

Social History in Museums

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Editor's Foreword

In this themed issue, museum professionals share insights into a rich variety of projects which marked the centenary of the beginning of the First World War.

Challenging stories and complex logistics were key factors in the project undertaken by Daniel Morrow in New Zealand.

Engagement with the experiences of local people during the war was at the heart of the exhibitions commented upon by Lydia Saul and in my own article. I go on to interrogate the interpretive approach of foregrounding the experiences of individuals, and to question whether it risks excluding important issues.

Innovative use of archival collections characterises several of the projects, particularly Katherine Belshaw's work in using archives to engage audiences with scientific advancements made as a result of warfare.

The projects undertaken by Rachel Drew and John Coburn engaged audiences creatively in non-museum spaces.

Community engagement is considered from two different perspectives. Maria Erskine shares an account of involving communities in the development of an exhibition, while Judith Green challenges museum professionals to think differently about community engagement and to recognise the important work already being done within communities.

In two very different projects, Chris Copp and John Coburn both worked in innovative ways with artists to encourage audiences to engage with collections and stories in new and unusual ways.

Reviews of the revamped galleries of the First World War at the Imperial War Museum and a book offering a new approach to researching dress collections complete this issue.

The articles included in this issue of *Social History in Museums* have, for the first time, undergone a peer review process. Professionals and academics within the sector have read and commented upon the articles, and the writers have had the opportunity to improve upon their original submissions in the light of these comments. As set out in the SHCG Forward Plan, my hopes in introducing this process are to increase the standard and standing of the journal. The process has largely worked well this year, but I intend to learn from the issues which have arisen and make further changes next year. The timetable has been particularly impacted upon, so look out for a call for papers for the next issue before too long. If you are interested in becoming a peer reviewer for the journal, please get in touch.

I hope you enjoy this issue.

Helen McConnell Simpson

Editor

For Us They Fell: A First World War Community Commemoration Project and Exhibition

Dr Daniel Morrow, Curator of Social History at Waikato Museum Te Whare Taonga o Waikato in New Zealand, shares a practical and detailed account of the development of a commemorative exhibition and digital project with the competing pressures of collaboration with an external exhibition development company, an aim for strong community involvement, and a varied and sensitive local context.

More than two years in the making, *For Us They Fell* is a large scale community commemoration project and exhibition produced by the regional institution Waikato Museum in Hamilton, New Zealand. It marks the centenary of local involvement in the First World War. The project consists of two major elements – an interactive database and research platform (live from mid 2014) www.forustheyfell.org and a semi-permanent exhibition occupying three large galleries at Waikato Museum. The exhibition, subtitled *The People of the Waikato in the First World War*, opened to the public on 25 April 2015. It will close on Armistice Day, 11 Nov 2018.

This essay examines the genesis and development of the *For Us They Fell* project. It reflects on some of the challenges involved in producing a large scale exhibition with a high degree of community involvement in the context of a generally focused regional museum. It also considers the ethic of community outreach that was central to the project, and the process of collaboration with an external museum design company to research and present the exhibition. For the benefit of peers in the industry, it finally evaluates those elements of the project that were most successful and those where hindsight has revealed a different approach may have been warranted.

The Museum and the Region

Waikato Museum is the main memory institution in the Waikato region – a cultural and local government area in New Zealand's upper North Island. The population of the region, which contains multiple territorial authorities, was estimated at 438,000 in July 2014. Waikato Museum is situated in the largest local urban centre, Hamilton City. Home to 151,000 people, Hamilton is a fast-growing city with a youthful population. It is within short travelling distance of several towns in the northern Waikato and New Zealand's largest city, Auckland.

Established in its current building in 1987, Waikato Museum is a general community museum that provides a mix of touring and curated in-house exhibitions. These span the four subject area offers of fine art, social history, science and tangata whenua (Māori). The museum is funded solely by the Hamilton City Council and operates as a department of the local government. Both Hamilton City and the Waikato have large indigenous Māori populations. This demographic is linked to the history of the region as a national centre of resistance to British colonisation and of Māori autonomy – as embodied by the Kingitanga, or Māori King Movement, established in 1858. The museum maintains a strong relationship with the regional Māori tribal confederation, Waikato-Tainui.

The Genesis of For Us They Fell

From an institutional perspective, the imperative to develop a First World War commemoration project was threefold. Firstly, the museum needed to replace Never a Dull Moment, its long-running flagship exhibition that explored the historic European

settlement of Hamilton. Secondly, the opportunity was apparent to capitalise on a remarkable groundswell of public interest in the First World War, as the centenary of the conflict's outbreak neared. Finally, we wanted to provide a uniquely local narrative of the war experience. This would be both a reflection of our regional focus and a point of distinctiveness from the many other projects being forwarded to funding bodies at the same time.

The idea for the exhibition that became *For Us They Fell* was first floated by Steve Lahood and James Mclean, principals at the Wellington-based museum experience company, Story Inc. Steve and James had worked with Waikato Museum Director Cherie Meecham in her previous role at Rotorua Museum. At a conference, the pair approached Meecham with the idea of collaboratively developing a First World War exhibition. Established in 1997, Story Inc competes for contracts to design exhibitions throughout Australasia and beyond. Over nearly two decades, the company has established a reputation as a leader in the industry for its creative approach to exhibition design and high production standards. It was agreed that Story Inc and Waikato Museum would jointly produce an application for funding from the Lottery World War One Commemorations, Environment and Heritage Committee.

The name "For Us They Fell", which some in the community have suggested might imply an uncritical attitude to war commemoration, was attached to the project from an early stage. The inspiration for the name occurred during a visit to Pokeno, a hamlet in the northern Waikato. The phrase was inscribed on the base of the local war memorial, one of the many monuments dotting country settlements and small towns throughout the region. These words immediately stood out for their simplicity and evocativeness. The phrase implied a link, yet not necessarily a celebratory one, between the Waikato of today – diverse, inclusive, dynamic – and a heritage including loss and suffering. For this reason, the phrase was chosen as the title for the commemorative project and exhibition. The intention in doing so was not to glorify war, but to recognise sacrifice and the role of this history in the cultural fabric of the region.

In October 2013, the museum and Story Inc learned that their application to the Lotteries Commission had been successful, with *For Us They Fell* receiving a grant of \$506,000. The grant money was added to \$250,000 of the museum's own funds to make an overall budget of \$756,000 New Zealand Dollars.

Aims of the Project

Like many large projects, *For Us They Fell* evolved significantly as it was developed. In retrospect, however, it is clear that the original proposal captured the major aims of the project in terms of content and visitor experience. From the start, we wanted to produce an exhibition that told the stories of Waikato people during the First World War, and that gave particular attention to stories volunteered by the community. Many of these narratives hadn't been heard outside of families. An objective voiced early on was to reclaim the individuality of those soldiers and nurses whose names were listed on the regional memorials. Doing so would give colour and specificity to losses that had become abstractions in the public memory. This local and personal focus would be our key point of difference from the other commemorations being staged around the centenary years. Many of these competing projects originated from major metropolitan and national institutions with significantly greater resources.

The museum and Story Inc also believed strongly from the outset that a high level of community involvement in the exhibition was desirable. We wanted to give people the

opportunity to share their objects and stories in the show. It was vital that this input be reflected by the soldiers and nurses from the region who served in the First World War that we chose to feature in the exhibition.

Education, at both primary and secondary school level, is very important to the museum's daily practice, so it was imperative that the exhibition have a strong and multi-layered historical interpretation. It would need to explain the major phases and events of the war and how they shaped the experience of our soldiers, nurses and those remaining on the "home front". The exhibition would also need to engage relatively deeply with several areas of the war in order to be relevant to the successive commemorations of its major milestones. In New Zealand, for instance, the centenary of the New Zealand and Australian Army Corps' campaign on the Gallipoli Peninsula would be a focus of attention during 2015. Later phases of the war, in particular the Western Front, as well the Armistice and the post-war period would come into focus as the anniversary period continued. In this way, the show had to be a "living exhibition", able to continually engage with the commemorations as they evolved throughout the anniversary years.

Finally, we wanted to capture public knowledge and memory of First World War soldiers and nurses on a community history portal that would outlast the exhibition. The idea was to compile a database on which all service personnel with a significant connection to the region were listed. Each soldier or nurse would have a Facebook-style page to which people could upload information about that individual. Rather than producing a conventional historical resource – we were conscious of the time-consuming moderation and attention to detail this would entail – we wanted to build a repository of community knowledge and memory of First World War soldiers. The outcome of this desire was the website www.forustheyfell.org, the process of building which will be examined in the next section.

The Website

www.forustheyfell.org was the first and, in many ways, the most challenging part of the commemorative project to be developed. The initial task was to build a list of Waikato-based soldiers who had served in the First World War. This turned out not to be a straightforward undertaking. Soldiers were sourced from the Hamilton Roll of Honour and the records of the Online Cenotaph at the Auckland War Memorial Museum. Others were found by recording names that appeared on war memorials across the Waikato region. The list was always going to be incomplete and imperfect – this was because many local soldiers are not listed on memorials, while some others with little connection to the region are included. The goal of the development team was that people in the community could suggest soldier pages for us to add. Members of the public could then populate the pages through their own research or memories. Information gathered on these pages would in turn feed back into the exhibition, both through the selection of stories featured and particularly on a set of consoles in a memorial space at the beginning of the show. Visitors could use these to search the database and have their results projected on the wall.

In addition to presenting a list of soldiers and creating profiles for them, it was decided that tools would be built into the site to allow members of the public to do research using online resources, which could then be uploaded. In terms of a digital platform, the development team decided that the *For Us They Fell* site would function best if built using Wordpress architecture, due to the simplicity, durability and familiarity of this system.

The Roadshow

Prior to finalising the exhibition content, we felt that in order to ensure the project had the desired level of community engagement, it was necessary to undertake a program of public outreach. We needed to spread the word about what we were doing and how people could help. A challenge we faced with this initiative was the sheer size of our region – 25,000 square kilometres – as well as a very diverse social landscape that includes smaller urban centres, country towns and large rural sections, and which spreads to both coasts of the North Island. The most direct way to get the message out, we decided, was to organise a “roadshow” tour of the region. Driving in a branded car, we would stop at Returned Service Association (RSA) clubs and other community venues to give a series of town-hall style meetings. At these events, our aims were:

- To sign up users for the website and create new soldier pages
- To source artefacts from the community that could be used in the show
- To hear stories of soldiers to consider for inclusion in the show.

In July 2014, myself and a student assistant from Waikato University, Gareth Ranger, spent two weeks travelling the countryside, stopping at clubs to give our presentations. In addition to raising consciousness of the website, the most fruitful aspect of the trip was the number of stories of local soldiers we heard. Several of these ended up being included in the exhibition. People also showed us a range of photographs, artefacts and mementoes from the theatres of the First World War. We photographed and recorded the details of these, arranging later to borrow some of them for display in the show. Although the number of attendees at the events fluctuated – sometimes we had only a handful in the audience – the trip was among the most satisfying experiences we had while preparing the exhibition. The initiative paid dividends in increasing our connection to the community.

The Exhibition

Although some preparations had been made earlier, the exhibition component of the *For Us They Fell* project entered its most intense phase of development following the roadshow. In keeping with our aim of recovering the personal stories of those who served and died in the First World War, the research team – which included academic and military historians and an iwi representative – set about selecting a number of soldiers, nurses, and civilian figures from the region whose stories would be featured in the show. In all 33 featured people were chosen from a longer initial list. Some of the featured individuals had been identified through archival research, but several of them came to our attention after meeting their descendants during the roadshow and being struck by the stories they shared with us. The group was also chosen with diversity in mind. It included people from almost every area of the greater Waikato, including those with affluent, middle, and working class backgrounds; townspeople and farming folk, Māori and Pakeha (New Zealanders of European heritage).

We opted to feature the stories of these people on large canvas banners placed throughout the show. These banners have a keynote image of one soldier, some text about that person and a smaller image of another soldier accompanied by their story. Some banners contain only one story – whether they have one or two doesn't reflect the importance of the individuals portrayed, but space and the quality of available images. The people banners appear in chronological order, so that visitors will encounter the individual in the sections of the war they participated in. Each banner

tells some of that person's background or war experience, but usually only a slice of it. Backward and forward arrows at the bottom of the banners indicate what section of the show that person was in last and where they reappear. For instance, a visitor might encounter someone in the Waikato 1914 section, then catch up with them on the Gallipoli peninsula, on the Western Front, or see how they fared after the war – if they were one of the lucky ones to have made it home. As mentioned earlier, in addition to the personal stories, the show also provides a conventional narrative of the First World War, with particular focus on the roles played by Waikato troops in the conflict and the effects on those on the “home front”. A series of infographics were particularly useful here for imparting often complex information regarding the origins and outbreak of the war.

For the exhibition, we also assembled a range of objects from the First World War. These are interspersed throughout the show, mostly in glass cases. The items chosen for inclusion skew towards material culture which demonstrates the intimate life of soldiers and nurses during the war – postcards, tickets, letters, telegrams, diaries. But we also included some weapons and technical equipment from the theatres of battle. As a relatively small and recently established museum, our holdings were limited in this regard, so augmenting them with items contributed by the community was absolutely essential to the viability of the display, as well as reflecting the exhibition's guiding ethos of public participation.

Evaluation

It is difficult to holistically evaluate *For Us They Fell* at this early stage of the project, as the exhibition component has over two years yet to run. A few aspects of the process already stand out, however. The first noticeable point is the success of the participatory framework for the show. Our attempts to mobilise the community paid off in significant ways, resulting in an exhibition that has both reflected and enhanced public understanding of specific local experiences of the war. This efficacy has been evident in the feedback we have received from visitors and particularly from those involved in researching and preparing the show. This process of consultation came, however, with considerable challenges. Taking the exhibition to the community involved liaising with a diverse collection of individuals and groups, including members of the returned services community, descendants of soldiers and iwi. Striking a balance between the need of the institution for a concise narrative and the strong emotional investment of families and interest groups in particular stories was a challenge we struggled to manage throughout the process.

The story of the Waikato Māori community during the war was particularly sensitive for us to try to access. Due to widespread anger regarding confiscation by the Crown of large swathes of Māori land following war in the 1860s, the impoverishment these actions caused many, and recent unsuccessful efforts to have the land returned, leaders of the Kingitanga movement discouraged participation in the war. This position was at odds with the enthusiastic volunteerism of other tribes. As a result, when military conscription was introduced for Māori in 1917, only Waikato-Tainui was targeted. While no Waikato-Tainui conscripts served overseas, those who refused to report for training were transported to Auckland, where they were interned and badly treated. For many Waikato Māori, the cultural memory of this indignity is still raw. We knew we needed to tell the story of their principled resistance, while also honouring the experience of those Waikato Māori who did serve in the First World War. Working with our Māori adviser, we identified two stories of serving soldiers that we felt went a small way toward understanding the Māori war experience. To our regret, we didn't manage to find a Māori conscripted internee to include in

the list of featured soldiers. It was instead necessary to tell the story of Waikato Tainui resistance through contextual panels and an interpretative profile of Kingitanga leader Te Pueau Herangi – an iconic figure in local Māori history who spearhead the anti-conscription movement.

The museum's relationship with Story Inc was generally a very successful collaboration, although there were issues surrounding responsibility for content generation and research which required negotiation throughout the process. As the museum's lead curator attached to the project, I worked with a number of subject experts as well as content producers engaged by Story Inc to generate and develop the exhibition. A potential danger in this collective approach was that the museum's relationship with its community stakeholders might be jeopardised by collaborators not familiar with the cultural and political considerations of operating in the context of a community museum in general, and the Waikato in particular. As mentioned, the work of preparing the exhibition was not without its challenges in this regard. Yet our regular consultation with those involved in producing content, and whose family stories were told in the exhibition, can be judged mostly successful as a strategy for mitigating the danger of fraying stakeholder relationships.

To conclude, *For Us They Fell* was a novel and instructive project for the Waikato Museum and for Story Inc in a range of ways, several of which have been explored in this essay. Mounting an exhibition and commemorative initiative of this scope would not have been possible given the demands on Waikato Museum as a publically-funded regional museum with frequently rotating displays, had we not successfully received a grant from the Lotteries Commission. It was thus necessary for us to conceptualise and deliver the project with a visitor experience company in order to maintain our regular schedule of exhibitions and programmes. This partnership, while not without its pressure points, was remarkably fruitful and rewarding in terms of meeting our objectives for the exhibition. By deliberately putting the needs of the community first from the outset, we were able to explicate the local experience of the First World War in ways that were meaningful and accessible to our visitors while not compromising on the historical complexity and nuance of the exhibition. Imperfect though the process was, the consultative approach to war commemorations has the potential for positive application in a wide variety of memory institutions and history museums.

Moved by Conflict: Individualising the History of Bristol during the First World War

Helen McConnell Simpson, Curator of Social History for Bristol Culture, considers the interpretive approach of highlighting the experiences of individuals, which is currently dominant in Social History in museums. She interrogates the validity of this approach, with reference to a recent exhibition commemorating the First World War.

The interpretive approach of bringing individuals' stories to the fore has come to characterise the presentation of social history in museums, replacing an earlier focus on social groups such as women and the working class. In recent years, this individualising approach has been taken by several new city history museums which have attracted many thousands of visitors, in Glasgow, Liverpool and Bristol.

The rise to prominence of this interpretive approach has mirrored the increasing focus in societies around the world on the individual. This was cemented in Britain under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s and is visible today in the popularity of social media and reality TV. Taking its cue from this trend, public history outside museums has arguably taken the individualising approach to extremes in the creation of the "historical reality TV" genre through series such as *Victorian Farm* and *Back in Time for Dinner*.

This article will examine the theory behind, practical implementation and efficacy of the individualising approach as applied in a recent temporary exhibition, *Moved by Conflict: Bristol and the First World War*. Leading from this, it will reflect on the relevance and appropriateness of the individualising approach in interpreting as complicated and wide-ranging an event as the First World War. It will question whether this approach risks submerging larger and more complex narratives, which are as crucial to a full understanding of history as the realities of working class lives missing from a rote recitation of the Kings and Queens of England.

The Development of the Individualising Approach

The foregrounding of the experiences of people beyond a small band of rich white men was central to the development of Social History as a discipline and methodology. Looking back to the formation of the Social History Curators Group in 1980, Cathy Ross states that, 'it's probably fair to say that most, if not all social history curators shared the general sense of mission that informed the new history; seeing their work as constructing a fairer view of the past, one which asserted the presence of "ordinary people" and their experiences in how we think about the past' (Ross, 2010, p.29). This ethos emerged from a long-standing desire for a more immediate history, more vivid and relevant to a wider range of people. This desire was expressed in 1932 by Carl Becker, the incoming president of the American Historical Association, who 'called for a popular history that would engage a broad audience and provide a sense of meaning and identity, a "living history," not one "that lies inert in unread books" and "does no work in the world"' (Woods, 1995).

Within this broader context, the approach of presenting history through the life stories of individual people gradually developed. According to a review of 1992, 'the new social history gallery at The Old Grammar School in Hull, where David Fleming was Principal Keeper, represented: "a move away from the focus upon mass movements and structural developments in social history; towards a greater focus upon individuals and personal experience"' (Redfern, 2010).

This individualising approach has become dominant in recent years in city history museums. It is key to the interpretation in the Galleries of Modern London at the Museum of London, opened in May 2010, which presents the history of the women's suffrage movement through extracts from suffragettes' diaries, and features direct quotations throughout the interpretive text. Individuals' stories and words are also foregrounded in three city history museums which opened in 2011 – Museum of Liverpool, Riverside Museum in Glasgow and M Shed in Bristol. At M Shed, historical events from the re-routing of the Avon in the Middle Ages to the 1960s' boycott of Bristol buses to combat racial discrimination are interpreted through the prism of individuals' stories.

Moved by Conflict and its Use of the Individualising Approach

Moved by Conflict was a temporary exhibition held at M Shed between October 2014 and March 2015. It was part of a programme of city-wide commemorations to mark the centenary of the beginning of the First World War, with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and was the key centenary event for the city's museum service. I co-curated the exhibition with a colleague from the World Cultures department, and the wider project team included colleagues from the city's archives and external academic advisors.

The theme of the exhibition was the physical and emotional movement of people to, from and within Bristol during the First World War. It focused primarily on the experiences of people in Bristol, but the first and last sections attempted to provide broader context. The exhibition opened with a consideration of Bristol's place within the British Empire, including a large inflatable globe marked with the boundaries of the global Empires in 1914. The last section mirrored this with another globe showing contemporary national boundaries and including symbols which represented every conflict in the world since 1918.

The modest scale of the exhibition space, the complexity of the First World War as an event, and the ambitious conceptual theme made it necessary to focus the interpretation quite precisely in order to exclude material. We decided to do this by focusing on the individual experiences of people living in Bristol. As has been mentioned, M Shed is characterised by the use of the individualising approach in interpretation, but Moved by Conflict applied this approach to an even greater extent than the permanent galleries. The rationale for this was in attempting to offer visitors something they could not get from the preponderance of television and radio programmes, books and newspaper articles about the First World War which were being presented to the public at this time. The exhibition team considered that this "Unique Selling Point" (USP) was the opportunity to engage with local and personal stories and objects. Closely allied to this, one of the key aims for the exhibition was that visitors would 'have an emotional reaction to the exhibition, relating to the individual stories represented' (Moved by Conflict interpretation strategy, 2013). The new First World War galleries at the Imperial War Museum were scheduled to open a few months before Moved by Conflict, which perhaps allowed the exhibition team to feel that the large, national story told through exceptional objects would be available for those who wanted it, freeing us to focus on the local and the personal.

The individualising approach was enacted in the exhibition in various ways. Many objects were loaned by members of the public in response to an appeal, which allowed for the inclusion of items passed down through families and considered too recent and precious for donation to a museum, and of individuals' stories previously known only to their relations. For example, a family photograph pierced by a bullet

hole was lent by the great nephew of the soldier who carried it in his breast pocket. Objects such as this contributed to the emotional resonance of the exhibition, and illuminated its themes of emotional and physical movement. Objects from the museum collections were also prioritised in the interpretation based upon the personal stories attached to them, meaning that initially incongruous objects such as a wedding dress were given centre stage.



A wedding dress presented as a key object © Jamie Woodley

The exhibition sought to challenge visitors' preconceptions by foregrounding the experiences of people who have been overlooked by the history of the war with which visitors might be familiar, which generally focuses on the experiences of soldiers on the Western Front. These included women working in poison gas factories, patients sent to the workhouse when the Bristol Lunatic Asylum was requisitioned as a war hospital, Conscientious Objectors and soldiers suffering from shell shock. Invaluable in uncovering these hidden histories was the in-depth research contributed by external academics and members of the public who brought forward family stories.

Several methods of interpretation aimed to bring these personal stories to life. Hidden Radio Frequency Identification (RFI) chips allowed visitors to sit at a bureau, lift a telephone and hear extracts from personal letters read aloud. The exhibition text featured lots of quotations and used examples of a named individual, illustrated with a photograph, wherever possible, rather than presenting an overarching, impersonal narrative. Key to this element of the interpretation was a collaboration with Bristol Old Vic theatre. Creative Director Melly Still created six fictional characters based on curators' research into real events and people. The stories of these characters were dramatised and filmed. On entering the exhibition, visitors chose a character to follow and collected a coloured wristband which activated "talking heads" style film clips of the character relating their experiences on screens throughout the exhibition. These characters represented people with differing experiences and views of the war, including a Conscientious Objector, a middle class woman who volunteered as a VAD, and the owner of a company fulfilling war contracts.



Concealed RFI tags allowed visitors to listen to readings of letters and documents © Jamie Woodley

The physical design of the exhibition was also intended to create an immersive, vivid experience, creating an environment in which visitors would respond personally and emotionally to the subject matter. Elements which sought to achieve this included walls which resembled stacks of munitions shells, a forest of recruitment posters through which visitors had to walk, and a film of soldiers marching which was viewed by the visitor putting their head through a hole into a dark space in which the film filled their vision.

Elements of the exhibition also encouraged visitors to consider the experiences of members of their own families. Visitors could type their surname into an interactive and see a graphic projected on the wall listing people with their surname who appear in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission database. Volunteers from a local family history society were stationed in the "Reading Room" area at weekends, to assist people in researching the experiences of their relatives. There was also a memorial wall, where visitors could leave the name of a relative who died in the war

Evaluation

Moved by Conflict attracted a relatively low number of visitors, just over 10,000. 17,000 visits had been projected, and previous charged-for temporary exhibitions at M Shed (admittedly with more cheery subject matter) have attracted up to 30,000. However, those who did visit responded very positively. Almost 70% of visitors surveyed described themselves as "very satisfied" with the exhibition, and a further 20% as "fairly satisfied". Over 70% of respondents rated the exhibition as excellent value for money, by far the highest proportion for a temporary exhibition in the last few years. Over 10% of visits were repeat visits, which were included in the price of the original ticket. The majority of visitors surveyed were over 55 years of age; this is perhaps unsurprising, but is unrepresentative of the Bristol population, which has a median age of 33 (Bristol City Council, 2015). Nearly 80% of visitors surveyed

identified as white British, though anecdotal evidence suggests that the remaining 20% were predominantly international tourists, rather than the 16% of the local population who have a black or minority ethnic background (Bristol City Council, 2015).

Several factors probably contributed to the low number of visitors. The time of year may have been significant, as visitor numbers generally dip during the winter. Several members of the public surveyed during the development of the exhibition expressed the view that an exhibition on this subject ought to be free and thus available to everyone, so the entry fee may have been a barrier. However, several free admission days and flyers offering half price admission did not significantly drive up visitor numbers. School visits were relatively few; the exhibition was aimed at those over 12, and M Shed attracts far more visits from primary than secondary schools. The final factor, which was much discussed in the media but difficult to accurately measure, is "First World War fatigue". 2014 saw a large number of television programmes, events and exhibitions on the subject, with the BBC's coverage of the centenary beginning in January, eight months before the anniversary of the outbreak of the war. By the time *Moved by Conflict* opened in October, people may have had their fill of the war.

The use of the individualising approach appears to have been very effective in bringing to life the local stories and personal objects which were considered to be the USP of the exhibition. One visitor comment identifies the approach as having exactly this effect:

There were some lovely personal details that somehow gave a complete picture – the boxed up wedding dress for example and the young widow who never re-married and lived into her nineties. One life so devastated by war – yet also an echo of many, many more lives shattered.

This comment captures the impact which the individualising approach can have – engaging visitors with a single person's story makes vivid and real the experiences of a larger number of people, removed in time. Comments made on twitter provide further support for the efficacy of this approach: 'interesting stories', 'very proud of this city', 'original, human, brave and moving'.

The inclusion of the "talking head" films of the fictional characters also seems to have contributed to the achievement of this aim. Over 90% of those who responded to the visitor survey chose to follow one of the fictional characters around the exhibition. Billy, a young private soldier, was the most popular, but the characters were all chosen in fairly equal number. A reviewer from Arts Council England commented: 'I saw several older visitors using these exhibits – even though they were unsure of the technology at first, it was simple and easy to use and people seemed to be engrossed by the stories they were listening to.' When the collaboration with Bristol Old Vic was first mooted, curators were very wary of including fictional stories in the exhibition and expected negative reactions to this from visitors. We undertook some prototyping of the interpretation, which highlighted that the line between fact and fiction was indeed unclear to visitors. The final version included more signposting of the characters' fictitiousness, though visitor comments suggest that some did still think the talking heads depicted real people. However, curators' scepticism was proven to be misplaced – the characters were often reported to be visitors' favourite part of the exhibition, and people found the stories moving and engaging.



Visitors could choose to follow fictional characters' stories in the exhibition
© Jamie Woodley

As some of the quotations above suggest, the individualising approach was also effective in achieving the other key aim of the exhibition, that of eliciting an emotional response from visitors. Many visitor comments focused on the emotional impact of the exhibition, including tweets such as 'very touching' and 'Overawed by the #MovedbyConflict exhibition'. The Arts Council England reviewer related this specifically to the use of the individualising approach: 'The Moved by Conflict exhibition was very sensitively curated and the focus on people's stories helped to make the content impactful and memorable.'

The inclusion of lots of objects relating to individuals was crucial in taking this interpretive approach and achieving the aims of the exhibition. The large number of loans from individuals were central to this, but represented a huge amount of work for collections staff. Organisations considering adopting a similar approach should not underestimate the amount of staff time involved in managing incoming loans on this scale.

Interrogating the Dominance of the Individualising Approach

The widespread trend for the individualising approach in public history is particularly evident in television programmes. The new genre of historical reality TV takes the approach to an extreme, by placing modern people in the recreated homes, clothes and occupations of a particular period of history. This genre began with the very popular *The 1900 House*, shown on Channel 4 in 1999, which has spawned several sequels set in different time periods, and versions in several different countries. There is also a much larger category of historical television programming which uses the individualised approach. For example, *The Ascent of Woman*, recently aired on the BBC and presented by Dr Amanda Foreman, traced the worldwide history of women since 10,000BC through profiling individual 'world-changing women' (BBC, 2014).

Commentators have criticised television histories for “dumbing down”, and characterising ‘the triumph of enthusiasm over education’ (John Tusa quoted in Gibson, 2005). This criticism is arguably aimed at the individualising approach itself, as it suggests the championing of the approach to history traditionally taught in schools, which focuses on overarching narratives and in which engagement is predicated on contextual knowledge rather than human empathy. In an article in the Radio Times entitled ‘TV is Dumbing Down History’, Alison Graham explicitly conflated this idea with the individualising approach, criticising ‘the infantile viewpoint that history is about the little people, not the people who won battles or started religions’ (Graham, 2011). The notion of “dumbing down” suggests that larger and more complex truths are being obscured by this focus on the readily understandable experiences of individuals.

In 2013, Michael Gove as Education Secretary proposed changes to the teaching of history under the national curriculum which augured a resurgence of the zoomed-out historical narratives which were dominant before the advent of Social History as a discipline. The proposed curriculum was extremely prescriptive, focused largely on English history, and took a firmly chronological approach. The historian Richard J. Evans referred to Gove’s stance as ‘narrow, tub-thumping jingoism’ (Evans, 2013). The proposed changes were redrafted in July 2013, following opposition from teachers and academics. The final version is less prescriptive and focuses less tightly on English history. However, in the 2016 budget, the government announced a commitment to convert every school in England to academy status by 2022, which would exempt them from adhering to the national curriculum (BBC, 2016). This renders the future of history education in schools increasingly uncertain, and the role of museums in informing people about social history increasingly important.

Contemporary scholarship has largely dismantled the grand narratives of history which were taught in schools in the past, which Evans refers to as ‘triumphalist historical myths’ (Evans, 2013). But does interpretation which focuses closely on individuals obscure the larger socio-political forces which impact upon those individuals? While the individualising approach in *Moved by Conflict* was successful in bringing local stories to life and creating an emotional impact, perhaps it obscured larger narratives and contexts in interpreting as wide-ranging and complex an event as the First World War. It is certainly true that the exhibition offered only a cursory account of the global political and economic forces at work in initiating and prolonging the war. Given the scale of the exhibition, the curatorial team felt that this was justifiable in giving prominence instead to local events and experiences.

However, some of the academic advisors who contributed to the project criticised the interpretive approach taken on these grounds. One local academic felt that the exhibition’s local and individual focus came at the expense of a more nuanced and in-depth interrogation of the social, political and economic factors which contributed to the instigation, duration and end of the war. He also strongly disagreed with the inclusion of the fictional characters, on the basis that museums should offer facts and suppositions founded on evidence, rather than creative imaginings. The fictional characters also provoked disagreements among the staff. Engagement staff felt strongly that one of the characters should be of black and minority ethnic heritage, in order to be inclusive in respect of our audiences’ backgrounds. However, curators objected to this on the basis that there is little evidence of non-white people living in Bristol at this time, and felt that this consideration was best answered by including the stories of Indian and Maori soldiers who passed through Bristol during the war. This issue would not have arisen if the method of interpretation had not placed so much weight on the inclusion or exclusion of specific individuals.

This highlights the relationship between the individualising approach and the inclusion of "hidden histories" of marginalised groups. A focus on personal stories allows for the inclusion of aspects of the wider historical picture which were previously submerged within overarching narratives.

The question remains whether a new approach to interpretation can evolve which combines the representative diversity and the vitality and emotional resonance of the individualising approach with an intellectually accessible illumination of the social, political and economic forces which shape the experiences of individuals. I believe that museum professionals should continue to use the individualising approach, because it is very engaging for visitors: it is vivid, emotive and aligns museum interpretation with wider societal trends so is very accessible. However, particularly with the current uncertainty around history teaching in schools, and the questionable levels of rigour in some television history programming, museums have a responsibility to provide a balanced and nuanced view of history. For me, this has to include larger, overarching themes and narratives. To ignore social, political and economic forces and contexts is to lend credence to the belief that individuals are entirely free to act as they choose. This is a worldview which disregards societally-afforded privilege and disadvantage, and airbrushes out the complexity of societies' changing characteristics and beliefs. These elements are essential to a rich and realistic engagement with history. The individualising approach has been used to attempt to illuminate these larger issues, for example by engaging visitors with the experiences of a particular Conscientious Objector in order to inform them about dissent and its reception during the First World War. However, this should become more explicit, to guard against interpretation which begins and ends with the individual. The challenge is to develop interpretive methods which make these larger narratives as engaging and accessible as an individual's experiences. This is the key challenge facing Social History in the next decades.

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Highlanders Billeted in Bedford: WWI Centenary Exhibition at The Higgins Bedford

Lydia Saul, Keeper of Social History at The Higgins Art Gallery & Museum, Bedford, describes the development of an exhibition highlighting a unique local story in collaboration with a local expert.

A truly moving tribute to the Highlanders who passed through the town in the early days of the War. We can only hope that those that didn't return died remembering the warmth and friendship of the townspeople that remains to this day.

The Higgins Bedford commemorated the Centenary of WW1 with an exhibition, Highlanders Billeted in Bedford. This exhibition ran from 27th September 2014 to 31st May 2015 and told the story of the Scottish Territorial troops who were stationed in Bedford from mid-August 1914 to early May 1915 while they prepared for Active Service on the Western Front. This exhibition was co-curated by a local historian and in partnership with the local archives, with additional support from the University of Bedfordshire.



Highlanders Billeted in Bedford exhibition with Major Ian Forsyth's uniform of the 4th Seaforth on loan from Tain and District Museum, Scotland. Photography by Melissa Banthorpe

Inspiration

Inspiration for the Highlanders Billeted in Bedford exhibition came from the desire to commemorate the First World War centenary from our own unique local perspective, partly prompted by the Imperial War Museum Centenary Partnership programme. In researching different topics and potential themes, we discovered the research of local historian Richard Galley who had posted a blog online to raise awareness of this little known history associated with Bedford and World War I. It is an inspirational story of over 17,000 Scottish troops arriving in a sleepy English market town (whose population at the time was estimated at 40,000) over one weekend in August 1914.

Richard also had a very comprehensive personal collection of photographic postcards, and some objects connected with this history. We realised there was

a great deal of potential to develop this story as a focus for our WWI Centenary exhibition, and approached Richard to co-curate our 'Connections' gallery at The Higgins using his photographs, objects and research to put together a visitor-friendly exhibition dedicated to the Highland Division's time in Bedford. Whilst the exhibition was in development, The Higgins hosted a Lights Out event in August 2014 for the national commemoration of the beginning of WWI. We used this as an opportunity to promote the forthcoming Highlanders exhibition, with an evening of music and powerful wartime readings provided by Bedford Pipe Band, The Royal British Legion and family members associated with local veterans. Some of these readings became the inspiration for the content of a short ten minute film on display as part of the exhibition, which was produced with assistance from Nigel Brittain and the University of Bedfordshire.

We aimed to communicate the experience of the Scottish territorial troops and explore the issues involved in housing such large numbers of troops in and around the town. Bedford was chosen by the military because of its central location, but most importantly because of its good rail links down to the south coast ports where troop ships would take the men quickly to France when they were required. Some of the other reasons included a large quantity of available housing stock which could be used as billets for the troops, a high proportion of public spaces available for training such as school playing fields and parks, and available land to build training trenches for practising trench warfare at Clapham Park, Foster Hill and Queens Park on the outskirts of the town.

Photographic Displays

There was a wealth of photographic material from the local Bedfordshire and Luton archives, Richard's personal collection and our own collection, and so we chose to exhibit 60 images that told the story of the Highland troops arriving, the training they underwent, key events, and when they left Bedford for the front. We enlarged the original postcard size images to A2 so visitors could see the faces of people more clearly as well as the local scenery, to see what Bedford was like during 1914/15.



5th Seaforth outside their billets in Garfield Street, Bedford. Image courtesy of Richard Galley

The individual portraits taken by local photographers of some of the men were enlarged and placed in wooden frames to distinguish them from the other images. Biographical captions for the portraits were pieced together from census and official records. Having so many images to hang, it was decided on a system of aluminium split battens attached to the wall, with the images printed on aluminium composite panels.

We used cartoons in the exhibition, which had been published in the Bedfordshire Times and Standard. The cartoons are a useful contemporary record, which covered aspects of the Highlanders' stay in Bedford that the official photographs did not show. For example, some of the cartoons depicted the interior of the billets. They are an interesting window on the world during the First World War, to the attitudes being published in the newspapers at the time, which were often used for propaganda as well as keeping up morale of the troops and local residents. They often featured comical subjects and captions – perhaps lightening the mood and easing any tensions between the military and civilian life. Some of these cartoons were drawn by men from the Highland regiments themselves, such as Private Stewart Knock of the 6th Seaforth.

Quotes

We went to Cople range to fire the trained men's course every day but unfortunately I did not finish it for I managed to catch the measles. After spending two days of torture in the tent I was sent to Clapham Hospital... and was there three weeks.

Private Hugh McArthur, Memoranda summarising events of 1914

We were keen to use original quotes from individuals about particular aspects of the Highland Division's stay in Bedford within the themed areas. These were selected to give an authentic voice and to add first-hand accounts to the interpretation. Relevant quotes were selected from original source material that complimented each of the themes, and produced in large vinyl text around the walls underneath the images. These were particularly important in giving visitors a first-hand reflection of the soldier's experience. Richard Galley had been inspired initially in the subject from the 1915 diary kept by Private Hugh McArthur of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. This record is now part of the Imperial War Museum's archive, but is a personal testimony to the arrival of the Scottish troops in the town and specifically the problems that were caused to the Division by the onset of disease in the winter of 1914/15. Many of the men were from remote parts of the Highlands and so they had no immunity to childhood diseases, such as measles, diphtheria and scarlet fever. The situation became so bad that quarantine camps were established on the outskirts of town where affected men lived under canvas while the diseases ran their course. It is estimated that about 150 men were lost to these diseases, or secondary conditions such as bronchial pneumonia, with 33 being buried in Bedford's Foster Hill Road Cemetery. These men are honoured every year with a Remembrance Service at the burial site.

Exhibits

It became apparent fairly early on that original artefacts were in short supply, so we approached the local archives to investigate the potential to display material held there, such as photographs, postcards, letters, newspaper articles and official

contemporary documents from landlords and householders, that could complement and expand the themes in the story. The exhibition was broken down into seven key themes: 'Introduction'; 'Mobilisation'; 'Billeted'; 'Out and About'; 'Sickness and Disease'; 'Highland Games'; and 'Leaving for the Front'.

To welcome visitors to the exhibition, a short piece of film was shown of the 1/4th Cameron Highlanders on a route march through Kempston, a village just outside Bedford. This footage was obtained from the National Scottish Sound and Film Archive.

One of the key exhibits introducing the exhibition was the uniform of Major Ian Forsyth of F Company (Invergordon) 1/4th Seaforth. Major (then Captain) Forsyth was billeted in Bedford for training, leaving for the front in November 1914. He fought bravely in many battles, survived the war and returned to his family's farm at Balintard. He was awarded the Territorial Decoration in 1920 for his dedicated military service and his personal effects were later donated to Tain Museum, Inverness.

We felt it was important to have some original uniform on display from someone with a direct connection between the Highland Division and Bedford. The uniform was a powerful way to assist visitors in visualising the real people, and gave an authentic first-hand connection to the story. Showing the uniform was important because the photographs of the time are black and white and so do not reflect the colourful tartan of the Highland Division. The tartans were a badge of identification and allegiance to a particular regiment and clan history. In the 'Billeted' theme, we included the respective infantry regiments of the Highland Division which came to Bedford – Seaforth, Cameron, Gordon, Argyll and Sutherland, and Royal Highlanders (Black Watch) – and showed the particular areas of the town where each regiment was billeted.

Whilst researching our own collection, we discovered an album of photographic picture postcards that represented some of the Scottish regiments billeted in Bedford, in particular the 5th Seaforth. One individual featured was Private Henry Martin. His war medals were part of Richard Galley's collection and we soon discovered by fateful coincidence that his picture was one of the portraits contained in the album from The Higgins collection, so we were able to put a face to the name and war medals. Private Henry Martin's story was a significant one because he was a local lad aged just 17 when he enlisted with the 6th Gordon Highlanders whilst they were in Bedford. The Highland Regiments recruited extensively for additional men for their ranks, both in Bedford and further afield, whilst stationed here. Private Martin left with the regiment for the front and fought alongside the Scottish troops at Neuve Chappelle in May 1915, dying from injuries sustained in action.



Private Henry Martin of the 6th Gordon. Image courtesy of The Higgins Bedford

One display case was dedicated to items associated with Bedford's Borough Recreation Committee for The Troops and to the efforts of local people in making the Scottish troops feel welcome in the town. Exhibits included a certificate, armband and badge owned by one of the Recreation Committee's volunteers and held in the

Higgins collection. The Recreation Committee provided entertainment and leisure activities to keep the men out of trouble and occupied whilst off-duty. Their successes included many concerts, a Division-wide celebration of Hogmanay, and a unique Highland Games held on Bedford (Grammar) School's playing fields on Easter Monday 1915, attended by many thousands of Scottish troops, visitors and local residents.

Evolution of the Exhibition

We also had some special sporrans on display – each regiment had their own design of sporran. Examples of these were put on display as they were loaned following the opening of the exhibition. One of the sporrans had been sent from America and had been given to a Bedfordian householder as a parting gift when the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders left for the front. One of the other sporrans displayed had belonged to Maxwell Hargreaves, who had been recruited in Lancashire by the Gordons and joined the rest of his regiment travelling to Bedford in August 1914. Maxwell was lucky and survived the war with a couple of near misses – the last, ironically on Armistice Day, when an unexploded bomb nearly took his life while he was on the “rum run”. His family, having seen the exhibition, were enthusiastic for his uniform and story to be included in the displays in tribute to him and the other troops who risked their lives.

Visitor Feedback

The reactions to the exhibition have been very positive, with many people commenting on not knowing about this history and appreciating it being told. A sense of pride seems to have been captured from local people. We have also received comments from visitors from Scotland who knew nothing of the story:

Very interesting I had no idea my fellow Scots came here!' (Stewart from Argyll)

We had hoped to raise awareness among local people of the story of the Highlanders billeted in Bedford in 1914 -15, and this was largely achieved:

Thank you for the Scottish Regiment exhibition, very moving & very informative.
A good job done.

The exhibition had aimed to re-awaken the town's memory of this event, engaging with local people and the impact it had on the townspeople; you can see from the following comments the sense of pride local people felt that this story was being told:

Came to look as my Grandfather was living in Castle Road at the time and is still very much alive today and remembers seeing the Gordon Highlanders.

My Great Uncle Henry from Sandy joined the 6th Battalion Seaforth Highlanders in January 1915. He served in France from May 1915 until he was Killed in Action on March 21st 1918.

We were also very pleased to re-connect with those who served in the Scottish regiments and their descendants, with comments including:

Impressive for this daughter of a Scots Soldier. Thank-you.

Brought Back Memories (Ex 2nd BN. Seaforth Highlanders)

My Father talked fondly of Scottish Troops with which he served.

Lovely to see my Grandfather ... [he] was one of the Highlanders who met my Grandmother and settled here in Bedford.

Final Thoughts

The Highlanders Billeted in Bedford exhibition was a powerful local story that was well received by the public. The partnerships between Richard Galley, The Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service and the University of Bedfordshire all helped in the culmination of the success of the exhibition and associated film.

Richard's contribution as co-curator was invaluable due to his unique specialist knowledge of the subject and pioneering research in this area from first-hand accounts and photographs. Richard helped us to understand and appreciate the photographs and objects, and how best they could be used to tell the story, as well as assisting with key contacts for loans. Using his research and images on the subject, we were able to jointly shape an exhibition that was story-led, with a good complement of objects related directly to the troops and townspeople of 1914.

Sophie Viney, a local composer, created a choral piece based on the poem 'To The Seaforths', written by an anonymous Bedford householder in honour of the troops as a tribute and farewell to them and featured in the exhibition on the introductory display panel. The music was performed on Armistice weekend 2014 by Bedford Creative Arts Community Choir and Bedford Choral Society and added to the film as part of the centenary tribute to the Scottish troops billeted in Bedford.

We have been able to re-use the film resource and outsource this to other commemorative WWI displays in Scotland, with it being used by Argyll and Bute library service. A selection of photographic panels and boards are now on display in a mini-touring display at Knockando Mill in Morayshire.

In addition to this public response, some young people taking part in their Arts Award at The Higgins used the Highlanders Exhibition as inspiration for content for their portfolios – creating their own artwork and poetry that reflected the WWI commemoration. One of the questions asked by one of the Arts Award students about curating the exhibition was, 'What advice would you give to people who want to do a WWI exhibition?' I would say be clear about what your angle and story is. What is the message that you would like your audience to take away with them – how would you like them to feel and what would you hope they understand from the experience. Try not to bombard people with places and numbers, but get across the real story through human experiences. Be sensitive to people's emotions, as war is a harrowing subject and it can be quite difficult to get a good balance between telling people the facts and making the very harsh reality palatable for your audience.

It has been a privilege to be tasked with bringing this exhibition and WWI commemoration to the people of Bedford, and to honour the men and women, both troops and civilians, who played their part. We had aimed to engage with the local community and raise awareness and pride in Bedford's contribution at the start of the Great War, and I feel that this was achieved by reaching our target audience, with many repeat visitors and the positive local response to the displays – especially in including additional loans within the exhibition as it progressed. I think that we were successful in finding the balance between fact and emotion, from reading our visitors' feedback. I was conscious that within this exhibition we intentionally did not focus on what life was like for the troops in the trenches once they left Bedford. However, we are already looking at a follow up exhibition with a slightly different focus – Bedford's War Machines will be staged in 2016, in conjunction with commemoration of the Battle

of the Somme, and again with a unique Bedford focus recognising the contribution of local companies (and people) to the war effort. So watch this space.

Thanks to:

Co-Curator: Richard Galley:

W: www.bedfordhighlanders.blogspot.co.uk/

Visit The Higgins Bedford website at: www.thehigginsbedford.org.uk

Interpreting Archives: The Innovation Race at the Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester

Katherine Belshaw, Curator of Engineering at the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester, explores the challenges and unexpected rewards of putting archival collections at the centre of an exhibition aimed at families.

The Museum of Science and Industry tells the story of how ideas change the world, from the Industrial Revolution to the present day and into the future. From working textile machinery and steam engines to hands-on experiments, the museum's aim is to inspire visitors about the potential for science and industry to impact our lives.

The Innovation Race is the museum's First World War centenary exhibition, aimed at families with children aged 7+. Featuring material uncovered during original research into the museum's own paper archive, as well as objects from the collection and loans from the Imperial War Museum, the exhibition reveals the experiences of Manchester's scientists, engineers, business owners and workers during the First World War, as they fed the fighting fronts with the materials that were vital to victory. From Nobel Prize winning physicists to factory workers, Manchester's makers mobilised on a vast scale to meet the demands of the first industrial war. Manufacturing companies transformed their outputs, engineers and scientists were called upon to devise new wartime technologies, and more women than ever before entered factories and workshops. The Innovation Race exhibition highlights not only the contributions they made, but also the impact that war had on their own lives. It covers surprising, less explored wartime experiences, like the skilled male workers who stayed behind engineering munitions instead of going to fight and the scientists who had to put aside their pioneering research to tackle new wartime threats.

Using innovative interpretation and display methods and a bold design, the exhibition tells compelling, people-focused stories rooted in the museum's own paper collection, bringing archive material to life for a family audience. This article outlines the challenges and achievements of curating the exhibition, with a particular focus on content research and development, interpretive approach and display methods. It will demonstrate how archive collections, as resources for both research and display, can be used by museums to produce engaging and meaningful exhibitions for families.



The Innovation Race exhibition © Museum of Science and Industry/Jason Lock Photography

Finding a Focus in the Archive

The museum's commemoration of the First World War was programmed to take the form of a one year long family exhibition in the Highlights Gallery. This space was designed specifically to host exhibitions that showcase under-displayed areas of the collection and trial new methods of interpretation and display, in order to inform longer term museum planning. Some research had taken place to develop an exhibition proposal, however the museum's paper archive had initially been overlooked. Several items from the object collection were identified, however no unifying theme emerged that could tie them together into an exhibition concept. A conversation with Jan Shearsmith, an archivist at the museum, proved to be a turning point in the development of the exhibition's theme.

The museum's extensive archive holds the business records of some of Manchester's most influential manufacturing companies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Used by researchers of all types, from PhD students and academics to artists and local historians, as well as MSI staff, it is a rich resource. Jan revealed that holdings for a number of companies, including electrical engineers Ferranti Ltd, locomotive manufacturers Beyer, Peacock and Co. and printing machinery maker Linotype and Machinery Co. Ltd covered the First World War period. An initial review of the archive revealed a wealth of information. Material included diaries, letters, photographs, engineering drawings, staff records, minute books and government contracts, which together built a unique picture of the transformations that took place in Manchester's industries as they were called upon to supply the fighting fronts with materials. The wealth and variety of material made it clear that the archive could be used to develop a First World War exhibition that uncovered little known stories about the experiences of Manchester's makers as they took part in the city's industrial war effort. Resonating strongly with the science and industry impact stories that sit at the forefront of MSI's themes, the top level message of the exhibition was decided upon and expressed in the form of a simple, focused statement:

In 1915 Manchester's makers responded to a call to arms and began waging their war from the factory floor. The stories of engineers, businessmen, workers and their families will explore the innovations and sheer muscle it took to make industrial war a reality.

Interpreting Archives

Recent thought has placed emphasis on the ability of archives to reveal a multiplicity of meanings, stories and perspectives, dependent on the way in which they are catalogued, contextualised and interpreted (Nesmith, 2002). This is in contrast to the traditional view of archives, which has seen them simply as repositories of historical information and archivists as their neutral caretakers. This revised perspective has implications for the way archivists approach the cataloguing of their collections, however it is also a useful perspective from which to consider the way archive materials are used in museum displays. It highlights that the way in which curators choose to contextualise and interpret archive material in museum displays can shape the specific meanings, stories and perspectives that are drawn out of them. This places significant responsibility upon the curator, but also offers great potential for the use of archives in museum displays.

Despite their potential, interpreting paper documents effectively in museum displays is a challenging prospect. In particular, archives have not traditionally been considered particularly accessible for families with children. Pages of text do not naturally have the same appeal as other types of museum objects and could be

considered off-putting for this audience. The challenge for the curator is therefore to employ interpretive methods that reveal, shape and make meaningful archives' hidden stories for visitors.

For The Innovation Race in particular, compounding these challenges was the nature of the archive subject matter, essentially the work people did to develop and manufacture munitions and associated war technologies. Questions had already been raised by colleagues about the extent to which this could ever be "family friendly". However, the project team was confident that with careful research and interpretation, it would be possible to set these stories within contexts that made them accessible and meaningful to the family audience.

Planning Interpretation

With these factors in mind, developing an interpretation plan was a crucial piece of work that shaped the exhibition. It guided everything from content research and development to display methods, and ensured that the challenging source material and subject matter was interpreted for our family audience. Developed collaboratively between the collections, exhibitions and learning departments, the main points of the interpretation plan for the exhibition emerged as follows:

Bring everything back to the top level message. Every story and every item displayed should clearly relate to and help reveal the central theme, namely the contribution of Manchester's makers to the city's industrial war effort and the impact of war upon their own lives.

Interpret each story from a person-centred perspective. Use the contributions and experiences of people as the focus for each story told in the exhibition. Make information relevant by placing it within contexts that children can relate to and that foster intergenerational conversations, for example family relationships.

Tell compelling stories simply. As an exhibition for families, the stories need to be compelling enough to engage adult interest whilst being accessible enough for children.

Maintain a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) focus. Keep technical explanations simple and highlight examples of experimentation, innovation and problem solving in the stories being told, to provoke curiosity and inspire and engage a young generation of potential future scientists.

Employ a creative approach to the way archival material appears in the exhibition. Work with artists and designers to use content researched in the archive to create engaging and original installations that bring to life the stories from the archive. Be highly selective in terms of archival material chosen for display in the exhibition and work creatively to produce a variety of textures, moods and effects.

Research and Content Development

Carrying out archival research where the endpoint for the material is a family exhibition was a novel prospect, entirely different from research carried out for a thesis or paper. The aim was to uncover material that would form the overarching stories of the exhibition, but also select individual items that could be displayed to reveal those themes. Guided by a careful focus on the audience and interpretation plan, carrying out the research required a constantly questioning approach: 'Does this piece of material reveal a personal story about someone's contribution or impact?'

How could this item be effectively interpreted in the exhibition?’

The museum’s archivist Jan was instrumental in uncovering research material and suggesting new avenues to explore, and the exhibition provided the opportunity to fully research areas of the archive that had not been fully uncovered. There was a real sense of discovery during the research process. Key finds included an original letter sent by David Lloyd George to engineer Sebastian Ferranti, appealing for his help in the Inventions Department, and rare Ministry of Munitions documents filled in by engineering company Gresham and Craven to detail their switchover from male to female labour. The archive revealed the little known work of the Lancashire Anti-Submarine Committee, who investigated how sound waves could be used to locate submarines. The stories of Olivia Forbes, Ferranti Ltd’s first female worker who remained with the company for over 40 years, and the skilled male workers who stayed behind at British Westinghouse rather than going to fight brought into focus the experiences of a variety of different people.

Ferranti’s Desk

Some of the richest First World War material uncovered in the archive related to the wartime experiences of electrical engineer Sebastian Ferranti and his family. Ferranti Ltd was one of Manchester’s most important electrical engineering companies and the Ferranti archive came to the museum in 1995 following the closure of the company. One of the first to take on government munitions contracts during the war, Sebastian Ferranti transformed the output of his Oldham based business to manufacture shells and fuses. The archive holds his intricate, hand drawn engineering sketches, revealing his thought processes as he developed manufacturing techniques to meet the demands of war. Thanks to his extraordinary electrical engineering mind, he was also invited to join the Inventions Department set up by the Ministry of Munitions, where he worked alongside other top engineers and scientists on new war technologies. The archive contains letters sent between Ferranti and the Ministry as he assessed a steady stream of ideas for electrical inventions.

The wartime story of Ferranti and his family is most clearly and poignantly revealed in the letters sent between Ferranti and his son Vincent, fighting in France. The letters detail in equal measure the changes wrought by war upon both Ferranti’s factory and his own family. Sons Vincent and Basil both joined the army and went to the Front. Basil was killed in 1917 after a German shell bombardment and Vincent came home from the fighting to help with the mounting munitions work before returning to the Front. Ferranti’s wife Gertrude helped recruit new female workers into the factory and his daughter Vera became a skilled mechanic when she herself started work at the munitions factory.

It was the letters that inspired artists Lucy and Barney Heywood of Stand + Stare Collective to create Ferranti’s Desk, an interactive installation that uses wireless Radio Frequency Identification technology (RFI) to trigger sound and projection when the visitor places a photograph of a member of the Ferranti family onto the reclaimed, vintage desk. Based entirely on archival material, which the artists selected through meticulous sifting through documents and photographs, Ferranti’s Desk brings to life the stories hidden in Ferranti’s papers, placing the archival material in the spotlight in a unique and accessible way. Narrations using original words from Ferranti’s letters alongside photographs, documents and animations evoke the wartime experiences of different members of the Ferranti family in a poignant and evocative way.

The Emotional Impact of Archives

The Innovation Race exhibition and the Ferranti's Desk installation in particular have emphasised the potential for archive materials to exercise a remarkable emotional impact, perhaps a feature that is sometimes underestimated. The first time I looked inside Sebastian Ferranti's pocketbook diary for 1917 and read his scrawled note for July 12th, 'war office wired, Basil died of wounds', I felt a powerful, emotional reaction. It was that moment of discovery and sense of personal, emotional connection that the Ferranti's Desk installation intended to provide for visitors. By engaging with the wartime story of the Ferrantis, visitors were offered an insight into the life-changing impact that the First World War had on families across Manchester.



Ferranti's Desk' installation © Museum of Science and Industry/Jason Lock Photography

Displaying Archives for a Family Audience

There was a resolution from the beginning that despite its archival focus, The Innovation Race should not consist solely of books or pages of text displayed behind glass. The archival material needed to be made appealing and accessible in order for it to successfully reveal its meanings for its family audience. A decision was therefore taken that accessibility of material should be prioritised ahead of the display of the original archive items. There is original material on display in the gallery, however this more flexible approach meant that rather than being restricted by the conservation needs of each piece of archival material, there was much more creative freedom to consider how best to display the materials to facilitate audience engagement with them.

Modern Designers devised a concept that used purpose built desk furniture with

an industrial feel as surfaces for display. Carefully selected archive materials, reproduced in perfect detail with a hard-wearing plastic coating that made them touchable, were arranged on the desks, as if they had been placed there by their authors. Alongside them, vinyl quotes picking out key content from the documents helped to highlight the significance of each item. Taking away the barriers between visitors and the archival material has changed the way that they are able to view and interact with it. Visitors can lean over the material and point things out, fostering conversation and exploration amongst visitors. The display approach has also helped to set the archival items back into their original context, revealing them to visitors as working documents written under the pressures of war.



The desktop archive displays combining original material with reproductions on open display
© Museum of Science and Industry/ Jason Lock Photography

Conclusions

The Innovation Race has broadened access to the museum's archive material, revealing hidden stories to a family audience and encouraging the museum to think creatively about exhibiting archive material. Curating this exhibition has made it clear that the archive should not be overlooked when developing content for new exhibitions or galleries at the museum. It has also highlighted the potential for archives to exercise a powerful emotional impact. The exhibition has shown that by developing a careful focus for interpretation and collaborating with artists and creative exhibition designers, archive material can be the central focus of a stimulating family exhibition.

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Real Life: Retold

Rachael Drew, Community Curator at Scarborough Museums Trust, recounts the development of an innovative drama-based community history project, which attracted new audiences and prompted vivid engagement with collections and heritage sites.

Scarborough Museums Trust (SMT) looks after and shares Scarborough's heritage, collections and their stories with people, in the present and for the future. We aspire to build a spirit of community and ownership around the museums in Scarborough, which include the Rotunda Museum and Scarborough Art Gallery. Our new strategy includes the aim 'Strong connections with communities using the Trust and its collections as a starting point for conversation, discussion and engagement'.

In recent years, audience numbers at SMT venues dwindled. The majority of visitors were tourists and these visits were usually not repeated. The new strategy, combined with a staff restructure, gave staff the impetus to try new things and to look once more at engaging the local community. We hoped to diversify our audience by increasing our offer to include work that is relevant and engaging for those who have become disengaged. Real Life: Retold formed the beginning of our work with new audiences. It is a fantastic example of how an innovative project can reinvigorate the relationship between a community, a venue and the local heritage. The project merged theatrical and museological disciplines with great effect. It was a community-focused drama and research project, created with the aim of giving visitors a new way to connect with the Bombardment of Scarborough.



Performer in Real Life: Retold © Kevin Ladden

Bombardment

The term Bombardment is used to describe events that occurred on the morning of December 16th 1914, when two German battle cruisers emerged in Scarborough's

South Bay and fired hundreds of shells on the undefended town. The German ships steamed up the coast to Whitby and fired shells in a further bombardment lasting around ten minutes. Meanwhile three other German battle cruisers descended on Hartlepool, firing hundreds of shells before taking fire themselves from the Heugh Gun Battery. In all, over a hundred people were killed, hundreds were injured, and many buildings and homes were destroyed. The events were detailed through a combination of artefacts, ephemera, sound recording and a reconstructed dining room, in the *Remember Scarborough!* exhibition at Scarborough Art Gallery.

Real Life: Retold

We wanted to work with local people, but felt that we would have more success if we worked with a partner organisation who already engaged local people. We approached the Stephen Joseph Theatre Outreach department (SJT), who specialise in working with the community. They encourage people to engage with drama through work experience, placements, projects, workshops and tours. The focus on drama and performance meant we were able to think in terms of creating a performance based on the experiences of real people, which would extend the skills of the volunteer participants and also give them the opportunity to learn about the heritage of Scarborough.

We approached the SJT group of amateur writers to create work inspired by *Remember Scarborough!*. The pieces were to be presented in different spaces in the gallery and related to what was in the space, so audiences were presented with an engaging way to learn about local heritage, see the work of local dramatists and to appreciate the venue itself.

We decided to create work based on events which took place before, during and after the Bombardment, three pieces for each time period. The writers used the exhibition, artefacts and their own research to inform their plays, and facts were verified by the experts who contributed to the project.

The pieces included characters from all walks of life, from herring girls, to soldiers, servants and children. Each piece was worked on individually, and performers, writers and directors were in the fortunate position of being able to watch rehearsals and gain insight and input where appropriate.

The project received £4200 from the HLF World War I Projects fund, which meant we were able to extend the scope of the project, initially by creating a film and a book of the pieces, but also to be able to take the work to *Remember Scarborough!* partner venues in Hartlepool and Whitby.

Profile of Participants

Performers in the project were Whitby and Scarborough based people aged from 8 – 65, involved in drama as a leisure activity. The groups were made up of individuals who, although interested in the arts, were not necessarily interested in the Art Gallery or Heritage in general and had little or no knowledge of the Bombardment. All contributed creatively, in addition to using the exhibition as inspiration and a source of research for character creation.

Writers on the project were based in both Scarborough and Whitby and aged between 18 and 65.

Performance

Due to the nature of the space at Scarborough Art Gallery (SAG), each piece could only be viewed by a maximum of eight people at any one time. Demand was so high that we split audiences into three groups and each group viewed the scenes in a different order. As the scenes all stood alone, this did not seem to impact on the enjoyment of the piece.

Utilising different rooms as different spaces was innovative, and SAG has not been used in this way before. Linking with community performers and writers is not often seen in smaller museums, and we believe the piece really gave the venue new life as it linked in so strongly with the rooms, which made excellent “sets”. Seeing the herring girls perform in front of a large picture of Scarborough Harbour made audiences view the painting in a new way; the performance itself was given a further context and the venue a new lease of life as a performance space. The phrase “brought to life” may sound twee, but the painting has taken on a new meaning for me. I will always hear those herring girls squabbling when I see it, and I hope our audiences and participants felt the same.



Performer in Real Life: Retold © Kevin Ladden

Tour

The work was toured to Pannett Art Gallery (PAG) in Whitby, a very grand, purpose built space, set in a park. PAG supports a writing group and there is also an SJT run youth theatre group. We invited both of these groups to contribute to our piece, and made tweaks to the script to tie the piece in with the Bombardment of Whitby. PAG was also exhibiting Bombardment based pieces, and the scenes fit exceptionally well in front of the panels and paintings. The performances were very well received and people were very positive about the results.

The piece also toured to Heugh Gun Battery, Hartlepool (HGB), which added a new dimension and layer of complexity. The site is a large open-air gun battery, located right next to the beach in Hartlepool, and the site contains tanks and other weaponry. It has many small spaces, which are not linked, and our pieces had to be run in different buildings at different times. Also, there was no heating in many of the spaces, so keeping performers warm became a challenge. Audiences had to be kept small as space was at a premium, but in spite of this we did have a good turnout and, again, feedback was excellent.

Finally, the piece was performed at the Stephen Joseph Theatre two months later, to a full house in the Macarthy Theatre. Once again we had to change the pieces to work on a proscenium arch stage and in spite of this, the feedback was excellent.



Performer in Real Life: Retold © Kevin Ladden

Measuring the Project Outcomes

We asked the participants what they knew about the First World War and the Bombardment at the start of the project, so we could compare their answers at the end of the project. The initial responses showed the majority of the cast knew nothing of the Bombardment and those that did were not aware of specific events.

We measured the impact of the project using questionnaires, which were given to participants and audience members at the end of the project.

A film was made of each of the scenes, with comments throughout the process from audience and participants. Three sets of photos were taken – rehearsals, dress rehearsal and performance. The HLF funding evaluation report was written.

Key Challenges

The logistics of moving people, costumes and props around three different heritage sites was extremely challenging. We liaised in depth with venue staff and our use of a stage manager, Garry Leck, was extremely helpful. Garry was able to keep track of all the props and was very competent at loading, unloading and lifting, in addition to instructing volunteers. We also hired coaches so we could ensure everyone had transport and could be kept together.

Ensuring the piece was historically accurate, and sensitive to the memories of those who were killed and their families, was managed by several members of staff. Alison Watt, the writing tutor, was excellent at steering the pieces in the appropriate direction and Esther Graham, the Remember Scarborough project officer, also proof read the pieces, as did Robin, our freelance military consultant.

Keeping volunteers happy came down to providing food and drinks and ensuring that a warm space for them to relax in was provided at each venue. We neglected to think of these expenses initially, thinking people would have time to leave the venues, but the piece eventually ran at over an hour and there was no time.

Some Comments from Participants: “What Were the Best Things About the Project?”

Learning new skills and techniques. Meeting new people. Learning more about Scarborough history. Seeing new places. Everything!

It is always extremely powerful to see community embracing a project like this and to see the collaboration between experts, writers, actors, costumiers etc

Being part of this project, wearing 1914 costumes which made me feel part of 1914. The feeling of community we all had.

Meeting and making new friends. Chance to explore different performance spaces and the challenges that came with that. Learning new things about my home town and its heritage

Some Audience Responses:

Very good, very moving stories, well written and acted.

A brilliant event. Well done to all who took part and were involved.

Very professional, moving and enlightening.

Fantastic! Interesting, informative, thought provoking. Characters very interesting. Actors did an amazing portrayal of individual stories.

Outcomes

The project saw three local writers create nine short plays, which were performed by 28 community actors and directed by three local directors. The plays were performed 13 times in total, to 332 people across three venues. Another performance was programmed in February 2015 at the Reach Out Festival at the Stephen Joseph Theatre. A DVD and a publication were also created.

One of the performers, Elizabeth, used to be an actress but hadn't done any performing in a long time. She had moved to Scarborough and was quite isolated and low after having a bad experience with an amateur group. Her first project with the SJT drama group was *Real Life: Retold*. Elizabeth had an extremely positive experience on the project and she wrote a blog about her involvement, including the history she had learned. She said she felt the project had reaffirmed her love for drama and history, and she continues to work with the SJT group. Her blog can be read here:

www.aclockinathunderstorm.uk.com/real-lives-retold/

The project engaged the local community, including children from the disadvantaged Whitby and Scarborough areas, who may have had little interaction with Scarborough Museums Trust. The feedback from the project highlighted the impact learning about the Bombardment had on the participants. The majority said that they felt they understood and felt closer to those who lived through the Bombardment and the ordeal they faced. Some did not even realise the town had been attacked, so this had changed their attitude towards the town and the First World War.

95% of participants felt that they saw the Art Gallery as a more versatile space and somewhere they were more likely to visit. All of our participants said they had an enjoyable experience and would love to take part in a similar project again.

60% of audience members came to the Art Gallery specifically for the performances, and over 50% of those had not been to the gallery for a number of years, if ever before. This leads to the diversification of our audience, which is fantastic for our organisation gaining strength and community support in the future.

All staff involved at both SMT and SJT are delighted to have created a sustainable partnership, and we are already looking towards our next project. We feel that the project challenged the perceptions of audience members and participants alike in persuading them that the Art Gallery could be lively, exciting and a comfortable space to witness great art and their own heritage.

Photography of the project can be seen at:

www.flickr.com/photos/129229408@N08/

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¹ Scarborough Museums Trust, 'Business Plan 2015-18' p 2

Trent to Trenches: Involving Volunteers and Communities in a Major Exhibition

Maria Erskine, Curator of Community History and World Cultures at Nottingham City Museums and Galleries, shares an insight into the development of an ambitious temporary exhibition and engagement programme with a large number of volunteers.

Nottingham City Museums and Galleries initially approached the idea of curating a large scale exhibition on Nottinghamshire in the First World War with some trepidation, primarily due to a lack of assets and the realisation we did not have a staff member with in-depth knowledge of the subject. It may be that it was this lack of existing in-house expertise that contributed in part to the display's success. We were able to approach local experts who knew their contribution was key to the success of the project, which meant many gave generously of their time. We were also able to take a complex topic and break it down into segments that allowed the public to gain an overview without feeling intimidated by detail. Staff emerged from the project with improved knowledge, having delivered an exhibition that was well researched and historically accurate. Tackling this history was far from straightforward, but seeing the public's enthusiasm for it validated the need for the museum service to participate in national programmes of this type.

The Trent to Trenches exhibition opened at Nottingham Castle on 16th July 2014. It was the largest temporary exhibition we had ever organised, occupying 1000 m² and dominating the top floor of the museum. Trent to Trenches was a programme of events and activities across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, organised by a range of heritage and tourism agencies. The highlight of the programme was a major exhibition held at Nottingham Castle, produced in collaboration with representatives from the local regimental museum, volunteers and community groups. The intention was to recognise the contribution of the men and women of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, both at home and fighting on the front. The aim of the exhibition was to give an overview of the war to an audience with little prior knowledge, but to have enough detail to interest those familiar with the topic.

Galleries began with the pre-war 1914 royal visit to Nottingham and took a chronological approach. The floor space was split equally between events at home and on the front line, so that we could ensure the involvement of women and local industries was represented. We had a timeline that ran the length of the exhibition with two bands, one listing international events and the other local. On the local timeline we highlighted incidents such as the explosion at the Chilwell munitions factory that killed 134 people and injured 250. Areas covered included the fighting fronts, hospitals, trench art, local regiments, schools and prisoners of war. The galleries ended with a session on remembrance, where the public were invited to leave their own comments and reflections attached to a pin board of poppies. This is also the section where we shared material gathered through the involvement of community groups and housed a digital table top interactive that allowed local visitors to see the level of casualties amongst military personnel from their area.

From the outset our ambition was to create a programme that involved volunteers and drew on available expertise. We were open about the fact that we did not have a military historian on staff and that the curator responsible for this collection area was on maternity leave. One of the trustees of the Museum of the Mercian Regiment acted as the lead volunteer for the project and was keen to recruit people from throughout the county. Appeals were made in the local press and radio, as well as our volunteer

co-ordinators using their networks. We launched the programme with an early evening event where potential volunteers were invited to learn more (and sign up to our paperwork) in January 2012. There were ten groups people could join, including: research, tours, war memorial talks and sourcing of artefacts. None of the groups would be working directly on content for the exhibition, so we ensured other partners were represented to explain the overall vision of the programme.

Volunteers recruited in that first tranche were from a narrow pool, unrepresentative of the general population. This early response to our appeals made us question the possibility of wider engagement at an early stage of the project, and identified this as a need. All groups had a nominated lead, some who had been approached directly as individuals we knew held specialist skills or knowledge. These would be the main points of contact and would organise meetings with the volunteers at venues convenient for their members, with spaces available at the museum if appropriate. Around 50 people signed up, many of whom would not be working on our site, which presented new challenges for us.

Sourcing Material

Due to the importance of the theme, the lack of museum collections was an issue to overcome, rather than a reason to reconsider. Even with the collections of the local regiment at our disposal, we only had material to fill one of the temporary galleries and the plan was to use the whole of the top floor. We secured six paintings on loan from the Imperial War Museum, the loan of a naval flag from a local church and some pieces from the local archives office, but much more was needed. The obvious solution to this was to appeal for public loans that would help us tell stories that resonated and presented opportunities for empathy.

With the help of volunteers, three *Hidden Treasures* roadshow events were organised, at three different locations around the county. These events were advertised as an opportunity for the public to bring in objects and find out more about them from a panel of experts, as well as having the option to make them available for the upcoming exhibition. The public that attended could be split into two groups: those who wanted to learn about their objects and those who wanted to share the stories of their relatives. The volunteers enjoyed the opportunity to share their knowledge and have access to interesting items, while meeting other enthusiasts for the subject. The roadshows ran from 10 am to 3 pm and had a steady stream of visitors. Our team of experts each had a scribe alongside them and photographs were taken to record all pieces that people were happy to have considered for inclusion. These photographs proved invaluable in exhibition planning and were still being referenced when we returned objects at the end of the exhibition.

We were surprised by the range of objects that were offered. Many people did bring medals and photographs, but these were often offered alongside more unusual pieces. Highlights included a heart shaped pin cushion sent from France, a doll sent by a father six days before his death, and a cross that served as a grave marking in Palestine until the soldier's parents had it replaced with a stone. The most emotive piece was one that saved a soldier's life. The lender told us that his grandfather had been spared thanks to the wallet that sat in his breast pocket. It was thick with photographs of his wife, best friends and family, and had absorbed some of the impact of shrapnel, leaving him alive but with broken ribs.



Wallet loaned to Trent to Trenches¹ © Nottingham City Museums and Galleries

Over 150 people attended these events, with around half of the objects eventually displayed secured in this way. Press coverage helped raise awareness and meant some additional items were offered in the following weeks. Only two of these loans were converted into donations after the exhibition, one to the local archives office and another to the Museum of the Mercian Regiment.

The logistics of managing that number of loans from private individuals were complex. We were lucky to have funding for a freelancer to work two days a week on project administration, supporting the process of contacting lenders and arranging deposits. A number of days were held where people could come into the museum, with lenders allocated individual time slots. Personal stories were an important interpretation technique, so where lenders could provide information, the experiences of individuals were written up as short panels. It was important to focus on the human, to illustrate the impact the war had on the lives of normal people and to allow visitors to empathise and imagine the impact on family life.

Broadening Involvement – Working with Army Families

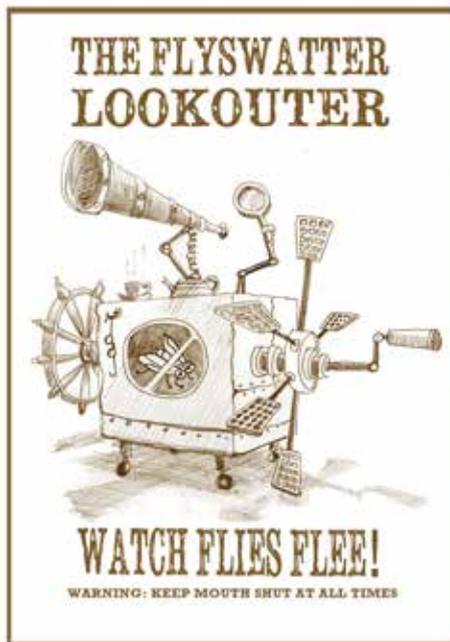
At the same time that we were planning our exhibition, Ian Hislop's comedy drama *The Wipers Times* aired on BBC 2. The programme was based on the renowned satirical magazine which was produced by the 12th Battalion of Nottingham's Sherwood Foresters on the front line. The magazine changed its name as the troops moved around Belgium and France, but maintained a wry sense of humour with articles, spoof adverts and poems. We were already including copies and a printing press in the exhibition, but began to see the publication as a way to accommodate

additional voices and add a contemporary perspective.

As a museum service, we are keen to create more family learning opportunities and so decided to work with army families. Through a Grant for the Arts we were awarded £12,500 for *The New Wipers Times*, allowing us to hire a project co-ordinator to oversee recruitment, commissioning, publication and evaluation. We commissioned graphic artist Carol Adlam and writer Helen Cross to plan sessions and develop content for a book with families based at Chetwynd Barracks, Nottingham.

The project was promoted directly through the army welfare personnel at the barracks as a chance to have fun, share stories and improve creative writing skills. There were eight workshops, delivered to 41 participants, held mostly at the barracks at a range of times. The project also included a trip to Nottingham Castle, where participants met curators and carried out creative writing exercises.

Children and adults in the group were encouraged to create individual and group stories. Every participant was represented and credited in the book, either as creators of stories or contributors of ideas. The finished graphic anthology includes a selection of the factual and fictional stories created, along with a selection of spoof adverts taking inspiration from the original *Wipers Times*. The stories range from the moving depiction of a boy missing his father, to the account of the stresses on a couple's relationship caused by periods of separation, to the amusing tale of stray dogs on the barracks, retold by the cub scouts in the style of a newspaper front page. Interestingly it was feedback from army wives that was the most positive, as they felt the project gave them a platform to express the realities of military life from their viewpoint. Printed copies of the publication were featured in the exhibition, given to all participants and were available for sale in the museum shop. A downloadable version was produced and available for free during the exhibition run.



Sample spoof advert from *The New Wipers² Times* © Nottingham City Museums and Galleries

Broadening Involvement – Working with Communities

In order to be inclusive in our content, we worked with members of the community via Nottingham City Homes, ensuring we included the story of those who did not live in the city at the time. To run alongside our exhibition, our outreach team submitted a bid to HLF Your Heritage. The project was called *Eleven, Eleven, Eleven* with an initial aim to record memories of the war that had been passed down through the generations to people from 11 different community groups. These would be gathered by a diverse group of volunteers, building on existing relationships we had from earlier projects. These memories and reflections would be filmed and shown in the galleries, afterwards forming part of a touring exhibition that went out to libraries and community centres in the city.

The project evolved as it became clear that the brief would be hard to deliver. Instead of recording memories, participants held workshops outside of the museum, taking the project out to elders, encouraging people to think about the First World War and how it had impacted upon individuals. Sessions included genealogy training, re-enactment workshops and an event based on world literature from the period 1914 to 1918. Facilitating these events gave us a hook to attract potential groups and ensured individuals with relevant stories could be identified and encouraged to take part in the film-making exercise.

The role of participants changed to that of facilitators, helping groups research the contribution of their family members and learning about the political standpoint of other nations. Although this deviated from the original plan, we achieved the core aim of involving diverse groups in delivery and placing the exhibition within international boundaries. As well as contributing content to *Trent to Trenches*, the project steering group were tasked with producing a pop-up exhibition that would visit 11 venues and run alongside an events programme.

Broadening Involvement – Working with Young People

As part of the project, funds were available to engage young people, and so our youth panel, Illuminate, were asked for ideas. They suggested a trip to the battlefields and selected a guide who created a tour based on their needs as a group with little existing knowledge. In order to support the *Eleven, Eleven, Eleven* programme, their trip focused on sites related to non-British involvement, but also allowed attendees to gain a greater understanding of the conflict as a whole.

There were 40 places available, with the majority going to group members or young people recommended by the group. The remaining places were offered to community representatives, who we had already linked with and had stories that we wanted to develop. Alongside staff, they visited non-British memorials and gravesites, such as the Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux and the Neuville-St Vaast German War Cemetery³. The trip acted as a springboard for research by individuals, as the tour leader brought in the involvement of particular communities. The tangible output from the trip was a film recording the group's journey and photographs of the sites visited, which both featured in the remembrance section of the exhibition. One of the other significant benefits listed was the opportunity to spend time with a mix of people. Members ranged from age 16 to 80, creating a forum to explore issues from a range of perspectives.

Reviews and Feedback

Trent to Trenches proved extremely popular with visitors and brought a noticeably different demographic. Our temporary exhibitions are primarily art based, so it was good to see this show attract more family groups and older visitors. In total over 100,000 people saw the exhibition, the highest figures we have for a temporary show since charging was introduced.



Trent to Trenches Installation Shot © Nottingham Castle Museum | John Hartley 2014

Many keen on the subject made repeat visits, as there was a lot of information and visuals to absorb. Staff were surprised at the number of visitors who spent a large amount of time in the galleries, reading every panel and taking time to contemplate the unfolding of events. The public said they found the exhibition informative, factual and thought provoking, although due to the size it was hard to take everything in on a short visit. Press reviews were extremely positive, with Nottingham Post hailing the exhibition as a 'triumph'⁴.

Importantly we also had positive feedback from people who had loaned their objects to the museum. Most of the contributors were delighted with the opportunity to share their family's stories with a wide audience and had brought several generations of their own family to visit. When collecting objects, participants were given the option to keep the graphics relating to their objects, and many said they would display them in a prominent place at home.

Lessons Learnt

One of the main issues over the course of the project was communication with volunteers and managing expectations. It took a while for us to ensure volunteers in the project were all signed up to our volunteer paperwork and saw themselves as museum volunteers, rather than merely working on *Trent to Trenches*. We tried to nurture relationships by having the project co-ordinator attend meetings with groups, as well as with group leaders and hosting events where all project volunteers could come together. One of these was an evening social event at Nottingham Castle, the other was a trip to Imperial War Museum North for both museum staff and volunteers.

One concern that materialised was how hard it is to engage volunteers on a single project over a long period of time. The first group of volunteers were signed up two years before the exhibition opened and around half were still engaged by the summer of 2014. Some of this was due to people finding employment or finishing a discrete piece of research that they saw as their contribution, but sometimes it was because group leaders did not receive enough support and had not maintained contact. If we did the project again we would only have the researchers recruited so early and would maintain much closer management of those whose work would feed directly into the exhibition. We would also question whether, with the resources at our disposal, we could realistically maintain relationships with all 150 volunteers involved.

As mentioned earlier, one of the things that really surprised was how much visitors read. On numerous occasions we found ourselves in meetings stating that the exhibition would not be allowed to turn into a book on the wall, as there was a danger of this due to how many volunteers were contributing. Ultimately there were nearly 40 large scale panels, holding a word count of around 200 words that had been edited by an independent exhibition copywriter. The object labels were researched and written by museum staff. Visitor behaviour showed that when a subject is significant and ties in with a national moment of reflection, people will take the time to read and learn. The key is to keep the message as simple as possible, while allowing discussions within the gallery setting.

The show did not result in a physical legacy, in terms of new objects donated or a permanent display on our site. However, what it did demonstrate is the demand for high quality, engaging social history exhibitions. In an environment where curators are increasingly being asked to justify gallery space for their collections over other disciplines, Trent to Trenches illustrated the ability of history exhibitions to educate and connect. Social history allows an individual's truth to be told and invites the audience to glimpse another's reality. Exhibitions on the First World War have succeeded where they have done this, exploring the horrors of war while remaining firmly rooted in real life experience.

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Bringing it Back Home: Community-Driven Engagement with Heritage in the West End of Newcastle upon Tyne

Judith Green, of the St James' Heritage and Environment Group in Newcastle upon Tyne, shares an insight into the work of a volunteer-run heritage group in a disadvantaged area, and challenges museum professionals to re-think their approach to community engagement.

It is commonplace these days for museums and galleries to aim to reach out to their local communities in different ways. They may be seeking to increase footfall, to uncover new sources of personal stories or memorabilia to add to exhibitions and archive collections, to demonstrate their inclusiveness by involving the “hard to reach”, or more ambitiously to develop genuinely democratic and participatory practices in their work. Often, however, the institutions themselves may be unaware of the variety of heritage-related activity already taking place within local neighbourhoods, regarding their communities as potential customers or volunteers rather than as sources of innovative partnerships and ways of working. This article describes a case study of a current First World War project based in the west end of Newcastle upon Tyne, showing how it needs to be seen as part of a process of community development rather than a stand-alone heritage project. This example is not put forward as unique or especially innovative. On the contrary, it is important to recognise that work like this is happening in communities across the country but that it is often ignored or undervalued.

St James' Heritage and Environment Group: A Journey of Exploration

Who are we? St James' Heritage and Environment Group is an independent volunteer-run community organisation based in the heart of the west end of Newcastle. We became a heritage organisation more or less by accident. Six years ago, a group of local residents and volunteers came together to carry out what was initially intended to be a short-term project to map the historic graveyard of St James' Parish Church in Benwell. This was one of a number of action-research activities that took place as part of a feasibility study to determine the future of the church building. The group (which soon predictably acquired the name of the Graveyard Group) had first to spend months chopping down ivy and brambles, picking up litter and broken glass and generally reversing the effects of decades of neglect. The effort proved worth it once the mapping was underway, supplemented by painstaking research on burials, as it was realised that the graveyard actually tells the story of the West Newcastle communities of Benwell and Scotswood over about 150 years. This spans a period when that area changed from being largely rural to becoming a dense urban area and one of the most important sites of the industrial revolution, to its present day status as a post-industrial area undergoing major physical and social transformation (St James' Heritage & Environment Group 2014, 2015).

Over a period of months, the volunteers returned every week in all weathers, taking on more and more tasks, and the group grew in strength and commitment until it was soon obvious that we had the makings of an organisation. Meanwhile, the response from the local community indicated that our project was more than the private obsession of a few individuals but had tapped into a wider need and interest. Visitors began to drop in while we worked in the graveyard and residents of the surrounding area commented favourably on our work. We realised that our graveyard

with its associated church was a place of major significance in the local community. This was partly because of its landmark position in the heart of the area and as one of the few remaining heritage sites in an area that has undergone enormous physical change over the past half century. Perhaps more significant were the personal connections with the lives of individuals and families through burials, marriages, baptisms and social events in the past, which meant that this church and graveyard were part of so many people's own stories. The fact that the place had been neglected for decades and allowed to fall into such a state of mess and disrepair was widely seen as a symbol of the social and economic decline of the wider area, and the efforts to restore and improve it met with real appreciation. A third factor which underpinned our belief that we had a valuable job to do was the realisation that we were actually re-writing the received "history" of the area. Our work involved, in practice, detailed empirical research such as uncovering inscriptions and piecing together memorials, and in the process we challenged a number of inaccurate assertions contained in published works. It was a delight to realise that "history" was not something past and done, with experts responsible for creating historical knowledge for ordinary people to receive, but that we could ourselves help to shape the story of our area. We began to realise the benefits of enabling local communities to research and tell their own stories, both for the communities involved and for the wider production of historical knowledge, as confirmed by evidence from museum studies (Watson 2007a).

In 2010, the Heritage and Environment Group became a constituted group dedicated to encouraging people to explore and celebrate the history of the area. Thus began an exciting journey of exploration to rediscover the almost forgotten stories of the area's past and uncover new ones. The Group remains wholly volunteer-run but the scope of its work has expanded significantly. As well as continuing to maintain and improve the graveyard, it now runs projects, produces publications, and offers activities and resources for people of all ages. Basically, we research and tell stories about the local history of our area, but the important thing is that we do this primarily with and for a specific local community.

Our Community

A major spur to this work of reclaiming the area's history was the fact that, for most of the past half century, the west end of Newcastle has been generally seen through the prism of deprivation and social problems. By the end of the 1960s, it was officially identified as one of the most disadvantaged areas in the country when it was targeted by the National Community Development Project, the government's answer to the USA's War on Poverty. Over the following decades, the area has been a site for almost every government anti-poverty and regeneration initiative – in itself, a case study of the impact of public policy. Perhaps the lowest point came in 1991 when three nights of street rioting, flashed across the nation's TV screens, brought the area's name into disrepute and left a legacy of stigma from which the local community still suffers today. In the face of this, one of our aims was to put some different stories out into the public domain, not only to change external perceptions about the area but also to help to restore local people's pride in their area and their heritage.

We use a community development approach in our work, meaning that we try to understand how the local community operates, what people's lives are like and what motivates them, and how we can actively involve them in our work, rather than seeing ourselves as "producers" of heritage and our audience as individual consumers. Many of the people we work with would be counted as among the "hard to reach" by other organisations. Most of the neighbourhoods that comprise our main target

area are among the 10% most deprived nationally, and have relatively low levels of educational attainment, high levels of illness and disability, and a growing proportion of residents from ethnic minority backgrounds, notably migrants from Eastern Europe. This is not a population that is commonly associated with engagement in heritage in the traditional ways such as visiting museums or heritage sites or going on guided heritage tours, but this does not necessarily imply a lack of interest in heritage. Rather, as Smith and others have argued, it is a question of recognising the different ways that diverse sections of society consume and interact with heritage and culture (Smith et al 2011).

There is an extensive literature on community development and community engagement in general (Gilchrist and Taylor 2011, Popple 2015), and in relation to heritage in particular (Smith et al 2011, Watson 2007b), which it is unnecessary to revisit here. An important underpinning principle of our work, however, could be summarised as “starting from where people are but not leaving them there”. We aspire to move people on, whether this process is seen as heritage learning, social justice or whichever phrase is currently in fashion. Another key point is that, as an organisation, we see ourselves as part of the community rather than, perhaps as a museum does, as a separate institution seeking to make links with a community. Some of us live here, some of us work here, and all of us mix routinely with local residents and community organisations. We are part of a nexus of relationships which inform our work and enable us to mobilise people to become involved in particular projects and activities.

Bringing it Back Home

Bringing it Back Home: What the First World War Meant for Benwell and Scotswood is the name of our modest First World War project. It began in 2014 as a partnership project led by the Heritage and Environment Group in partnership with two local schools, two churches and a community group. The project has a number of interlinked elements.

The core of the project was to work with local residents to research the stories of individuals and families, thereby creating a qualitative record of the varied impact of the First World War on ordinary people which would be disseminated via a small exhibition based on the stories and pictures collected, a photographic archive, and a resource pack. We would gather information about the impact of the war through seeking out stories about the diverse experiences of the families of current and former residents and exploring the interconnections between major historical events and personal biographies (Mills 1959). As well as stories of battlefield experiences, we wanted to collect stories about the home front, including the longer-term impact of the war on families and the community. We knew, for example, from previous reminiscence work, that some local families were forced to go “on the parish” after men were killed or injured in the war, enduring the cruelties and indignities that this reliance on charity entailed. The nature of the local industry was also of particular interest, as its preponderance of armaments, shipbuilding and heavy engineering production meant that, as well as those in the armed forces, many residents played an active role in the war effort as factory workers. The role of women in munitions and other work would provide a basis for exploring gender issues which can easily be overlooked by a concentration on battlefield experiences. The plan was to gather these stories primarily from present and past residents directly, supplemented by material gathered from other sources such as local newspapers, archives, online resources and historical advisers.

A complementary programme of talks, films, displays and events was intended to raise interest locally in the project and to share knowledge about World War One and its impact on the local area with the local community and the wider public. Several hundred adults have participated in these different activities. Bringing it Back Home is also an intergenerational project, and one important aim was to bring the subject alive for young people by imaginatively exploring the experiences of people affected by the war using drama and creative writing. This work with young people was successfully completed at an early stage, as the schools were keen to respond to the wave of interest nationally as the centenary of the outbreak of war approached. We commissioned Time Bandits, a historical re-enactment group specialising in work with schools, to run workshops in two local schools. The most intensive work was with primary school children, involving them in finding out about real-life local stories of individual experiences and family life in the area during 1914-18, and culminating in a drama performance.

The major disappointment for us has been the difficulties encountered in collecting family stories from local residents. People came and enjoyed the activities, but suggestions that they might contribute photographs, memorabilia and stories met a sea of blank faces. We had quite simply under-estimated the time distance. For most people, we might as well have been asking them about their family experiences of the Roman invasion of Britain. Similarly, the generation that might have been expected to have memories of hardship and ongoing consequences for families of deaths and disabilities caused by the war, even if still alive, were on the whole no longer able to be actively engaged in community activities. Our optimism had been based on the experience of previous projects, but it appeared that memories of the First World War were not among the stories handed down in most families. We did receive several sets of photographs and related documents and stories, mainly from people with a particular interest in their own family history and mainly relating to the experiences of men on active service. These, in combination with the additional material that our researches from local newspapers and other sources were revealing, enabled us to mount a small exhibition. However the main area where our aspirations proved unfounded was in finding first-hand stories from families now living in the west end who had come from other countries such as Eastern Europe with very different experiences of World War One. Our main route here was the local secondary school but, despite strenuous efforts by the history staff, no information was forthcoming. We concluded that again the events of 1914-18 were too distant, and for the large East European Roma community in particular they were understandably overshadowed by the terrible experiences of the Second World War and the discrimination suffered to the present day in their countries of origin. However this work did produce some interesting and thought-provoking discussions, with some young people, for example, challenging the description of a “world” war for a conflict which had left some countries untouched. The willingness of these young people to engage with difficult issues of competing perspectives on the conflict indicated that the barrier to obtaining stories from minority ethnic families was indeed lack of information rather than perhaps sensitivities about being identified with the “enemy” side, but it is impossible to be certain about this.

Community Development and Heritage: A Case Study

This final section identifies the elements of the project that characterise the *Bringing it Back Home* project as an example of a community development approach to “doing heritage”. None of these elements are particularly innovative when taken separately, but together they provide a useful case study of a way of working in and with a local community to learn about and share local heritage.

An Ongoing Conversation

The first point to make, is that our decision to carry out a First World War project was not stimulated by the availability of funding or the desire to participate in a larger programme: it arose from our ongoing work and the interest we identified locally. At the risk of over-simplifying, in the jargon of community development this was a “bottom-up” rather than a “top-down” project. *Bringing it Back Home* is one of a number of projects we have run with the aim of exploring different aspects of the history of the area, linking the micro-level stories of individuals, families and places with larger historical events and developments. We have tried out different ways of involving the local community in the research process and of sharing and learning from the findings. The current First World War project was in fact a development from an earlier project called *War and Peace in the West End*, which brought together stories about conflicts which had impacted on the geographical area and its past and present residents – including information about how the Roman invasion and English Civil War affected the area, the history of its 19th and 20th century armaments industry, and personal stories from present day residents varying from experiences of active service and manufacturing munitions during the Second World War to stories from refugees and asylum seekers who had fled from conflicts happening elsewhere in the world today. It also included several creative elements such as knitted air raid shelters, barrage balloons and fighter planes made by local knitting groups and two “peace trees” created by a local nursery school and a women’s group adorned with people’s wishes for the future. In the course of the *War and Peace* project several people volunteered family photographs and information relating to the First World War. Some of these were incorporated in that exhibition, and a number of people had asked if we were planning to do any work for the forthcoming centenary of the outbreak of World War One. There were other factors also that influenced our response. The question had a particular relevance to us as the First World War memorial for Bnwell is located in St James’ Church. In effect we had “rediscovered” the memorial which was carved in oak panels in the unlit baptistry and had largely been forgotten. Despite the fact of its existence having slipped from popular memory, we knew that the memorial could still hold considerable emotional significance for some people. One of our original graveyard volunteers, for example, had been strongly affected by finding that it included the name of a great-uncle whose early death in the war had had an enduring impact on the remaining family and directly affected her own early life. Despite living locally, she had never realised that there was a war memorial in the church containing his name. In the course of the *War and Peace* project we began to publicise the fact that we were interested in collecting family stories, photographs and other documents relating both to the experiences of people on active service or on the home front during 1914-18, and to the legacy of the war in terms of the ongoing impact on families. It was a natural progression to apply for a small grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund for a World War One project.

Just as the project had no definite beginning, so also it has no definite end. In this way it contrasts with the way projects run by museums tend to operate, whereby funding is obtained, staff appointed or allocated, an exhibition is created and mounted and then at a certain point it is taken down and probably scrapped. Although the material collected will be archived for future use, the project itself will come to an end at a preordained time. Of course we have requirements to meet in relation to HLF, and formally *Bringing it Back Home* will conclude at the appointed time having completed its spend and achieved its outputs. But because we operate on a small scale and do not have the responsibilities of buildings or staff, we can be flexible and responsive, able to add to or extend elements of the planned programme and take off in new directions as opportunities and interests occur.

One example is the way in which our World War One exhibition is effectively a work in process rather than a finished product. We have deliberately left space to allow for more contributions from local residents, and are already finding that visitors to the exhibition are being prompted to go back and search their wardrobes and attics for dimly remembered and previously unconsidered photographs of men in uniform or women in munitions factory turbans.

Inclusive

Another characteristic of the *Bringing it Back Home* project is that it aims to be inclusive. Another over-used word, it can be used to summarise a way of working that tries to reach out into the community in different ways in order to engage a wide range of people and to take into account the diversity of the community. At one level this can be seen in the fact that, with the exception of the work taking place within schools, all of the activities were open to anyone to join in, whether contributing to the research, attending talks and films, or visiting exhibitions or archives. In order to encourage wider participation, small pop-up displays were mounted in different community venues across the area. As well as the usual forms of publicity, efforts were made to raise awareness of the project through word of mouth, which is especially important in an area like the west end of Newcastle.

Researching the local experience of the First World War and its impact was at the heart of the project. The process of collecting stories and other material about the experience of the Benwell and Scotswood community involved working with present and former local residents as researchers and as contributors. There was no paid research input: the research was carried out by volunteers. This required active efforts to engage people. Different people have helped with different aspects of research, including searching online for information about those commemorated on the war memorials for Benwell and Scotswood in the two parish churches, reading contemporary newspapers, and locating photographs of the area during 1914-18. Allocating and coordinating these tasks involved a sometimes delicate process of negotiation about individuals' particular skills and interests. An important part of the project was organising group visits to investigate collections and sources of material of potential value in our research. We knew from experience that local people usually lacked the confidence or motivation to participate in such activities as individual volunteers, preferring a friendly group setting which offered a chance to socialise and to try something different outside their immediate area without wholly leaving their comfort zone. The importance of established relationships can be a key factor in creating a presumption that the opportunity on offer will be interesting and enjoyable, thus tempting people to get involved in an activity they might not otherwise have considered. It is not unusual for people to turn up to one of our activities without having really taken on board what it is about but simply trusting us to give them a good experience. It is also not unusual for people to turn up without prior notice, despite the requirement to book, while others fail to appear because of illness or other unforeseen events. The result is that it is difficult to predict how many people will be involved in any particular activity or what their interests and skills will be. This can be stressful, but it also in our experience can often bring fresh and illuminating perspectives to a subject.

Our project has also tried to be inclusive in the sense of recognising the diversity of backgrounds and experiences within the local community. We wanted to avoid an over-emphasis on the battlefield experiences of men. The experience of women, especially those who worked in the munitions industry locally and those who did various kinds of voluntary work, was explored through a variety of talks, and we

sought information and photographs from the community. The workshops in schools included a focus on the impact of the war on children and young people in the area, helping the pupils to imagine and understand the realities of life in that period. We also wanted to take into account the ethnic diversity of the area, and the need to acknowledge that not everyone's families had lived here during 1914-18 or fought on the same side in the war. We realised that there were important similarities between this earlier period and the current situation in the area, in that both were times of rapid social and economic change locally. In the 1910s, the local population was growing at a dramatic pace as a result of industrial development and it was also changing in character from a semi-rural and relatively affluent population to one mainly comprising manual workers. These changes were accompanied by high levels of in-migration from the surrounding rural areas as well as from more distant parts of the British Isles such as Ireland and Cornwall. In recent decades, the area has again experienced major changes, including de-industrialisation and high levels of in-migration, most recently from Eastern Europe and Africa. In order to create a wider picture of the impact of the war, we wanted to include family stories from people who had moved into the area, as well as stories about the experiences of people who were resident here during the 1914-18 period. This was a major factor behind the decision to work with two local schools, as their pupil profiles reflected the ethnic composition of the local community. One was the secondary school serving the whole area and with a highly diverse pupil intake. The other was a primary school situated in the middle of the area which has experienced rapid changes in the ethnic composition of its pupil intake in recent years as a result of in-migration. As well as directly engaging the young people, we hoped to reach their families through the work in schools, but as previously noted this was possibly the least successful aspect of our project.

Museum of Place

Unlike many heritage organisations, we do not aspire to creating a mini-museum or local heritage centre. The graveyard and associated church provide a physical base for some of our activities, including regular weekly open-access drop-in sessions, but in a very real sense the whole area is our museum. While we mount exhibitions in a similar, albeit much cheaper, form to a museum, we display these not only in our base at St James' but in community venues across the area and in other formats such as books, slide shows and leaflets. Activities and events take place in different places also. The underlying principle is to take things out to where people are, rather than to expect them always to come into a separate space owned by someone else.

More fundamentally perhaps, we treat the whole area as a space to be interpreted and appreciated for its heritage significance. In practical terms this means linking people to the physical reality of places that are part of the story of World War One or other historical events, through tours, visits and other means. In some cases this may be through retrieved objects that are all that remain of buildings now demolished. A specific example related to World War One is the rescuing from a nearby Methodist church, on the brink of demolition, of a bronze war memorial plaque which we plan to re-mount in an alternative local site. The significance of this is as much about preserving in an accessible location a physical memory of a church which occupied an important place in the lives of many residents as about its relevance to the war. In other words, the main value of this object to the community lies in the fact that it is place-specific rather than in the fact that it is a historical record. This process of connecting people to specific places through physical means seems to be especially important to a community like ours which has experienced massive changes over the past decades as successive waves of housing clearance and regeneration have removed thousands of homes and other buildings – and in some cases obliterated

all trace of whole streets. Counter-intuitively, this experience of change seems to mean that many people have a particularly strong sense of place and their identity appears to be bound up with the ability to locate themselves and their families geographically. This experience is reflected in the findings of a number of heritage studies pointing to the importance of iconic buildings to the urban poor (Wedgwood 2009, Watson 2007b).

The Whole Person

A very significant aspect of our work is that we relate to people in a holistic way, not just as customers or consumers of heritage. We see them as people with a range of motivations, needs and interests – social, creative or learning – which need to be taken into account. This is not to say that we try to be social workers or that we swoop on every visitor with offers of comfort or involvement in an art activity. Of course many people come along who just want to look at an exhibition or listen to a talk, and we do not intrude further beyond passing on information about our other activities through programmes and leaflets. There are many others who engage in different ways, however, and most of our activities have multiple aims to reflect the variety of needs and interests. A few examples may best illustrate this.

Some people participate in our activities and events not because they have a particular passion for history but because they are lonely or bored and are seeking company and a reason to get out of their home. We need to structure our activities to take this into account. Sometimes this is as simple as offering tea and biscuits and an opportunity to talk, but we also factor this in to how we organise the actual activities. For example, we run guided walks (such as one around the war graves in the graveyard and memorials in the church as part of *Bringing it Back Home*) and these often involve reminiscence by participants in contrast to the usual model of a heritage walk which is about an expert transmitting information to a passive audience. At one level, this is because of the recognised benefits of engaging in reminiscence, especially for isolated older people, and the evident enjoyment that participants gain from it (Bornat 1994). It also illustrates a more general point about place-specific heritage learning work, which is that the participants themselves will often be experts as well as recipients of knowledge. A relevant example from *Bringing it Back Home* is that we have run illustrated talks about the local armaments industry, since Armstrong-Whitworth was one of the world's major producers of warships and other armaments during this period. Our invited expert speakers have on several occasions been helped or corrected by members of the audience who have been able to identify buildings, machines and products from their personal experience of working in the factories. This in turn can be seen as an example of a more general feature of this kind of community-based work – the reciprocal nature of the relationships involved, with participants as contributors as well as recipients of heritage learning. Most people who take part in our activities or visit our exhibitions bring something that enhances our work in some way, whether by loaning objects or photographs, providing a snippet of information that helps to fill in a gap in knowledge, or in some other way – including bringing home-made cakes or offering to wash the cups after an event.

Our work usually involves a strong element of creative activity as well as the more traditional forms of heritage learning. The benefits of this are clear: it offers an enjoyable experience and an opportunity for people to discover or exercise talents and skills; it provides a setting for people to get together with others, share ideas, enjoy companionship, and perhaps get to know people from other backgrounds or neighbourhoods in a non-threatening environment; it can engage people who

have no active interest in heritage learning, perhaps because they were alienated by history lessons at school; and it can produce impressive outputs that can be shared with a wider audience, thus giving the community something to be proud of and raising its profile more widely. The *Bringing it Back Home* project included the series of workshops run by Time Bandits with children at a local primary school. These involved working with the children to create dramatic stories based on real situations identified from newspapers and other sources, leading to a performance by about a hundred children to an audience of parents and invited guests. The adult activities included showings of fictionalised films about the First World War, such as *Warhorse*, in addition to archive films. We were also able to bring together more than 200 adults and young people through a special First World War themed concert performed by pupils from the local secondary school together with children from two local primaries. This concert, which combined song, dance and drama, managed to transmit a considerable amount of “heritage learning” about the war and its impact locally, as well as being a highly enjoyable and moving experience. In addition, although it was not part of the formal HLF-funded project, we formed a valuable partnership with the Hatton Gallery at Newcastle University, following a chance meeting, and organised a series of joint events at the Gallery linked with *Screaming Steel*, a national touring exhibition of World War One art and poetry. Through our networks, we recruited residents from Benwell and Scotswood to participate in special events including drawing and poetry workshops using the inspiration of the paintings on display at the gallery.

Another element of our work is enhancing people’s skills and knowledge. A simple example of this is the service we offer at our weekly open-access sessions or via email of giving advice and help to people interested in researching family history from online war records, census and other external sources as well as from our own burial and other local records. Rather than a defined activity such as a one-off family history event or a course, this service is an integral part of the way we work and part of an ongoing process of engaging people and building relationships. Another example from the *Bringing it Back Home* programme is a facility to help people to improve the quality of their old family photographs. Hopefully this will equip some people with the IT skills to do this themselves in future, but for us it is equally valuable as a means of making new contacts, of sourcing material and information for exhibitions, or simply giving people the opportunity of an enjoyable session with friendly people.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to present a case study of a particular First World War project as an example of the sort of small-scale community-based heritage work that is happening in many places and organisations across the country as a contribution to the ongoing debate about the purpose and direction of heritage work in the 21st century. We do not claim it as a model of good practice: in fact, we have deliberately flagged up its weaknesses. We want to draw attention to the fact that there are a large number of such small local projects taking place, but that these are often ignored by or simply unknown to large heritage institutions, despite the valuable contribution made by the Heritage Lottery Fund in supporting such work through its First World War and All Our Stories small grants programmes. It is important to distinguish between projects which have developed “bottom-up” from local communities and those which are the result of exercises in community engagement or co-inquiry initiated by museums, universities or other institutions. Valuable though the latter undoubtedly can be in involving people in the production of historical knowledge and helping to strengthen local identity and social cohesion (Pente et al 2015, Lynch 2011), they form only part of the picture of heritage activity taking place

in and with communities across the country (Crooke 2012). This is not an argument for keeping these independent local projects apart from heritage experts and institutions. On the contrary, our experience tells us that there are substantial mutual benefits from partnerships between community-based projects and museums and other formal institutions – but that these must be genuinely equal partnerships respecting the different aims, values and working methods of the community partners.

Note

For more information about our work and to view our publications, see our website: stjameschurchnewcastle.wordpress.com

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Resonance: Reflections on the Great War through Artworks Inspired by Staffordshire Collections

Chris Copp, Senior Museums Officer at Staffordshire Archives & Heritage, gives an inspiring and practically useful account of working in partnership with artists and several other heritage organisations to develop a touring exhibition of innovative new work produced in response to collections.

Resonance is an exhibition touring seven Staffordshire museums during 2015 and 2016 as part of the county's commemorations for the Great War centenary. Organised by Staffordshire Museum Service on behalf of the Staffordshire Museums Strategic Consortium, it is an artistic response to our collections of First World War objects, documents and archives. The exhibition features new ceramic work by Stephen Dixon, with complementary photography and film by Johnny Magee. This article will focus on the way in which the museum collections informed the development of the exhibition and the experience of working with artists during the project.

The Partnership

Staffordshire Museums Strategic Consortium is a group of local authority and independent museums who work together on projects and programmes of work benefiting the museum sector in Staffordshire. In recent years this has included a review of museum governance and the creation of a Staffordshire Great War trail, brand and website¹. For the purposes of this project, the partners were the Staffordshire County Museum; the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery; Gladstone Pottery Museum; the Museum of Cannock Chase; Brampton Museum and Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme; and the Ancient High House, Stafford. Two non-museum partners were also involved: Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service, which holds important archival collections relating to the First World War, and the National Memorial Arboretum, who were to host the final leg of the exhibition and associated "celebration" event in March 2016. Construction work for a new visitor centre building at the Arboretum has meant that they will no longer be able to host *Resonance* as originally planned. However, we are fortunate that another Consortium partner, the Wedgwood Museum, has been able to step into the breach, having reopened in July 2015.

Developing the Project

During 2013, the Staffordshire Museums Consortium began to discuss potential joint projects to commemorate the centenary of the First World War under the 'Staffordshire Great War' banner. All the partner museums and archives have collections relating to the war, and have their own programmes of exhibitions and events over the centenary period. It was decided to produce a touring exhibition and to look at new ways of looking at our collections by working with an artist. This was the first time the Consortium had worked to produce a joint exhibition, as well as being the first artistic project undertaken as a partnership.

Having drawn up a project brief, the Consortium initially considered a number of contemporary artists working in a variety of media, some based in Staffordshire and others from further afield, all of whom had produced work around the themes of conflict, commemoration and loss. We also wanted to ensure that there was a strong element of community participation in the development of the project and that the artist had experience of this kind of work. We needed an artist who could

work collaboratively². Ultimately we approached Stephen Dixon, a ceramicist and printmaker with an international profile based at Manchester Metropolitan University, who is interested in investigating contemporary narratives through ceramics. Steve is also Professor of Contemporary Crafts at Manchester School of Art. He was immediately enthusiastic and saw the project as an opportunity to explore museum visitors' responses to the Great War and the objects, photographs and documents held in our collections. He was particularly interested in exploring what is missing from museum collections, which tend to be primarily patriotic, military and technological in nature, and in how the Great War still "resonates" with people a hundred years on. The consortium were confident that Steve would be able to create new and innovative works of the highest quality to help bring to life the stories held within our collections and to help our museums reach new audiences, particularly those aged 16 to 24. We also felt that working with a ceramicist would connect with north Staffordshire's history of pottery manufacture.

In March 2014 Staffordshire County Council's Museum Service put in a bid on behalf of the Consortium to Arts Council England's Grants for the Arts fund to work with Steve. The bid for £20,000 was successful. At this early stage, a basic contract was drawn up which defined the parameters of the partner museum and practitioner roles in the project.

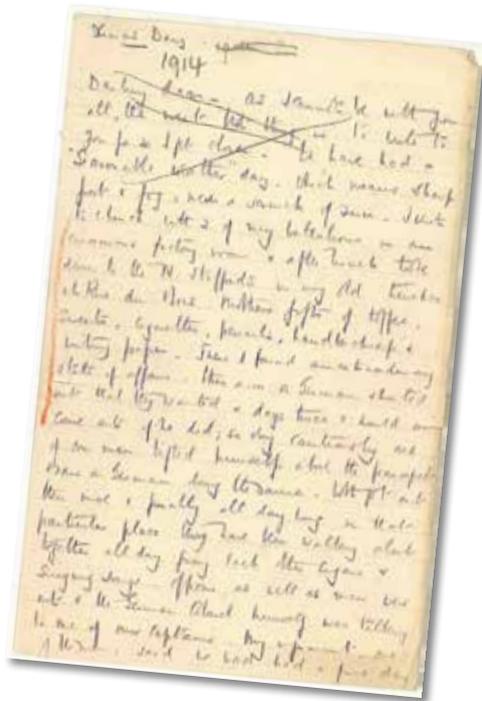


Crested china model of Zeppelin L32. Staffordshire County Museum © Stephen Dixon

Researching the Collections

The artists began their research work at each of the venues. It soon became apparent that there are types of object which are represented in most of the museum collections: souvenir crested china, medals, postcards and commemorative mugs. Some objects were more unusual, such as the trench club and tank driver's mask from the Brampton Museum's collections. There were also some items unique to Staffordshire, including the objects and images of the Great War Army Training Camps on Cannock Chase (Whitehouse 1983; Cunliffe 2014)³, and General W. Congreve's letter describing a 1914 Christmas Truce football match, held at Staffordshire Record Office.

An unexpected bonus was that Steve co-opted his colleague at Manchester Metropolitan University, filmmaker and photographer Johnny Magee, to work alongside him in different media. Both artists paid at least one visit to each museum as well as to Staffordshire Record Office. These visits served two purposes. Firstly, they gave the artists an opportunity to visit the potential display spaces for the exhibition. Secondly, they allowed them to spend time looking at the collections in detail. The artists were faced with the challenge of creating an exhibition which had to work in a variety of rooms and buildings of different sizes, from two first floor rooms in the 16th century timber-framed Ancient High House in Stafford, to the former 18th century stables at the Staffordshire County Museum at Shugborough, to dedicated temporary exhibition spaces at the Brampton Museum and Art Gallery and the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery. Their answer was to create a bespoke solution for each venue, with some installations to feature in each venue, and others which would be venue specific.



General W. Congreve's letter written to his wife, Christmas Day 1914: "...There I found an extraordinary state of affairs – this a.m. a German shouted out that they wanted a day's truce & would one come out if he did; so very cautiously one of our men lifted himself above the parapet & saw a German doing the same. Both got out then more & finally all day long in that particular place they have been walking about together all day giving each other cigars & singing songs... next door the 2 battalions opposite each other were shooting away all day & so I hear it was further north, 1st R.B. playing football with the Germans opposite them – next Regiments shooting each other." © Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service

In working with the collections, curatorial and archival staff and volunteers spent at least one day with Steve and Johnny at each site, to show them collections on display and in store, to provide background knowledge, and to highlight objects or stories of particular local interest. During this phase of the project Steve produced an on-line

blog on the Staffordshire Great War website⁴. For the duration of the development stage of the project, Consortium meetings became monthly (rather than quarterly) to act as a project steering group. This enabled Steve to show how his work was developing, and enabled the partners to have input into the exhibition and keep on top of any complications, as well as monitoring funding and the project timetable.

Steve was particularly inspired by the many examples of crested china, to the point where he has himself become an avid collector. Crested china was a popular form of Staffordshire souvenir-ware made by Stoke-on-Trent companies such as W.H. Goss of the Falcon Works, and Wiltshaw & Robinson who made Carlton ware at their Copeland Street factory. Crested china was at the height of its popularity during the Great War, with miniature china versions being produced of everything from tanks, zeppelins and the SS Lusitania, to tin hats and binoculars, all transfer printed with a town crest. Steve created new installations featuring items in the crested china style, but extended its repertoire in new and provocative ways.



'The Beautiful Game' © Stephen Dixon

A key element of the exhibition, and one of the first pieces produced, is 'The Beautiful Game'. This piece commemorates the events of Christmas day 1914, when an unofficial truce called a temporary halt to the fighting on the Western Front (Weintraub 2001; Brown 2001). It is widely documented by soldiers from all ranks and from both sides, that improvised football matches took place in no man's land during the truce. Perhaps not surprisingly, the most commonly quoted score is 3-2 to the Germans! The work adopts the genre of crested china to commemorate this extraordinary event. Two teams of ceramic footballers, German and British, are lined up on a Subbuteo football pitch. The figures feature regimental crests and the names of individual soldiers known to have witnessed or participated in the Christmas truce through their published letters, diaries and testimonies.

'Fragments from France' features shards of pottery, some from battlefield excavations in Flanders, others collected in France, transfer printed and fired with images of fragments of documents, ephemera and photographs from the Consortium's World War I collections. The title is inspired by a plate held by the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery featuring a cartoon by Bruce Bairnsfather. Lieutenant Bruce Bairnsfather's popular cartoons, published as 'Fragments from France', documented the war from the perspective of a serving soldier on the Western Front.

Johnny Magee focussed on postcards and photographs, re-interpreting and re-imagining these images in film and photography. The film and accompanying soundscape Johnny produced for the exhibition, entitled 'Listen', are important in creating a subtle, haunting atmosphere in the exhibition spaces. One of the most powerful of Johnny's pieces is based around 'Real Photo' postcards in the museum collections. Here, photographic postcards have been scanned, blown up to many times their original size, and painstakingly coloured by the artist using digital image editing software. The increased scale and the use of naturalistic colour alter perceptions of these images. The impact of looking into the faces of the British and German servicemen is strikingly emotional and poignant.

During the development stage and also during the tour itself, Steve and students from Manchester Metropolitan University have been working with museum visitors in workshops at each venue. The workshop gives visitors an opportunity to design and create a transfer design in order to make their own mug to commemorate an individual, perhaps a relative, who contributed to the Great War effort, whether in the armed forces, or as a nurse, in a factory or any capacity, military or civilian. Steve then takes them back to his studio and fires the transfers onto blank mugs. They are then added to the exhibition, gradually populating a case of 64 Staffordshire bone china mugs with names and faces. The piece, 'Column', is set out in such a way as to mimic the way in which they would be placed in the kiln for firing. Each museum has used these workshops to target a specific audience. Museum of Cannock Chase worked with a local youth group, Staffordshire County Museum ran a drop-in session for family visitors during half-term, and Brampton Museum and Art Gallery involved Newcastle College of Further Education students. These are just a few of the pieces in the exhibition, but taken collectively the works created look at the ways in which the Great War affected the Staffordshire home front, examining themes of absence, loss, individual heroism and shared humanity, and consider how these themes resonate within the material culture found within the collections. New work is being added at each museum, so the exhibition will grow and develop as it tours Staffordshire.

The artists wished to keep interpretation to a minimum, allowing visitors to respond to the exhibition without a great deal of curatorial intervention. There are introductory interpretation and acknowledgements panels, but the various elements of the exhibition have not been individually labelled. Instead, for those visitors who would like to find out more, a visitor guide was produced which describes each piece, provides some historical background, and explains the artists' inspirations for the work

Conclusion

The project does not end until April 2016, so it is still very much alive. There are already some tangible benefits. It is enabling us to engage with hard to reach audiences. It has generated an excellent exhibition, and on the tour's conclusion there will be new acquisitions for the partner museums' collections of fine and decorative works of art by highly regarded artists. The acquisition stage of the

project will not take place until the end of the tour as work is still being created. In discussion with Stephen Dixon and Johnny Magee, the partner museums will select work from the exhibition to be added to the permanent collections of one or more of the partner museums on behalf of the partnership.

There is evidence that the exhibition has had some success in encouraging visitors to visit a series of museums in the county as they follow the progress of *Resonance*. Stephen Dixon's involvement in the British Ceramics Biennial in Stoke-on-Trent during the summer and autumn of 2015 both inspired him to create a new, large-scale World War I related piece at the Spode factory site, and enabled partner museums in north Staffordshire to participate in city-wide activities and promotion relating to the Biennial.

There are some less immediately tangible benefits too. From a museum curatorial point of view, it is challenging, but undoubtedly exciting, to let go of control of exhibition development and creation. The whole project has been extremely rewarding and the Consortium undoubtedly chose their partner practitioners well. The end result has been completely different from the social or military historian developed exhibitions and displays which we would generally produce. The contrast in approaches is stimulating and imaginative and has made the museums look at their collections in a new and inspiring way, bringing fresh life to our core collections.

Working in partnership has enabled our museums to achieve something we would have struggled to do as individual institutions, particularly given our increasingly limited staff and financial capacity. Each partner has been able to commit staff and volunteer time to support the artists in their work with the collections, and to set up and dismantle the exhibition as it travels around the county. In addition, representatives from partner organisations attended four steering group meetings which took place during the exhibition development stage. The commitment by the partners has been important, as inevitably there will be a number of hidden costs when undertaking this kind of project. To offset some of the capacity issues, the funding included money to pay for design and production of interpretation panels, a display case for the 'Beautiful Game' piece and transport of the cases between venues. Four high quality museum showcases (originally purchased by the Marches Network to support Birmingham Museum Trust's Renaissance funded regional loans programme) were loaned for the duration of the exhibition from the Marches Network at no cost. In all, the partners were able to commit cash funding and volunteer and staff time to the value of £7,000.

The experience for the artists has also been a positive one, and if anything expectations have been exceeded, as Stephen Dixon comments:

From an artist's perspective, *Resonance* has been a rich and rewarding experience. The project has given the unique opportunity of behind-the-scenes access to an extraordinary range of Great War archives, objects and artefacts, many of these both personal and poignant. An unexpected bonus has been the longevity of the touring exhibition, which has allowed us to continue to develop new ideas, locate and curate new combinations of objects, and refine and develop the artworks over a much longer period than is usual in an exhibition project. The only downside to *Resonance* for me has been my acquiring a serious addiction to eBay!

We hoped that the exhibition would encourage our visitors to pause and reflect. Initial visitor reaction has been for the most part positive:

Very sophisticated, subtle and evocative.

Really interesting, I enjoyed the combination of the two artists' work.

Thought provoking. In particular 'Listen' was made more poignant because I could also hear the real birdsong from outside the museum.

The themes of common humanity are well explored.

Very different approach to the First World War, and for that quite an impact.

A very moving and wonderful experience.

The experience has been a positive one for artists and museums alike. We are continuing to collect visitor and venue evaluation and have started to plan for the Consortium's next project.

Acknowledgements

We would particularly like to thank Arts Council England for their £20,000 grant obtained through the Grants for the Arts scheme, without which this exhibition would not have been possible.

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¹ See: www.staffordshiregreatwar.com/

² Not published at the time Resonance was being planned, but a useful document with case studies and advice on selecting and working with artists is: Murch, A. and Porter, G. (2015) *Animating Audiences: Working with Artists, Engaging Audiences* (Arts Council England). Downloadable at: www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/browse-advice-and-guidance/animating-museums-working-artists-engaging-audiences [accessed 9 October 2015]

³ See also: www.staffspasttrack.org.uk/exhibit/chasecamps/default.htm

⁴ See, for example, Steve's blog entry following his visit to Museum of Cannock Chase: www.staffordshiregreatwar.com/blog/resonance-111014/

Decoded + Tributaries: creative enquiry and experimentation with 1914-18 collections

John Coburn, Digital Programmes Manager for Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, shares an insight into two innovative digital interpretation projects. He explores the collaborations with artists, technologists and members of the public which created unusual ways of engaging audiences with collections and histories.

How can working with digital artists and creative technologists open up cultural heritage collections to a wider public? What are the points of connection between museums and archives and the research interests of these digital practitioners?

Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM) is a major regional museum, art gallery and archives service. It manages a collection of nine museums and galleries across Tyneside and the Archives for Tyne and Wear. Over 2014/15 TWAM produced *Wor Life*, a programme of activity funded by Heritage Lottery Fund, to commemorate the start of World War I (WWI). The primary aim of the project was to recognise the often overlooked local impact of the war and understand what happened to the people left at home.

TWAM's digital team has existed since 2007 and is focused on delivering digital public engagement projects. Together with the appointed *Wor Life* project team, comprised of staff delivering everything from learning and outreach projects to curatorial work and collections documentation, the digital team produced a number of digital creative projects as part of this programme. As with any good digital heritage project, our ambition was to create novel, user-centric, human experiences rather than blinding audiences with the capabilities of technology. It was our intention that these projects should provoke and challenge an audience's perception of Tyneside during 1914-18. This period of time is of course synonymous with Britain at war. We were certainly interested to reuse our collections to explore how Tyneside life from that time was profoundly affected by military action, mobilisation and the atrocities on the front line. But we were also keen to explore the lives of people where WWI's effect during 1914-18 was less explicitly connected; where societal changes were perhaps more residual.

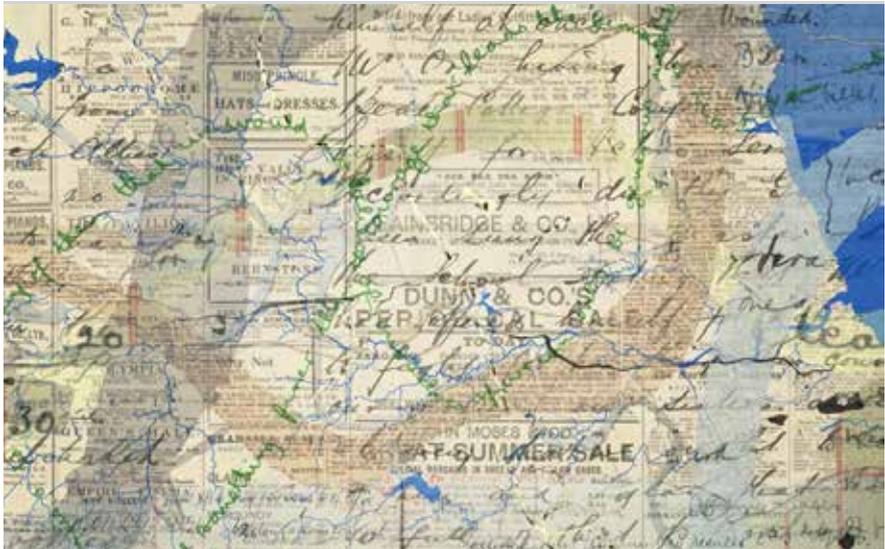
Additionally, we were aware that a number of other WWI commemorative projects were planned regionally and our digital projects should seek to complement them but also stand apart from their interpretative focus.

Two key projects were produced by TWAM's digital and *Wor Life* team in collaboration with external artists, creative technologists and producers. These collaborators were invited to research and creatively reuse WWI material within our collections, and ultimately produce work that would provoke and inspire audiences. We actively encouraged them to seek out collections and material from the archives, find untold stories and ask questions that weren't necessarily being explored by TWAM.

Tributaries

Tributaries was a collaboration with the American sound artist and musician Halsey Burgund. Halsey has worked extensively in the fields of digital art and museums practice for well over a decade. He is a former research fellow at Smithsonian and is currently a research fellow at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). We were first made aware of Halsey through his project *Scapes*, produced in 2010 for the

deCorva Museum (USA). Six months before *Wor Life*, we had contacted Halsey to understand his interest in a possible WWI-focused collaboration.



Artwork for *Tributaries* © Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums

Halsey creates participatory audio artworks using mobile apps. The experiences are designed to encourage audiences to listen, record and reflect on geolocated sounds and voices that relate to the physical environment immediately around them. Each audio artwork evolves as participants create and upload sounds in response to what they see and hear. Halsey's intention is to connect people with the lives and experiences of others, people who are here today or who perhaps lived before them.

All of this is something we wanted to achieve within the *Wor Life* programme. A primary aim of our projects was to encourage an empathy for the past.

After a year of transatlantic collaboration with Halsey (communications mainly conducted via fortnightly Skype chats, and collections research shared via Google Drive), and in partnership with Newcastle Libraries, we produced *Tributaries*. *Tributaries* is a location-sensitive mobile app in which users experience a soundscape of original music and modern-day spoken recordings of stories and experiences from 1914-18.

All of the source material for *Tributaries* was taken from the collections and archives at TWAM and from the newspapers at Newcastle Libraries. Each artefact provided a snapshot of lives lived in Tyneside between 1914 and 1918. We used a wealth of rich historical content, recorded as spoken audio. It included family papers; diaries of Frederick Tait, a conscientious objector; letters between long distance lovers; mundane postcards; school logbooks detailing observations of the changing behaviours of its pupils as the war progressed; newspaper classified ads; personnel files of German workers in Hawthorn Leslie shipyards; sports results; recipes; and a daily weather logbook recorded at St Mary's lighthouse, ably brought to life by BBC weather reader Jennifer Bartram who selected a representative sample of 98 daily weather reports from 1914-18. There were also a small number of crackly oral history recordings, offering first hand experience of Tynesiders who lived during that time.

1914						1915						1916								
DATE		WIND AND WEATHER				TEMP.		WIND AND WEATHER				TEMP.		WIND AND WEATHER				TEMP.		
DAY	MO.	HR.	DIR.	FORCE	REMARKS	MAX.	MIN.	DIR.	FORCE	REMARKS	MAX.	MIN.	DIR.	FORCE	REMARKS	MAX.	MIN.	DIR.	FORCE	REMARKS
1	Jan	1	SW	1	Clear	26.3	61	SE	1	Clear	26.5	22	SE	1	Hazy					
2	Jan	2	SW	2		26.7	62	SE	1	Shower Hazy	26.2	20.15	SE	2						
3	Jan	3	SW	2	Hazy	26.1	62	SE	2	Clear	26.2	20.15	SE	2	Clear					
4	Jan	4	SW	3		26.02	62	SE	3	Hazy	26.2	20.07	SE	3	Hazy					
5	Jan	5	SW	1		26.07	63	SE	1	Clear	26.2	20.0	SE	1	Clear					
6	Jan	6	SW	2		26.04	60	SE	2	Hazy	26.2	19.44	SE	2						
7	Jan	7	SW	2	Clear	26.12	60	SE	2	Clear Hazy	26.2	19.20	SE	2						
8	Jan	8	SW	3		26.06	61	SE	3	Clear	26.2	19.04	SE	3						
9	Jan	9	SW	1		26.12	59	SE	1		26.2	18.10	SE	1	Hazy					
10	Jan	10	SW	4		26.04	62	SE	4		26.2	18.24	SE	4	Clear					
11	Jan	11	SW	3		26.78	62		3		26.2	18.70	SE	3						
12	Jan	12	SW	4		26.72	62	SE	4	Shower Clear	26.2	19.72	SE	4						
13	Jan	13	SW	2		26.82	60	SE	2	Clear	26.2	18.27	SE	2						
14	Jan	14	SW	3	Hazy	26.73	61	SE	3	Hazy	26.17	20.60	SE	3	Hazy					
15	Jan	15	SW	4	Clear	26.68	60	SE	4	Clear Showery	26.2	19.72	SE	4	Clear					
16	Jan	16	SW	2		26.60	61	SE	2		26.2	19.00	SE	2						
17	Jan	17	SW	1	Rain Clear	26.78	62	SE	1		26.2	18.44	SE	1						
18	Jan	18	SW	3		26.17	61	SE	3		26.1	16.20	SE	3						
19	Jan	19	SW	3		26.04	61	SE	3	Showery	26.1	16.20	SE	3						
20	Jan	20	SW	4		26.71	62	SE	4		26.1	16.72	SE	4						
21	Jan	21	SW	4		26.81	62	SE	4		26.1	16.01	SE	4	Hazy					
22	Jan	22	SW	3	Hazy	26.53	61	SE	3		26.1	15.22	SE	3						
23	Jan	23	SW	3		26.47	62	SE	3	Hazy Showery Storm	26.1	15.20	SE	3						

Weather logbook 1914-18 (GU.2H/3481/2) © Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums

We hoped this range of material revealed the emotionally bare experiences of Tyneside lives lived in the shadow of WWI. But that it also captured a sense of the everyday and the normality that continued in spite of the turbulence and tragedy surrounding these people.

The research effort and audio production were conducted with the public. Over the year, 127 public participants collectively spent 142 hours researching, reusing and responding to 605 historical artefacts from the collections, and contributed over one thousand recordings (each typically around 30 seconds in length). Participants were invited to attend open workshops. We worked with schools groups and also set up a temporary recording booth in a local shopping centre.

In addition, we worked with a number of historical societies and community groups involved in WWI projects whose focus is a specific area of Tyneside. We walked the streets of Heaton, Tynemouth, Fenham and other locations with local experts and recorded accounts and imaginings of what life would have been like for the people who lived in the houses we passed.

It was rewarding to see some participants grow personally attached to the individuals whose experiences they were unearthing. A number of them were repeat researchers, committing hours of their time to digging through and recording at times indecipherable handwritten text.

The collections research was conducted by TWAM and Halsey was responsible for the technical build of the app and the accompanying website. But this was a true collaboration and every other stage of the project (collections criteria and selection, app concept, user experience design, audio recording) was open to discussion and a democratic process. We had asked Halsey to work with us because of his different

approach to creating user experiences with layers of heritage content. But he was just as interested in receiving our creative input as he was in our collections knowledge.

Halsey visited Tyneside twice. Once in February 2015 to familiarise himself with the region's geography, in particular the sights and sounds that were in proximity to a particular stretch of the river Tyne (flowing from a few miles west of Newcastle, out to the North Sea). And he returned to Tyneside to support with the launch of the app.

So what was *Tributaries* and how did work?

In Halsey's words:

Tributaries is all about a flow of voices and experiences. Users of the app are immersed in music and a stream of voices that flows like the water of the Tyne. The piece evolves over time and each contributor has their own unique effect on the whole, just as small streams form tributaries and then rivers.

I want people to wander around Tyneside and see familiar places in a new light. I hope to bring them to a different era and allow their imaginations to conjure how things might have been 100 years ago, and how their lives might have been.

A test version of *Tributaries* was made available to TWAM three months prior to launch. With invited public participants, the TWAM digital team tested the app across Tyneside, identifying technical and user experience problems. *Tributaries* was continually iterated and refined as a result of this feedback. The final version was launched for iOS and Android in August 2015 and is available to download for free from the App Store and Google Play Store.

It does two things. You can either LISTEN or you can SPEAK (record sounds).

All of the content in the app can be filtered into one of two categories, if you so wish: *Personal* (individual voices represented through diaries, letters, etc.) and *All of Us* (accounts of experiences shared by multiple people, to be found in news reports, weather reports, logbooks of munitions workers).

When you LISTEN, you tune into an audio score of voices and music. The score is geolocated so the sounds automatically change depending on where you are in Tyneside. Every listening experience is unique. There are over one thousand excerpts of voice in there currently, and this continues to grow as more sounds are contributed. Halsey created an algorithm that automatically curates the order in which the recordings are played back, and the order is different every time.

The listening experience is optimised for Tyneside so, while it can be downloaded and listened to outside the region, it will no longer be location sensitive.

If you choose to SPEAK (create audio recordings), there are six provocations inviting you to reflect on Tyneside today and the Tyneside that was lived in between 1914-18. For example:

Record a sound you think could have been heard here 100 years ago.

Give a weather report for today.

Reflect on what you think happened here 100 years ago.

Recordings are immediately uploaded and geolocated, available to listen to for anyone who is in proximity of your location.

This is an evolving artwork and a collage of voices and sounds. We hope this experience creates points of connection between lives and experiences spanning over 100 years, from 1914 to the present day; that it encourages people to reflect on places they thought of as familiar and a time they thought they knew or indeed know little about.

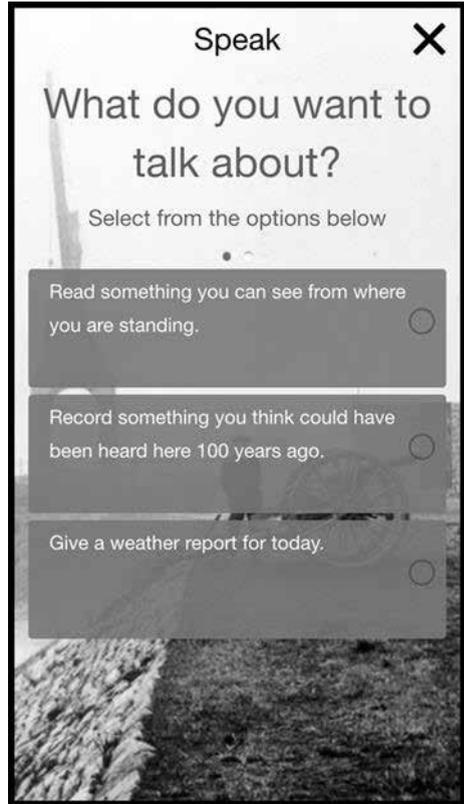
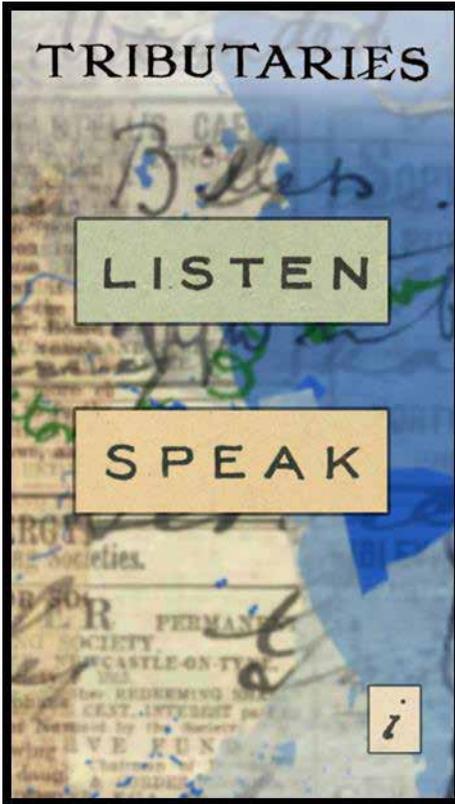
Halsey used period musical scores and songsheets from the TWAM collections as inspiration for what ultimately became an ambient musical piece. This discreetly accompanies the voices and sounds. The music is also location sensitive and changes depending on where you are in Tyneside.

We were fully aware through the project's development that its approach was experimental and would not be for everyone. However, we saw it as an exciting opportunity to reach new audiences with our collections and move beyond just engaging audiences with an existing interest in WWI. It is an artwork and while it encourages audiences to listen on location, it is not an audio trail. There is no map or objects to guide you. The voices that are heard are not full oral histories with a beginning, middle and end. These voices fade in and out intermittently, they appear and fleetingly disappear, accounts of lives and stories merging together.

The desired effect is to create a collective sense of the past that perpetually exists "in the ether". Digital heritage becomes a playful, sensory experience. Collections are not navigated using an existing knowledge of history or a map, but by a desire to *actively listen* and immerse oneself in another time or place. We hope that audiences are driven by a desire for rich content, navigating unique paths through an algorithmically-curated soundscape of human lives.

Why did we produce *Tributaries* as a native iOS/Android app? Firstly, it would have been difficult to replicate the level of functionality and ease of use on a web-based equivalent. The user experience on the web would have been weakened, given that the core functionality of the app (geo-location sensitivity curating historical audio assets) would have been lost.

There are clear reasons why an app can be an inappropriate platform for a digital project. They are expensive to develop and require users to own compatible devices, thereby reducing the potential audience base. An added barrier to engagement is that users are required to download the app rather than quickly browse the web content. However, we know audiences do download cultural heritage apps. TWAM's previous app project, first launched in 2012, proved there was a public appetite for geo-located alternative historical content. The app was downloaded over 16,000 times in 4 years and continues to be used on average over 25,000 times a month. Additionally, given Halsey's practice focused almost exclusively on apps as a digital canvas for his audio artworks, an app was deemed the most appropriate platform for creating *Tributaries'* personalised and immersive audio experience. The system was built using the open source, location-sensitive audio platform Roundware, making it more affordable.



Screenshots of the Tributaries app © Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums

Arguably, the success or failure of an app is entirely dependent on the quality of its content, the experience offered and its public profile. Three months after launch we are approaching 1000 downloads. This is less than the initial spike of downloads *Hidden Newcastle* experienced (2,500 in the same time frame), but the analytics data suggest depth of engagement has been higher in *Tributaries*. On average people have listened to it for 20 minutes (compared to a 4 minute average for *Hidden Newcastle*) and we've received close to 100 new publicly contributed recordings. We will be continuing to promote the app to audiences for the remainder of the *Wor Life* programme and our grant commitment to HLF is that we will maintain it for the next five years.

There have been very interesting responses to this more experimental presentation of 1914-18 lives. Comments were mainly received via TWAM social media channels and by email. One public comment we received made it plain that they'd prefer we made available the full histories for audiences to manually explore for themselves, rather than the participatory experience we'd created: 'I want HISTORY, I don't want art or music anything else'.

Some audiences accessing it outside Tyneside have enjoyed the experience but have expressed minor disappointment at not being able to access the location sensitive functionality of the content.

But on the whole, comments have been positive:-

What I really liked about it was my experience of letting it play while I was quietly sitting ... it drifting in and out of my consciousness and took on almost dreamlike feeling/experience.

I particularly liked the evocation of the past, with the snippets of things like playbills and schedules of events ... For me it was less of an educational input and much more of a reflective experience.

Sometimes eerie and haunting. Listening to the voices I forgot where I was and was taken somewhere else.

Tributaries analytics data will be monitored on an ongoing basis. All public contributions to the app will continue to be reviewed by Halsey Burgund and TWAM. Additionally, minor technical fixes to the system will be made when iOS and Android operating systems are updated.

Decoded 1914-18

Following an open call to creative producers across Newcastle University and their extended networks, we produced Decoded 1914-18. This was a two week long programme of digital and AV installations, events and workshops in public spaces and TWAM venues (Discovery Museum, Shipley Art Gallery, the Archives and its science and technology basement stores).

We supported the development of seven projects, including one with the internationally-renowned BBC sound recordist Chris Watson, who actually lives round the corner from one of our museums.

It was the responsibility of the producers to identify collections as a starting point for a piece of work that explores an aspect of Tyneside's WWI story.

There followed six months of research and development of each project, with staff from the *Wor Life*, digital and curatorial teams supporting the collections access. This collaborative process of collections discovery was a rewarding but time consuming process. Producers would generally enquire about types of collection we might have available using broad search queries often incompatible with object record data on catalogues ('What do you have that relates to civic life in Newcastle streets during 1914-18?' 'Do you any descriptions of the sounds of warfare or bombardment?'). Collections research therefore required a back and forth between TWAM interpreting thematic search requests and the producers using the returned research as a starting point for creative enquiry or a thread from which a new research query could be generated.

The produced work included:

- *Tuning In – Listening Back in Time*: an installation of time-distant voices and personal accounts of events on Tyneside during WWI. The work was presented using period audio technology in a darkened museum basement store that was conceptually framed as a radio receiver base.
- *Parade Ground*: a digital artwork recreating a large scale regimental photo that visualises every Tyneside soldier who enlisted. The piece attempts to bring home to the viewer both the terrifying scale of the region's contribution to the war and the very human and individual nature of this contribution. It was projected onto buildings and bus stations in Newcastle city centre and in Gateshead.

- *The Handmaidens of Death*: an audio visual experience which focuses on the role of women in Tyneside's First World War industrial economy and how these changing roles affected their lives and their perception of themselves. This was exhibited for a week in Tyne & Wear Archives.
- *Shiver the Flowers Like Fear*: a sound installation of spoken word and music framed around the wartime diaries of Gateshead author, playwright and social activist Ruth Dodds. It was presented online and at Shipley Art Gallery, which is close to the former home of Ruth Dodds.
- *War Workings*: a two day public making event situated in Discovery Museum that invited artists and passing visitors to digitally rebuild or respond to communications technologies invented or employed during WWI. This was later followed up with two sold out workshops inviting the public to digitally rebuild WWI technologies including hydrophones, morse code receivers, short wave radio transmitters and carbon granule microphones. The public also experimented with their built technologies "on location" at various WWI heritage sites over a weekend (including a former gun battery and radio tower in Tynemouth and the Fulwell acoustic mirror).

The impact of *Decoded 1914-18* in numbers:

- Over 7,000 people visited the installations, participated with the maker workshops and attended the live performances.
- Over 3,500 people experienced the work online.
- 50 volunteer hours were contributed.
- 234 objects were researched, reused and digitised.

We captured written feedback from the public via comments cards present in each installation space. There were only 83 responses in total over two weeks which is relatively small compared to the total number of visitors. Additionally, we received over 50 comments via social media and by email.

The digital installations in the museum clearly inspired different reactions from audiences. Some of the public wanted to see more objects or more explicitly object-linked stories on display. But there were a significant number of comments from new visitors who had specifically visited the museum to see this new interpretative work, with some comments cards asking the museum for 'more of this kind of thing, please'. Other comments stated that the experience of the installation was too abstract for their tastes, other comments cited this style of presentation as powerful and emotionally effecting ('beautiful', 'multi layered', 'touching').

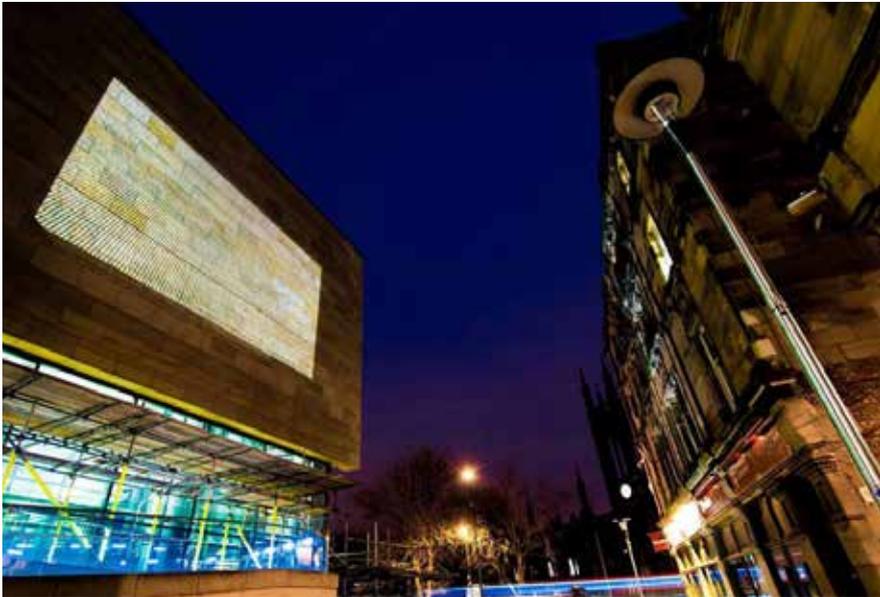
Interestingly, 62% of the 83 comment cards stated that the installation had made them feel differently about WWI.

Decoded volunteers also collected anecdotal information about the impact of the work displayed outside the museums. Some of the public who witnessed the projected visualisation of 30,000 soldiers on the sides of buildings were reported to have been taken aback with the scale of the region's war effort. Nexus Tyne & Wear (the transport company responsible for the Gateshead Interchange) reported clusters of travellers stopping to watch the installation and speaking to fellow passengers about the work and its significance!

The maker workshops inspired a diverse mix of visitors to collaborate and engage in dialogue about WWI communications technologies in our collections. This format of activity, situated in a museum gallery, served as a gathering point to many passing visitors who were intrigued to find out more. For example, a retired industry professional spoke at length with a young creative technologist who was hacking with Arduinos, and a grandparent stated that they 'loved playing with the morse code and showing to my granddaughter!'

The second round of maker workshops received a 100% positive response from all 30 people who attended, with most citing being able to get hands-on with the technology, to understand its internal workings and to consider contemporary applications of it (as opposed to seeing it on display in the museum) was what they enjoyed most. One quarter of these participants did not identify themselves as a regular museum visitor.

Decoded has in part inspired TWAM staff to explore further public workshops centred around rebuilding and reusing defunct mechanical objects. Earlier this year, TWAM worked with Newcastle University to reuse 100 year old wax cylinder sound recorders, and we invited the public to record and capture their own audio recordings.



Parade Ground projected onto the side of King's Gate, Newcastle upon Tyne © Guy Schofield

To conclude, working with this cohort of creative technologists and digital artists on the *Wor Life* programme has enabled TWAM to create unique public experiences that differently interpret and respond to the region's WWI past. Working in collaboration with TWAM, their vibrant mix of ideas and interdisciplinary practice has helped us apply a new lens on Tyneside and the lives and experiences of its residents through the years 1914-18.

Projects were driven by research questions that the museum might not have considered ('how can we reimagine the aural experience of battle if no audio

documentation exists?'). Impact was generated outside the museums' walls that would have been difficult for TWAM to create itself using physical objects and exhibition spaces (provoking audiences to reflect on Tyneside's physical landscape and the everyday experiences that connect lives from 1914 with the present day). Definitions of what constitutes public engagement with collections were experimented with (audiences engaging with WWI sound technologies by rebuilding them live and publicly testing them across related historical sites).

On a practical level, we were able to glean insights into how best to support this form of broad, creative enquiry for future activity. Working with these creative practitioners to source relevant collections was frequently a time-consuming process. Online record data was sometimes insufficiently rich to support their search enquiries. Practitioners would often trawl collections using highly specific or abstract thematic search requests (e.g. "grief"), that were not compatible with the available data. Finding the right collections required an ongoing and protracted dialogue with curatorial and archives staff, but the process was ultimately felt to be worth the effort.

Tributaries and Decoded have been R&D projects into how our museums can experiment with the potential of our collections and buildings to reach more diverse audiences. We will continue to encourage new ideas and practice from outside the organisation and understand how they can influence the practice of TWAM.

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Tributaries

www.tributaries.org.uk

Download Tributaries for Android

www.play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=org.roundware.tributaries

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www.itunes.apple.com/us/app/tributaries/id950762678

Decoded 1914-18

www.decoded1914.org.uk

www.halseyburgund.com/work/scapes/

www.hiddennewcastle.org

www.roundware.org

Review: *The Dress Detective: A Practical Guide to Object-Based Research in Fashion* by Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim

Helen McConnell Simpson, Curator of Social History for Bristol Culture, reviews a new book which offers a refined methodology for analysing items of dress in museum collections.

Taking their inspiration from the world's greatest consulting detective, dress historians and curators Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim propose a new approach for "reading" a dress artefact. This involves three stages: observation, reflection, and interpretation. A series of case studies of different types of garments from various eras demonstrate how to apply the approach in practice. The book also provides checklists to use as prompts when applying the approach. This is an attractive book with a wealth of colour images providing detailed views of the garments featured in the case studies, as well as reproductions of fashion plates, photographic portraits and paintings.

In the first section, Mida and Kim offer a brief history of object-based research in fashion, and highlight the key thinkers in this area. The authors then set out their own contribution, proposing a new practice-based framework which builds on established professional practice and material culture theory. The authors' proposed model is a development of that advanced by Jules Prown, refining the methodology to make it more easily applicable in practice and more specifically relevant to dress history artefacts.

The proposed approach consists of three phases: observation, capturing information from the artefact; reflection, considering experiential and contextual material; and interpretation, linking one's observations and reflections to fashion theory. In detailed chapters on each phase, the authors set out their methodology and include prompt questions for use during that phase of the investigation. These are gathered together into checklists which are included as appendices. In the observation phases, Mida and Kim advocate adopting a 'slow approach to seeing': slowing down and working methodically, in order to avoid missing crucial details. During the reflection phase, personal reactions to the artefact are recorded, alongside information gleaned from a breadth of contextual material, including provenance records, comparable garments and contemporary images. In the final stage, the researcher reaches conclusions by interpreting clues offered by the garment and contextual material, drawing on their own experience and knowledge of fashion theory.

Seven case studies follow, in which the approach is applied to a variety of garments from different time periods. Detailed images of the garments are accompanied by the authors' observations, research and conclusions, allowing the reader to follow the process. In a case study of a woollen pelisse from about 1820, minute examination of the construction, measurements, signs of wear and decoration of the garment lead to a deduction that the wearer was tall, slender, left-handed, relatively wealthy and possibly newly married. Surely even Sherlock Holmes would be impressed!

Although the methodology is more widely applicable, the focus of this book is western dress from 1800 to the present day, primarily womenswear, which will cover the bulk of dress collections in most museums. The case studies focus on high end garments; three of the seven feature couture items. However, the methodology could be equally well applied to garments worn by people of lower social standing, though precise contextual information may be harder to find.

Mida and Kim's methodology is designed to be used by students and researchers with limited time to examine items during study appointments at a museum. As such, the approach is formulated so as to be easy to use and require a relatively short amount of contact time with the garment, in which to undertake the observation phase. Further time is required for the subsequent phases of the model, however, so this should not be considered as a method for staff or volunteers to use in quickly gathering information about a number of items or an entire collection. This is a methodology for in-depth study of a single item.

Within this context, however, this book will prompt less experienced researchers to ask the right questions, thus gaining a greater understanding of key items in a collection. This will be particularly useful in the many organisations which do not have access to a specialist dress curator. The extensive checklists of what to look for and consider when analysing an artefact, included as appendices, are key to this. A thorough knowledge of fashion history, or access to good reference books, will still be necessary to researchers, however, as the book offers a methodology for collecting data rather than detailed background information against which to analyse it. However, the authors do give an overview of the history of each significant feature (such as shop labels), and direct researchers towards a few relevant resources for further study.

The Dress Detective is published by Bloomsbury.

Review of First World War Galleries: Imperial War Museum, London

Stuart Frost, Head of Interpretation & Volunteers at the British Museum, finds engaging displays which offer rich interpretation at the redeveloped First World War galleries at Imperial War Museum, London.



Soldier in the desert © Stuart Frost

The Imperial War Museum's First World War galleries opened in July 2014 to almost universal acclaim, attracting such large numbers of visitors that at peak times ticketing needed to be implemented. On my most recent visit, the volume of visitors appeared have settled into a more typical pattern; the overall impact of the displays remained as high as when I saw them for the first time.

The First World War galleries are in many ways more like a special exhibition than typical permanent displays with multiple entry points and fluid visitor paths. There is a linear sequence of around fourteen sections and a chronological narrative; there is one entry point, and one exit. Once a visitor enters they have to follow the sequence, and the overall experience is more tightly choreographed than most free admission displays. It is an approach with obvious advantages given the primary focus on the

events of four years.

The exhibition begins with an audio-visual presentation, *The People of Britain 1900-1914*, and several ship models including HMS Hercules, a Dreadnought emblematic of the pre-war rivalry between Britain and Germany. Original film footage is overlaid with short statements and statistics, reminding the viewer, for example, that women weren't allowed to vote, that the average life expectancy in the East End of London was 30 and that the capital was home to over 300,000 horses. Further context is given in *Hope and Glory*, a section that highlights Britain's status as a major world power before the outbreak of war. An introduction to the gallery is provided in British Sign Language, and there is also a raised plan with Braille captions.

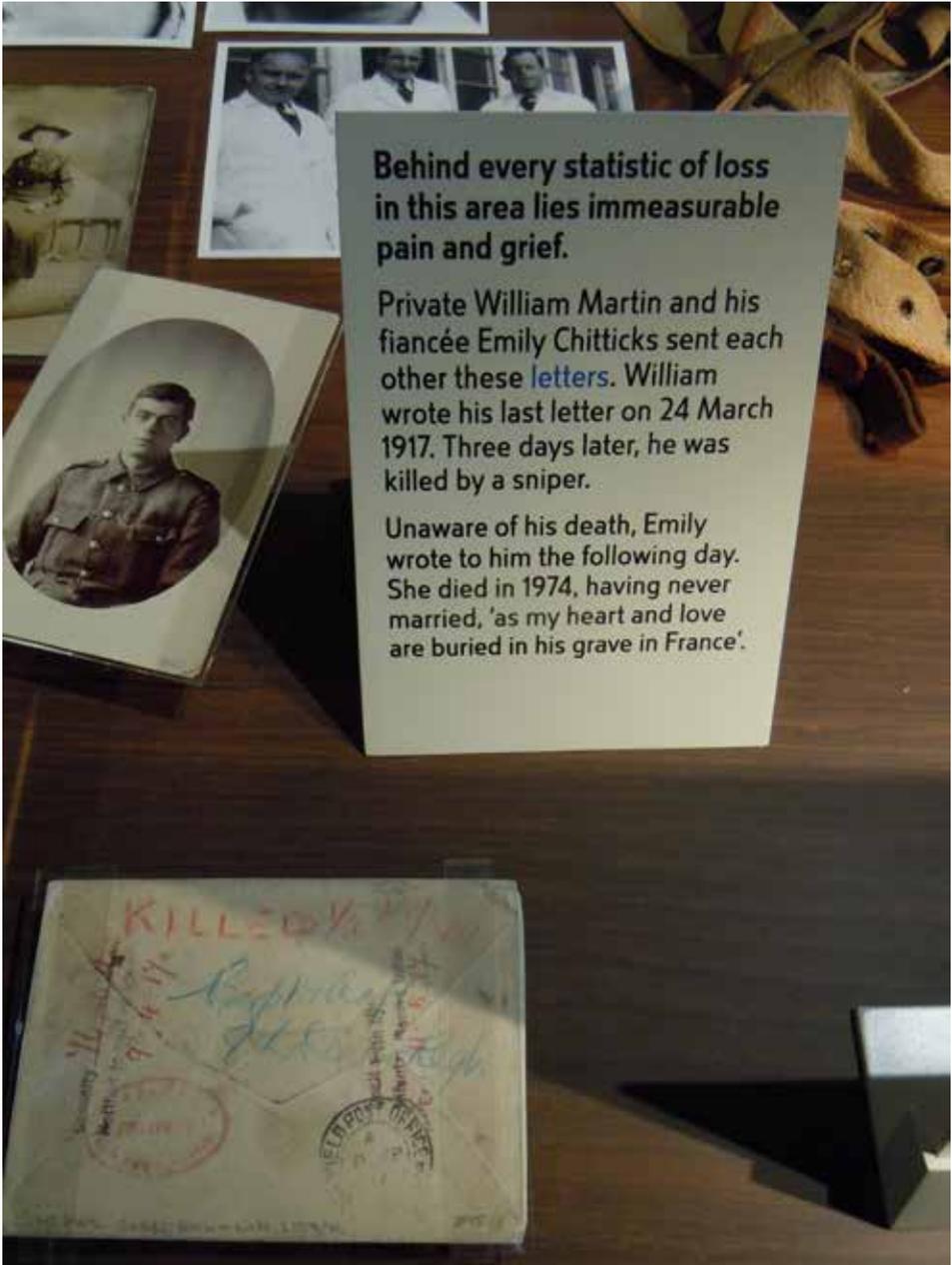
The causes of the Great War – a conflict that few expected at the time – are dealt with concisely, largely through an audio-visual presentation. The main focus in these displays is on the events of the war itself, after initial waves of patriotic optimism gave way to shock and stalemate. The experiences of those who saw active service and those who contributed on the Home Front are integrated together, providing a holistic view of the impact of the conflict. The expansion of fighting to Africa, Asia and the Middle East is also addressed.

There is an impressive range of interpretation throughout: ambient audio, a film theatre, digital interactives, replica clothing for visitors to try on, and family labels. The section on recruitment, *Your Country Needs You*, allows visitors to measure themselves to see whether or not they would meet the requirements to enlist in the British army. The ruler for measuring height contains texts along its surface to illustrate how standards were relaxed as the war progressed, and the need for new recruits became more pressing. The attention to detail is impressive and the influence of both the access and youth panels that supported the development of the galleries is evident throughout.

There is also a good balance between big history and individual personal experience. It is arguably the personal moments that provide the most potent and memorable insights, helping 21st century visitors relate to events that are increasingly remote, and what are almost incomprehensibly vast numbers. Statistics are cited regularly, the total dead and wounded for example, but it is the experiences of individuals that bring home something of the reality of what this actually meant. The use of quotes is particularly effective at giving perspectives of the time, rather than those of years or decades later. Some of these voices powerfully undercut any romantic illusions that visitors might have:

Whatever war journalists may say, or poets either, blood and entrails and spilled brains are obscene. War is about the most unclean thing on earth.

Captain Theodore Wilson



Letters and a quotation © Stuart Frost

The Trench Experience of the old galleries is gone and will undoubtedly be missed by many regular visitors. Its replacement is less literal and more subdued; this more subtle approach does seem more appropriate even if the impact is less pronounced. The use of ambient audio is especially effective, almost subliminally creating atmosphere that helpfully underscores the physical display. There are life size images of real soldiers in one end of the trench, and projected silhouettes of soldiers on its side. A Mark V tank looms above visitors in the trench, and a Sopwith

Camel aeroplane suspended from the ceiling adds further drama and scale. These two vehicles are impressive, and they signal the beginning of important developments in 20th century warfare. However, perhaps the interpretation could give the visitor some more help in actively looking; the tank and plane function primarily as extremely impressive set dressing, and both need a little more space and time.



Trenches display © Stuart Frost

The longer term impacts of the war – the societal changes that the Great War set in motion, and the legacy of the Versailles peace conference – are addressed concisely.

The galleries end as they begin with an audio-visual presentation, here focussing on post-war Europe. This reminds visitors as they leave the galleries that they know what those who were alive in late 1918 could not; tragically, the hard won peace would not last, and within twenty years the horrors of modern warfare would be experienced by vast numbers of people around the globe.

The Imperial War Museum's great strength is – of course – that it offers a unique history of the Great War through its collection. Its artefacts often provide an immediate and sometimes visceral connection to the events and experiences that defined this period. One of the challenges of a linear narrative-driven approach for collection rich permanent galleries is maintaining a balance between the artefacts as storytellers and the overarching story for the galleries as a whole. The balance is well struck here, but occasionally the larger interpretive framework dominates at the expense of individual objects.

A great deal of effort has gone into designing the vehicles for delivering the label and panel texts, but sometimes smaller objects or documents feel slightly overwhelmed by the design, the amount of interpretation or the size and colour of the panel or label. The intermingling of real documents and graphic reproductions is understandable for conservation reasons, but occasionally it blurs the distinction between what is authentic and what is a facsimile, and reduces the impact of some of the original documents.

The scale of the galleries means that the museum recommends that visitors devote around 90 minutes to them. Interest in the First World War is – of course - particularly heightened at the moment, and many visitors to the Imperial War Museum will undoubtedly make the First World War galleries the main focus of their visit. However, for visitors who are keen to see as much of the Imperial War Museum as possible during their visit, it would be difficult to view these displays quickly, or to identify the most significant objects or stories within with limited time. There is certainly plenty here to reward and sustain repeat visiting.

The inherent difficulties of presenting such a vast and complex historical narrative in a museum makes it impossible to please everyone, and inevitably aspects of the current presentation will provoke conflicting responses and different opinions. However, given the size of the challenge and the scale of the achievement, the project team should be hugely proud of the galleries. They have created a new object-rich history of the First World War that works for today's audiences, one that feels relevant and balanced. The project team's complete commitment to maintaining a visitor-focussed approach is evident throughout in a myriad of details; they have delivered an impressive suite of new displays that set intimidatingly high benchmarks for other museums to aspire to.

Find out more

Cornish, P. (2014). *The First World War Galleries* London: Imperial War Museum

Online

Imperial War Museum

www.iwm.org.uk/exhibitions/iwm-london/first-world-war-galleries