whistles were used extensively by the military during the First World War, perhaps most poignantly to signal the soldiers to go ‘over the top’ to attack enemy trenches. The two whistles used were the famous ‘ACME Thunderer’ and the ‘Metropolitan’.

The Metropolitan whistle belonging to Sgt. T.W. Harper of 2nd Battalion Royal Warwickshire regiment saved his life when it deflected a German bullet that was aimed at his heart.
Located in the original factory of the jewellery manufacturers Smith & Pepper, the museum tells the story of jewellery and metal-working in Birmingham.

During the First World War Smith & Pepper were one of 300 jewellery manufacturers who switched production from gold and silver ornaments to munitions.

The Museum’s current temporary exhibition, An Adaptable Trade, explores how the jewellery industry adapted to wartime austerity, the impact on local people, and the vital role played by women. Looking in detail at three prominent Jewellery Quarter firms, and illustrated with items loaned from family collections, it reveals the extraordinary sacrifices made by a generation of Birmingham people.

An Adaptable Trade runs until June 2015
The Jewellery Quarter boasts two historic cemeteries.

Key Hill, opened in 1836, was Birmingham’s first public cemetery and was open to all denominations. Warstone Lane – for Anglicans only – opened twelve years later in 1848.

Warstone Lane contains 51 First World War burials. A screen wall lists by name those whose graves are not marked by headstones.

Key Hill contains 38 burials from the First World War, all commemorated by name on a screen wall.
Completed in 1924, the Hall of Memory was built to commemorate the 12,320 Birmingham citizens who died during the First World War.

Designed by local architects S.N. Cooke and W.N. Twist and constructed almost entirely by Birmingham craftsmen, it cost £60,000 which was raised solely through public donations.

Outside stand four larger than life bronze statues representing the Army, Navy, Air Force and Women’s Services by the Handsworth born sculptor Albert Toft. Inside are three fine low-relief sculptural plaques by another local artist, William Bloye, entitled Call, Frontline & Return (below).

The three Books of Memory detailing the names of the fallen are available to view online at www.halofmemory.co.uk
The Library of Birmingham houses a wealth of material related to the First World War in the Archives & Heritage section on Level 4.

These include photographs, letters, silk-embroidered postcards, song cards and other documents and memorabilia.

The library is also home to the Birmingham War Poetry Collection.

The collection was originally presented to Birmingham Central Library in 1921 in memory of Private William John Billington of the 2/24 Regiment, who was killed in action in Palestine in March 1918. It represents one of the largest collections of its kind in the world.
St. Thomas’ Peace Garden was designed around the ruined tower of St. Thomas’ Church, which was the only part of Thomas Rickman’s 1829 structure to survive the Birmingham Blitz of 1940.

Originally laid out as public gardens in 1953 to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, the area was renamed the Peace Garden in 1995 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War.

When the world leaders came to Birmingham for the G8 summit in 1998, each premier planted a tree as a living symbol of peace.

The Peace Garden includes a colonnade which had originally formed part of the Hall of Memory but which was relocated here when Centenary Square was laid out in 1989.
St. George’s church was originally designed by J.J. Scoles in 1836-8 but was largely rebuilt by J.A. Chatwin in 1884-5. The church contains the funeral memorial to Raymond Lodge who died on the Somme aged 24. Raymond’s father, Sir Oliver Lodge, was an eminent physicist and man of science, but such was his grief that he turned to spiritualism.

Nearby to St George’s on Church Road was the home of Sir William Mills, inventor of the Mills Bomb (left), the standard issue hand grenade of the British and Imperial forces.

Early in 1915, Mills opened the Mills Munitions Factory in Newtown and by the end of the war the company had manufactured a staggering 75 million grenades.
Founded in 1552, this historic school originally occupied buildings in New Street in the city centre. The school moved to its current site in 1936.

Over 1400 Old Edwardians served in the First World War, including J.R.R. Tolkien who lost two of his closest friends during the Battle of the Somme.

To commemorate the centenary, the school chapel has been renovated and a new exhibition created to tell the stories of the 245 Old Boys who lost their lives during the war. In addition, a new documentary film, Tolkien’s Great War, explores the impact of the war on Tolkien and his friends.

Due to the limited capacity of the chapel pre-booking is required to view the exhibition. Register on the school website at www.kes.org.uk/great-war-exhibition.
At the outbreak of war the University of Birmingham was requisitioned by the army as the 1st Southern General hospital.

Various parts of the campus were used as temporary wards, including the Great Hall. By the end of the war the hospital had accommodation for 3,500 patients.

In November 1916, J.R.R. Tolkien was brought to the hospital from the Somme after being diagnosed with trench fever.

Matron Lloyd became famous as Birmingham’s “Lady of the Lamp”. She received several honours for her work with the wounded soldiers. She was personally presented with a white quilt embroidered with the coats of arms of nine British and Commonwealth regiments.
The Quaker Cadbury family purchased the land now known as Bournville in 1879 to build their new cocoa and chocolate factory. From 1893 they created nearby Bournville village to provide affordable, high quality housing for their workers.

During the First World War, Cadbury’s continued to produce chocolate, albeit in reduced quantities. They produced ‘chocolate for the troops’ gift parcels throughout the duration of the war. In total 20,000 parcels were sent out to troops on the front, as well as to those who were wounded and recovering at home or in hospital.

Although many of their employees fought in the war, the Cadburys’ Quaker principles meant that most family members were opposed to joining up as combatants.

However, Laurence Cadbury was one of the founding members of the Friends Ambulance Unit.
Highbury was home to Joseph Chamberlain from 1880 until his death in 1914. During the First World War the Hall was turned into an Auxiliary hospital funded in part by Kynoch Armaments.

The hospital was quickly earmarked to be the Special Neurological Department of the 1st Southern General hospital and was fully equipped with ‘electrical appliances of the most modern and varied character, and a gymnasium with modern apparatus provided for rehabilitation, education and occupational therapy’.
Cannon Hill Park was given to the city of Birmingham by the philanthropist Louisa Ann Ryland in 1873.

The park contains a memorial to members of the Scouting movement in Birmingham who were killed in the First World War. The memorial was designed by the architect William Haywood (1876-1957) and was unveiled on 27 July 1924. Haywood was a founder member and the first secretary of the Birmingham Civic Society, which was established in 1918.

Cannon Hill Park also includes a fine memorial to the soldiers of the Warwickshire Regiment who were killed in the second Boer War.

Completed in 1906, the memorial was the work of Albert Toft, who later went on to sculpt the four allegorical figures which adorn the Hall of Memory.
In the early stages of the war, convoys of wounded troops bound for the Southern General hospital arrived at Moor Street station. They would then be transported in ambulances to the hospital which was based at the University of Birmingham.

As the war progressed a new station was created at Selly Oak goods yard which was nearer to the university campus.

At nearby Snow Hill station a rest station manned by volunteers was established where servicemen travelling by train could get a hot drink and a sandwich at any time of day or night. The rest station catered for 362,000 men from 2,372 trains during the war years.
BOOKING AND FURTHER INFORMATION

To book the Birmingham First World War Tour contact Sue at enquiries@birmingham-tours.co.uk or telephone 07805 115998

Websites
www.voicesofwarandpeace.org
www.1914.org
www.bbc.co.uk/history/O/ww1
www.britishlegion.org.uk

Further reading
Great War Britain:
Birmingham Remembering 1914-18
by Sian Roberts (2014)
In connection with The Library of Birmingham

Tolkien and the Great War:
the Threshold of Middle-Earth
By John Garth
Harper Collins, 2014

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