

## Our Thanks

To the Heritage Lottery Fund for supporting our project.

### And to...

Our principal research Partners - Leith Academy  
Prince's Trust XL Group students  
XL Group team leaders - Robbie Huxtable and Christine Boal  
PYC Youth and Children's Worker - Craig Maughan  
Our project Artist Heather Scott at Hide and Seek Art Glass  
Tree of Life partners Out of the Blue Arts Centre (OOTB)  
Tree of Life Sculptor Colin McLeod at Hawthorn Joinery  
OOTB Gretna 100 team leader Gavin Crichton  
Colonel Robert Watson (Rtd.) Royal Scots  
Family members and descendants of the Leith Battalion  
National Records of Scotland staff  
Lady Haig's Poppy Factory  
The Andrew Grant Collection

And the many individuals connected with, and who are contributing to, our project.

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Supported by  
**The National Lottery**<sup>®</sup>  
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## Remembering the Leith Battalion

### Why?

In the early morning of 22 May 1915 one thousand and twenty-eight officers and men of 7th (Leith) Royal Scots set out for Gallipoli. As they set out from Larbert Station no one foresaw the tragic events that would unfold as a head on collision with another train at Quintinshill, near Gretna, would take the lives of 216 men.

Few train crashes in Europe can have had more of an impact upon one small community than the Gretna rail disaster which took place at Quintinshill Junction on the 22nd May 1915.

Three trains were involved; a special troop train, a local train and the night express coming north from Euston Station, London. The special troop train carried the Leith based 7th Battalion Royal Scots, Territorial Force bound for Liverpool on their way to Gallipoli as part of 156th Brigade of the 52nd (Lowland) Division. The Battalion had been mobilised at the outbreak of the First World War and had served on coastal defences. Bound for war and in high spirits they left Larbert in two trains and headed south. It was the second of these trains that was involved in the crash.

The Signalmen at Quintinshill, anxious to complete their paperwork, simply forgot the local train which should have been shunted on to a loop line but which was sitting directly outside their signal box and gave the all clear signal for the troop train to come through. The impact was so great that the troop train was crushed to less than half its normal length and the wreckage overturned on to the northbound line.

Minutes later the northbound express from Euston crashed into the debris setting it on fire. It was Britain's worst train crash. Three officers, twenty-nine non-commissioned officers and one hundred and eighty two soldiers were killed or burned to death. Thousands lined the streets of Leith for the funeral procession and burial at Rosebank Cemetery. Most of those who survived the crash returned home and the remainder of the 7th Battalion sailed to Gallipoli. The two signalmen were held responsible and served terms of imprisonment. The Pilmeny Youth Centre dedicates these pages to the memory of all those Leith soldiers and their comrades who set out on 22 May 1915...and never returned.

The Pilmeny Youth Centre are planning four commemoration themes to remember the tragic events of Gretna 1915.

## Our Four Themes

- 1) To construct a stained glass poppy wreath, and encased in a glass frame. The poppy will display the individual names of local men who perished in the disaster. The commemorative poppy, once complete, will be permanently displayed in the Lorne/Pilrig community.
- 2) Working in partnership with the Lady Haig Poppy Factory to construct a unique wreath made from over 1000 poppies. PYC would like to present the wreath at one of the many commemoration events being held in May 2015. In addition to this we will be distributing 1000 poppies to local primary school children, free of charge, ahead of Remembrance Sunday 2015.
- 3) In partnership with Out of the Blue Arts Centre, to construct a three dimensional "Tree of Life". The tree will display 2016 stained glass ID tags on each of the branches and leaves in remembrance of the 216 men who died in the tragedy. The Tree of Life will take a position of prominence during the OOTB Gretna 100 exhibition in May 2015. The venue is the old 1/7 Royal Scots Leith Battalion Drill Hall and Territorial Army HQ. Indeed, the Drill Hall will be a fitting venue to showcase the tree
- 4) PYC will stencil 216 poppies along the procession route from OOTB to Rosebank Cemetery. The poppies will be a temporary display, weather permitting, for the week or two, pre and post the remembrance service at Rosebank Cemetery, Leith in May 2015. Our hope is that our poppies will generate some local and city wide discussion into the reasoning of the displayed poppies and ask why the poppies have been placed. Its hoped local press and media can be used to convey the message, and generate local, and hopefully, national interest in the Gretna story.

