

# La iniciativa Europeana 1914-1918. Del concepto al proyecto

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## The concept

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The *Europeana 1914-1918* project is based on the *Great War Archive*, an initiative at the University of Oxford where people across Britain were asked to bring family letters, photographs and keepsakes from the War to be digitised. The success of the idea has encouraged Europeana, Europe's digital archive, library and museum, to bring other national institutions across Europe into an alliance with Oxford University.

Like the *Great War Archive*, the Europeana 1914-1918 project is a new kind of digitisation project as it actually targets material that the public owns. In short, an *online* system has been set-up whereby members of the public can submit material they own to do with the First World War. In conjunction a series of open days, Family History Roadshows or Community Collections Days, around Europe has been set up whereby people can bring material in and it will be scanned there and then for them.

## The project

The project is collecting memorabilia and stories from the period of the Great War (1914-1918), focusing on European items: letters, postcards, photographs and stories. Contributions can be made in two ways:

1. via the project website <[www.europeana1914-1918.eu](http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu)> by adding a picture of the item and type in the story *online* or.

2. at the collection days events by bringing the item(s) to the event where project staff will photograph the items and record the stories that go with them.

Collection days have previously been held in Germany, UK, Luxemburg, Ireland and Slovenia. Future collection days will be held in the UK, Cyprus, Belgium, Italy, France and Austria. Oxford University provides professional expertise to Europeana 1914-18, leading the training for the family roadshows, and providing expert support in digitising and cataloguing.



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The *online* story collection opened in March 2011. At the website, anyone can add their objects to the collection together with their stories. More information about how to add something to the collection can be found on the <<http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu/en/contributor/>>. The objects that are submitted will be checked by the project team and then made available through Europeana.

Since its start Europeana 1914-1918 managed to collect over 2,500 stories relating to more than 45,000 items. It thus harnesses the power of the Web along with the potential of ‘mass’ amateur digitisation to collect thousands of items from World War One that would otherwise have disappeared or remained hidden from researchers and scholars worldwide. The initiative tackles the problem that it would be too expensive to locate all these items and then to digitise and catalogue them using traditional digitisation process. Yet at the same time these items are being lost, thrown away, or accidentally damaged. Using the web as a collection medium and tapping into the public’s enthusiasm for preserving their heritage Europeana 1914-1918 meets these issues head-on. It is not a usual digitisation project but it is eye-catching and attracts a lot of research and education interest.



## What connects a life-saving Bible, a crucifix in a bottle and a postcard from Hitler? [Europeana Press release – May 2012]

Web portal Europeana has collected and shared these extraordinary personal stories of World War 1 from across Europe. The Hague, 2 May 2012.

Untold and extraordinary real-life stories from World War 1 have come to light and will be shared *online* as a result of family history roadshows run by the digital innovation service Europeana. They include a life-saving Bible, the first-hand testimony of a centenarian, and a postcard from a 27-year-old soldier named Adolf Hitler, which suggests that the future dictator had problems with his teeth and his spelling.

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In preparation for the 100th anniversary of the conflict, WW1 roadshows have been held in Germany, England, Ireland, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Denmark. People are invited to bring along WW1 memorabilia to be seen by experts and digitised. The Europeana 1914-1918 website also shows people how to upload their own digital scans. The idea for the roadshows came from the success of the University of Oxford's Great War Archive in 2008, funded by leading UK educational technology innovator, JISC.

Two thousand people of all ages from across Europe have attended the roadshows to share family stories. Roadshow participants have been joined by *online* contributors and 45,000 photos of objects, scanned letters and diaries have been uploaded onto the website to date. Most of these are previously unpublished and have never been seen or studied outside the families.

Jill Cousins, Executive Director of Europeana said: "*The project's success highlights the huge interest that Europeans have in their shared history. People pass their stories down their families, and in Europeana have found the means to preserve them for future generations, and make them universally accessible. Europeana brings a new approach to cultural history, linking people's own stories to the official histories of the war that we're collecting from the national libraries and archives.*"

Markus Geiler contributed pictures of his grandfather's life-saving Bible, with the lump of shrapnel embedded in it from the grenade that killed his comrades while they slept. He said:

*“I am here to show how a family story can actually become part of the collective memory of Europe. I hope that there will be many, many such stories, and the European idea will develop even further when people deal together with the past and tell each other their stories.”*

In Preston, UK, John Stafford's first hand account of the Battle of the Somme was brought along by his daughter Joan Almond, 85. The typed manuscript documents Stafford's experiences and illustrates how he coped with post traumatic stress disorder, decades before the condition was recognised. Stafford lay horribly injured for two days until Allied troops found him and carried him across 'Death Valley' to medical help. Joan said: *“I think the war must have haunted him a lot, especially when you read his account. My mother used to encourage him to write down his experiences and this seemed to have a calming influence.”*

The participation of Irishmen in WW1 was politically sensitive and as a result many of their stories have never been told. That was one reason why the Dublin roadshow was the best attended in Europe so far. More than 600 people turned up, some queuing for hours, to share their memorabilia and stories. They include a marvellous wartime love story, told by Joseph Heapes' daughter-in-law, Máire, of how Joseph found the love of his life, Mary, while a prisoner of war in Germany.

Slovenian centenarian Slavko Zupan is one participant able to share his direct memories of the war. His enthusiasm for the project was such that he visited the roadshow in Nova Gorica, Slovenia, twice. To illustrate his childhood recollections Slavko brought along a bottle containing a richly decorated wooden crucifix. It was made by a Russian prisoner of war in Slovenia. Existing on meagre rations, prisoners crafted such objects to barter for food or cigarettes. The crucifix has been in Slavko's family since 1916.

The Munich roadshow revealed what at first sight appears to be just one of many postcards sent by soldiers in the field. The postcard, 'Greetings from Nuremberg', describes the sender's recent trip to the dentist and his desire to go back to the front line. That soldier was Adolf Hitler, writing to his comrade Karl Lanzhammer in December 1916.

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Director of Oxford University Computing Services, Dr Stuart Lee, one of the digital experts attending the roadshow, recalls the moment when he was first handed Hitler's postcard: *“I felt a shudder run through me. I found it hard to believe that at a local event to record ordinary people's stories, I was seeing a previously unknown document in Hitler's own hand. Europeana's project is remarkable in that it can bring in the most meaningful story in a person's whole existence – the Bible that saved a life, for example – as well as the mundane and misspelt jottings of the future dictator.”*

For more information please see

<[www.europeana.eu](http://www.europeana.eu)> [Europeana portal]

<[www.europeana1914-1918.eu](http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu)> [website to add an explore stories]

<<http://pro.europeana.eu/web/europeana-1914-1918/home>> [project partners website]