



Changing the Landscape: Mapping an Archive

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The Project

Changing the Landscape, a multimedia arts project funded by the [Arts Council of England](#) and the [National Lottery](#), is a deeply personal exploration of the cataclysmic destruction wrought by The Battle of the Somme. The project interprets the unpublished correspondence of 150 illustrated letters and photographic postcards sent home by my great uncle, Rifleman Barney Griew, a furniture maker from Hoxton Square, London, who trained as a mapmaker and scout in spring 1916. The archive has been described by William Spencer, WW1 expert at [the National Archives](#), UK as 'unique' and by Luke Smith, digital lead at [IWM](#) as 'rich and fascinating'.

The project will culminate in an exhibition in London, 2016, the centenary year of The Battle of the Somme and Barney's death. It will bring together a mosaic of multiple image and text. This will include, for the first time, Barney's archive, a series of my own contemporary paintings and photographs, as well as a specially commissioned multi-screen video installation by independent filmmaker, [Jeremy Bubb](#). In addition, I will select relevant entries from the [British War Diaries](#) and feature a panoramic photograph shot from the trenches on the same day, in May 1916, that Barney and the London Rifle Brigade were assigned 'Yiddish Street' trench (so called because of the Hackney Jewish soldiers). This will be exhibited with my drawings, made within the National Archive UK Image Library. Barney's journey through France will be plotted with both archival and contemporary images on <http://www.historypin.com/> to coincide with the exhibition.

Barney's Letters

I began researching the journey of Uncle Barney to The Somme having spent some years working on map-like aerial paintings of the obliteration of Passchendaele. These included strong photographic and sculptural references and focused on the psychological impact of the extreme changes in landscape wrought by constant bombardment. When I opened the box of Barney's letters for the first time, it was to discover his descriptions of crawling over No Man's Land to make maps, which echoed my own preoccupation, and the location of the family furniture manufactory, just a stone's throw from my East End studio.

The project and exhibition will incorporate a multitude of media and references: abstract and figurative painting and drawing, photography, new technology, moving image, text and archival material designed to capture the multiplicity of viewpoint present in so many of Barney's daily letters and images. These are written to his brother Isaac, his sister (my grandmother) Fanny and his parents Solomon and Rebecca, who arrived in Hackney as part of the Russian and Lithuanian Jewish diaspora in the late 19th Century. Through his words and images we perceive the months preceding The Battle of the Somme as if through the monoscopic sight-lines of

a rifle.

- To Fanny he sends multiple photographic postcards of places visited, using them to pinpoint his location (followed incongruously by drawings of French fashions).

- To Isaac, his confidante, he writes the horrific unvarnished truth: *'Isn't all honey dodging big shells etc. my pal, Middleton, sitting between Sam and myself was hit by a high explosive in the head and I hear he has died since. R.I.P.'*

It is to Isaac that he also reveals his terrible dilemma ' how best to protect his parents from the reality of war and the events he is witnessing. As the letters continue, we note Barney's decline, weeks before his death. His constant writing home, like daily modern day tweets, let us know again and again that he is still alive and breathing.

Tracing Barney's Footsteps

In undoing the censor's pen, I have been able to visit each of the locations where Barney was billeted and bought the postcards. One of the more compelling areas of recent research has involved establishing links with the descendants of the community in The Somme who billeted and fed Barney and the troops. On my first trip I was approached by a farmer and shown a hospital in his dilapidated barn, complete with the British regimental coats of arms painted on the wall. He then revealed a roll of British secret military maps, hidden up a chimney by his grandmother for fear of discovery by the enemy.

The night before I left for my last research trip to The Somme, I discovered an order hidden amongst the War Diaries. It was dated 30th June 1916 and detailed Barney and his fellow battalion scouts' crawl through No Man's Land to ensure that the barbed wire be cut for the commencement of The Battle of the Somme the next morning. By focusing on the intimate nature of my relationship with Barney and allowing his drawings and words to breathe life into the historical material, the intent is that the universal will also be touched upon.

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