

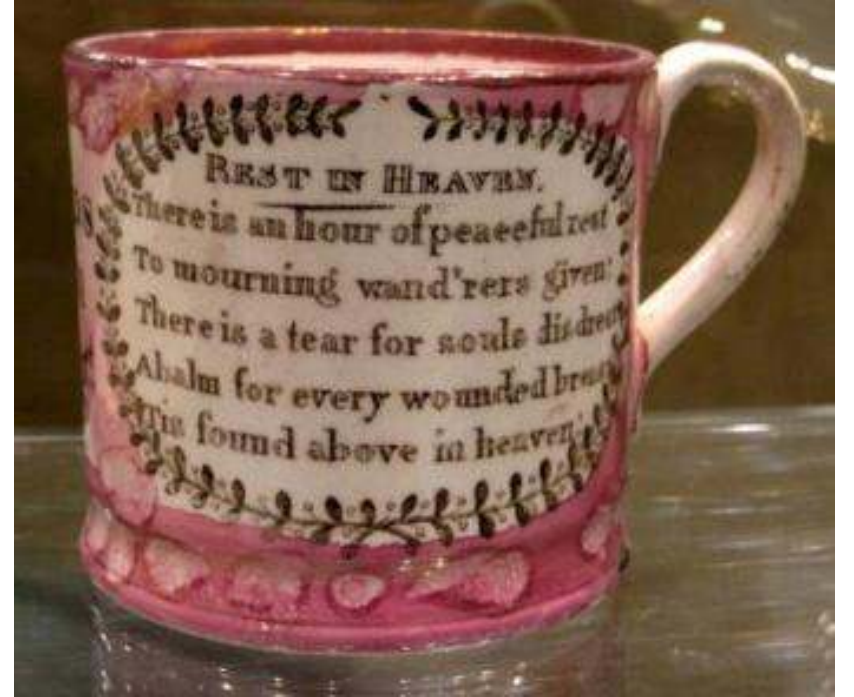


AHRC Next Generation Design Research Workshop, 23 April 2018

# Clay and commemoration: exploring the role creative clay work may play in promoting the wellbeing of NI veterans

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- According to the Northern Ireland Veterans' Health and Wellbeing Study, Psychology Research Institute, Ulster University, there are an estimated 110-150,000 veterans living in Northern Ireland (Armour et al, 2017a).
- Preliminary results of this study suggest that this population is at risk of high incidence of mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder (Armour et al, 2017b).
- The important role creativity, social interaction and learning new skills plays in wellbeing is increasingly recognised, as shown by the Government's recent Culture White Paper (DCMS 2016) and the NHS's 'Five steps to mental wellbeing' (NHS 2016).



A Sunderland 'lustreware' mug at Durham Light Infantry Museum commemorating 'Thomas Brown 68<sup>th</sup> Reg., 1842'

The lineage of Third Battalion, The Rifles (3 RIFLES) can be traced back to the Durham Light Infantry. County Durham soldiers have a long history of serving in Afghanistan.



Objects from the 3 RIFLES Focus Group where soldiers discussed how their tour in Afghanistan (Operation Herrick 11, 2009-10) might be commemorated in ceramic.



Left: Rifleman Hiles' IED clearing ('barma') brush inscribed with a tally of the improvised explosive devices he found.

Right: khukuri excavated by Rifleman Hiles and described as "a special find".



*Rifleman Hiles' IED Brush*, a ceramic interpretation of the original used in Afghanistan. Porcelain, stains, decals, pink lustre, mixed media. Photo: Jo Howell





Almost all the soldiers had tattoos relating to their service and commemorating fallen comrades.

'These men have seen hell and now gone to heaven'

'When the rich wage war it's the poor who die'

'Lest we forget'



*Swift and Bold Jug*, surface decoration based on tattoos and lucky charms. Photo: Jo Howell





Ceramics workshops with military veterans developed in collaboration with the National Glass Centre, University of Sunderland, and charity Forward Assist as part of my AHRC Cultural Engagement Fellowship, 2016.



# Impact



Work exhibited as part of *Created in Conflict: British Soldier Art from the Crimean War to Today*, Compton Verney Art Gallery & Park, 17 March-10 June 2018, curated by Prof Holly Furneaux, Cardiff University, and Dr Amy Orrock, Curator, Compton Verney



In Conversation: Making, Collecting and Curating Soldier Art, 12 April 2018. Dissemination event bringing together curators, artists, soldiers and collectors.



Installation view of Created in Conflict: British Soldier Art from the Crimean War to Today, Compton Verney



*Swift and Bold Jug* on display with trench art and other items of soldier art



**MEMORIES OF LOSS**

**Soft and Bold Jug and Willow Bowl** 180 Franks, 2016  
by Catherine McHugh  
porcelain, glass, plaid fabric,  
dolls, fabric scraps  
Catherine McHugh's Willow Bowl and Jug are made from porcelain, glass, plaid fabric, dolls, fabric scraps, and other found objects. The Willow Bowl is a small, round, white porcelain bowl with a handle, and the Jug is a larger, white porcelain jug with a handle. Both pieces are decorated with a plaid fabric pattern and a small doll figure. The Willow Bowl is also decorated with a small, white porcelain figure of a person. The Jug is decorated with a small, white porcelain figure of a person. The Willow Bowl and Jug are made from porcelain, glass, plaid fabric, dolls, fabric scraps, and other found objects.

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The humble paintbrush becomes an object poised between life and death



**FACING THE FUTURE**

**The Queen's Hospital for  
Injuries, Program, 5000  
The Toy-Nakers' Shop, 2018**  
John Stockwell  
During the First World War, the Queen's Hospital for Injuries was a place where wounded soldiers were treated. The Toy-Nakers' Shop was a place where soldiers made toys for their children. The painting shows a group of people in a room, possibly a hospital or a workshop, with a dog in the foreground.

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**NEEDLE AND THREAD**

**Private Thomas Wilkey, 1916**  
by Thomas William Wood  
oil on canvas  
Private Thomas Wilkey is a young man in a military uniform, sitting in a bed and reading a book. He is wearing a white cap and a white uniform. The painting is set in a simple room with a bed and a chair.

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**THE STAINS OF LIFE**

**Beau Makes a  
Patchwork Quilt**  
by Susan Stockwell  
oil on canvas  
Beau is a young man in a military uniform, sitting on a bench and making a patchwork quilt. He is wearing a white cap and a white uniform. The painting is set in a simple room with a bench and a table.

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Coverage of Created in Conflict in Art Quarterly, Spring 2018





Coverage on ITV News at 10, 16 March, 2018.

# Pilot Project

- Secured £4000 from Strategic Research Fund to undertake scaled-down version of UU Research Challenge Fund proposal (£19000)
- Statistically significant number of veteran participants (60 participants in 4 groups of 15)
- Initial focus groups, ceramics taster sessions and possible exhibition
- Robust tracking and feedback collection in association with Northern Ireland Veterans' Health and Wellbeing Study

# Aims and Objectives

- To assess the effectiveness of clay work in promoting wellbeing amongst NI veterans.
- To investigate the role of objects and embodied practices relating to conflict within the veterans' home context.
- To gather data which may be used to design a clay work tool kit for therapeutic use in the veteran context.
- To ascertain the feasibility and efficacy of developing a larger study as part of an AHRC ECR Grant which will examine cross-country (NI, UK, ROI) differences in the utilisation of clay work tool kit for therapeutic gain.

# Challenges

- Heavy teaching commitment (18 hours a week)
- First year in job spent developing new materials and a syllabus
- Will managing a large-scale project distract me from my own creative practice?
- How can I make the pilot as effective as possible in terms of preparing an AHRC ECR Grant application?



# References

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