

Dunham Massey – ‘Sanctuary’ from the trenches

As part of the First World War centenary commemorations, Dunham Massey, a National Trust property on the edge of South Manchester, has recreated its past as a military hospital in a two-year immersive experience for visitors called ‘Sanctuary’. Trust staff and over 80 volunteers used archive material and items from the collection to uncover and bring to life the story of the Stamford Hospital. Between April 1917 and January 1919 the Hospital was home to 282 convalescent Tommies and the medical staff that looked after them.

Visitors have been moved to see the Saloon turned back into a ward with 25 beds and the Great Hall as a recreation area. The operating table has been recreated at the foot of the staircase. Visitors also learn about the role that the family played, especially the women, in caring for the soldiers and managing the House. The programme of events accompanying the recreation includes live interpretation by actors and poetry readings. This has added to visitor understanding and enjoyment.

Overall the Hospital experience has worked because:

- It tells a hidden story using the real histories of people involved;
- It immerses the visitor in an authentic scene;
- The quality of work commissioned, using professional actors and playwrights; and
- It generates an emotional response from the visitor.

Feedback from visitors has been positive and the hospital has driven a significant increase in visitor numbers with timed tickets needed to manage popular times. Overall visitor numbers so far in 2014 are up 58% on last year with paying visitors (as opposed to NT member visits) up by 82%. It is attracting a wider audience to the property and leading to increased secondary spend, Dunham Massey now has the highest catering sales in the National Trust and the 4th highest retail sales.



Images from the National Trusts recreation of the military hospital © National Trust

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