

<b>Institution:</b> University of Leeds		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> D26		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Beyond the Trenches: Changing the public understanding of the impact of the First World War on women and colonial soldiers		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2005–2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Alison Fell	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Professor of French Cultural History	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 2007–2021
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2013–2019		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>  <p>Fell's research raised awareness and changed attitudes in individuals, communities and organisations locally, regionally and nationally. Fell collaborated on First World War Centenary projects with BBC documentary makers and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS); Leeds Museums and Galleries; and arts, heritage and community organisations funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund's (NLHF) <i>First World War: Then and Now</i> scheme. The resulting documentaries, public events, performances and exhibitions led to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the inclusion of women's and West African soldiers' experiences in collaborating organisations' films, exhibitions, and other public commemorative activities</li> <li>enhanced public understanding of the First World War as a global conflict in which women as well as men participated.</li> </ol>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>  <p>Since 2005 Fell's historical research has examined:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the impact of the First World War on French and British women's lives</li> <li>the representations and experiences of French and British colonial soldiers</li> <li>French and British women's campaigns to repatriate the bodies of their dead male relatives</li> </ol> <p>From 2014 to 2019 she led <i>Legacies of War</i>, a research and public engagement hub at Leeds, and was Co-Investigator of the AHRC-funded Gateways to the First World War Public Engagement Centre which aimed to stimulate public interest in the centenary through a range of events and activities such as open days and study days. This facilitated collaboration with stakeholders and dissemination of research findings.</p> <p><b>Key research findings</b></p> <p>Fell carried out new archival research on case-studies of French and British women (including nurses, factory workers, charity workers, secret service agents, members of resistance organisations, and members of the auxiliary services of the British armed forces). Although most historians had suggested that a 'veteran identity' could only be applied to men, Fell demonstrated how this cohort of women claimed 'veteran' status in order to enter public life or intervene in public debates. She also analysed contemporary films and television broadcasts to show how popular cultural representations often fail to grasp the extent and range of women's participation and its impact [1, 2].</p>		

Fell analysed both cultural attitudes to, and lesser-known memoirs and interviews with, French West African soldiers to argue that war service fostered new cultural stereotypes, on the one hand, and changed self-understandings on the other. She also used previously unexamined archival sources to show that some of the relationships between white French and British women and Indian, West Indian and African men that developed in France in WW1 led to a questioning of racial and cultural stereotypes [3, 4, 5].

Through analysis of primary sources and interviews with descendants, Fell discovered that French and British women's campaigns to repatriate their male relatives' bodies after the war contained evidence of a new understanding of their relationship to the state, based on the notion of a 'social contract' despite the fact that they remained largely disenfranchised [6].

### 3. References to the research

#### Publications:

1. *Women as Veterans in Britain and France after the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
2. 'Remembering the First World War Nurse in Britain and France', in Alison S. Fell and Christine Hallett (eds), *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
3. 'Nursing the Other: The Representation of Colonial Troops in French and British First World War Nursing Memoirs', in Santanu Das (ed.), *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 158-75.
4. 'Beyond the *Bonhomme Banania*: Lucie Cousturier's Encounters with West African Soldiers during the First World War', in Laura Rowe et al (eds), *Other Combatants, Other Fronts: Competing Histories of the First World War* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2011), pp. 221-39.
5. [with Nina Wardleworth, 50/50], 'The Colour of War Memory: Cultural Representations of *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 9.4 (2016), 319-34.
6. [with Susan Grayzel, 50/50], 'Women's Movements, War and the Body', in Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe (eds), *Women Activists Between War and Peace* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 221-49.

#### Funding:

- 2012-13, AHRC, PI, 'Legacies of War', £25K
- 2013-14, AHRC, PI, 'Leeds Stories of the First World War', £100K
- 2013-14, AHRC, PI, 'Discovering First World War Heritage', £40K
- 2014-19, AHRC, Co-I, 'Gateways to the First World War, £1.4 million
- 2016, AHRC, PI, 'Edie's War: First World War Nursing', £15K
- 2017, AHRC, PI, 'The Stories Behind the Pictures: French and British colonial troops', £15K

#### 4. Details of the impact

##### (i) National collaborations: BBC documentaries and Somme100

###### *BBC documentaries*

Following the publication of [4], a public historian and TV presenter contacted Fell for the 2014 documentary *The World's War: Forgotten Soldiers of Empire* (nominated for a 2015 RTS Programme Award). A 2013 survey showed that 68% of the UK population were unaware of the participation of African men in WW1 [A]; Fell's research [4, 5] led the programmers to include a section about French African troops' interactions with French women. The presenter commented that 'before discussions with Professor Fell [...] this was only one of the editorial options. [...] It was her ability to convey her research in a way that worked on television, on location, in a language suitable for a lay audience and with authority and passion, that ensured the sequence was filmed' [B]. Fell was also quoted in the presenter's accompanying book *The World's War* (WW1 Book of the Year at the 2015 Political Book Awards). This interview was one of two selected for inclusion in a BBC teaching resource on colonial troops, reaching thousands of UK schoolchildren. A 2016 survey revealed that television was 'the most widely-cited source of information about the Centenary' with the BBC 'by far the most likely outlet' [A, p. 42], and that public awareness of 'colonial troops' had risen since 2014 [A, pp. 33-4]. *The World's War* is therefore likely to have played a key role in this shift in public perceptions.

In 2018, another documentary-maker contacted Fell having read a blog based on her research on French and British women's repatriation campaigns [6]. Fell's filmed interview based on this research became central to the narrative of a BBC documentary, *We Will Remember Them*. The documentary-maker comments that his discovery of Fell's original research marked 'a turning point in the making of the programme. [...] [Fell's chapter] really did shape the argument.' [C] *We Will Remember Them* reached over 500,000 in its first two airings, 'more than double' what would be expected in that time slot, while the documentary-maker notes: 'Most of the reviews highlighted the original research [Fell has] undertaken on repatriation' [C].

###### *DCMS: National Commemoration of the Battle of the Somme*

In 2016 Fell was appointed to the DCMS committee organising the UK commemoration of the Battle of the Somme in Manchester. Her research on women's participation in WW1 inspired the committee to commission additional activities focusing on nurses, pacifist women and actresses for the 'Experience Field', aimed at a broad public audience. These included an interactive exhibition, field hospital and short commissioned play. The project director for Somme100 comments that Fell 'was a key member of our advisory group' helping 'to shape our commemorative activity and also directly provid[ing] content' [D]. The Manchester 'Experience Field' attracted 7413 visitors over 2 days including 1400 school pupils from 35 schools. The film capturing the event reveals an enhanced public understanding of the war's impact on women as well as men. One older woman said that learning about the WW1 nurses was 'interesting' and 'humbling', while a 9 year old schoolgirl commented that 'I saw an experience I hadn't seen before and I liked learning about the nurses' [D].

##### (ii) Regional collaboration: Leeds Museums and Galleries

The *Legacies of War* team collaborated closely with Leeds City Council in a partnership described on the front page of their evaluation report as 'key' to the development of their WW1 commemoration programme [E]. Fell's research insights underpinned a joint statement produced by the University and Leeds City Council, the guiding principle of which was 'to move beyond the idea that the conflict only affected white men in French trenches'. The Leeds WW1 programme reached 3,244,333 people [E]; Fell's team collaborated on 17 individual projects, several of which focused on women and French African soldiers. In 2015, following her public talk and workshop based on [2] and [3], the Leeds Museums and

Galleries WW1 curator asked Fell to help produce interpretation material and case studies for the *Healing Home* exhibition in Temple Newsam House, which focused on nurse and patient experiences. In a survey carried out by Leeds Museums and Galleries, 98% of respondents agreed that the Leeds WW1 programme had 'taught them something new', and 81% that as a result they 'felt differently, or more strongly, about WW1' [E]. The *Healing Home* exhibition reached 26,828 visitors. As a result, the curator commented that 'by 2018 women are definitely more on the Leeds WW1 map than they used to be [...] there's also a more nuanced understanding of how different women's lives were affected, and people have started to have more empathy with women's experiences' [F].

### (iii) Collaborations with community groups funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund

Through her role as Co-Investigator on the Gateways to the First World War Public Engagement Centre, Fell collaborated with 25 NLHF-funded WW1 commemoration projects. The NLHF strategic lead for the WW1 Centenary commented that a significant benefit of Fell's work was the way it led to 'a greater appreciation in communities that their heritage has value and they can tell their stories with confidence and pride' [G].

In 2017, Fell advised two Hull-based community groups: the Iranian Community of Hull and Humber All Nations Alliance. The project produced an exhibition entitled 'Stories Behind the Pictures: WW1 Colonial Troops'. This conveyed the experiences of both Indian and, following Fell's talk to the project steering group based on [3] and [4], French African troops. They also produced a film which captures public responses to the exhibition such as 'I had no idea that [colonial troops] were involved in the war' and 'So many Muslim troops died for the Allied cause and for the British empire and I think that would really be helpful today if people knew' [H].

In 2018 Fell was historical advisor for a photography exhibition entitled No Man's Land at the Impressions Gallery, Bradford. This combined images taken by female WW1 photographers with new commissioned images by contemporary female war photographers. The curator exhibited photographs by Mairi Chisholm, one of the women featured in [1], commenting that '[Fell's] expertise brought context, insight and academic rigour [...] [and helped] me understand the larger context of women's participation in the First World War and consider international parallels' [I]. Fell also advised on an accompanying NLHF project with New Focus, a group of volunteers aged 14–18 who produced a book aimed at teenagers focusing on WW1 women, using case studies from [1]. The NLHF project manager commented: '[Fell] inspired New Focus to think outside the traditional viewpoints of the First World War and look at the points of view of women in a variety of roles. Working with a leading expert [...] gave New Focus the confidence in sharing their opinions, asking questions and discussing how they could share the heritage in new ways. [...] This experience inspired the whole design of the publication' [J]. 3,500 copies of the book were sent to 63 Bradford schools and libraries and 87% of schoolchildren surveyed said they found it 'inspiring' [J]. This project won the 2019 National Creative Learning Heritage award and featured prominently in the NLHF WW1 evaluation report.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. British Future surveys 2013 (pp. 1-20) and 2016 (pp. 21-58)
- B. Testimonial regarding *The World's War*, October 2019
- C. Testimonial regarding *We Will Remember Them*, November 2018
- D. Testimonial by the project director, DCMS, Somme100, Manchester, September 2016. The 20-minute film referred to in the email, and quoted from above, is at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnQwQBLOokM>

- E.** Leeds Museums and Galleries First World War Programme Evaluation Report, 2019
- F.** Transcript of interview with the Leeds Museums and Galleries First World War curator, January 2020
- G.** Testimonial from the NLHF strategic lead for WW1 centenary, March 2015
- H.** Film of the NLHF project: 'The Story Behind the Pictures: WW1 colonial troops': <https://vimeo.com/237199036> (quoted comments at 00:40 to 01:00)
- I.** Testimonial from the curator, Impressions Gallery, Bradford, October 2019
- J.** Testimonial from the NLHF project manager, New Focus, Bradford, October 2019