



War House

Jules Hudson is a familiar face to millions of TV viewers as a presenter of *Countryfile* and *Escape to the Country*.

His involvement with the BBC1 archaeology series *Dig 1940* tapped into a personal interest in military history, so **Hudson's** asked him to mark the anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War with a visit to Duty Calls, a series of exhibitions and events in Yorkshire. →



Jules and Chris Ridgway discuss the changes in the park at Castle Howard during WW1 with the Atlas Fountain and Hawksmoor's Pyramid in the background.



James Paine's classical Palladian facade at Nostell Priory.

The First World War touched every community in Britain. Thousands of memorials in our towns, cities, villages and churches are a silent testament to the sacrifice made by a generation who found themselves caught up in the tragedy of the first truly global conflict the world has ever seen. Men and women were drawn into factories, farming, the mines, forests and, of course, the misery of the front lines both on land, at sea and, for the first time, in the air. They came from every corner of the British Isles and its commonwealth, and from all walks of life: butchers, bakers, butlers, housemaids, engineers, teachers, the unemployed and those that had just left school. The rich, the poor and the privileged were plunged into a national effort that mobilized itself for a new kind of conflict, that of Total War. Every aspect of Britain's society and

industry became committed to victory despite the most appalling losses. Some 9 million men died from all sides along the tortured ribbon of the Western Front, which stretched for some 485 miles from the sand dunes of Belgium to the Swiss Alps.

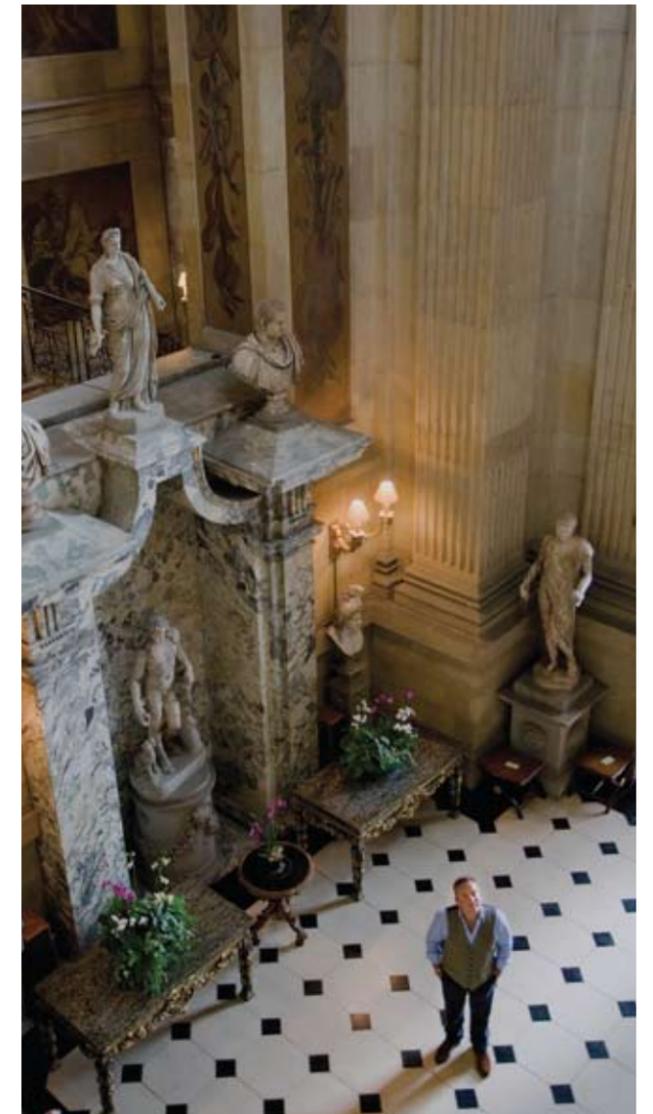
The casualty lists paid no regard to class or fortune; throughout history, warfare itself has always been a brutal and unforgiving leveler. When we look back at the enormous changes in society that the First World War ushered in, it is perhaps the often-rarified world of the country house, based as it was upon the remnants of Britain's former feudal system that has become the barometer for that change. ITV's hit fictional series *Downton Abbey* has introduced a new generation to the stark divisions between those 'upstairs', and those that served them from below. In reality, by the wars' end these divisions were so

altered, that for many country estates it marked the beginning of the end.

This year preparations are well underway to commemorate the centenary of start of the war in 2014. The changing fortunes of many of our greatest country houses and their families are once again the subject of much re-appraisal and study. The *Duty Calls* initiative in Yorkshire has set about the task of revisiting many of the stories that can still teach us much about the role our country houses and those that lived and worked in them played in the conflict. Earlier this year I had the chance to see four of them for myself, spread about a county that has long been home to some of our oldest and finest family seats. Castle Howard, Nostell Priory, Kiplin Hall and Brodsworth Hall have different stories to tell which offer a fascinating insight into the country house at war.



Brodsworth's Curator, Caroline Carr-Whitworth, tells the story of Amy Tyreman, aged 11, whose tireless knitting for the troops was rewarded with 28 letters from grateful soldiers at the front.



Castle Howard, for all the grace that the architect John Vanbrugh conferred upon it, is in many ways an enigma. The common story of a family brought to a standstill with the loss of its heir is not that played out here. Nonetheless, of the 9th Earl of Carlisle's 6 sons, only two were alive in 1914 and in 1917, his youngest Michael was killed at Paschaendaele.

The estate itself was reluctantly given over to producing food as enemy U-boats in the Atlantic wrought an increasingly appalling toll on allied shipping. Although Castle Howard itself was never requisitioned, its horses were, a common feature of many country estates and one familiar from the critically acclaimed War Horse.

Remarkably however, archive correspondence reveals that they expected them back. Refugees from Belgium also moved onto the estate, and their letters and diaries reflect another side of the human cost of the war in Europe that is often overlooked as we focus on the front lines.



Curator Chris Ridgway shows Jules Hudson a First World War bugle with papers, diaries and letters in the Muniment Room at Castle Howard.



Above: The soaring splendour of Vanbrugh's Great Hall at Castle Howard captures the imagination of every visitor. Jules is looking up to the Venetian frescoes by Pellgrini, damaged by fire in 1940, and the restored dome.

Left: Part of Castle Howard's Duty Calls exhibition chronicles the wartime story of Michael Howard, killed in 1917. Both surviving Howard sons fought in France.





Red Poppies & White Butterflies, the exhibition at Nostell Priory, aims to capture the wartime memories of visitors with stories of participants written on poppies (those killed) and butterflies (survivors) by their descendants.

Robert Adam's cool interior sets off Chippendale's chairs in the Top Hall at Nostell Priory.

Nostell Priory was a house that also saw its fair share of upheaval within the St Oswald family. Their eldest son Roland was thought to have been killed in action, but survived and fell in love with chorus girl Nellie Green. Despite the obvious society questions, he married her in 1915 amidst a flurry of newspaper gossip. He survived the war, eventually joining the Royal Flying Corps, and went on to become 3rd Baron St Oswald. Today, the family records have been re-assessed under the enthusiastic eye of exhibition curator Sarah Burnage. I joined a group for a seminar

exploring the effects of the war on the family and the house, as well as providing access to the service records held by the national archives online. I tapped on the keys and found the report of my grandmother's brother, killed whilst serving with the Navy in the eastern Mediterranean. Opening the archives and inviting locals to come forward with their tales of life at Nostell has revealed much that is new, and has sparked plans to extend the appeal for yet more information from the public in piecing together the Priory's wider history. →

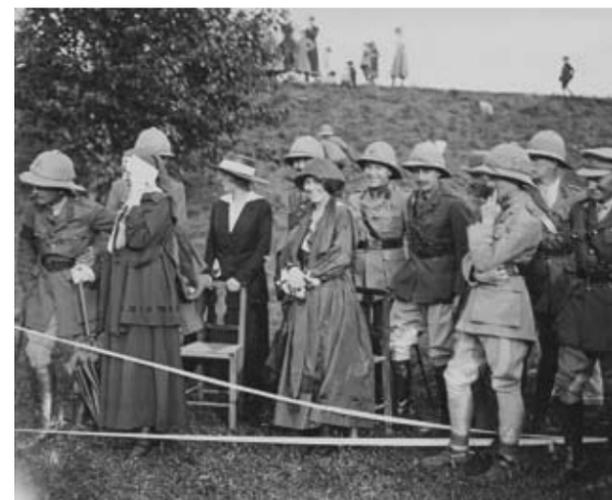


The loss of garden staff at Kiplin to the trenches in 1914 was to herald the decline of the kitchen garden in the 20th century.

Both Castle Howard and Nostell Priory are to most eyes archetypal country houses. Grand and imposing, they dominate the landscapes that have been so carefully created around them. Kiplin Hall however, is an altogether different proposition. Built back in the early 1600's, its looks have changed little, even if its size has somewhat altered thanks to later remodeling. Nonetheless, this pretty building is at once a welcoming house that was home to an extraordinary woman. In 1916 Bridget Talbot became a nurse and served under her own steam in Italy and the Adriatic, looking after the wounded and running canteens. Fiercely independent, she never married, despite her beguiling looks, yet she eventually returned to live at Kiplin and bequest it to the trust that now maintains it. The attic rooms provide a fascinating exhibition of Bridget and Kiplin's history.



Charming early 19th century skittles dressed as various colonial soldiers from the toy collection at Kiplin Hall.



Bridget Talbot's medals from her WWI service to commemorate her extraordinary contribution running canteens for troops in Italy from 1916 to 1918. Her brother Geoffrey's flying helmet was returned to Kiplin after he was killed when his plane crashed at Dover in 1916. At this point Bridget's war diaries stop. Behind is the uniform of the Napoleonic Kiplin Yeomanry. →



Book a special Duty Calls mid-week stay at Middlethorpe Hotel & Spa from March to September 2014. Quote Hudson's for a special rate of £xxx per night (xx% discount on high season ticket price of £xx providing you show at least one ticket from a Duty Calls exhibition. Middlethorpe, a fine 18th century mansion on the rural outskirts of York once home of the Barlow family, was Visit Yorkshire's Hotel & Restaurant of the Year in 2013 and marries fine dining with relaxed country house ambience and an up-to-the-minute Spa.



Amy Tyreman, 2nd left back row, with her brothers and sisters around 1916.

Left: Acting out period roles from Brodsworth's wartime history has proved an important channel for sharing memories for the oral history programme.

Brodsworth Hall is the youngest of the great houses I visited. Classically Victorian, it was designed from the outset as a family seat that borrowed much from the architecture of its neighbours. With service quarters, a library, great hall and dining room, it represents the Victorian ideal of a new-build country home. Curator Caroline Carr-Whitworth looks after one of the country's biggest oral history records from former owners and estate workers. The staff lists were much depleted first by those that volunteered in 1914 for their part in a war 'that would all be over by Christmas', and then by those conscripted the following year. However it is the fortunes of Brodsworth's young chauffeur and cowman that I found particularly intriguing. Having joined up as privates and survived the trenches, they both rose through the ranks to become Captains. Catapulted into a different class, neither could have returned to their old jobs 'below stairs'. The last records of them are requests for references as post war London Cab drivers. It is a sobering thought that having been decorated and promoted in the struggle for freedom, they were unable to conquer the class system upon their return.



Duty Calls is the perfect title for these exhibitions. Duty and an individual's sense of it, no matter which level of society they were drawn from, is writ large

across the horizon of so many personal accounts. At the start of the War, the country house represented a microcosm of all that was good and bad about British society 100 years ago. At its end four years later, once again the country house served as a window on a world that had changed forever, for better and for worse. So next time you find yourself with

an afternoon to spare, drop by and visit one of the *Duty Calls* exhibitions. As you'll discover, whilst those that lived through the First World War have now sadly passed away, there remains much to see that we should remember.

Duty Calls: the Country House at War. A series of exhibitions exploring the impact of war on country houses and their communities.

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