WW1 Creative Writing Competition

For 7-14 year olds

About the Competition

The Norfolk Record Office is where the archives and records of the county are looked after and made accessible to the public. Among the millions of original and unique documents we hold are many relating to WW1, like personal diaries written by different people involved in WW1 in many different ways.

The Education and Outreach team have chosen three diaries that we think are the most interesting and unique, written by a solider, nurse and church army worker. Using the photographs and transcripts of the sections provided, we would like young people to use these personal Norfolk in WW1 stories as inspiration to write something creative (perhaps a poem or short story). For example, it could be a story where the solider and the nurse meet and talk about their experiences. Or it could be a poem that creatively describes the diary entry. Any kind of creative writing is welcome! (but please keep entry to one A4 page). If you would like to be sent a hard copy of the competition pack please email our Education and Outreach Officer, Victoria Draper: victoria.draper@norfolk.gov.uk

What’s the Prize?

The prize is an archive experience for the winner and their school class, (or guides/scouts/youth group). This experience will include:

- the Indenture Game: learn about the Norfolk Record Office and the documents it holds.
- A Behind-the-Scenes tour of the archive taking you around our impressive strongrooms which hold over 12 million documents. With their rolling shelves, cold temperature and huge size, many visiting students have commented that it reminds them of a James Bond film!
- Learning how to handle documents safely and seeing some of the things we have found in among the documents when we are given them (including spiders!).
- Finally, you will see some of our ‘gem’ documents.
- The winning entry will also be published on our blog.
Entering

We encourage schools to promote this opportunity to their pupils and, if possible, provide the time to write their entry. This way a whole class could enter with each student creating their own entry. Individuals are welcome to enter too!

Entries will be judged by the Education and Outreach Team.

The deadline for submitting an entry is the 27th March and the winner will be informed by the 30th April.

Once the winner is announced we will be able to discuss a convenient time to hold the archive experience.

How to Enter

You can send your entry by post or by email.

If sending by post the address is:

Norfolk Record Office: The Archive Centre
Martineau Lane
Norwich
NR1 2DQ

If entering by email the email address is: norfrec@norfolk.gov.uk

Please put Creative Writing Competition as the subject of the email.

Along with your entry, please provide your name, age, school, contact telephone and email (and how you would prefer to be contacted)

The following pages provide the transcripts and extracts of the three documents.
Frank Dunham’s diary gives a very detailed account of life on the Western Front, where he acted as a stretcher bearer.

This extract describes his very first experience of being in the trenches.

My first night in the trenches proved uneventful, and I slept well in spite of cold feet – we heard the next morning that the company men had been working during the night building up the sides of the communication trench and front line, which had been knocked about by shells recently. Owing to the mud in the trenches, we were all issued with rubber waders, and if these got wet through, we could change them for a further pair at a drying room, i.e a good sized dugout fitted with racks in which large braziers were kept going. In company orders appeared the notice that it was a crime to get ‘trench feet’, and everyone was expected to rub his feet daily with whale oil and have clean dry socks to change into. About 2 pm on November 24th, I had my first experience of shell fire, Fritz commenced sending over light shells and trench mortars, and continued this for 3 hours. We sat in our dugout, which was just about splinter proof, and could hear several ‘lumps’ quite near us, and quite expected to be called out any minute to attend to casualties. However as it was getting dusk the shelling died down, and we were just congratulating ourselves on having no work to do when the call of “Stretcher Bearers” floated up the trench. Out we got, and were told that 3 chaps had been hit by a shell which burst in the front line, and running up the communication trench found two, Austin and Wheeler, with slight wounds, which they had bandaged themselves with their field dressings and the other, Chambers, moaning in the bottom of the trench. Being dark by now, we couldn’t see where he had been hit and he appeared in such pain, that we put him on the stretcher, and made off at once down the communication trench, and we had to climb on top of the trench and go through part of the Ravine Wood. I shall never forget this carry – it was slow work, and the mud in the wood was knee deep, we were slipping all over the place with the stretcher, and I felt sorry for poor old Chambers, who gave an extra loud moan every time the stretcher bumped.
get out of it, and we jumped down, and
found the SBs dugout to be built in the
side of the trench, and only 2 feet high.
This meant that we could just crawl into it,
and lie down - we soon had a candle alight,
but had to make sure that the sack over
the entrance did not let the light out. I passed
a remark that we had not seen any shelling
getting into the line, and the 'Old-Sweat' told
me that it seemed a mutual arrangement between
Fritz and ourselves, not to shell whilst ration
lemon and rice was about. We found our-
selves in the support line, being about 100
yards in rear of the front line, which half of
our company was holding. This sector was to
the SE of Ypres, and known as the Ravine, and
the trenches appeared in good condition. My
first night in the trenches proved uneventful, and
I slept well in spite of cold feet - we heard the
next morning that the company men had been
working during the night building up the sides
of the communication trench and front line, which
had been knocked about by shells recently. Going
to the mud in the trenches, we were all issued with
rubber waders, and if these got wet through, we
could change them for a further pair at a dressing
room, i.e. a good sized dugout fitted with racks,
in which large braziers were kept going. In company
orders appeared the notice that it was a crime to
get 'trench feet', and everyone was expected to
rub his feet daily with whale oil and have clean
socks to change into. About 2 pm on November
27th, I had my first experience of shell fire. Fritz
commenced sending over light shells and trench-
mortars, and continued this for 3 hours. We
sat in our dugout, which was just about
splinter-proof, and could
hear several lumps crinkle near us, and quite
expected to be called out at
any minute to attend
to casualties, however,
as it was getting dusk
MC 947/1

The following digitisation, and we were just there.

when the shovel was done, and we were just there.

I'm not liking dirt, and we were just there.

When we got there, and we were just there.

We were just there.

I'm not liking dirt, and we were just there.
Beatrice Gurney went to Belgium after the war with the Church Army. Her diary describes life in a formerly-occupied country: in this extract she organises a party for Belgian children made orphans by the war.

The children’s party was a great success. Someone suggested flags and in one minute our garden, which has no flowers and is only a yard with cinders rolled as pavement, was gay with any number. Fred the head storesman, a delightful person who has 3 little girls and adores children, did most of the preparation and put up a long table for 40, which was made very gay with endless crackers found in the store, and heaps to eat, and before 4 the party arrived, 40 kids in black. Pinafores green and black, stiff Eton collars, and black and white washing hats. They looked so solemn, with 2 attendant sisters, one a charming and quite gay soeur superiere. The funny thing was they filed in 3 abreast and walked straight to the tea table and sat down. They never said how-do-you-do or looked our way. They were asked to tea and meant to have it. They were painfully silent at first and well behaved, and tried to stand up every time they were given food. We loaded the table with pistolets, buttered buns, open tarts, plums and cocoanut cakes, sent specially by the lady pâtissier. They eat enormously and we had to get more and more supplies. The sister said they usually had ½ a tartine and café au lait, so she did not think she would give them any supper! They looked all fat and well and happy tho’ the tragedy of their being in the orphanage was so terrible. Many were orphans of civilians shot by the Germans. Many no-one knew anything about at all. Children, babies found in the devastated areas, the youngest, a really darling little thing of about 4 was found as a tiny baby by its dead mother who had been killed by a bomb when fleeing from some ruined town.
Hamers. 13 Aug. 19. It is going to be really hot again but there is some air which makes all the difference. The Children's party was a great success. Some one says Jacked was in one minute our garden which had no flowers is only a garden with children dotted as pavements. Jack was very surprised. Fred the head Stiles man, a delightful person who has 3 little girls & adored children. Did most of the preparation. I put up a toy table for 40. It was made very fancy with endless crackers forced in the soft cheap box. I before the party arrived 40 kids in black holiday gowns in black stuff Elgin collars & black chiffon wraps. They looked so solemn & solemn. One of the attendants is von or someone else. They looked so solemn & solemn. They were asking Jack to come away but I told them not to. They were pleasantly silent as first well behaved & said to stand up everywhere they were served food. We loaded the table with pretty little buns
Let's, loose, open lasts, pleine + come nut canes but especially by the lady balatonites. They eat erroneously & we had to get more & more supplies. The soldier said they usually had 1/2 a lorraine & cafe an hour. So she did not think she is give them any supper. They looked all far & well & happy. No the tragedy of their being in the orphanage was so terrible. Many were orphans of children shot by the fascists. Many no one knew anything about or all. Children, baby found in the devastated areas, the youngest a really beautiful little thing of about 4 was found as a tiny baby by the dead mother who had been killed by a bomb. They fleeing from some ruined town. Many were orphans. It was a good thing the soldiers brought some small ones as they were very shy. However the last was thinner than Richardson our silent shy house orderly. She feared a cracker with one child a cherished pandemonium began. They had never seen crackers & thought them sort of very smart serviettes.
Jessie Hayward, from Hardley, was a nurse. She was travelling through the Mediterranean on the troop ship called Transylvania when it was sunk by the Germans. This extract is a detailed account of her experience. It includes descriptions of how the ship is torpedoed, the evacuation into lifeboats, the sinking of the lifeboats, and the rescue by a Japanese destroyer (ship).

10:15am: a bang which those who heard will never forget; Sister S. and I got up and said the ship has been struck. There is no panic, every one goes to his allotted place, what white faces all around. A Scotch officer tightens my lifebelt (I have never seen him since) and we are to get in “ladies first,” how often I have read but never expected to hear that cry. Pte Frances helps me in and immediately find my feet wet, but this is a mere detail. Matron and 45 of us all pushed in 3 Tommies and then the boat is lowered. I really think this is the worst moment. The captain gives address from the bridge, we hear there is no crew. Who will volunteer? Two sailors come down the [?] Jack acts as skipper, we shall never forget him. Only a lad of 17, but how brave and splendid he was through out. Our boat sets out and the men from the boat give us 3 cheers! I cannot look back. The sea seems quite rough. The sisters help with the oars, we are in sight of shore. My rowlock is broken so I cannot row, I wish I could, only to do something one feels better. “throw the extra oar overboard, some poor soul may be glad of it” Jack says.

The boat seems full of people, some poor girls very sea sick, I feel pretty fit at this stage. “You did not get me well at Cambridge for nothing, Sister Hayward” It seemed strange to hear my own name. Francis works hard, throws off his coat and even his life belt to work. Jack’s smiling face at the rudder, cheering us all and shouting out orders. It seems a long way to shore. A second torpedo strikes our ship and an answering shot from the Destroyers. The Transylvania seems to be going down on one side. Many boats are now launched all around us. Why don’t they pick us up? Our boat is filling with water, we start bailing out, but it seems so fruitless and the waves are so big. We throw all sacks, coats, rugs etc over board. Another bang and HMS Transylvania is no more. The Japanese destroyer rushes up. Has the submarine been sunk? The sea seems alive, men clinging to oars, rafts and boats. They look sadly at our boat and we are sinking. Every one waves and cries for help. Jack signals with a sisters white cap. “What can we do now” says the 2nd Saylor, Jack shakes his head. His orders have ceased and I notice his grave face which has smiled before. “Give me my life belt” Francis puts it on only just in time, and all the sisters think we shall sink with the boat. I wonder what they will think at home. A lot flashes through my mind. My life has been a useless one. God help us all. Each wave we think must be the last. Another big wave and the boat is swamped, but somehow is still floating and we are all hanging on. One V.A.D jumped out as she could swim and is clinging to our oar behind me. I am washed out and find myself
clinging to an oar and piece of rope. At first I felt very frightened and believe I was calling out. Francis is also washed out and I still find I am next to him. He said “hold on Sister don’t be frightened”. All around we see boats. Will no one pick us up? “Hold on” “Hold tight” is the general cry. I can see some of those agonized faces now.

After a time I felt calmer, but my arms were aching so I felt I must give in. Will they never come? Jacks says “hold on Sister a 2nd boat is coming to pick us up”. The waves seem so big, quite over my head, the salt water makes me feel so sick. I thought of home and all my very dear ones. Life is sweet. It seems hours we were in the water, some one tried to get me back into the boat but I could not. I could see and feel little now. A cheer! from the distance it seemed and then some one said the destroyer was alongside. I thought my head was going to be knocked and it was a pity to be killed after all the “holding on”. Two hands came down and I was pulled up first. My hair seemed caught, the rope ladder was there and I got one foot on. I felt the ship’s boards under my feet and crowds of men all around me. All went black! I knew I was lying down and some one was [?] my hands and face. A doctors was calling for brandy, it all seemed so far away. “Sit up you are all right” Drink this “wine” out of a bottle.” “take her down below to the Storeroom.” I was led down somehow, and how nice to feel the warmth.
April 15th, 150 miles off St. Helen's. Our Senior Toynbee comes up the chart. Such a nice man.

10.15. A bang. Which those who heard will never forget; either I got up, or I said the ship has been struck. There is no panic, away we go to the all clear place, what white gulls around. A Scotch officer helps me in a rowing boat first, my feet feel well, but this is a more delicate matter. All of us all pushed in. Tommy n. Then the boat is lowered. I really think this is the worst moment. The Captain gives order from the bridge. We hear there is no crew, who will volunteer? Two sailors come down the rope. Jack acts as skipper, we shall never forget him. Only 14 of us, but how brave all listened, they were shocked. Our boat gets out of the water from the ship, give a cheer! I cannot look back. The sea seems quiet enough. The sailors help with the boat. We are in sight of shore. My hatchet is broken. So I cannot row. Wish I could, only to do something one feels better. showed the extra can overboard, some poor man may be glad of it, Jack says.

The boat seems full of people, some poor sick very seasick. I feel pretty fit at this stage. You did not get me well at Cambridge for nothing, LISTEN TO YOURSELF! It seemed strange to hear my own name. You were wrong, threw off his coat & even the life belt to work.

Jack's smiling face at the committee, cheering us all so heartily, but ordered. It seems a long way to shore. A second impact strikes our ship & an answering shot from the destroyers. The Pennsylvania seems to be going down on one side. Many boats are now launched all around us. Why don't they pick us up? Our boat is filling with water, we start bailing out, but it seems so fruitless. There
waves are so big. We throw all our clothes on the boat. Another boat seems to be our only hope. The lives of the others seem to be in danger. What can we do? We call for help. Jack signals with a white flag. We are doing our best to save ourselves. But I wonder what the others will think of us. A boat comes through our boat. My life has been a useless one. Good help us all. Each wave we think must be the last. Another big wave & the boat is swamped, but somehow we are still floating. We are all hanging on. One O.A.D. jumps out as he could swim. I am holding him. I find myself clinging to an oar - piece of rope. At first I felt very frightened but believe I was calling out. Francis is also calling out & I still feel a need to him. He said, "Hold on sister don't be frightened. All around we see boats. Will we be picked up?" "Hold on, hold tight is the general cry. I can see some of those agonized faces now. After a time I felt calmer, but my arms were aching so I fell unconscious. Will they ever come? Jack says, "Hold on sisters, a 3rd boat is coming to pick us up. The waves seem to be big, quite over my head. The salt water makes me feel so sick. I thought of home & all my dear ones. Life is sweet. It seems hours we were in the water. Some one tried to get me back into the boat, but I could not. I could see little now. A cheers from the distances it seemed
Then some one said the destroyer was alongside. I thought my head was going to be knocked off it was a pity to be killed after all the holding on. Two hands came down & I was pulled up first. My hair seemed caught. The rope ladder was then. I got on first. I felt the ship boards under my feet. A crowd of men all around me. All went black! I knew I was lying down. Someone was chafing my hands & face. A doctor was calling for brandy. It all seemed so far away. "Sit up you are all right. Drink this wine out of a bottle. Take two down below to the storeroom." I was led down somehow. I do not know how to feel the warmth. Two or little Taps brought a lower rub my hands, my teeth were chattering. I could not keep a limb still.

After this I seemed to come round & I heard it was 1-30 p.m. People all around me were very sick, but I felt quite fit & chummy again. I was able to laugh & talk. All the relief. Many of the Sisters were undressed, but I would not let them take my things off. Officers, Loomines, & Sisters were all helping each other. It was a strange sight. Taps handed round, wine, biscuits & water.