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Coming next to The Little Theatre....



DUNSTABLE REP PRESENTS

THE TRENCH

by Oliver Lansley



Directed by Alan Clarke

The Trench is presented by special arrangement with and all authorised performance materials are supplied by Les Enfants Terribles. lesenfantsterribles.co.uk

(Age recommendation 12+)

Dunstable Rep

NODA

CAST

Bert.....Marlon Gill

Collins/Chorus 1.....Anthony Bird

The Guide/Chorus 2.....Jenny McDonald

The Demon/Soldier 1.....Nick Norkin

Soldier 2/Chorus 3.....Daniel Clarke

Bert's Wife (Violinist).....Lynette Driver

'The Trench' is a relatively new play, inspired by the true story of a skilled miner named Willam Hackett – the only tunneller ever to receive the Victoria Cross – who became entombed in a tunnel during World War One.

Our central character, Bert, finds himself trapped in a collapsed tunnel. As the horror threatens to engulf him, he discovers another world beneath all the mud and death.

Setting off on an epic journey of salvation, the boundaries between reality and fantasy blur as he questions what's real, what's not and whether it even matters?

This fascinating and compelling play first premiered at The Edinburgh Fringe in 2012 and was devised, created and produced by the renowned and unique 'Les Enfants Terribles' Theatre Company.

Dunstable Rep is thrilled to bring audiences this thought-provoking, disturbing and above all, moving production.

PRODUCTION TEAM

Director.....Alan Clarke

Assistant Director...Angie Goss

Sound.....Andrew Hayward

Lighting.....Josh Mitchell

Production Design....Alan Clarke

Shadow Director.....James Trapp

Set Build.....Mervyn Wilson, Emma Dickson, Alan Goss, Marlon Gill, Paul Hoskins, Alexander Gill & Cast

Costume & Props.....Alan Clarke & Angie Goss

Marketing Design.....Megan Clarke

Publicity.....Sarah Cunnane

With thanks to the Dunstable Rep committee,
the front of house and bar staff teams and Aidan Brown.

Stay for our Q&A

Following the play (60 minutes running time) there will be an interval, after which the audience will be invited back into the auditorium for a 'Behind the Scenes' and Q&A session with the cast and creative team.

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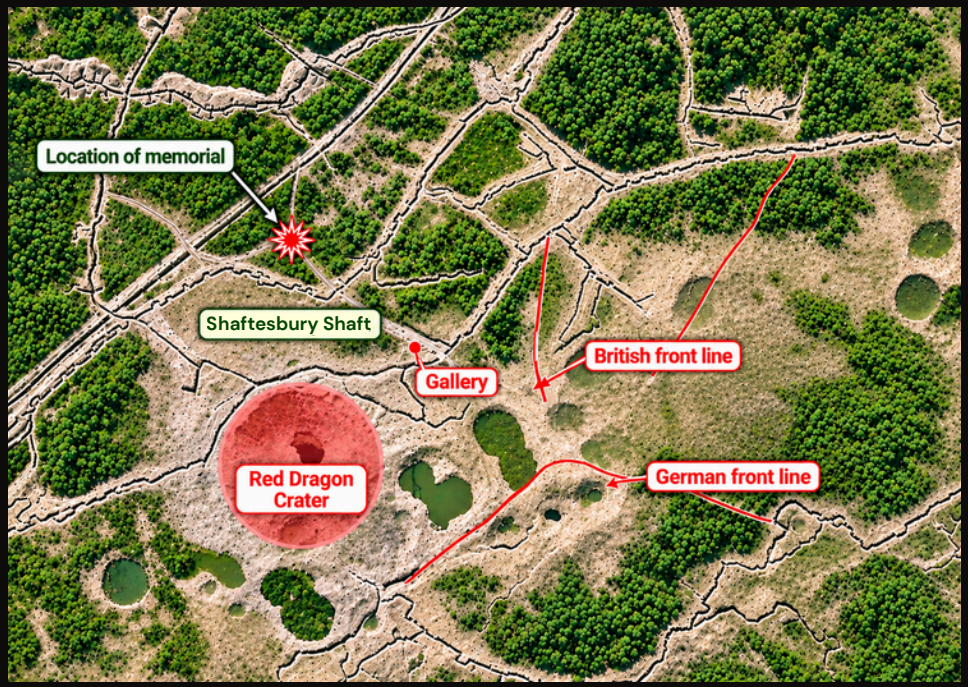
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THE MEN, THE HISTORY & THE SACRIFICE

Beneath the mud and devastation of the First World War, another war was being fought: a silent, terrifying battle deep underground. While soldiers fought above the surface, specially recruited miners worked in darkness, digging tunnels beneath enemy lines, laying explosives and listening for the sounds of the enemy digging towards them. These men were known as the Tunnellers of the Royal Engineers.

The Trench, written by Oliver Lansley, takes inspiration from one extraordinary true story from this hidden battlefield: the story of Sapper William Hackett VC and Private Thomas Collins.









Top left: Private Thomas Collins

Top right: Sapper William Hackett VC

Left: A Memorial to the Tunnelling Companies of the Great War and William Hackett VC

THE REAL STORY: JUNE 1916

William Hackett was a miner from Nottinghamshire who had spent much of his working life underground in the coal mines of Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire. At 42 years old, he was initially considered too old for military service. Determined to do his part in the war, he eventually joined the Royal Engineers in October 1915 and became a member of the 254th Tunnelling Company.

On 22 June 1916, Hackett and four fellow tunnellers were working beneath the battlefield at Givenchy-lès-la-Bassée in northern France. Their task was to construct a tunnel towards the German lines, approximately 35 feet below the ground.

At around 2.50am, a powerful German mine exploded, causing a section of the tunnel to collapse. Five men were trapped underground, cut off from the shaft and the possibility of escape.

A desperate rescue operation began. After hours of digging through fallen earth and broken timber, rescuers eventually managed to make contact with the trapped men.

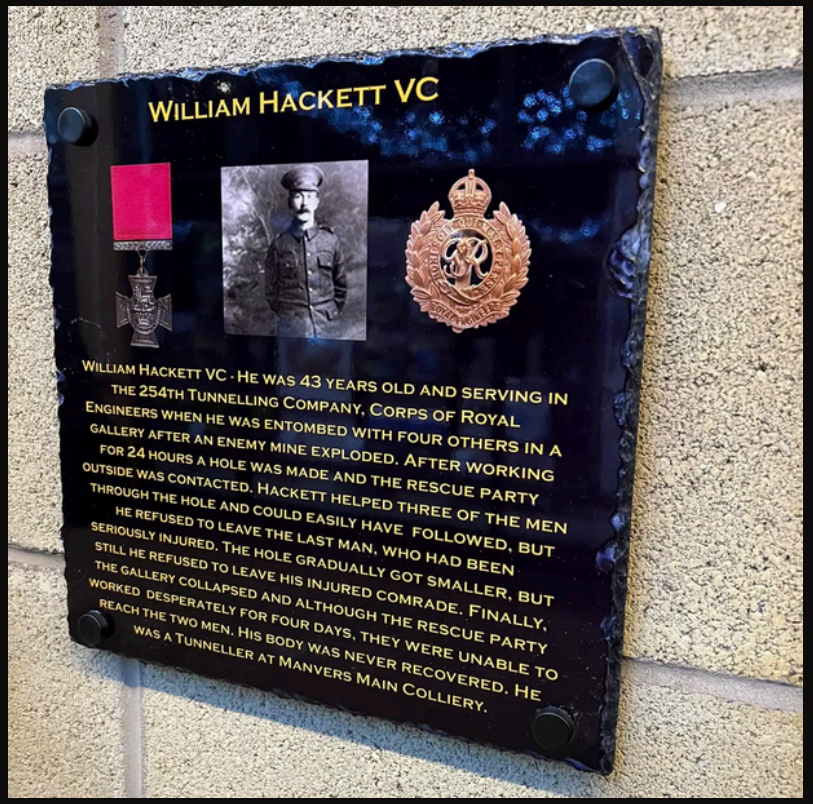
Hackett helped three of his comrades escape through the narrow opening. He could have followed them to safety, but one man remained: 22-year-old Private Thomas Collins of the 14th Battalion, the Welsh Regiment (the Swansea Pals), who was seriously injured.

Hackett refused to leave him.

Despite the increasingly dangerous conditions and the repeated appeals of the rescue party, he remained with Collins. His reported words were: "I am a tunneller, I must look after the others first."

The tunnel eventually collapsed again, burying both men. Despite a further four days of desperate rescue attempts, neither man could be reached. Their bodies were never recovered, and they are believed to remain beneath the fields of Givenchy.

For his extraordinary bravery and self-sacrifice, William Hackett was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. He remains the only military tunneller ever to receive this distinction.



THE LETTER

One of the most poignant moments in The Trench comes when Bert receives a letter from home, bringing devastating news. This moment is a powerful piece of theatrical invention, representing the terrible fear of losing everything that gives life meaning, even while fighting for survival.

The reality of William Hackett's own family life was different, but no less heartbreaking. William was married to Alice, and they had two children: Arthur, aged 14, and Mary, aged 12. In January 1916, while William was serving in France, he received news that his eldest son, Arthur, had suffered a terrible accident at Manvers Main Colliery. Just four weeks into working at the mine, Arthur had been injured by runaway coal trucks and had his right leg amputated below the knee.

The letter in the play may be fictional, but the heartbreak at its centre was very real. William's story reminds us that behind every soldier was a family waiting, hoping and praying for their safe return. His final sacrifice was not simply that of a soldier for a comrade, but also that of a husband and father who would never again see the people he loved.

