



‘CAPTURING COMMEMORATION: REFLECTIONS ON THE CENTENARY OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR’

The National Archives, 12th October 2018
Symposium Report



University of Essex

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was produced in October 2019 with funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. It may be freely distributed and copied in PDF format, provided due credit is given.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Project Website: <http://reflections1418.exeter.ac.uk/>.

For a collation of Tweets from the symposium, please access:
<https://wakelet.com/wake/2f8c9dc3-f94e-461c-a624-dc0800d1d10a>.

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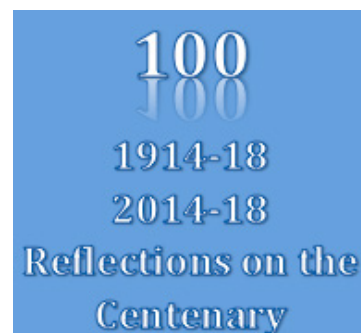
James was employed at the University of Essex as the project's Research Fellow
between May 2017 and January 2019.

'REFLECTIONS ON THE CENTENARY OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR' OVERVIEW

Developed by academics from the Universities of Essex, Exeter, Kent and Glasgow, this three-year research project has two major aims:

- To reflect upon the co-production of knowledge and legacies associated with the First World War centenary (in terms of skills, training and community building) across the UK, by working with the five AHRC-funded public Engagement Centres, the Heritage Lottery Fund, academics and project representatives.
- To record and consider the ways that the centenary commemorations – the multiple events, representations and projects around the First World War – have shaped attitudes to and feelings about the conflict more broadly.

A final project report will be published at the end of 2020.



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In October 2018, the AHRC-funded research project **‘Reflections on the Centenary of the First World War: Learning and Legacies for the Future’** convened a one-day symposium at the National Archives (London). The event set out to initiate a conversation amongst practitioners and representatives from organisations in the process of conducting evaluations of First World War centenary commemorative activity across the UK.

This report overviews the event’s four interconnected sessions, as well as outlining some main findings and recommendations for future evaluation practice. Observations on methods, issues and outcomes were collectively put forward by workshop participants, based on their first-hand experiences. Content should therefore be of interest to academics, heritage practitioners, and community group stakeholders.

Our thanks to all presenters and those who contributed towards proceedings, as well as to Jessamy Carlson and the National Archives for hosting the event.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - OBSERVATIONS

- Evaluation is primarily about mapping project outcomes against funding criteria, reflection is more about legacy – but they can, and ideally should, be integrated.
- Embed cross-sector collaboration from the outset, via implementing techniques to record the project as it progresses. Integrating skilled expertise, such as a professional evaluator, can capture, communicate and capitalise upon lessons learned.
- Funding organisations need to think through and act on the distinctions between monitoring, evaluation, and reflective learning. Effort typically goes into designing evaluation, but it is not always evident who (apart from the funding body) might utilise the final product, and what they might want to get from it.
- Those evaluating need to be conscious of the selective bias in only focusing upon successful project elements, and instead consider ways of hearing from those who chose not to engage or could not commit to doing so, as a technique for developing future audiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY/SKILLS/INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

- A significant number of evaluation reports are not sufficiently distributed or utilised as information sources. Developing and sharing techniques to construct meaningful questions for better future practice across sectors should be a priority.
- Tapping into the existing expertise of organisations with knowledge of delivering evaluation would benefit future practice.
- Rather than agonising over evaluation 'hows', there is a necessity to consider who we are evaluating for – be that ourselves, our institutions, or our funders. Because the drivers behind evaluation processes differ across the heritage sector, universities, public bodies and government, there should be more common ground in communicating something practical and meaningful across sectors.
- Social media should be harnessed to demonstrate impact, as an evaluative resource in itself (e.g. documenting tweets as a record of activities). More sophisticated, bolder use of Twitter and other platforms provides the means for creating conversations and spreading knowledge.
- The First World War centenary fostered uncharted enthusiasm for ground-up contributions, through pioneering partnership schemes and in establishing new links between heritage organisations. Pursued opportunities deepened existing public perceptions, and in some cases, helped promote a more inclusive, accepting society.
- Local or regional co-produced histories can profoundly challenge mainstream representations, diversify perspectives, and shed light upon less well-known narratives.
- Regular auditing of Higher Education research (the 'Research Excellence Framework') assesses research impact using a model that emphasises the effect of academic research on the wider community, thus strengthening an unequal power structure not recognised by many academics who work collaboratively with non-academic partners. One suggestion is replacing this model with one that redefines impact as a two-way process, in which ideas and research are developed in harmony.
- Centenary creativities demonstrate that nurturing relationships with community groups takes significant time and resource investment. Where feasible, approaches such as multi-user tool-kits and local stakeholder workshops can be platforms for fruitful collaboration.
- Commemoration is fundamentally about identity, in creating connections at a personal or emotional level, which often act as an impetus for successful public engagement. But measuring these experiences remains tricky to evaluate effectively – further practice-based research is needed in this area.

‘CAPTURING COMMEMORATION’

Symposium Brief & Objectives

The centenary of the First World War (2014-2018) was a major national and international event, with most participant nations marking official acts of commemoration.

Activities prompted high levels of participation and engagement across the UK, which in turn helped to generate strong public resonance. Commemorative and educational activities were led by local, regional and national groups, supported by a variety of different funding bodies, including the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the Arts Council, and the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF, now known as National Lottery Heritage Fund).¹

Most of these organisations were tasked with evaluating their respective projects; collecting feedback, responses and thoughts from both project participants and the general public. Evaluation is key for publicly-funded organisations, with transparency, accountability and evidencing outputs, outcomes and impact all acting as essential criteria.



Education and social media have both been major themes of commemorative initiatives. Photograph courtesy of British Future.

BRITAIN AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR CENTENARY

‘Britain marked the centenary of the First World War in numerous ways, and at state, social, communal, familial and individual levels. The centenary did act to widen public knowledge of the war, with projects commemorating the contribution of non-European troops, the arrival in Britain of Belgian refugees, and the impact of the war on the home front, all working to extend a sense of the war’s impact outside of the trenches of the Western Front that have for so long, been at the heart of British cultural memory of the war...For many, participation was an active process, with many thousands viewing the major public arts events and thousands more taking part in local heritage and community history projects.’

Lucy Noakes (2019).

1. For additional context and analysis, consult Noakes (2019); Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee (2019); Malan et al (2019).

To date, there had been no collaborative or shared consideration of the techniques, practices and methods by which different evaluations have been conducted, or the extent to which people felt they had benefitted from activities associated with the centenary. Nor had there been consideration of how collective results might be utilised in a mutually supportive manner, so as to produce the best possible overview of centenary activity and its impact in the UK during this period.

Via organisation-led discussions, this 'Capturing Commemoration' workshop sought to share the expertise of practitioners and academics as a means of generating guidance and a set of initial recommendations on evaluation, in addition to considering the meanings and legacies of the centenary. It thus provided a forum for organisations to share experience, findings and practice in relation to the following questions:

- How have people and communities benefitted from involvement in themed projects?
- Are there legacies from the First World War centenary?
- How has the centenary impacted upon public understanding on war?

PANEL PRESENTATIONS

Four interlinked panels were led by presentations from invited organisations, themed around evaluative processes:

- 1) 'Evaluation Objectives' – National Heritage Lottery Fund
- 2) 'Target Audience' – British Future
- 3) 'Evaluation Methods' – First World War Engagement Centres
- 4) 'Sharing Results' – Northern Ireland Community Relations Council

Summary overviews of individual presentations follow within the next section of this report.

ORGANISATIONS REPRESENTED:

- 14-18 NOW
- Arts and Humanities Research Council
- British Future
- 'Centre for Hidden Histories', University of Nottingham
- Department of Culture, Media & Sport
- 'Everyday Lives in War', University of Hertfordshire
- 'Gateways to the First World War', University of Kent
- National Heritage Lottery Fund
- Historic England
- Historic Royal Palaces
- Imperial War Museums First World War Centenary Partnerships Programme
- 'Living Legacies 1914-18', Queens University Belfast
- Morris Hargreaves McIntyre
- Northern Ireland Community Relations Council
- The National Archives
- University of Cardiff
- University of Essex
- University of Exeter
- University of Glasgow
- University of Kent
- University of Newcastle
- 'Voices of War and Peace', University of Birmingham

PANEL SUMMARY: ‘EVALUATION OBJECTIVES’ - THE NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND²

All NLHF Grant programmes are evaluated via in-house frameworks. Projects also participate in structured self-evaluation as a means of both proving and improving their work. Emphasis is placed upon outlining clear aims at the outset, to enable robust evaluation that evidences demonstrable success against individual aims and identifies areas for improvement. In 2012, an extensive grant-data evaluation programme was commissioned in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University, with a final published report due in 2020.³

The NLHF & the First World War Centenary


The First World War centenary provided an unprecedented opportunity to encourage a broader range of perspectives and enhance public understanding of the conflict, especially its impact on a range of communities. The NLHF prioritised the role of young people within heritage activities and on establishing a legacy of community heritage.

From April 2010 to October 2018, £96.5 million was awarded, with the money spread across 2155 projects, impacting 9.4 million participants (excluding ‘14-18 Now’ and Imperial War Museums). Local community history projects were supported by the ‘First World War: Then and Now’ scheme. Grants were additionally made to heritage organisations, public bodies, charities, community development trusts, disability and health organisations and groups representing diverse cultural communities.

Projects addressed a wide range of topics related to the conflict, ranging from dissent and objection to the role of women and children on the Home Front. Some initiatives sought to improve the condition of tangible heritage (such as war memorials and preserving wartime buildings), whilst others utilised performances, exhibitions, videos, websites and publications as a form of public engagement. Improved understanding of the First World War was a learning outcome for 99% of funded projects.

Challenges manifested in the forms of involving educational institutions, the digital legacy, and working with twelve development teams across the breadth of the UK. Project volunteers did not always represent the demographics of the population (with school children and retirees overly represented), whilst some projects had insufficient capacity to engage beyond those already involved. Nevertheless, the vast majority delivered shared learning and community heritage as part of a national moment, with later evaluation recording the power of the organisation’s ‘bottom up’ approach, ‘where people define, explore and share their heritage in their own way’.

Project Outcomes		
Heritage	People	Communities
Better managed	Developed skills	Reduced environmental impacts
Better condition	Learnt about heritage	More and wider range of people
Better interpreted and explained	Changed attitudes and/or behaviour	Better place to live or visit
Better identified and recorded	Enjoyable experience	Local economy boosted
	Volunteered time	Organisations more resilient



Courtesy of NLHF.

2. Presentation delivered by Karen Brookfield (formerly NLHF Deputy Director [Strategy], now independent consultant) and Araba Webber (formerly Policy Advisor, now NLHF Head of Strategy).
3. For more information, see Brookfield (2018); ‘www.heritagefund.org.uk/publications/first-world-war-centenary-evaluation’.

PANEL SUMMARY: 'TARGET AUDIENCE' – BRITISH FUTURE⁴

British Future undertook research into public expectations of the First World War centenary in Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow and High Wycombe, alongside national attitudes research.⁵ Their findings revealed the paradox of a powerful sense of the foundational importance of 'the world wars' in shaping our society, identity and world, combined with a shaky grasp of First World War information, and a widespread inability across demographics to separate the first global conflict from the second.

Baseline evidence collated in 2012-13 acted as a foundation for contextualising and tracking public attitudes in subsequent years of the commemorations. YouGov tested public knowledge and attitudes to the centenary in December 2014 once the centenary was underway, after the 2016 centenary of the Somme and then following the 2018 Armistice commemorations. The pre-centenary baseline made it easier to measure perceptions of change, rather than being subjective and anecdotal. Representative attitudes research further revealed insight into who was likely to engage and why, demonstrating that whilst widespread approval of the centenary existed, there was a section of the public who paid little attention to it.

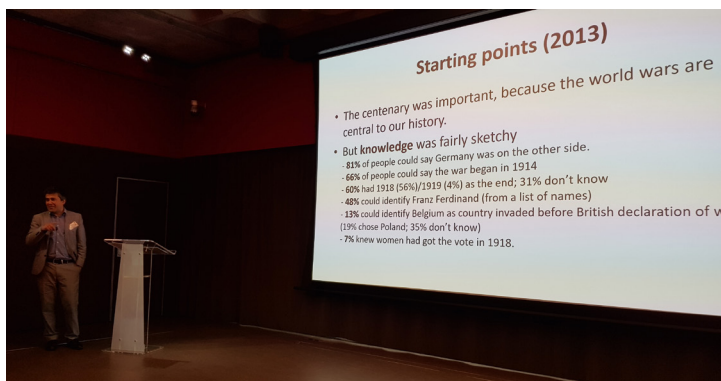
British Future's research also informed public discussion in the context of media and political claims about the centenary. Some voices worried about a jingoistic or divisive tone, whilst others wanted emphasis placed on Britain having won the war, not just the pity of lives lost. What these surveys revealed was a limited appetite for polarised controversies which, strikingly, shrank further by 2016 and 2018 - reflecting both a broad approval of the tone of the centenary alongside a disinclination to start a 'culture war' over remembrance. Even by 2016, appetite for more commemorative content was growing, shown by 51% of those surveyed supporting the view 'I hope to learn more during the rest of the centenary'. Broadly speaking, survey respondents reacted positively to engage with a variety of topics, alongside the potential messages of centenary meaning, such as peace, Europe, reconciliation, learning, sacrifice and poetry.

Asked to name the year that the war began, there were significant differences by gender, ethnicity and age: 60% of women could identify 1914, compared to 72% of men; 47% of non-white respondents, compared to 67% of white respondents; and 79% of those aged over 60 but just 46% of those aged under-24.

British Future Survey, August 2013.

4. Delivered by Sunder Katwala, Director of British Future, an independent, non-partisan think-tank and charity which works on themes of identity and integration. British Future reports on the First World War centenary can be accessed via www.britishfuture.org.

5. Published as 'Do Mention the War: Will 1914 matter in 2014?' Report in August 2013.



Sunder Katwala (British Future) presenting at 'Capturing Commemoration'.

Courtesy of 'Reflections on the Centenary' Project Team.

KNOWLEDGE SHIFTS OVER THE CENTENARY

The conflict's centenary represented an important opportunity for practitioners and educators, in seeking to broaden understanding beyond the mud and trenches of the Western Front. As British Future's survey findings outlined, there was an interlinked need to establish basic foundations for knowledge, onto broadening awareness and deepening understanding, and then identifying areas for future work. As a Case Study, British Future chose to focus on the lack of public knowledge around the fact that Muslim soldiers were part of the Indian army during the conflict. They worked in partnership with civic Muslim NGOs – including the Islamic Society of Britain and New Horizons in British Islam – as a way of raising awareness amongst Muslim communities and broader society. A multi-faith coalition project with the British Legion in November 2018, titled #RememberTogether, sought to broaden remembrance engagement via broadcasting its message amongst traditional audiences, nationally and locally, across Britain.

Most people in 2018 felt that the centenary had brought people together across the nation. That was not its only impact, however: people felt that they and their children had learned more about their history and wanted to go on and find out more.

British Future

By the centenary's close, the largest knowledge shift from the British Future surveys was that soldiers from across the Commonwealth were part of the First World War. By 2018, 71% of the public knew that Indian soldiers had fought for the British Empire during the conflict, compared to 44% prior to the centenary, a rise of 27% (with awareness of Indian soldiers being slightly broader than those from Australia and Canada). Knowledge of Kenyan soldiers rose to 38% (+16%) from a much lower base of 22%, suggesting that the African contribution still remains a less prominent theme amongst the overall Commonwealth contribution to the war. Knowledge additionally rose of the participation of soldiers from minority faiths; after the centenary, knowledge of Sikh soldiers fighting in the conflict was 48% (+14% across the centenary), of Hindu soldiers 46% (+12), of Jewish soldiers 41% (+5) and of Muslim soldiers 38%, rising 16% from a significantly lower 2014 base of 22% awareness. Nevertheless, the overall findings indicated a desired next stage of relaying stories around diverse participation within the First World War beyond minority areas, as a way of increasing awareness and knowledge within majority white areas.

ETHNIC MINORITIES: REMEMBRANCE IS INCLUSIVE



British Future Survey, 8-15th May 2015 (expressed as %). Sample of 2000 ethnic minorities. © British Future.

PANEL SUMMARY: 'EVALUATION METHODS' – AHRC FIRST WORLD WAR ENGAGEMENT CENTRES⁶

The interlinked objectives of the Engagement Centres involved considering the processes of commemoration, cross cultural and contested perspectives on the past, and transmission of and changes in cultural memory, via interaction with (marginalised) communities.

Implementing an evaluation strategy required planning from the outset of a project – usually formative evaluation during, followed by summative evaluation at its conclusion. Each Centre sought to embed evaluation via methods that enabled comparison with other projects and for tweaks to be made where there was opportunity to explore or develop issues further. All made use of conventional modes, such as surveys, feedback forms and observation. Websites and related resources provided evidence of activities, whilst an impact database and social media gave individual projects a presence, through the showcasing of photos, audio-visual material and testimonials. Focus groups, (online and paper) questionnaires and participation surveys provided useful data regarding attendance, beyond acting as a way of mapping out what people took from participating in events or initiatives. Targeted interviews were also conducted with high level stake-holders, with film serving as another evaluation resource for some Centres. Feedback from communities was fed into the designing of digital platforms (namely individual Centre websites) for promoting projects online, whereas Twitter functioned as an informal method of capturing immediate feedback from people at events as they were ongoing (although changes had to be made to ensure compliance with new data protection legislation).

The 'Gateways' Centre drew on academic literature from heritage and tourism studies in order to map out evaluation methods. For the 'Living Legacies' Centre, for example, developing evaluative methods meant gathering information to measure and assess the Centre's reach and significance, particularly across communities in Northern Ireland, including national stakeholders, such as the HLF and local museums. Some Centres deployed 'Shared Experience' and 'Reflection' workshop events to bring together academic and diverse community partners, usually in a location away from university campuses (the need for interactions to take place outside of formal learning environments having been identified by Facer and Enright [2016] in their work on the 'co-production of knowledge').

Evaluating Co-Production & Academic Impact

All of the Centres utilised a 'co-produced' approach, as a way of producing locally and regionally-produced histories to challenge mainstream representations of the conflict. Making less well-known histories visible to a wider audience drew upon the 'sedimented histories' approach outlined by Sarah Lloyd and Julie Moore (2015). Involving grassroots participants allowed the Centre to contribute towards diversifying histories and develop respective skill sets for both community and academic partners. The 'Centre for Hidden Histories' cited the importance of third sector and community worker gatekeepers, alongside the fact that those volunteers who were retired professionals brought specific skills and expertise to research proceedings.

Credited strategies for successful co-production included the importance of establishing good relations with community partners. Micro-studies designed by the 'Everyday Lives in War'

6. Delivered by representatives from four of the five Centres, based respectively at the University of Nottingham, Queens University Belfast, the University of Kent, and the University of Hertfordshire.

Engagement Centre evidenced the importance of dissolving the distinction of hierarchies between the Higher Education Institution and the community-based project, whereby the academic became integrated as a member of the project group, rather than serving as an external advisor or knowledge gatekeeper. The support of a Centre administrator (and/or a dedicated community historian), who could act as a point of liaison between academic and community sectors, represented a useful approach for nurturing these relationships. It was similarly clear that evaluation had to be clearly explained to community partners; communicating clearly that support from Higher Education institutions and funding bodies require that academic involvement in, and support for community-based projects be evaluated (via questions about new knowledge, research skills learned and working with academic partners). Conscious emphasis was duly placed on ensuring that participants did not feel intimidated by evaluation. Instead, evaluation enabled the Centres to recognise where their sustained backing worked effectively; for example, teachers contributing to the pre and post-project evaluation of a First World War project, run in 2017 by the 'Gateways' Centre, indicated an increase in grades for those students who participated.

By the same token, it was felt that evaluation risked over-representation of similar groups, and that asking the same individuals who had attended multiple events could lead to skewed or biased results (and evaluation fatigue). Because the Centres had been set up to simultaneously support First World War projects and challenge familiar narratives, recording support and positive outcomes proved easier to document than whether, or the extent to which, people changed their minds on a particular subject. Furthermore, other forms of engagement, such as 'light touch' one-off conversations or email exchanges, did not lend themselves to evaluation collation purposes.

Centre representatives acknowledged that collecting evaluation material and responses was vitally important for REF Impact case studies that would evidence academic outreach. Implementing AHRC-prioritised aims and objectives proved challenging, on the basis that funded research projects were tasked with presenting collected information as outputs, rather than processes. The use of 'Researchfish' impact reporting likewise led to a slightly retrospective approach, because evaluation was not fundamentally built into all Centre activities from the outset. Not all effects of co-production could be categorised within impact models, and although effective, only some Centres adopted reflective models from 2016.



First World War AHRC Engagement Centre Representatives at 'Capturing Commemoration'.

Courtesy of 'Reflections on the Centenary' Project Team.

PANEL SUMMARY: 'SHARING RESULTS' – COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL NORTHERN IRELAND⁷

The 'Decade of Commemoration' project ran in partnership between the Community Relations Council (CRC) and NLHF in Northern Ireland. Planning for forthcoming centenary activities began in 2010-11, anticipating the significant events within the 'long decade' of 1912-1923, which were to shape the sense of history and identity between Britain and Ireland. With ongoing challenges in dealing with Northern Ireland's past, commemorative activities can be divisive. Organisations were understandably fearful of the problematic nature of commemoration.

In their own words, NLHF and CRC 'never saw it as their role to dictate how commemoration would happen at a community level, [we] merely sought to ensure that there would be thoughtful examples of commemoration that examined the complexity and multi-faceted nature of our history in the context of the challenges of a post-conflict society'. A roundtable group of public bodies - including museums, libraries, universities and local councils - all collated a set of 'Decade Roundtable' principles for future commemoration:

- 1) Start from the historical facts;
- 2) Recognise the implications and consequences of what happened;
- 3) Understand that different perceptions and interpretations exist;
- 4) Show how events and activities can deepen understanding of the period.

Adopted by the Northern Ireland Executive and local councils, these guiding mantra underlined ethical thinking for an inclusive society, whilst also underpinning the development of resources and museum exhibitions – at sites such as the Public Record Office in Belfast – that would inform public commemorative activity.

Over the centenary period, NLHF and CRC supported local and community initiatives, via accessible informational materials, conferences and events. A 'Remembering in Public Space' initiative sought to situate discoverable information within public spaces, thereby bringing commemoration into accessible places.

7. Delivered by Jacqueline Irwin (CRC) and Paul Mullan (NLHF). For a more detailed overview, consult Mullan (2018).



Paul Mullan (NLHF) presenting at 'Capturing Commemoration'.

Courtesy of 'Reflections on the Centenary' Project Team.

Set against the raw potency of recent memory, iterative projects actively championed the concept of bringing back 'a complexity to the story of the First World War that had been lost through the polarisation of Northern Ireland society'. Prioritising evidence-based, cross-community dialogue provided the means to uncover hidden narratives, and challenge some existing debates or myths, thereby enriching understanding. Engagement with the arts proved particularly successful in moving from single narrative to pluralist responses; drama, literature and visual responses all brought a multitude of groups into discussions, and provided creative ways to interact with the past via human stories. Drama especially offered a mediated space that permitted critical engagement, alongside interaction with both the issues and the evidence. For many local practitioners, the history of the First World War could be put to contemporary use for good, such as improving understanding between Unionists and Nationalists (alongside knowledge around the contribution of minorities).

Given the unpredictability of what might have emerged from these efforts, reflective learning was integrated upon the establishment of the Roundtable. Though funders traditionally fear 'discomfort', many developed project resources sat at the theory and practice interface, in commemorating polarising events.⁸ Local histories were able to offer new perspectives, though it was also recognised that certain groups were either yet to engage or had chosen not to. Project success thus came to be defined in terms of initial fears about the opening of old wounds during the commemorative period. Though contemporary political sensitivities endure, and the destabilising impact of Brexit threatens a return to perpetual polarising commemoration, it has to be hoped that these projects now act as a template for handling more difficult future anniversaries in Northern Ireland (including the centenary of Partition and fiftieth anniversaries around the 'Troubles').

8. <https://www.community-relations.org.uk/decade-centenaries>.

PRINCIPAL REFLECTIONS

This section outlines thinking around five identified key themes, building on ideas from across the Case Study presentations and suggestions advocated by attending practitioners.

Audience & Evaluation Capacity

The First World War centenary commemorations witnessed unprecedented participation and interest at the community level. The context of the centenary commemorations witnessed a dual emphasis on evaluation, chiefly as a process for improving forthcoming work, before attention latterly turned onto determining longer-term legacies stemming from respective initiatives.

By early 2018, 'survey fatigue' began being cited as an inherent problem of organisations who had been involved in mutual partnerships or support schemes (for instance, community groups who might have received HLF funding as well as advice or guidance from the AHRC Engagement Centres). Whilst the broad consensus was that reporting to funders and reflecting back on one's own work remained a useful tool, the idea of 'over-evaluation' - the notion that there was an excessive amount of similar or repeated information (sourced from groups or individuals) being compiled around the impact of funded projects - was viewed negatively, and seen as an inefficient use of resource. Coupled to this was a concern that organisations might adopt selective evaluation, by 'spinning' information in an overly positive light or evidencing case studies that had delivered or possibly exceeded prior expectation. In other instances, significant logistical challenges prevented impact being gauged; for example, copies of Peter Jackson's 2018 'They Shall Not Grow Old' film were distributed to all secondary schools. Co-ordinating broad-brush evaluation on its educational value, let alone individual responses (when working with audiences under the age of 18) would have proved difficult to realise in practice.

For some organisations and stakeholders, evaluation was identified as a 'capturing' or monitoring exercise, whilst others consider it a distinctive tool for applied learning and future practice, with common ground between these interpretations sometimes lacking. Attendee consensus was that 'cut-through' evaluation should do more than purely archive – instead, honest critique should be utilised as a way of retrospectively evidencing where things might have been done differently. It might involve reaching audiences who may not have chosen to listen,

had the basis of the subject matter lacked immediate resonance. Relevant issues can then be identified, nuanced and learned from within future practice. Evaluation should thus seek a longer reach than merely satisfying funders, or as a justification for the existence of that organisation – emphasis needs to be placed on 'reflective' learning that has utility, ideally applicable in other contexts.

Part of this mind-set involves producing evaluation findings that resonate beyond our own immediate expertise and knowledge. Amidst manifested concerns around how to best share material to involve policy makers and other government stakeholders, there is an urgent need to consider the needs and uses of funders, as well as what other representatives might take from this work. As examples of best practice, take the findings 'The First World War in the Classroom' and 'Teaching and Learning War' projects (led by Professor Catriona Pennell, University of Exeter) and the NLHF-funded 'Meeting in No Man's Land' (co-ordinated by Age Exchange, in partnership with Professor Michael Roper and Dr Rachel Duffett, University of Essex). These initiatives have offered first-hand assessment of the ways in which, respectively, young people were engaging with the centenary, and how transnational family oral histories were shared, holding value within sectors beyond academic and heritage practice.⁹

In acting as an advocate between research projects and government departments, responsibility for industry-orientated resources lies largely with the AHRC, in funding research that aligns with government priorities and UKRI policies. If the AHRC were to endorse an approach stipulating that funded projects produce shorter, tailored evaluative overviews designed for think-tank and government (namely the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, alongside the Treasury), such action may provide the means for raising awareness and showcasing their significance within these circles. Securing information in relation to First World War projects would be of benefit and practical use to DCMS particularly, whereas other departments may be interested at times in other projects and initiatives. Equally, where such resources already exist, one advisory measure would be greater assurance on the part of government that, even with issues such as high staff turnover, disseminated resources will be studied and utilised effectively within future practice.

9. See Pennell (2018); Roper & Duffett (2018).

Academia & Impact Agendas

For academic representatives, evaluation meant demonstrating 'impact'. Although universities have significant experience of evaluation through teaching appraisals and the National Student Survey, there is a narrowly defined understanding of 'impact' within the confines of Higher Education, based around REF definitions and university targets. The current definition is too linear and hierarchical for many humanities projects, lacking emphasis on building partnerships and fostering healthy working relationships with communities and the wider world.

This anxiety stems from impact being notoriously difficult to trace and document in any direct way, particularly for humanities subjects. Impact agendas tend to seek academic leadership within public-facing initiatives, which risks reinforcing negative power relations. Academic partners are required to evaluate participation as part of funding commitments, essentially to evidence that their research has impacted upon the wider community (or indeed been shared across different local projects). But documenting this has proved somewhat challenging within the premise of co-produced projects, in which academics and community groups are considered to be on an equal footing (in terms of bringing knowledge, credibility and expertise to proceedings).

Story-telling was advocated as one evaluative method that might provide the means for effective communication of what had been done, but without being devoid of critical thinking. A story framework could act as a useful resource for others to study, prevents the same story from being told repetitively, and is more manageable as an archive or (online) resource to access.

Learning across Sectors

One commonly expressed theme at the symposium was the collective wish to have begun commemorative activity planning significantly earlier than in reality (with suggestions that a workshop hosted in 2014, with a focused remit on evaluation and legacy, would have been of significant value to all attending stakeholders). The NLHF was considered to be the most prepared organisation present when it came to anticipating the need to evaluate centenary activity; partly by virtue of it being able to draw upon existing evaluation models and practice, alongside the fact that it was an existing organisation (in contrast to the newly established AHRC Engagement Centres and 14-18 NOW).

One suggestion discussed at the symposium was to draw upon existing frameworks and expertise from museums, libraries, archives and other organisations who have been conducting evaluation under the auspices of visitor studies and visitor engagement. A more joined up cross-sector initiative, drawing upon museum pedagogy, would capitalise upon existing research and foster opportunities for learning across organisations. The Visitor Studies Group website was cited as a free-to-access resource that could broaden thinking about how to understand visitors and non-visitors, through engaging people across businesses and sectors.¹⁰ Heritage organisations also bring valuable know-how of working with communities, often acting as intermediaries.



'Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red' at the Tower of London in 2014. © Historic Royal Palaces.

10. <http://visitors.org.uk/>.

On the other hand, integrating evaluation from the outset for organisations has proved difficult to enact across the board, especially when it came to anticipating stakeholder numbers. Dr Megan Gooch from Historic Royal Palaces shared the example of the 'Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red' Poppies installation in 2014 at the Tower of London.¹¹ Its surprise popularity meant that an evaluation structure was not initially in place, which made proceedings more complicated when further stakeholders became involved. The IWM-led First World War Centenary Partnership similarly indicated the challenges of securing meaningful organisational data, due to two different facets – firstly, understanding how they work as an organisation, and secondly gauging how each organisation engaged with the centenary. Motivations for getting involved with various projects could not be documented consistently across organisations. Accordingly, as one of the main lessons suggested for future commemorative activities, incorporating well-planned evaluation processes was considered the most effective way of being able to respond and react to unforeseen issues.

Commemoration & Emotional Connection

Attendees shared initial findings and anticipated results from surveys and evaluations addressing public engagement with the First World War Centenary. A number of the organisations represented had incorporated evaluation frameworks from their outset, to capture a range of outputs and outcomes. An example was the independent evaluation of 14-18 NOW being carried out by research consultancy MHM, which had incorporated a structured approach to tally with its 2014, 2016 and 2018 seasons.¹²

Findings from the first MHM Evaluation Report noted increasing emphasis placed on stories being told through individual perspectives. Telling stories through the lens and experiences of one person allowed audiences to relate to individuals, as a way of conceptualising the scale and range of the conflict. One of 14-18 NOW's strongest examples of this approach was the Jeremy Deller commissioned 'We're Here Because We're Here' installation, where participants took on an individual soldier's identity, humanising them as part of delivering the artwork. Connection with audiences on such an individual level accordingly manifested predominantly as an emotional or spiritual encounter.

Emotional appeal and reaction were both recognised as key drivers behind why people had engaged with this subject matter. Engagement enables the sense that one's own identity can become stronger as a result, via closer links with family through new knowledge, or identity as a member of a larger community. But concern was aired regarding the extent to which emotional engagement prompted understanding. Moreover, gauging whether understandings or impressions of the First World War have changed (and if so, to what extent) as the result of emotional attachment, remains difficult to measure from an evaluation perspective.

11. <https://www.hrp.org.uk/about-us/research/lest-we-forget-poppies-and-public-commemoration/>. See also Kidd & Sayner (2018).

12. '1418 Now' was the UK's arts programme over the centenary, and commissioned a host of new works from artists, musicians, film makers, and performers. Its principal funding came from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Arts Council UK and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. For links to its Evaluation Reports, visit <https://www.1418now.org.uk/about/>.

Long-term (Digital) Legacies

As commentators have observed, the First World War centenary commemorations coincided with a period of tumultuous political and social change across Britain. With the symposium set against the closing phases of a five-year commemorative period, some attendees made reference to it setting some form of precedent, or model of approach, for upcoming anniversaries of the Second World War – including its own centenary beginning in 2039.

Against this backdrop of wanting to now take stock and reflect back on achievements, arguably the most significant outcomes, or indeed challenges, stemming from the centenary are the local legacies of projects. The high levels of new knowledge produced thus made for an unresolved issue around both preservation and circulation, particularly in terms of ensuring more people could subsequently uncover material from centenary initiatives.

Equally, not everyone needs to know about every single project that has taken place. In terms of the sheer quantity of information generated, distributing information and sharing interest across different projects is a laudable but not always realistic aim. But enquiries via digital media has been a fundamental form of public engagement within the centenary content, not least in its capability to spark online searches and to host project websites. But should individuals want to discover more about a particular aspect of the First World War now beyond its centenary, does the opportunity to do this exist, and where is this information held?

Widespread concern has since emerged around the future of outputs from the wide array of funded projects, and the risk of disappearance in the long-term. Digital legacies can be ephemeral, meaning that dealing with individuals' expectations about a project's digital footprint is fundamental.¹³ To cite the example of the Europeana initiative, many contributors did so on the understanding that participation offered permanency for digitising objects – but long-term maintenance and preservation requires long-term investment and planning.¹⁴ Indeed, whilst Europeana was cited as an appropriate digital infrastructure for some types of content for as long as funded for digital access, it was felt amongst those attending that the UK Government should invest in its own digital portal for centenary activities, as a way of ensuring the continued visibility and access to digital outputs created throughout the centenary, and supporting their sustainability in the short to medium term. Preserving the longer term digital legacy of local project findings would require continued investment as preservation technologies change. A co-ordinated umbrella project would do well to record the wide-ranging efforts pursued by local radio, newspapers and other media, as a way of granting centenary project findings and legacies future meaning.

CLOSING REMARKS

In summary, this symposium enabled contributors with subject matter expertise to determine how evaluation practices could/should operate in future, by thinking through the context and experiences of the First World War centenary commemorations. The participatory and interactive format enabled participants to share their best practice frameworks, convey current concerns and ultimately identify areas for potential (cross-sector) change in future, prior to outlining a number of 'next step' recommendations.

13. For detailed insight into this issue of digital preservation, see Konstantelos et al (2019).

14. <https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/collections/world-war-i>.

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