The extraordinary stories of ordinary people whose lives were transformed during the First World War will be told in their own words in a landmark new series for ITV, made in partnership with Imperial War Museums.

Marking the centenary of the outbreak of the war in 1914, the experiences of men and women, young and old, from across Britain and the social classes that divided society at the time, are vividly brought to life in 4x60 series The Great War: The People’s Story, produced by Shiver [ITV Studios].

With narration from Olivia Colman, The Great War: The People’s Story tells the real-life stories of soldiers, from privates to officers, their wives and girlfriends left behind, and people from Britain’s villages and cities. They are portrayed by a cast of actors including Alison Steadman, Daniel Mays, Claire Foy, Brian Cox, Romola Garai, MyAnna Buring and Matthew McNulty, who speak their words as they were written in their diaries and letters.

These moving accounts, revealing their intimate thoughts and feelings, offer a raw insight into the profound impact of being caught up in a conflict that would change their lives – and Britain – forever. Sourced from archives and libraries across the country, selected in partnership with Imperial War Museums, which provided much of the material, and brought to life by actors – each story conveys the hopes, fears, heroism and tragedies of countless ordinary British people… made all the more powerful by the fact that every word is real.

**Episode One**
“I am only doing the same as thousands of other fellows you would not be proud of me would you if I acted the coward now and tried to evade my Duty would you?”

Reg Evans, Corporal Ist Hertfordshire Regiment, in a letter to his mother

“I'll see if I can go one better than these big men with their cars, credentials, and money, I'll see what I can accomplish as a war correspondent.”

From the memoirs of Dorothy Lawrence, who went to France as an undercover frontline reporter

“This is a life and death struggle with Germany. Everybody who could do something and won't is a beastly, unpatriotic kind of person.

“I'm the last person to be a jingo and hate flag wagging and union jack hurrahing etc. but I do feel that I might be useful, with my motor or without it, in case of attack by Germany and so I've offered my services to the War Office, if they want such a chap as me...”

Lieutenant Alan Lloyd, 78th Brigade Royal Field Artillery, in a letter to his wife, Dorothy

“What a tremendous series of adventures I've been through in the last fortnight! I went into the trenches under the guidance of another officer. To begin with the cold was intense and a sharp frost every night. Secondly the Germans keep up a tremendous fire all night, far more than in the daytime. Of course all the time bullets keep whizzing over your head and shells bursting all around. But you get used to these things.”
Lieutenant James Butlin, 2nd Yorkshire Regiment, in a letter to his friend Basil at Oxford University

In episode one, as war breaks out, Daniel Mays plays Reg Evans, a cockney lad and one of the first to volunteer to fight. He found himself a hero in the trenches, his journey told through moving letters to his anxious mother at home. Matthew McNulty plays Alan Lloyd, an upper-crust young man from Birmingham who joined the army in the same month he was married: his letters to his new wife from the battlefields of Ypres reveal the shock of a generation of young men coming to terms with a war more terrible than anyone had foreseen. And Myanna Buring plays Dorothy Lawrence, a young woman determined to find a part she could play in the war… and who set off on her own to the trenches, undercover as a war correspondent. Adam Byron plays James Butlin, a young Oxford University student, whose letters indicate initial positivity on joining the conflict disintegrating into despair as the reality of trench warfare takes its toll.

“My Company Officer sent for me and explained that Headquarters wanted a volunteer to go out that night and report what damage had been done to the enemies wire and front trenches by the intensive bombardment. The artillery would receive orders to cease fire for an hour whilst the reconnaissance was carried out but so as not to raise suspicions at the lull, machine guns would carry on covering fire over the German lines. Whoever took the job on would have to go alone. It would probably mean death but would certainly mean glory. Then after a pause, he came to the point. "Will you go? " he asked. For a few seconds I hesitated. What could I say?"

Reg Evans

“Shortly after thick darkness set in, I heard heavy footfalls… All at once the door flew wide open; and in marched three men. “We arrest you in the King’s name.” “Oh, I see,” I said.”
Dorothy Lawrence

“I write from my dug out in the Observation Post P. Aeroplanes overhead, guns booming, rifles cracking, bullets singing away, it’s the same thing day after day. We think that the troops opposite us must be Saxons, because they seem rather sporting. They put up boards in the trenches to signify “Bullseye” or “Outer or inner” after our fellows have potted at them, and we do the same for them. It might be musketry practice!...

“Take care of yourself and think what a topping time we'll have after the war - so long as we win.”

Alan Lloyd

“My nerves are not what they were and I can tell you I could do 3 months in England with advantage. John Bull is as optimistic as ever but then he writes in England and in peace. Let him sit here in the trenches with a few trench mortars and rifle grenades falling round his way and write the same tonight. I am feeling a bit vicious tonight. Also I have not been up to form these last ten days, not feeling ill enough to be really bad but just bad enough to make me look on the gloomy side of things…”

James Byron

Reg Evans Daniel Mays
Alan Lloyd Matthew McNulty
Dorothy Lawrence Myanna Buring
James Butlin Adam Byron
Dorothy Lloyd Lily Loveless
Frances Evans Rosalind March
Winston Churchill Adrian Scarborough
PRODUCTION CREDITS
Director – Paul Copeland
Composer – Edmund Jolliffe
Producer – Izzy Charman
Executive Producer – Ollie Tait

Episode Two:

The series continues the real-life stories of Reg Evans (Daniel Mays), shot in the face in the trenches, as he undergoes pioneering plastic surgery – and of Alan Lloyd (Matthew McNulty), who has swapped life with his new wife and baby son for the battlefields of Ypres and the Somme. But it also explores war on the Home Front – through the diaries of fashionable celebrity cook and restaurateur Hallie Miles (Alison Steadman) and suffragette Kate Parry Frye (Romola Garai), as they see the old Edwardian world crumble around them, opening up ever more opportunities for women, as ever more men – including their own loved ones – and sent to fight and die at the Front.

Reg Evans       Daniel Mays
Alan Lloyd      Matthew McNulty
Hallie Miles    Alison Steadman
Kate Parry Frye Romola Garai
Harold Gillies  Jo Stone-Fewings
John Collins    Tom Turner
Jack Sweeney    Jonathan Bullock
Arthur Burke    Giles Anderson
Dorothy Lloyd   Lily Loveless

Episode Three:

This episode shifts its focus to a changing Britain, and the lives of those left behind at home. Claire Foy plays Helen Bentwich, a clever young woman who
chafed against the restrictions placed on her sex – and seized the chance to work in the arms factories at Woolwich Arsenal, before becoming appalled by the conditions there and joining a trade union. Brian Cox plays the country vicar Andrew Clark, whose wry and funny diary is marked by increasing sadness as more and more men leave his village for war, never to return. The fighting is entering its darkest phase – with all hopes for a quick end dashed – but still life and love goes on… Emily Chitticks (Amy Morgan) is a servant girl whose fallen in love with Will Martin (James Norton), a soldier at a local barracks. But soon the call will come for him to go to France too…

Rev. Andrew Clark        Brian Cox
Helen Bentwich            Claire Foy
Emily Chitticks           Amy Morgan
Will Martin                James Norton
Hallie Miles              Alison Steadman

Episode Four:

1917. War is in its darkest phase. Everyone knows victory can only come at a long, slow, and painful cost. So many lives have been lost that now men previously exempted from military service – because of their age or because their jobs were considered vital to the war effort – are called up. We hear the stories of three of them: the black Glasgow shipbuilder Arthur Roberts (Nathan Stewart-Jarrett), sent into the Battle of Passchendaele; Duff Cooper (Henry Lloyd-Hughes) the dashing and debonair lover of Lady Diana Manners (Tuppence Middleton), the daughter of the Duke of Rutland; and Londoner Ted Poole (Gerard Kearns), just 18 and the last of his fathers’ sons left alive.

Duff Cooper                Henry Lloyd-Hughes
Lady Diana Manners         Tuppence Middleton
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<th>Helen Bentwich</th>
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**Interview with Danny Mayes, who played Reg Evans**

**What impression did you form of Reg Evans from his letters to his mother?**

The amazing thing about the letters, first and foremost is that, you know, it’s the primary source and what you read is exactly what he thought and what he wrote, so from an acting point of view that’s just like, gold dust.

It’s-the thing that struck me about it all, even though he came from a sort of working class background, was the fact that he would write so eloquently- but I think, maybe that’s a sort of consequence of the time, that people were naturally more articulate - to actually sit down and write a letter within those sort of-in that environment, in those circumstances was, was something, everything is so fast nowadays isn’t it but he had a great heart- he did and he had no question of doubt in his mind of whether he would sign up or not. He was one of the first through the recruiting office’s doors and he desperately wanted to do his bit for King and Country, and there’s something just really proud about that. I know you kind of get that sort of stereotypical English Tommy but it wasn’t like that, he was proud to be British and he was proud to do his bit and just some of the actual missions that he gets involved in, I mean there’s one specific mission that he goes on, like he volunteers, he’s the first one to put his hand up, and he does that kamikaze run to the German trench.
He didn’t think twice about it, and people talk about heroes and there was obviously tonnes of heroes that came back from the war, but he kind of typified that, he embraced what that meant to be heroic, and it means lots of things but he certainly was a hero and he even- when he came back to reintegrate himself into society, after the obvious horrendous injury that happened to him- he was one of the first to have reconstructive surgery, he didn’t grumble about it, he just muddled on through it but to sort of be disfigured in that way – I remember specifically seeing the photographs of him, it was quite distressing . So he paid a huge price for the sacrifices he made so I have the utmost respect for him.

Were you struck by the lack of self pity that came through in the letters because I think it was just absent, wasn’t it?

It was, and I think that’s obviously a reflection of the time also. I guess there was also certainly a degree of him not allowing himself to come across like that to his mother- you know, it’s just as much about him trying to make her feel better about the situation than himself as well, so I think again that’s a really admirable trait of his character.

I think it’s a consequence of the time and it’s more and more in keeping with that Victorian sensibility and in a nutshell, people weren’t- they just didn’t express their emotions and feelings like a lot of people do today- we’re all sitting with psychiatrists going ‘tell me about your feelings’ and that.

But his words kind of just flowed from him and some people would say, it’s interesting that he didn’t have a sweetheart, that always the person that he’s writing to was his mother and there’s something really, I guess, kind of endearing about that.

Did you feel a connection with that?

I did, well I- they approached me about it and when they sent a few of the letters through and then I had the opportunity to go and meet Reg’s daughter
so we went and had lunch at the Soho hotel and it was a really beneficial thing to do because before that she gave me a poem that she’d written about her dad and the memories she had about him and against that was just a little tool to get into it and put that work in and to get a bit closer to him, that was a really good thing to do.

Then when you meet her- this person actually existed and this actually happened and so to meet his daughter it sort of added to that level of responsibility

Also because travel wasn’t an option for them- lots of these guys – obviously they did it because they felt like it was their duty to do so, but it was that opportunity to go out and see the world so a lot of people, including Reg, embraced it in a way to broaden their horizons, that sense of adventure that he embraced.

It’s powerful because it’s a real story. And because of the way he expresses himself, it’s all reading between the lines in some ways because you never know what he must’ve, well we can speculate, what he was feeling - an ordinary lad and yet put into this incredible experience which nobody had, they’d had no precedent for it really, that level of war. And they were under the illusion that it was going to be over by Christmas and everything and yet there he goes and he gets half his face blown off…

**Why do you think people should hear his story in amongst all the others?**

It is about looking at these gargantuan moments in history, whether it be the war or the fire or whatever, but telling it from a human perspective and I think that’s the key to it.

So it’s a hugely vital moment in history and it’s about documenting it as best we can now. If you can literally engage the next generation into and educate
them as to the sacrifices that people made then it becomes something else, doesn’t it? It’s a programme but there’s a real sense of importance about it and it’s about being meticulous and trying just to be as moving as possible within telling the human story, so it’s a vital document because it’s there to engage us and educate us.

**Interview with Alison Steadman, who played Hallie Myles**

Reading her diary extracts and immersing yourself in the role, what impression did you form of her, as a person? Because she was a witness, wasn’t she, in many ways…

I mean, my overall impression of her was that she was the kind of woman I would have loved to have met. I really felt so close to her-I know that sounds a little bit sentimental, perhaps, but I just think she was such an intelligent, compassionate woman, and I think in another lifetime she could’ve made a wonderful novelist. She was obviously a highly intelligent, sensitive woman who was full of empathy.

For me, it’s such…I mean, of course one knows about the First World War, my father-my grandfather rather- fought in the first world war, you know, my mother used to talk about it and the terrible atrocities etc. etc. and we all have some awareness of it, but for me, her account just made it…real…made it, domestic, if you like…I could feel how she felt, how the general public felt, those who were living in London, those who weren’t at the front but who were equally-over the years of the war- began to suffer – and were so stressed by it. And she taught me things I’d never thought of really, you know, and I have to say that when I was working on the script, when I was sent it, there was one speech in particular that I couldn’t say without crying. And I went over and over it and I went over it over several days and I kept saying to myself- look, you have got to be able to say this because this is in front of camera- you are speaking this- it’s no use bursting into tears because you know, that’s a negative thing and they wont be able to use it. But I found incredibly moving-
It was all incredibly moving. That was, yes, the final sort of station was just extraordinary—something I’d never thought about—that the final kiss or the giving of a flower or the giving of a tiny present in a hand, and no words spoken and then another train coming in with all the wounded men coming back who were—half of them dying—and certainly all of them seriously injured—but I think it was the account that she read in the paper, of a London flat—block of flats— that had been set on fire by the German fire bombs—what do you call them—....bombs, you know, when they came over—and the whole building had gone on fire, and this couple had been trapped on a high floor and couldn’t get out, and had burnt to death. And when the fire brigade finally got access to their flat, they found the two of them kneeling by their bed in prayer, and he had his arm around her and they were praying together, and that’s how they died— that’s how they burned to death—and they hadn’t moved—they had literally just went knelt, by the bed, praying. And to me, that—it was so incredibly moving that—sorry, I’m even upset now thinking of it—the courage and the suffering of those people—and they weren’t the poor men at the front—but it just touched me that the suffering of the whole nation really—and it was that growing awareness that this was not something that they could all cheer and wave off and be smiley about—but it got worse, and worse, and darker and darker until in the end, you know, people were just completely ruined by it—mentally and physically—and, yea, it was—her description—and also the fact that she was a pioneering woman, I mean her and her husband had a vegetarian restaurant just off the strand, in 1914, and the government ended up relying on them to give them recipes for vegetarian food when there were meatless Thursdays and the people couldn’t have meat. And of course no one knew what to eat! They didn’t have a clue! With everyone so used to eating meat, that was the main thing, and the government then relied on her to come up with these recipes, which she did! And so they were printed in the newspaper and you know, and people wrote to her, and she got mail sacks full of recipes which she posted off to people. I mean she was so full of energy and, you know, compassion, and inventiveness, and so I just thought she was the most wonderful woman, and as I say, I even felt a kinship with her that the description at the end of the war, when the war had finished and they were recycling a lot of the stuff, and there was a sort of museum where they put,
where they’d recycled stuff, that had been used in the war, and her
description of that and her description of the fact that people didn’t seem to be
interested in that- and I’m a great recycler and I’m a great one for recycling
and reusing things and not using- and I sort of almost campaign not to use
plastic bags and plastic bottles so- here was another thing I felt very close to
her about so… yea she was just an amazing woman.

It will remain with me, and I won’t forget it, and I haven’t looked at that script
since we finished the recording but it’s as clear, and there was a scene at the
very end of the war when everyone’s in the streets celebrating, and she of
course is out there waving her flag with everybody else, but I just knew that
she was just inside completely wrecked and heartbroken over the terrific loss
of life that had occurred during the whole war, and the futility of it, and that
when she came back home and she shut her front door she just broke down,
and you just saw the woman that had been internally sort of broken by the
pain of the whole experience that she’d gone through.

The other thing that sticks in my mind is her description of the hospital
because she, she had the shop, and lived near the strand in Charring Cross,
you know, and Charring Cross hospital, I don’t know if it was called that then
but that hospital- when the dying soldiers were brought there, to die, and there
was thousands of them, just lying in bed dying and trying to be, you know,
there wasn’t even a pain relief that we have now but there were nurses that
were obviously trying to comfort them in the best way they could, and that
they blocked off the street and put a notice up that said ‘silence please,
respect for the dying’, and that cars would, well there weren’t that many cars
we know, but what cars there were, they would stop and people wouldn’t
speak as they walked past the hospital, you know, people would slow down
and go quiet, and so the level of respect- and I’d never sort of thought about
that you know, how it affected London people, you know, so much.

Why do you think her story should be heard?
Well, I just think, I mean, apart from the fact that she lived through it and was full of empathy and she was this highly intelligent woman, she bothered to make a diary, she bothered to put this down, and I think there has to have been a whole part of her that was saying, ‘this has to be recorded for the future, for someone, people in the future to read’. We know there are, there’s footage, and there’s books being written by experts but this was an ordinary woman who was living and working in central London who had empathy, she saw so much at first hand and lived through it and she wanted the tale to be told, she wanted people in the future to know what it was like and to know what they went through- and I think she did that so brilliantly and I’m only glad that I was asked to play the part, you know, and I hope I served her well, I tried my best.

**Was it an interesting exercise as an actor because normally you work with a script and here you're working with people's words?**

Yeah, well that for me is that made it so extraordinarily moving, was because this want something someone had written from their imagination they’d heard about –oh I’ll put this or say she did this- this was true, this was real.

There was no wooliness, there was no exaggeration, there’s no ‘well maybe’ and ‘I thought this’, no, on this day, on this date, in this year, this is what is happening or yesterday, this is what happened and this is what we’ve been told and this is how we’re feeling. And it’s just extraordinary- I mean because the letters to and from parents, loved ones, wives, girlfriends, are of course absolutely brilliant and are equal in their wonderful memory and all the real things that happened, but it’s wonderful to have somebody’s diary where they are expressing their own emotions as an observer, someone who hasn’t got their husband going off to the front, or their son, but who’s, you know, full of empathy for those – and their café- giving meals to those that were either going off the next day or had come home wounded and giving them a place where they could come and eat and be comforted- again she was so close to all that.
She was very public spirited, wasn’t she?

Yes, oh absolutely, you felt that everything she was doing, she was not doing it for profit or for self congratulation, or for money, you know, she was doing it because she genuinely felt so strongly, and so- she was so upset by the whole situation, and the journey that we go on with her is just brilliant.

She wanted to contribute, didn’t she, she wanted to try to be positive and make things better…?

Yes! I mean like everybody, she goes through the full ‘I’m behind it all I’m going to do this and I decided this’, you know, and we saw this in the paper and then gradually, you know, the realisation is that there are thousands and thousands dying everyday and that it is futile and that ‘what on earth are we going to do, is this going to end’, you know, is this going to be over so quickly, this is going on for years, and is getting more and more entrenched, and you know, nobody knows how to put it right and it’s an absolute nightmare situation, I mean we must never forget that when was are happening, with hindsight we can look back and we can say oh it was from 1914 till 1918- they didn’t know that! When it started they thought it was going to be a few months maybe, and then a year, and then another year, and then suddenly, you know, its four years, five years (sic), gosh how many years is this going to go on? It could’ve been ten, it coul’ve been twenty years, there’s no way of knowing, so when you’re living in the middle of it, you know it’s incredibly bewildering and frightening.

She noticed very minute details that you just wouldn’t get in a history book would you?

Yea, that’s right, she looked out in the street and she’ll see they way people are walking or, you know, and she will take from that, she knows the mood of the population , she hears the sounds in the streets and she knows ‘that’s a frightened call’ or whatever it is, but the scene she describes at the station
when-with the soldiers going away and returning, it just had me in bits, just so wonderfully- the description and the empathy she has and again I’d never read anything like that before, about, you know, that happening, you know people went off and came back but no idea of that silence, when people just couldn’t speak.

She was very good at summing up the collective mood wasn’t she, as a witness it’s quite a striking ability she had and you felt she was getting it right.

She could’ve been an amazing historian, of course, well she is a historian, if you like you know, for that period and time, but you know she has a wonderful use of language and she could’ve’ been a novelist or historian, you know, she was just such a clever woman.

Did this role give you a different perspective and an insight that perhaps challenged what you’d thought about the war before?

I don’t think it’s- I don’t think it challenged it but I think what it did it just, it was like opening a door into a room, you know, you’ve been told the room looks like this, and then suddenly you see the detail of it, and through her I saw it from that woman’s point of view, from a woman’s point of view, I mean I’ve done tiny bits about the First World War before that have been incredibly moving, but to see the war and to see the scale of it from her point of view, just opened the whole thing up to me on a personal level, because we don’t often get it on such a personal level- we get facts and figures and we get dates and we get you know all the numbers of poor men that fought and died and were injured and you know, and somehow, sometimes you can see that as history, and leave it in that box, ‘oh that’s history’, then suddenly I was feeling it from the point of view of a human being and the pain and the misery of living though all that, and all the people that lost their loved ones, that their lives were taken from them, not only the men that died but the women who were waiting for those men to come home who were pregnant and had a child
with no father or had a family because their husbands were taken before they could have a family, you know the whole repercussions of it is so great.

**It vividly brings the whole thing to life; it makes people in history books seem like real people, not just remote figures from the past**

Exactly, not just facts and figures and faded photographs, these were real people.

I was so moved by some of these descriptions, and trying to speak them to camera was sometimes very hard because you know, I was feeling in my heart, I mean the camera man said to me on one take, he said 'I could see your emotion rising up through, coming up into your face into your eyes as you were doing the speech he said I could visibly see it happening, you know, and you couldn’t help it sometimes because it was, you know, listen, I don’t know, I’m not, sort of, putting me in her shoes but I was trying my best to be that woman and feel the feelings that she felt at the time.