

PRESS RELEASE

30th May 2014

Warner & Sons in World War One

In commemoration of the centenary of the outbreak of World War I, the **Warner Textile Archive** in Braintree, Essex, has undertaken a special research project, in an effort to uncover the contribution of Warner & Sons, one of the nation's great textile companies, to the British war effort.



Business as Usual?

Of the recent research, Kate Wigley, Archivist at the Warner Textile Archive says: "In some ways, it was business as usual for Warner & Sons – the Company maintained a relatively busy factory, and received regular commissions to hand weave silks and luxury fabrics." Despite the outbreak of war, some were able to maintain their luxury lifestyles, and Warner & Sons fulfilled orders for the likes of dress silks and silk linings for fur stoles. Frank Warner also spent time refining the Company's invention of three-pile velvet – a hugely extravagant luxury that very few people could afford.



Farringdon (1917)
Silk with metal thread

However, output became dependent on supplies of cotton, wool and silk, and like the rest of British industry, Warner & Sons was forced to respond to changes in society. Much investment was made into the production of silk, including noil cloth, which was essential for the manufacture of cartridge bags. In 1916, Warner began to experiment with Japanese silk, and its potential to be used for bullet-proof vests. He loosely laid between 15 and

20 layers of silk and found that the spaces between each layer slowed down the bullet more effectively than quilted fabric.

This same year, the Government sought the advice of Warner as an advisor on the future role and prospects of Britain's textile trade industry. However, Warner felt obliged to resign from the role a year later, feeling conflicted due to his position as President of the Silk Association of Great Britain & Ireland at this time.

In August 1917, the Office of Works requisitioned Warner & Sons' head office on Newgate Street, London. The Company was given 48 hours' notice in which to vacate the building, before it became the Government's Admiralty Pay Office. New premises were urgently acquired 50 yards away, and with staff working round the clock, Warner & Sons' Newgate Street offices were emptied.



Angelo Damask (1914)

In addition, a number of the Company's workers were enlisted and several lost their lives. In memory of its fallen employees, the Company erected a stone memorial at its premises in Braintree. The memorial was later moved to St. Michael's Church in the town, where it can be viewed today.

Centenary Events Programme at the Warner Textile Archive

Warner & Sons During WWI

From Wednesday 4th June 2014

A display in the Archive Gallery will highlight the contribution of Warner & Sons to the war effort and the design commissions undertaken by the Firm between 1914 and 1918.

FREE within Archive admission charge; the Archive Gallery is open every Wednesday and on the first Saturday of the month.

Meet the Artist: Frances Pickering

Thursday 10th July 2014 / 10.30am – 4.30pm

Textile artist Frances Pickering will be at the Archive on this special open day, demonstrating her signature techniques and talking about her work as she draws inspiration from the role of women during the First World War.

FREE entry and no need to book

Business as Usual: Twitter Tour

Thursday 17th July 2014 / 6pm – 7pm

Archivist Kate Wigley will lead an illustrated guide to Warner & Sons during WWI, including luxury silks and velvets, handwritten letters and particularly delicate and fragile items which will not be on display in the Archive Gallery.

Follow @TextileArchive or use #WarnerInWWI to get involved.



Wartime Luxury

Thursday 9th October 2014 / 11am – 12.30pm

Wartime Luxury will explore the high-end commissions received by Warner & Sons between 1914 and 1918. Join Archivist Kate Wigley in the Archive Store and discover a different side to factory life on the Homefront through luxury silks and other pieces in the Collection.

£5 per person, please call 01376 557741 to book a space.

Remembrance Sunday

Sunday 9th November 2014 / 11am

In memory of the employees of Warner & Sons who lost their lives while serving in World War I, representatives from the Warner Textile Archive will be laying a specially-created wreath at St Michael's Church in Braintree, where a stone memorial recognises the contribution of the Firm to the war effort.

If you would like to contribute to the wreath with a message, please get in touch with the Archive by calling 01376 557741 or emailing info@warnertextilearchive.co.uk.

The Warner Textile Archive's WWI research project and events programme is part of the IWM First World War Centenary Partnership

For further information about the Archive's research, please contact:

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