

Digging for Clues to Life in the Trenches

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University of Birmingham archaeologists will dig for clues as they reveal what life in the trenches was really like – on the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Passchendaele.

Martin Brown, honorary research fellow at the University's Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity and director of the project says first hand evidence and accounts of day-to-day life on the Western Front is very sparse: "We want to find out how trenches were lived in and what people got up to in them.

"For two and half years troops lived – and adapted – in these trenches. We want to discover how the social evidence marries with the existing military history we have - it will be fascinating to gain an insight that the written records don't give us."

The team will dig at the scene of the Battle of Messines, which preceded Passchendaele by a month. Unlike the muddy slog of Passchendaele, Messines was a stunning victory.

Martin and his team, which includes Birmingham Archaeology colleague Kirsty Nichol, will be working at the site of the famous Christmas Day truce. He says: "Contrary to the widespread image that World War I was a total, bloody mess, the Battle of Messines was a huge success: it was well planned, troops were well prepared and resourced and the move was meticulously executed. We have investigated the training ground used by these men and now want to see them in action."

The international team will also be digging to map battle manoeuvres and to investigate what the allies did to attack the German positions.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Martin Brown is an honorary research fellow at the Institute of Applied Archaeology at the University of Birmingham.

Martin Brown is available for interview, please call : +44 (0)7890 620 157 or (0) 07990 684 691

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