



Immediate Release

The Lord Ashcroft Gallery: *Extraordinary Heroes*

Opens 12 November 2010

IWM London opens The Lord Ashcroft Gallery, its first major permanent gallery for ten years, this November.

The new gallery, paid for by a £5million donation from Lord Ashcroft, KCMG, will house the *Extraordinary Heroes* exhibition containing the world's largest collection of Victoria Crosses (VCs), which has been established by Lord Ashcroft since 1986. The 164 awards, which range from the Crimean to the Falklands wars, will go on public display for the first time alongside 48 VCs and 31 George Crosses (GCs) already held by IWM. The VC is Britain and the Commonwealth's premier award for extreme gallantry in the face of the enemy, while the GC is Britain's most prestigious civil decoration.

Visitors to The Lord Ashcroft Gallery: *Extraordinary Heroes* exhibition will discover the personal stories behind each decoration in a state-of-the-art new space filled with interactive touch-screens, multimedia platforms and original interpretation.

Alongside the precious award groups in the gallery will be many objects on display for the first time. They include the extensively damaged backpack worn by Lance Corporal Matt Croucher GC. In Afghanistan in 2008, during a covert patrol of a Taliban bomb factory, Croucher threw himself onto a grenade smothering its explosion. This quick, decisive action saved the lives of his comrades and thanks to the pack he too, remarkably, escaped with few injuries. Also on display for the first time in years will be the diving suit worn by Acting Leading Seaman James Magennis in his VC action. Magennis overcame exhaustion and danger to make several dives in the Johore Straits to place limpet mines on a target in 1945. The first VC acquired by Lord Ashcroft was awarded to Magennis.

To mark the opening of The Lord Ashcroft gallery, IWM has also commissioned significant new works for its Collections. Among them is a portrait by acclaimed war photographer Don McCullin of Lance Corporal Johnson Beharry VC, whose series of brave actions included moving his column out of an ambush and carrying wounded comrades to safety in Iraq in 2004.

To find out more about the motivation behind all the awards, visitors can choose from a range of interactive touch-screens, life stories, video montages and sound clips to delve into the life stories and actions of all featured recipients.

In contrast to the multimedia offerings, visitors will also be confronted with a number of large models recreating aspects of some famous VC and GC actions. For example, a life-size shark, relating to Cadet David Hay's 1941 GC action of saving shipwreck survivors from shark infested waters, will hang from the exhibition ceiling so that the enormity of the task faced by Hay will be literally unmissable.

The 241 VC and GC decorations featured in the gallery will be arranged by seven different qualities – leadership, sacrifice, aggression, skill, initiative, endurance, and boldness – encouraging visitors to examine an individual's reaction to the difficult decisions behind their feat of bravery. The Lord Ashcroft

Gallery aims to intrigue, inspire and amaze by re-telling forgotten stories of bravery that show how, when faced with extreme situations, some people can do extraordinary things.

Diane Lees, Director-General IWM says: "IWM is delighted to be opening this new gallery which will ensure Lord Ashcroft's remarkable collection of VCs has a public home. Our mission is to enrich people's understanding of war and its impact on ordinary people, so we are very grateful to Lord Ashcroft for enabling us to share the stories of some extraordinary heroes through these medals."

Lord Ashcroft says: "My fascination with bravery, and in particular the Victoria Cross, goes back to my childhood, so I'm thrilled to be responsible for a new gallery at IWM which will help audiences of all ages discover some of the most gallant actions in history. IWM's reputation for helping people understand the experience of modern conflicts is unrivalled, and I'm confident that members of the public will be inspired and motivated by the exceptional courage of the ordinary men, women and children featured in the outstanding exhibition."

The Lord Ashcroft Gallery will also cover the history of the VC and GC's establishments; information on the importance of the Victoria Cross and George Cross Association to its members; reflection on the loss and grief of bereaved relatives of VC and GC holders; original illustrations of famous actions by renowned British artists; and copies of vintage comic books *The Victor* and *The Hornet* which will resonate with older visitors. An official book accompanying the exhibition, *Extraordinary Heroes*, is published by Osprey Publishing in November 2010. Lord Ashcroft's new book, *George Cross Heroes*, is published by Headline Review in November 2010.

Admission to The Lord Ashcroft Gallery: *Extraordinary Heroes* exhibition is free. Visitors may experience a short wait at peak times.

**For further press information contact Ellie Farrell, Senior Press Officer:
020 7416 5497, efarrell@iwm.org.uk**

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Notes To Editors

Lord Ashcroft, KCMG

Lord Ashcroft, KCMG, is an international businessman, author and philanthropist. He was Deputy Chairman of the Conservative party in the UK from December 2005 to September 2010 and is Treasurer of the International Democratic Union. He is the founder and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Crimestoppers, the only UK charity dedicated to solving crimes, Vice-Patron of the Intelligence Corps Museum, Chairman of the Trustees of Ashcroft Technology Academy and Chancellor of Anglia Ruskin University. He is also a Trustee of the Imperial War Museum Foundation in London and a Trustee of The Cleveland Clinic in the United States.

Lord Ashcroft has a life-long interest in bravery and gallantry medals. In 1986, he started collecting Victoria Crosses. There are now more than 160 in his collection, estimated to be worth some £30 million, making it the largest collection of VCs in the world. Lord Ashcroft continues a close association with the Victoria and George Cross Association, to whom he is donating his royalties from his latest book *George Cross Heroes*.

www.lordashcroft.com | www.victoriacrossheroes.com | www.specialforcesheroes.com | www.georgecrossheroes.com Contact: angelaent@qol.com

IWM London

IWM London is IWM's flagship branch thanks to the breadth, depth and impact of our exhibits and displays. We share people's experiences of war through our First World War and Second World War galleries, the Holocaust Exhibition, the Lord Ashcroft Gallery, as well as many other displays and

temporary exhibitions. Our family learning sessions and events encourage debate and challenge people's perceptions of war.

Open daily from 10am – 6pm except 24, 25 and 26 December. Last admission 5.45pm
IWM London, Lambeth Road, London, SE1 6HZ. T: 020 7416 5000

IWM

IWM (Imperial War Museums) tells the story of people who have lived, fought and died in conflicts involving Britain and the Commonwealth since 1914.

Our unique Collections, made up of the everyday and the exceptional, reveal stories of people, places, ideas and events. Using these, we tell vivid personal stories and create powerful physical experiences across our five museums that reflect the realities of war as both a destructive and creative force. We challenge people to look at conflict from different perspectives, enriching their understanding of the causes, course and consequences of war and its impact on people's lives.

IWM's five branches are **IWM London**, with six floors of exhibitions and displays; **IWM North**, housed in an iconic award-winning building designed by Daniel Libeskind; **IWM Duxford**, a world renowned aviation museum and Britain's best preserved war-time airfield; **Churchill War Rooms**, housed in Churchill's secret headquarters below Whitehall and the Second World War cruiser **HMS Belfast**.

2014 - 2018 marks the centenary of the First World War, a landmark anniversary for Britain and the world. IWM will mark the centenary by leading a vibrant, four year programme of cultural activities across the country, including the opening of brand new First World War galleries at IWM London in 2014. For more information visit www.1914.org