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Research highlights silent warriors of First World War

A Northumbria University, Newcastle research student is calling for the women of World War One to be recognised.

John Hulme, a Master of Research student in History, asks why women rarely feature on war memorials despite the significance of their contributions during the war period. Using memorials, archives, databases and the works of several historians, John's research considers the status of women in Edwardian England, contemporary views of the war and the role of women in it, and memory and memorialisation.

His research paper, entitled ‘Commemorating the Women of World War One, Never or Now?’ concludes that the time is right for a discussion of a new memorial: one that fully recognises the contribution women made to the British victory in the First World War.

John said: “First World War memorials are a ubiquitous feature of our built environment, present in every city, town and village. Writers of the time acknowledged the presence of women in many wartime occupations from 1914 onwards. Women replaced men in factories and offices as well as filling jobs created to meet the demands of the war, including producing munitions, manufacturing aircraft and nursing the wounded.

“My paper seeks to address why, given this contribution, women feature so rarely on war memorials.”

The topic is particularly timely as it takes place during the nation’s four-year commemoration of the Great War of 1914-18. With 2014 marking 100 years since the start of the war, the Government is leading on a series of remembrance activities taking place across the country. Coordinated by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the events will culminate in the building of a permanent commemoration that will memorialise this significant milestone in world history.

John’s research will be presented at a Master of Research Symposium at Northumbria University next month (April). The session, which has the theme ‘Perspectives: Culture on a Global Scale’, takes place on Monday 27th April. The one-day event is open to the general public and brings together an exciting collection of papers from a new generation of researchers.

Fourteen postgraduate students from Northumbria’s Master of Research (MRes) programme will share their research in the Arts, English Literature, and History as part of their Research Development module. Their papers focus on a wide range of issues including: Gender, Popular Culture, Constructing Relations and American Culture.

Each year, as part of the MRes course led by senior lecturers Dr Nicole Robertson and Dr Tawny Paul, students are tasked with planning, arranging and presenting their dissertation research in an all-day symposium. It is an opportunity to showcase their work, spark public debate and interest, and gain valuable skills in conference planning and publicity.

Charlotte Gaunt, an MRes English Literature student, has been part of the design and communication group helping to publicise the symposium. She said: “Perspectives: Culture on a Global Scale is a combination of papers exploring changing attitudes and advancements in culture over the last 300 years, with the main focus centred on the last 100 years. The papers explore several aspects of culture from World War One memorials to large scale constructions and changing world superpowers. The focus is on media such as film, newspapers, and poetry to investigate the ever-changing face of culture throughout the world.

“The symposium aims to show that culture is not a discipline that can be defined or limited to one approach and that academic disciplines must continue to grow and change with each new development that affects the world – whether that be ‘history from below’, an examination of unexplored literature, or a new progressive art.”

Other papers presented during ‘Perspectives: Culture on a Global Scale’ include explorations of the Newcastle Women’s Unionist Association between 1918-1928, portrayals of masculinity in Lord Byron’s poetry, and the impact of Bruce Springsteen’s music as a challenger to President Ronald Reagan’s neo-conservatism.

The Master of Research Symposium takes place in Northumbria University’s Lipman Building, Sandyford Road, on Monday 27th April from 9.30am until 4pm. The event is free but those wanting to attend must register their interest by emailing leighton.wright@northumbria.ac.uk.

For further information about postgraduate study at Northumbria University visit www.northumbria.ac.uk/masters.

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