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Published by East Finchley Newspapers, P.O. Box 3699, London N2 8JA. www.the-archer.co.uk



Great War artifacts on display at East Finchley library. Photo Mike Coles

Life in the trenches

By Peter Hart, author of *The Great War*

I was delighted to be invited under the 'Good Reads' programme to give a talk on *Life in the Trenches* at the East Finchley Library on Saturday 12 April. The talk was to complement a display by the 10th Essex Living History Group, two of whom were dressed in authentic uniforms, with the weapons and artefacts of the time laid out for all to see and, if we wanted, to touch.

There were rifles, wicked-looking bayonets, helmets, and my favourite, a hard-tack biscuit fed to the troops in the trenches, part of a daily ration of a staggering 4,000 calories. These men led hard lives and food was fuel.

Harsh conditions

The front line trenches in France and Flanders were dangerous places: to look over the sandbag parapet meant risking death from a sniper's bullet. Shells could crash down at any time to kill you or your comrades. The men slept in crude dugouts, sometimes mere holes hollowed out in the mud walls of the trench. In winter the cold was excruciating and they were often up to their ankles in freezing water.

Voices from the past

My talk used quotes from the oral history interviews I did in the 1980s for the Imperial War Museum. These connect us to those grim times. Who for instance has not struggled to open a corned beef tin? Private Donald Price certainly did.

"We had a tin of bully beef. At the side of this thing was a key which you used to turn the top off. Mine didn't act and I got this jack knife to open this tin. Unfortunately it slipped and my



Peter Hart talks about life in the trenches in *The Great War* at East Finchley library. Photo Mike Coles

hand was jagged. See this – it's still there! A great jag and of course I bled like a pig! The boys bandaged me up!"

They also show the horrors of war. After one particularly shocking incident, in which many of his friends had been blown to pieces, Private William Holbrook recalled his young officer's reaction:

"The officer got his water bottle out, he'd got some rum in it and we had a good sip. He said 'How long you been out?' I said, 'Two years!' He said, 'Two years in this! God almighty! Do you know how long I've been here? Ten days and I'm bloody well sick of it!'"

It really was a terrible war.

Live comedy at the Phoenix

By Nick Young

Comedian Ian Stone will be compering a fundraising evening of comedy at the Phoenix Cinema on 12 May to support The Archer Academy, where his son Alexander is a pupil.

Although it will be raising money for the secondary school, it is an over-18s event. That said, the comedians who will be accompanying Ian on stage, including Milton Jones, are by no means 'blue' comedians.

"We did have the chat," says Ian, "and there will be no sensitive subjects." The message is clear: stand-up comedians do not have to resort to risqué material to get laughs. "If you're good enough, you can talk about whatever," says Ian, who like many of his fellow-comedians uses everyday observations as a source of humour.

An experienced stand-up, Ian is adept at dealing with anyone who tries to heckle him while he's on stage. "I talk to them, and let them know that it's not their time to speak ... I treat them with the disdain and contempt they deserve," he explains. "It's not about them, it's about me, and I'm there to entertain people."



Ian Stone

Mini and maxi

Ranked by *The Independent* as one of Britain's top ten

stand-ups, Ian has been performing since 1991. In over two decades in the comedy business, he has performed at venues varying in size from a pod on the London Eye ("a good laugh, but quite odd") to a crowd of 8,500 at Bestival on the Isle of Wight with Jimmy Carr, and he has performed for British troops in Afghanistan.

He has been on the TV shows *Mock The Week* and *Never Mind The Buzzcocks*, and performs regularly at the Comedy Store in London. Tickets for the Phoenix event cost £25 and are available from www.tinyurl.com/archercomedy.

Coffee and cake morning

Lupus sufferer Sippy Azizollah is organising a fund raising event on World Lupus Day, Saturday 10 May.

It will be held in the Five Bells, East End Road between 10.30am and 12 noon. Entry is £5 and participants are invited to bake a cake and bring it along on the day. This will either be shared to eat with your coffee or sold if it is spared. Raffle tickets will be on sale too.

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