

*The story behind the  
incredible carving of*

# WWI and WWII panels

John Murphy, Secretary of the West Riding Woodcarvers' Association,  
shares the story behind the making of two great World War carved panels



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## Paratroopers

By Malcolm Cooper – part of the WWII panel

*"Paratroopers played an important part in the Second World War. Germany was the first to see their potential, using them to effect in their attacks on the Netherlands and Crete. Before 1940 neither Britain nor America had parachute regiments. In June 1940, Prime Minister Churchill demanded a corps of at least 5,000 parachute troops and by the end of 1940, the British 1st Airborne Division was formed. Allied paratroops were used in 1944 on D-Day and at Arnhem but they suffered very heavy casualties. Most commanders recognised the value of airborne troops to seize strategic sites and hold them until ground troops arrived."*

The West Riding Woodcarvers' Association (WRWA) was founded in Huddersfield in 1992 and today has approximately 70 members. Throughout its lifetime, members of the club have produced several large-scale carved panels to support the fundraising activities of local charities (see *Woodcarving* issue 52 January/February 2000, and issue 101 March/April 2008).

In 2007, the association produced a panel commemorating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Overgate Hospice in Elland, Calderdale, in which local scenes and activities were depicted. It was well received and

helped raise money and awareness for the hospice. The success of this venture prompted the membership to undertake a similar, but more demanding, project. The subject matter this time would be scenes from the First and Second World Wars, the intention being to show, in a series of individual carvings, the horror, suffering, courage and human spirit of those who took part in these conflicts.

Initially, only one large panel was envisaged but when 54 carvers showed a willingness to be involved, it was quickly decided that we could produce two panels, commemorating each conflict.

▼ *Overgate Panel. 2.8 x 1m (9 x 3ft), depicting 41 scenes of Calderdale, for the Overgate Hospice, 2007*



## Planning

### Themes

On each panel, five 'themed areas' were planned, as shown in the two diagrams below – Air (blue), Sea (teal), Europe (green), Home Front (purple) and Rest of the World (orange). Each area would identify and separate the main conflict zones associated with each of

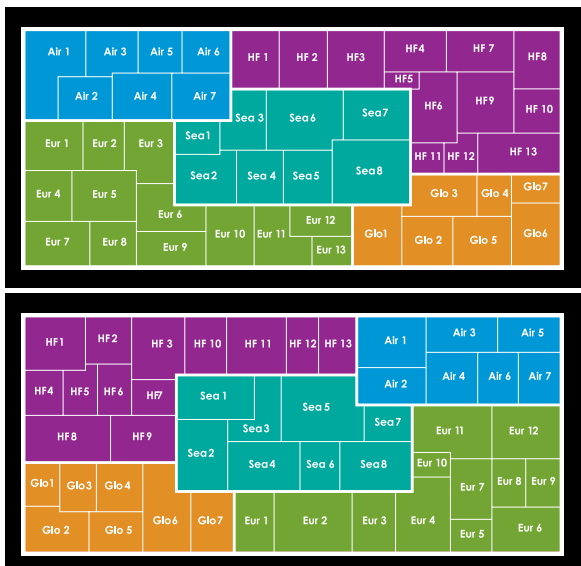
the World Wars. On the finished panels, these areas would be clearly defined by a larger spacing between them and the eventual 95 individual carvings.

A sub-group of the membership was formed from volunteers to collect suitable photographs and pictures representative of the five

selected themed areas, and to plan the overall dimensions and layout of the two panels.

It was agreed that the overall size of each panel would be 3.048 x 1.524m (10 x 5ft), including a 100mm (4in) wide utile (*Entandrophragma utile*) hardwood frame. As with previous panels, the timber for

▼ *A group of volunteers planning the dimensions and layout of the panels*





▲ The layout of panels showing a mix of photos and line drawings

carving would be lime (*Tilia spp.*).

Our aim was to cover as many sectors as possible of the armed forces and civilian population which played a part in both conflicts, such as the Bevin Boys, the Land Army Girls, Fire Fighters and animals used in war, along with the frontline fighting forces.

Eventually, 95 pictures of various sizes were selected, which would involve varying levels of skill and difficulty in carving. Because suitable photographs from the 1914/18 period were both scarce in variety and very dark in colour, a small group of very good artists amongst our members set about re-drawing all 95 pictures into line drawings to assist with the perspective and actual carving. These drawings were photocopied and resized to specific dimensions to fit into their allotted place in a full-size paper plan of each panel.

### Location & finance

The Royal Armouries Museum, Leeds, was chosen for the final location of the panels. As the Museum is Britain's oldest and

has one of the greatest and most comprehensive collections of arms and armour in the world, it was a perfect match to the military theme of our project. Plus with the museum located in West Yorkshire where all our members reside, the panels would be easily accessible.

On approaching the Royal Armouries, armed with a full-scale paper plan of each panel and samples of relief carvings done by club members, they were delighted to immediately enter into a joint partnership with the club.

Our club charges an annual subscription of £20 and it has never been our intention to accumulate funds beyond our general running costs, but to seek grants for any charitable project we undertake. On this occasion, we approached the Leeds Community Foundation for financial assistance with material costs. We were offered a very generous sum to cover nearly all materials, administration and publication costs, and we are extremely grateful to the Foundation for their encouragement and support throughout the project.

► All collected photographs were redrawn to assist the carving process

▼ Discussing the panel designs at a club meeting





## → The carving process

### Materials

We returned to a supplier with whom we have a close relationship – Hexhamshire Hardwoods in Northumberland. They supplied 95 individual 32mm (1¼in) thick, machined lime pieces to the sizes we requested. Our members were issued with instructions encouraging them to carve deep to create shadow, but to leave 10mm (¾in) of background to ensure that the carving could be screwed from the back onto an MDF backboard.

### Club together

The volunteer carvers were given three photocopies of their particular picture and a block of lime wood, both to the exact size dictated by the master paper plan of each panel. A set of brief instructions was issued regarding the depth of carving, keeping fine detail away from edges in case the size of the carvings had to be altered slightly on completion, and the need to not bleach or use any form of stain.

As the carvings progressed, it became apparent that everybody was determined not to let down their fellow carvers, and members were inviting each other to their home workshops to swap ideas. The overall outcome were carvings

to an admirably high standard. One of the overriding reasons for undertaking this project was to bring club members together so that everybody, irrespective of skill, could become involved.

### 8,000 hours

Everyone was encouraged to keep a check of the hours they put into the carving process. As a conservative estimate, we are sure that just over 8,000 hours of carving went into completing the panels.

Once finished, each carving was dipped for protection in a clear sealant and brushed over with a proprietary woodworm killer solution, so as not to introduce woodworm into the priceless exhibits within the museum.

Many hours were put into the machining, sanding, polishing and construction of the two custom-made frames by two of our long-serving members, and the individual carvings were precisely mounted onto a 19mm (¾in) MDF backboard. The construction was such that the frames and backboard holding the individual carvings could be separated for transportation.

A wooden cover to encompass both frame and panels was made to protect both.



▲ Mike Chambers carving his Hiroshima scene for the WWII panel



▲ Bletchley Park, by Trevor Metcalfe – part of the WWII panel



▲ War in Burma, by Jim Wrathall – part of the WWII panel

### ▼ Carving stages of Trevor Stanley's Memorial Plaque featured on the WWI panel







▲ *Advanced Dressing Station, by Bryan Hodgson – part of the WWI panel*

### Forget-me-not Hospice

From the outset our aim was to raise funds for the new Forget-me-Not Children's Hospice, serving the people of Kirklees and Calderdale, through the sale of commemorative booklets featuring a foldout cover, front and back. The inner of the foldout cover shows a diagrammatical representation and key to individual carvings, together with photographs of the completed panels. Each carving, photographed by one of our members, Graham Lockwood, is accompanied by detailed and interesting information regarding the subject matter, sourced by the carvers themselves.

With the proceeds of the Leeds Community Foundation grant, and the assistance of the Royal Armouries on design and printing, 3,000 booklets were produced to a very high quality. Help with financing the printing of the booklets resulted in us being able to sell them at the relatively modest price of £4 each, with all the funds eventually being passed to the Children's Hospice.

## Official unveiling

Every November the Royal Armouries undertakes a month-long 'Reflect and Remember' project which leads to a special Service of Remembrance, attended by local dignitaries, children and adult choirs, trumpeters and WWII veterans on Remembrance Day. During the two-minute silence, poppies descend from the upper galleries onto the heads of those gathered for the service. It was agreed that this occasion would be the perfect setting for officially unveiling the panels in their permanent home. We were honoured that HRH Prince Michael of Kent, accompanied by Dr Ingrid Roscoe, Lord Lieutenant of West Yorkshire, agreed to unveil the panels.

The day of the 11 November 2010 was a lovely occasion, with over 130 of our club members, family and guests attending. After a suitable introductory speech by a Director of the Royal Armouries, Prince Michael unveiled the panels and took great delight in meeting and talking to many of those present.

The panels were displayed and stewarded by our members from the 11 November until the end of the month in the 'Hall of Steel', which comprises over 3,000 items of armour and military equipment in the largest mass display of its kind in the world. On the 1 December, the carved panels, glass sheet, video information and carving details were moved to their permanent location on the 3rd floor at the entrance to the War Gallery.

The many wonderful comments expressed about the panels, the generosity of people who wouldn't accept change from £5 or £10 notes for a booklet, and generally just

talking to the very interesting, warm and lovely people who took time to view the carvings, was truly humbling for our members. Their comments, and the funds we raised for the Children's Hospice, fully justified the many hours the club had spent undertaking this project.

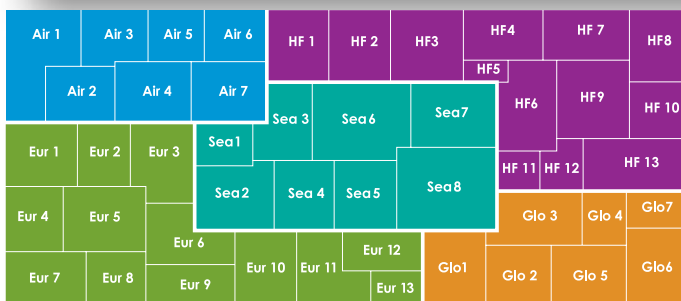


▲ HRH Prince Michael of Kent officially unveiled the panels at the Royal Armouries in Leeds

- To order one of the commemorative booklets, contact John Murphy on 01422 361109 or visit the West Riding Woodcarvers Association website at: [www.wrwoodcarvers.com](http://www.wrwoodcarvers.com). Booklets are £5 including p&p and goes towards the Forget Me Not Trust, set up to raise funds to build and run a children's respite centre and hospice in West Yorkshire.
- Alternatively, you can make a donation online at the Forget Me Not website at: [www.forgetmenottrust.co.uk](http://www.forgetmenottrust.co.uk) OR send a cheque to The West Yorkshire Forget Me Not Trust, 14b Longbow Close, Pennine Business Park, Bradley, Huddersfield HD2 1GQ Tel: 01484 487570



# World War I panel



## Air

**1. Airship Crashing into Sea**  
Terry Thorley-Lawson

**2. Pigeons in War**  
Catherine Davison & Trevor Metcalfe

**3. Ground Crew Loading Bombs**  
Mike Thompson

**4. Machine Gunner**  
Tony Smith & Dennis Farmer

**5. Observer Parachuting from Balloon**  
John Dean

**6. Biplanes**  
Nigel Combes

**7. Airship**  
Ken Cockcroft & Peter Keene

**Home Front**  
**1. Recruiting Poster**  
John Farrar

**2. Mother Saying Goodbye**  
Colin Pratley

**3. Land Army**  
Margaret Myatt

**4. Munitions Factory**  
Anne Ellwood & Peter Keene

**5. White Feather**  
Jim Longbottom

**6. Ambulance Train**  
Mary Stott

**7. Aeroplane Factory**  
David Holt

**8. Blind Soldier**  
Arthur Brook

**9. Stonemason**  
John Murphy (1)

**10. Memorial Plaque**  
Trevor Stanley

**11. Remembrance Cross**  
Richard Wood

**12. Leeds Pals Memorial**  
Liz Willoughby

**13. Unknown Soldier**  
Maurice Oldale

## Europe

**1. Salvation Army Girls in Trench**  
David Hey

**2. Casualties of Gas**  
Mike Chambers





**3. Sappers  
Tunneling under  
the Lines**  
Tracey Goddard

**4. German  
Grenadiers**  
Desmond Lindley  
& Mike Chambers

**5. Advanced  
Dressing Station**  
Bryan Hodgson

**6. Tank and  
Trench Warfare**  
Derek Adams

**7. In the Trenches**  
Jim Wrathall

**8. Toc H  
Talbot House**  
Dennis Farmer

**9. Mules in War**  
Michael Hadfield

**10. Menin Road,  
Ypres**  
Norman Walsh

**11. Golden Virgin,  
Albert**  
Peter Keene

**12. Heavy Artillery**  
Ken Taylor

**13. Dogs in War**  
Roy Williams

**Sea**  
**1. Mercantile Marine**  
Adrian Lindley

**2. RMS Lusitania  
Sinking**  
Jim Longbottom

**3. Battleships at Sea**  
John Kemp &  
Peter Keene

**4. Abandoned  
Trawler**  
Frank Greenwood

**5. U-boat**  
Derek Lindley

**6. Sailing Ship**  
Derek Adams

**7. Seaplane**  
Trevor Metcalfe

**8. HMS Amphion  
Sinking**  
Trevor Metcalfe

## Global

**1. ANZACs at  
Gallipoli**  
David Kent

**2. Aqaba Base**  
Peter Slavin

**3. Big Field Gun**  
Peter Nethergate

**4. Gurkha Memorial**  
Graham Readhead

**5. Lancashire  
Fusiliers at Gallipoli**  
Reg Platt

**6. Lawrence  
of Arabia**  
Graeme Richardson

**7. Graveyard  
Crosses at Gallipoli**  
Trevor Kilvington  
& Norman Shaw



## ➤ WWI panel in close-up

**Here are just some of the stunning carvings featured on the WWI panel, along with the their accompanying tales...**



### ◀ Observer Parachuting from Balloon

By John Dean

"Tethered observation balloons, usually manned by a crew of two, were a common sight in the First World War. As they floated above the trenches, their crews sent important reports of enemy troop deployments and artillery positions back to the ground by flag signals, or even radio messages.

If approaching enemy

aircraft were spotted, the ground crew quickly winched down the balloon and its crew escaped. The enemy sometimes tried setting the balloons alight using incendiary bullets. If this occurred then, despite having parachutes, it was often difficult for the balloon's observers to get down safely."

### Salvation Army Girls in Trench ➤

By David Hey

"Salvation Army officers, including women, served in France in various non-combatant roles during WWI. The women were affectionately known as the Doughnut Girls, thanks largely to the doughnuts they served to the soldiers.

The carving depicts Salvation Army doughnut girls and a sign bearing the name The Savoy Hotel outside a dugout, showing the troops' ironic trench humour."



### ◀ Casualties of Gas

By Mike Chambers

"On 22 April 1915, the German Army started its gas campaign against the Franco-British Ypres sector of the Western Front by letting off 6,000 cylinders of chlorine gas, badly affecting the men's breathing and causing casualties. This led to the use of phosgene gas, a compound of chlorine and carbon monoxide, and then to the introduction of

mustard gas in July 1917.

Mustard gas was very toxic if inhaled, caused severe blistering of the skin and often resulted in blindness – although this effect might not always be permanent.

This carving shows gassed soldiers covering their eyes with bandages soaked in water as a temporary relief from pain."





### ◀ In the Trenches

By Jim Wrathall

"This scene at Ovillers on the Somme in July 1916 shows a British rifleman on guard against a surprise attack from the enemy, whilst his companions in the trench take the opportunity to catch up on their sleep. They are occupying a well-constructed trench captured from the Germans.

A 'fire-step' was built so that soldiers could step up, observe the enemy and fire from their trench. Here the original step is on the left but the trench has been reversed. An emergency fire-step was hacked out of what had been the rear wall of the German trench so that it now faced the other way."

### Sappers Tunnelling Under the Lines ▶

By Tracey Goddard

"The war on the Western Front was at stalemate by the end of November 1914, as neither side could break through the enemy's entrenched defences. One solution was to mine under the enemy lines.

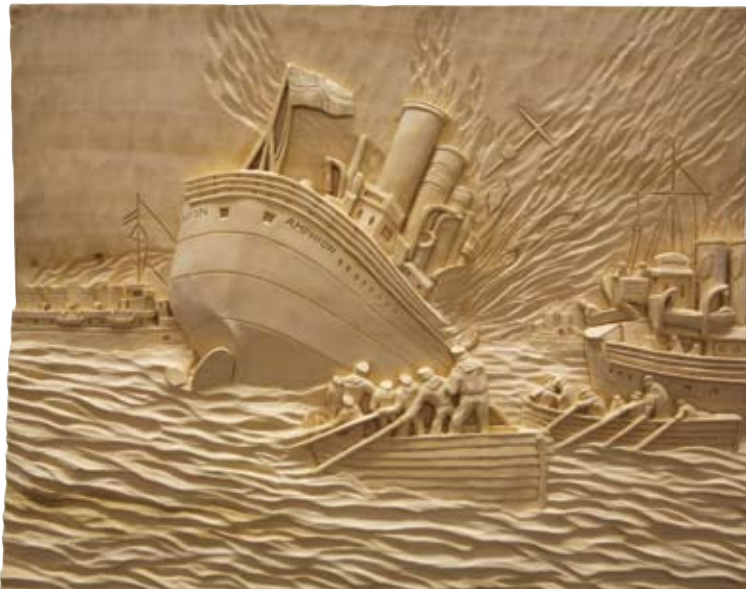
Specialised Royal Engineers Tunnelling Companies were soon formed from men who were sewer diggers or coal, tin and slate miners. They received basic military training and were quickly sent to France. There they worked in dark, underground spaces, often only 610mm (2ft) wide and 1.22m (4ft) high. They dug deep tunnels, set explosives and blew them up, often to coincide with the start of an attack on the surface. Large explosions formed deep craters."



### ◀ HMS Amphion Sinking

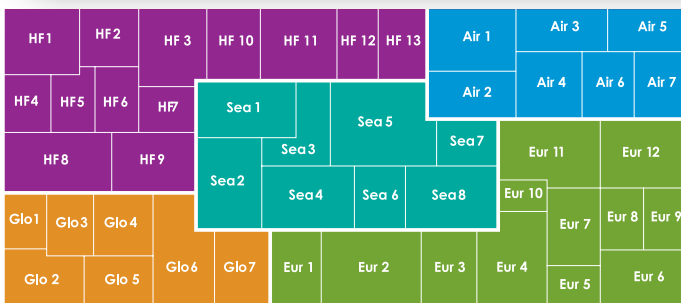
By Trevor Metcalfe

"HMS Amphion was the first British warship to be lost in the First World War. On 5 August 1914, Amphion helped to destroy the German minelayer Königin Luise as it dropped mines overboard, but the following morning, Amphion struck two of the mines and quickly sank. With the war only 32 hours old, HMS Amphion, which had helped to inflict the first German naval loss, became herself the first British naval casualty."





# World War II panel



## Home Front

**1. Bevin Boys**  
Peter Keene

**2. Fire-fighters**  
Margaret Myatt

**3. St Paul's Cathedral**  
Dennis Farmer

**4. Evacuees**  
Mary Stott

**5. Air Raid Precautions**  
John Murphy (2)

**6. Dig For Victory**  
Darrel Edwards

**7. Women's Land Army**  
Norman Shaw

**8. Bletchley Park**  
Trevor Metcalfe

**9. Factory Worker**  
Malcolm Till & Trevor Metcalfe

**10. Ladies Gossiping**  
Peter Keene

**11. Blitz**  
Michael Hadfield

**12. Shelters**  
Mike Chambers

**13. Women in Uniform**  
Derek Adams

**Air**  
**1. Battle of Britain**  
Michael Hadfield

**2. Loading a Bomber**  
Jim Wrathall

**3. Mosquitoes**  
Dennis Farmer

**4. Dambusters**  
Colin Pratley

**5. Spitfire**  
Malcolm Cooper

**6. Typhoon**  
Graham Hughes

**7. Pilots**  
Mike Chambers

**Global**  
**1. Prisoners of the Japanese**  
Trevor Stanley





**2. Hiroshima**  
Mike Chambers

**3. Desert Tank**  
John Hadfield

**4. Forgotten Army**  
George Crawshaw

**5. Gurkhas**  
David Kent

**6. War in Burma**  
Jim Wrathall

**7. Desert Army**  
Graham Lockwood

## Sea

**1. Aircraft Carrier at Malta**  
Maurice Oldale

**2. Russian Convoy**  
David Hey

**3. Cockleshell Heroes**  
John Murphy (1)

**4. HMCS Penetang**  
Ken Taylor

**5. North Sea Convoy**  
Arthur Brook

**6. Winston Churchill**  
Derek Adams

**7. Life Raft**  
John Murphy (1)

**8. Catalina at Gibraltar**  
Trevor Metcalfe

**Europe**  
**1. Dunkirk**  
John Farrar

**2. Captured German Anti-tank Gun**  
Mike Chambers

**3. D-Day**  
Peter Nethergate

**4. Arnhem**  
Bryan Hodgson

**5. Colditz**  
Maurice Oldale

**6. Pegasus Bridge**  
Norman Walsh

**7. Cologne**  
David Holt

**8. Paratroopers**  
Malcolm Cooper

**9. Death Camp**  
John Dean

**10. Homeless**  
Peter Slavin

**11. Tank**  
Mike Thompson

**12. Holocaust**  
Norman Walsh



## → WWII panel in close-up

**And now enjoy in close-up some of the wonderful carvings and their stories as depicted on the WWII panel...**



### ◀ Dambusters

By Colin Pratley

"This carving combines an Avro Lancaster bomber and the undamaged Eder dam. On 16 May 1943, Wing Commander Guy Gibson VC led a raid by 617 Squadron intended to breach the Mohne, Eder and Sorpe dams in the heavily industrialised Ruhr Valley of Germany. Special cylindrical bombs designed by Barnes Wallis – a genius who also did woodcarving – were used.

When released at a precise speed and height, they skipped across the surface of the water and rolled down to explode, causing shock waves to damage the dam. Two were weakened causing floods that disrupted industry, destroyed railways, road bridges and hydroelectric power stations, and caused heavy casualties."



### Arnhem ▶

By Bryan Hodgson

"During Operation Market Garden, one of the boldest plans of the war, the British 1st Airborne Division and the Polish 1st Independent Parachute Brigade were given the task of capturing Arnhem, Holland. The units were parachuted and glider-landed on 17 September 1944, and the days following.

A small force of British 1st Airborne reached Arnhem

Bridge but was unable to secure both sides, encountering stiff resistance from the German defenders. After very heavy losses, a full withdrawal of the remaining Allied force was made on 26 September.

If Operation Market had succeeded, the Allies could have advanced into Germany, with the chance of ending the war by Christmas 1944."



### ◀ Pegasus Bridge

By Norman Walsh

"Private Helmut Römer was on night sentry duty at Bénouville Bridge (later Pegasus Bridge) over the Caen Canal. Suddenly, an aircraft swooped out of the sky to the north. It was a British Airspeed Horse glider carrying 25 troops, and it was followed by two more. As Römer dived for safety, British paratroopers leapt from the gliders. Within minutes, they captured the bridge. Other airborne troops seized a bridge over the Orne River.

The bridge's capture by a single glider-borne company of the British 6th Airborne Division a few hours before the D-Day landings on 6 June 1944, secured the Normandy invasion's eastern flank."



## Gurkhas ▶

By David Kent

"Renowned for their ferocity and bravery in battle, Nepalese Gurkha soldiers have been an integral part of the British Army for almost two centuries. They still carry their traditional weapon – an 18in long, curved knife known as a kukri.

In the Second World War, they fought in North Africa and Italy but are more famous for their part in the Burma campaign. Some of the Gurkhas operated behind Japanese lines as part of the Chindits – a special force formed by Orde Wingate to stop the Japanese army threatening India. This carving shows Gurkhas waiting in ambush for a Japanese patrol in Arakan, western Burma."



## ▲ St Paul's Cathedral

By Dennis Farmer

"This carving combines images of damage around St Paul's Cathedral and of children bombed from their homes. The second 'Great Fire of London' occurred on 29/30 December 1940 after a two-hour attack by the Luftwaffe. Incendiary bombs set alight a large area of the City of London. Buildings damaged included eight Wren churches, the Guildhall, Law Courts and Tower of London.

One incendiary penetrated the lead of St Paul's dome and burned, however, the bomb fell outwards into the Stone Gallery and was quickly extinguished, so St Paul's was saved."

## ▼ Ladies Gossiping

By Peter Keene

"The horrors of the First World War with the use of poison gas in the trenches, had convinced the British government that the enemy might use gas against civilians, even though both sides had signed up to the Geneva Convention which prohibited it. By September 1939, 38 million gas masks had been issued to families – adult masks were black, children's were red and blue, and babies' masks had a bellows for adults to pump air in. However, poison gas was not used and by early 1940, many people were so blasé about the threat, that they ceased to carry their gas masks."



## Visiting the Royal Armouries, Leeds

*You can see for yourself these amazing World War panels at the Royal Armouries, Leeds – find them on permanent display on the 3rd floor to the entrance of the War Gallery.*

*Opening time: 10am - 5pm*

*Free entrance*

*Address: Royal Armouries Museum, Armouries Drive, Leeds LS10 1LT*

*Tel: 0113 220 1999*

*Website: [www.royalarmouries.org/visit-us/leeds](http://www.royalarmouries.org/visit-us/leeds)*