

ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY WAR HERITAGE GROUP

TUESDAY 3 FEBRUARY 2015
5.00 pm COMMITTEE ROOM 4A
HOUSE OF LORDS

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Present: Lord Faulkner (Chair), Jeffrey Donaldson MP (Treasurer), Baroness Andrews, Lord Attlee, Lord Clancarty, Lord Colville, Lord Cope, Baroness Golding Julian Lewis MP, Lord Maginnis.

Apologies for absence: Baroness Dean, Graham Evans MP, Meg Hillier MP. Lord Lexden, Anne McGuire MP, Baroness Royal, Lord Roper.

In attendance: Ms Diane Lees (Imperial War Museums), Graeme Etheridge (Imperial War Museums), Andy Bye (Prospect), Professor Gary Sheffield (University of Wolverhampton), Anastasia Anokhina, Frank Baldwin (Battlefields Trust), Simon Bendry (FWW Centenary Battlefield Tours Programme), Major Toni Holt, Mrs Valmai Holt, John Peaty (British Commission on Military History), Mike Peters (Guild of Battlefield Guides), Vikki Thompson (War Memorials Trust), Colin Wagstaff (Western Front Association), Professor Peter Doyle (Secretary).

Threats to the Imperial War Museum library and education services

Lord Faulkner opened the meeting by thanking Diane Lees (Director General, Imperial War Museums) for the opportunity of the All Party War Heritage Group to visit the museum, and inspect the new First World War Galleries. He then invited Ms Lees to make her presentation.

Diane Lees thanked Lord Faulkner and noted that the previous day had seen the one-millionth visitor to the new First World War galleries since its opening.

Ms Lees went on to explain the situation facing the museum for the 2015–2016 financial year. The museum was facing a 35 percent reduction in grant in aid, while supporting an extensive First World War programme worldwide. Ms Lees reported that while the museum has managed to sustain its existing staff complement so far, the funding issues means that there will be the need for changes. Though the museum generates some 50 percent of its income, the scale of the cuts to the grant in aid are such that the museum has had to look seriously at reducing its costs. She noted that the Imperial War Museum (IWM) has been diligent in maintaining services, but that the scale of the cuts has meant a fundamental examination of what the museum can offer. In view of this, the museum has been consulting its staff internally in order to consider the nature of the services on offer, and to examine them in order to meet modern demand. Ms Lees noted that the museum was at the start of a long journey,

and there will be a continuing discussion for the future. She also noted, by way of example, the pressures felt by other, equivalent institutions, with the Natural History Museum, London having been in a position to make some 60 staff redundant, and that the British Museum had in itself closed its library in 2010.

The Director-General said that she had appointed Mr Graeme Etheridge as Change Director, in order to examine the future means of making cuts in the museum, in the most humane way possible. She explained that the Imperial War Museum library had simply been targeted as it costs some £650,000 per year to run. As such, there had been a consultation with all staff about the way forward, and both the staff and the union, Prospect, had responded to the proposals. The background to the proposal to close the library was therefore delicate. Ms Lees then invited Mr Etheridge to continue the IWM presentation.

Graeme Etheridge (Change Director, Imperial War Museums) then explained the scale of the task ahead in the light of the cuts to Grant in Aid. He mapped out the likelihood that at the end of March 2016, the deficit could reach as much as 4 million pounds, and questioned how the museum might be in a position to manage? There was no desire to take money out of the museum; in fact there were plans to generate a further 1.5 million pounds of income, with the IWM being one of the best performing national museums in terms of income generation. Nevertheless, there was still a shortfall of half a million pounds, and there would be a need to find reductions in facilities management and services. In reality, there would need to be cuts of around 1–2 million pounds overall, as there have been increases in pension costs, which will continue year-on-year for the foreseeable future.

Mr Etheridge explained that a choice had been made not to find this money out of direct costs, and to maintain all the existing IWM sites in the UK. Nevertheless, maintaining them limits the choices available. And with no entrance charges, there is a need to reduce expenditure. Over the past three to four months Mr Etheridge had been engaged in a constructive dialogue with staff, putting in place support for any who may be faced with redundancy. Closure of the library and the Explore History centre, and of the educational services at IWM Duxford had been identified as a means of making cost savings. But in the light of the consultations, and following a review of the savings to be made – and the fact that a further 8 million pounds had been made available over the next four years to safeguard education services at Duxford (thanks to the efforts of Andrew Lansley MP in proposing allocation of funds from LIBOR) – the IWM will now continue to offer these services, with some modification to service levels and working practices.

Mr Etheridge went on to explain that the proposal was that the Reading Room at IWM London would be maintained, accessible four rather than five days a week (Monday to Thursday), and that there would now be an hour's break at lunchtime, rather than being open continuously from 10.00 to 17.00. While it was recognised that some researchers use the whole day, equally it was noted that some used just a hour or so, and it was hoped to encourage them to make maximum use of the facilities. Maintaining the Reading Room, there will be some changes to the service provision. One of these will include a nominal charge of approximately £9 a half-day session or £12 a day, in order to contribute to costs. This obviously represents a culture change. But the high level of public support for the Library demonstrated its importance, and it is expected that the charge, less than a peak ticket to the cinema, would be a small amount to pay. This was reflective of the difficult choices it was necessary to make, similar to those experienced in the rest of the museum sector.

Lord Faulkner thanked Diane Lees and Graeme Etheridge for their valuable contributions, and suggested that questions should be held until after the presentations by the other speakers. He then invited Mr Andy Bye from the Prospect Union, who had been leading the campaign against the closure of the services, to make his presentation.

Mr Andy Bye (Prospect) outlined the fact that his union has a big presence in all the museums and galleries, and that he was well aware of the problems facing all museums, in trying to reduce costs, and increase income. The fear in the sector is that the Government will allow cuts to creep forward. Mr Bye was satisfied that the IWM has dealt well with the consultation process it put in place, taking into account all views.

When the announcement was made in October that the Library services would be under threat, Prospect members in the library were worried about the the impact on the organisation as a whole, and not just about their jobs. The campaign to ‘save the library’ raised a petition of some 20,000 signatures, which were aimed at the Chancellor and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The announcements made the day before that the Library and educational services would not be lost were given a guarded welcome, and their implications will be considered. However, there is still to be a reduction in the staff numbers, and there is concern over the impact of charging to use the facilities. Staff were also worried about the longer term impact on the future of the library, particularly as there is not to be any continuing acquisition – the Library will not grow as it has over the last 100 years. These are the key concerns.

Mr Bye noted that in the past week the Holocaust Commission were to make an announcement for the location of a new memorial. Prospect views that it is important that the approach will go to the IWM, and the fact that the library is under threat, may have some impact. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Union and Staff give the announcement made by the IWM a guarded welcome, with the view that there is a better position now.

Mr Bye raised a couple of further points, particularly with regard to the status of ‘accessioned’ and ‘de-accessioned’ material in the library. In 2011 all library books were ‘de-accessioned’; prior to this they were all part of the main collection. This was done by the collections staff, in order to assist with collection management. However, with this status they remain under threat, with just some 20 items remaining as ‘accessioned’ items. In addition, it is the Union’s view that the IWM should make better use of donations to assist with funding.

Lord Faulkner thanked Mr Bye for his presentation, and invited Professor Sheffield to make his presentation.

Professor Gary Sheffield (University of Wolverhampton) opened his presentation by explaining he was speaking in a personal capacity. He explained that he has a deep affection for the museum, which he first visited as a boy with his grandfather. As an historian he was grateful to Diane Lees who has been helpful, her staff excellent. He wished his comments to be viewed as if from a critical friend.

Prof. Sheffield welcomed the recent announcement that the library would no longer be closed, but nevertheless, he has concerns, and has consulted widely for views. In his view, though the library is no longer to be shut, the handling of the affair

has not been well done. The thought that there would be a separation of the books from the collection would be bizarre. The shutting of a library in the 100th anniversary of the Great War, at a time when the IWM has received a significant amount of money, (albeit it from in different ‘pots’), would not be understood. While the Government is responsible, the museum is in a difficult position. International colleagues have expressed concern over the future direction of the museum, and questions have been raised over its management, and there is a sense of some alienation from the research community. The recent sale of ‘excess’ books from the library has done little to alleviate concerns.

The recent announcement indicates the direction of travel: a stay of execution. Reduced opening times is not an ideal situation; what of PhD students, who often have limited time to travel to the library? Prof. Sheffield also queried the concept that the proposed fee is nominal. Overall, the impact might be to ultimately to reduce the use of the library, and thereby make it more vulnerable. He asked what would be the public view of this? After all, there are a lot of people who carry out much amateur research, and these new changes might challenge them. There must be other ways to raise funds? There is a legitimate ‘search fee’ that could be levied to assist researchers, for example.

Finally, Prof. Sheffield addressed a comment to the IWM, asking why it was that the Reading Room does not permit the use of digital cameras? In his view this would improve the experience and reduce the time needed to use the library. Responding directly to this point, Ms Lees said she would investigate this immediately.

Lord Faulkner thanked Professor Sheffield for his views and invited parliamentarians to comment.

Lord Cope thanked the speakers for coming and asked what proportion of the Library consists of archival materials in addition to books? He asked who used the library?

Diane Lees replied that the archived materials are extremely important to the IWM, and are not included as part of the Library per se, and remain as part of the ‘Core Collection’. She explained that the library was mostly used by academic researchers, rather than family historians, as there are few personal records held there. She noted that the library consists of ‘reference books’. Commenting on the point raised by Andy Bye, she explained that the ‘de-accessioning’ of books was carried out in 2010-11 at the request of the librarians themselves, to aid curation. She also took the opportunity to answer Prof. Sheffield, in explaining that the books for sale were all duplicates.

Baroness Andrews commented on the ‘stay of execution’ experienced by the IWM library, and enquired about any conditions attached to the changes. She asked whether archives would be under threat.

Diane Lees explained that DCMS planned for another cut of 20 percent that would affect the museum as a whole, not just the library. With five sites and 114 buildings, this will bring further challenges in the future. She explained that she is very active in lobbying to secure funding. She admitted that the criticisms of the IWM management have been painful.

Lord Clancarty asked whether there was a sense of ‘privatisation from within’.

Diane Lees agreed that some services, such as visitor services and security, have been outsourced in order to reduce management costs, as previously staff have been on civil service pensions. Services had not declined, and security was efficient.

Lord Attlee commented on the difficulty faced by the management, and thanked Diane Lees for her efforts, and that of her team.

Diane Lees thanked him for his comments and added that she was extremely grateful for the efforts of Andrew Lansley MP in securing LIBOR funding to support education at Duxford, a major factor in affecting the funding model for the library and educational services.

Lord Faulkner then suggested that invitees may wish to make comments.

Frank Baldwin (Battlefields Trust) questioned whether it was necessary to spend 50 million pounds on a Holocaust Centre?

Diane Lees said she would continue to monitor the situation.

John Peaty (BCMh) added concerns in general about the future of military history museums in the UK, which were noted.

Major Holt, based on his broad experience, asked whether it was necessary to maintain all five sites of the IWM, rather suggesting a concentration on 'a centre of excellence'.

Diane Lees replied that each site does a different thing: buildings, a ship, an intact airfield, and access provision in the North (which she was instructed directly to maintain).

Lord Faulkner thanked the speakers for their contributions, and said it had been an excellent meeting. With no further business he closed the meeting.

The All Party Parliamentary War Heritage Group exists to promote and support the protection, conservation and interpretation of war graves, war memorials and battlefield sites.

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