

Asunder · conference presentation

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2016 commemorative project for the centenary of the Battle of the Somme, with a particular focus on the North East

Primarily funded by:
14-18 NOW WW1 Centenary Art Commissions across the UK and
 Sunderland Cultural Partnership



ASUNDER
 a film by Esther Johnson

ASUNDER tells the story of what happened to an English town during the First World War, with almost all of its men fighting abroad and its women and children left behind. The North East was in the front line, thanks to its shipyards and munitions factories.

Using archive and contemporary footage and audio, ASUNDER collages the stories of people from Tyne-side and Wear-side to uncover what life was like on the home front, with bombs falling on Britain for the first time, conscientious objectors sentenced to death, and women working as doctors, train conductors, and footballers. The narrative moves from an Edwardian golden era, in which sport grew in popularity and aircraft and cars pointed to a bright new future, to a war that horrifically reversed this progress. In the Battle of the Somme, British, French and German armies fought one of the most traumatic battles in military history. Over the course of just four months, more than one million soldiers were captured, wounded or killed in a confrontation of unimaginable horror.

directed by Esther Johnson
 text by Bob Stanley
 narrated by Kate Asher and Alan Armstrong
 music composed by Field Music and Warm Digits
 performed with Royal Northern Sinfonia and The Cornish Sisters
 produced by Esther Johnson and Bob Stanley
 www.asunder1916.uk
 or @1916asunder

Co-commissioned by Sunderland Cultural Partnership and 14-18 NOW WW1 Centenary Art Commissions, supported by the Heritage Lottery through Arts Council England and the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Sunderland Business Improvement District, Culture Bridge North East and the James Street Trust.

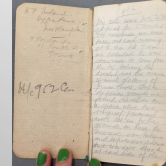
PROJECT AIMS

- to uncover untold stories of WW1 with a focus on Sunderland and the North East of England
- to experiment with mixing archive with contemporary footage shot especially for the film
- to create a narrative that weaves oral history testimonies, diary entries and memoirs from those that lived through WW1 with newspaper stories published in 1914-18 editions of the *Sunderland Daily Echo* and *Shipping Gazette*
- to collaborate with musicians from the North East to create an original soundtrack to be performed live at the premiere

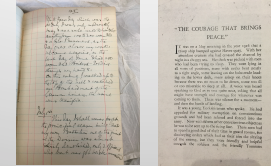
SOUNDSCAPE

NARRATIVE RESEARCH

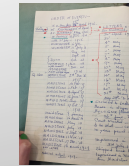
Diary Entries



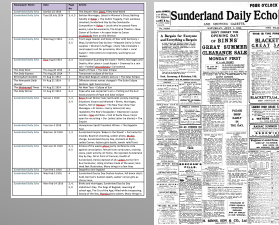
Essays



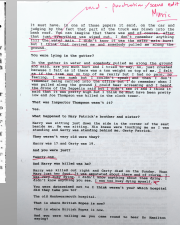
Memoirs



1914-18 Newspapers



Oral History Testimonies



FILM CHARACTERS

individuals from the North East

Margaret Holmes



Norman Gaudie



Bella Reay



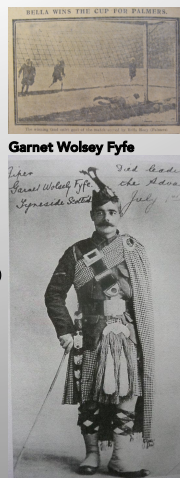
Arthur Linfoot



George Thompson



Robert Hope (Hepple)



Garnet Wolsey Fyfe

Plus: Lizzie Holmes and Lisbeth Simm (no found photographs)

MUSIC

- Orchestral score inspired by early 1900s experiments in music
- Use of woodwind and celeste popular in late 1800s/early 1900s. Decision not to use brass and traditional notions instrumentation for war.
- Researched traditional folk songs – found *The Rigs of Sunderland Fair* about an ideal day at the fair, sung A cappella in the film
- Researched Music Hall and early recorded music technologies such as wax cylinders
- Score – Orchestral and string quartet version

"One of the things which intrigued me especially about this project was our love of the orchestral music from that period. Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* premiered in 1913, Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* in 1912. Bela Bartok and Maurice Ravel were composing, as was Claude Debussy, so it was a time of huge change in harmony and composition and we've dipped into that period for inspiration a lot."

– Peter Brewis from *Field Music*



A NEW SONG.

THE RIGS OF SUNDERLAND FAIR.

COME all you honest folk, come listen to a while,
A Sunderland fair, it will make you smile,
And when the night is over, before the day is done,
The Sunderland fair we will be gone.

CHORUS.
Come in as soon as you can, come in as soon,
To Sunderland fair, it will be done.

From Wapping and Cannon, through the town,
To the Rigs of Sunderland fair, it will be done,
In a very short time they'll be gone.

From Wapping and Cannon, through the town,
To the Rigs of Sunderland fair, it will be done,
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PERFORMANCES WITH LIVE MUSIC

Asunder sheet music



Conductor Hugh Brunt



Asunder premiere programme



Rehearsals and recording at Sage Gateshead




Asunder team with Royal Northern Sinfonia



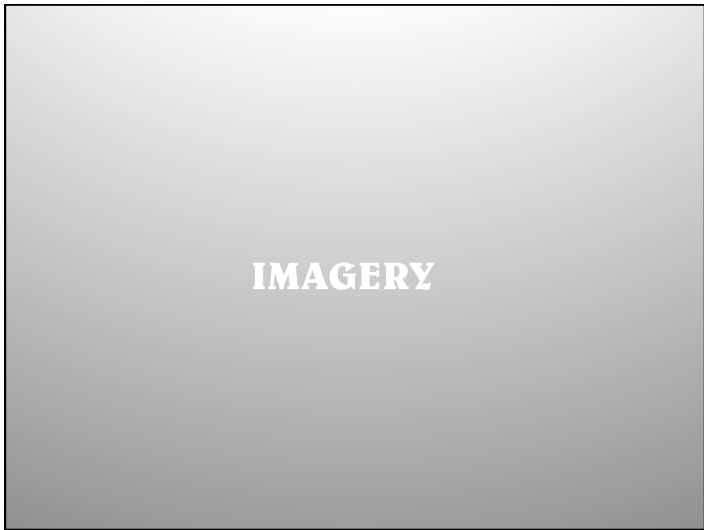
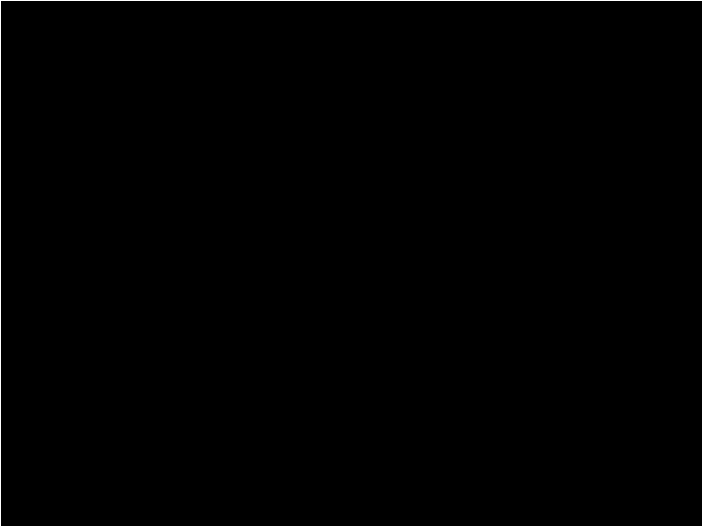
Performances with Live Music

PREMIERE – 10.07.16
Sunderland Empire Theatre
 Premiere included additional
Asunder inspired arts activities

Barbican London
 12.02.17

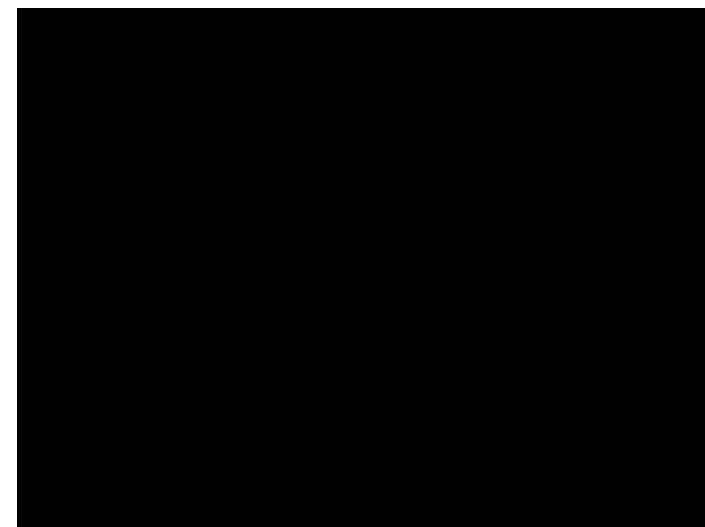
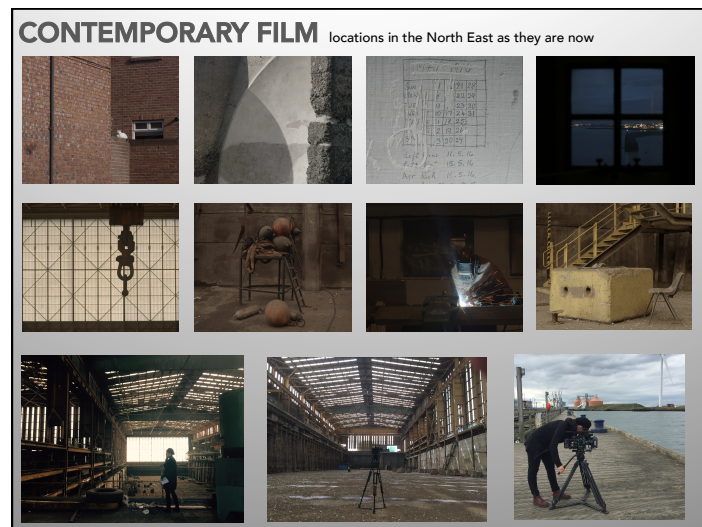
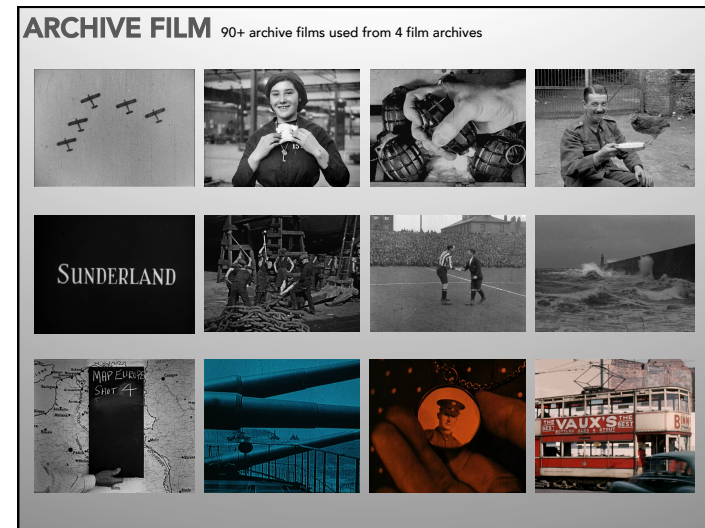


Asunder
 Sun 12 Feb, Milton Court
 Field Music and Warm
 Digits provide the live
 soundtrack to Esther Johnson's
 moving documentary about
 Sunderland during WW1



ARCHIVE RESEARCH





COMMUNITY SCREENINGS

Screenings taking place in locations in which the film characters once lived and knew:

e.g. Sunderland; Roker; Hendon; Blyth;
South Tyneside; Gateshead; Newcastle; Durham

CINEMA SCREENINGS

- Special screenings for schools
- Screenings with Q&As

2018 SCREENINGS

Have included:

- The Women's Library, LSE
- International Women's Day
- Sheffield Museums

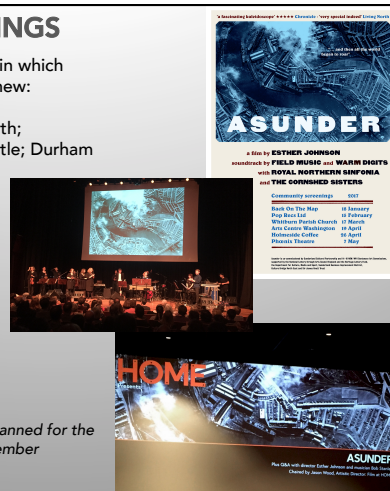
Late 2018:

- Sage Gateshead

a performance with live music is planned for the
WW1 Armistice Centenary in November

- BBC Broadcast
- DVD release

<http://asunder1916.uk/events>



PREMIERE AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

"In the plethora of events marking the centenary of the First World War and especially the Somme, *Asunder* really stood out for me: its highly imaginative concept, brilliant storytelling, geographical and cultural specificity, above all its power to move and connect with the reality of events 100 years ago. A fantastic piece of work." – Michael Chaplin, Writer

"The film was meticulously researched and put together to evoke so many emotions, what a tribute... I think the resounding set of applause at the end of the show said it all!" – Vicky Willis, Sir James Knott Trust

"*Asunder* was phenomenal!"
– Brenda Graham, Sunderland Heritage Forum

"I thought it was amazing and loved every minute. The stories were so lovely and left you wanting to find out more – faultless."
– Louise Clamp, Sunderland Vibrancy Group

"The show was incredibly moving and powerful, I was very emotional at points."
– Lynne Patience, Sunderland resident

REVIEWS

"a fascinating kaleidoscope"
– *Chronicle* ★★★★★

"very special indeed"
– *Living North*

"*Asunder* casts its spell"
– *Sunderland Echo*

"*Asunder* is a powerful fusion of the historical with the contemporary, a lyrical work that lingers long in the imagination"
– *Morning Star*

"Montage shots of residential streets, the remnants of industry and shipbuilding, relics of the conflict itself, fashion a meticulous mosaic of themed segments, captured with Johnson's trademark painterly eye for detail"
– *Culture Vulture*

AWARDS

Nominated for Learning on Screen BUFVC 2018
Archive Award

Nominated for BAFTSS 2018
Best Experimental Practice Research Portfolio Award

WINNER of Journal Culture 2017
Best Event of the Year

Nominated for Focal International 2017
Best Use of Footage in a Factual Production

Shortlisted for Living North 2016
Performance of the Year

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