



**Reflections on the Centenary  
of the First World War:  
Learning and Legacies  
for the Future**

**Project Report**

**Emma Hanna, Lorna M. Hughes, Lucy Noakes,  
Catriona Pennell, and James Wallis.**



# Acknowledgements

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**Emma Hanna, Lorna M. Hughes, Lucy Noakes,  
Catriona Pennell, and James Wallis, June 2021**

# 'Reflections on the Centenary'

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...history is the work of a  
thousand different hands.

*Raphael Samuel, Theatres of Memory. Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), p.18.



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# Overview and Executive Summary:

# Overview

How did community and academic researchers come together to work on public heritage and public history projects over the course of the First World War centenary? This Report examines this wider question through a focus on the five university-based First World War Engagement Centres that were funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to develop partnerships with community researchers over the course of the 'long centenary' (2014-2019). The AHRC funded the Reflections on the Centenary: Learning and Legacies for the Future project between 2017-2021. This Report is the first major outcome of that research project.

The First World War centenary saw large-scale interest and participation among the wider public. The creation and structure of the First World War Engagement Centres, established at the start of 2014, is outlined in **Section One**. The Engagement Centres funded a range of co-produced projects that brought community and academic researchers together. These projects are discussed in more detail in **Section Two**, while the range of other activities undertaken by the Engagement Centres is discussed in **Section Four**. Many First World War heritage projects were funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (now National Lottery Heritage Fund), and a number of these worked with the First World War Engagement Centres.<sup>1</sup> A detailed study of some of these partnerships can be found in **Section Three** of this Report.

Many of the projects that we examine produced websites and other digital legacies (for example, photos, digitized objects and documents, blogposts, recordings) that showcased their research. These outputs, and the vexed question of their preservation, are discussed in **Section Five** of this Report.



A First World War-themed 'Timetraveller' project working with Drama students. Courtesy of the Living Legacies Engagement Centre.

# Executive Summary

The 'long centenary' of the First World War saw academic and community researchers come together in unprecedented numbers to work on **co-produced projects** researching and communicating wide-ranging aspects and experiences of the First World War. While many of these focused on the experiences and memorialisation of male soldiers, particularly on the Western Front of Northern France and Belgium, many others explored different elements of the war, including the experiences of imperial soldiers, the legacies of these experiences for their descendants, and the war on the home front.

The First World War centenary saw unprecedented interest, and high levels of engagement, from the wider public. By 2018, the **Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)** had awarded £94.2 million to support over 2,000 projects across the United Kingdom. Many of these were funded under the HLF's First World War: Then and Now programme, which awarded projects between £3000-£10,000 in funding. HLF evaluation in 2017 estimated that by that point in the centenary 7.1 million people had participated in HLF-funded First World War centenary projects.

Building on their previous All Our Stories partnership, which ran between 2012-2013, and saw 21 universities funded by the **Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)** to work with HLF funded All Our Stories projects, the AHRC worked with the HLF to develop a funding programme that would support academic researchers to work with community groups on projects related to the First World War centenary. In 2014 the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) announced the creation of five **First World War Engagement Centres**. These Engagement Centres were to connect academic and community research into the First World War between 2014-2019.

Between 2017-2021 the AHRC funded the **Reflections on the Centenary: Learning and Legacies for the Future** research project. The key aims of this project were two-fold:

1. To reflect upon the co-production of knowledge and its legacies associated with the First World War centenary across the UK, with a particular emphasis on the role and work of the five First World War Engagement Centres.
2. To record and consider the multiple ways that the centenary of the First World War in the UK has both drawn upon and shaped attitudes to, knowledge of, and feelings about the conflict more broadly.

This Report addresses the first aim, in that it examines the structures, relationships and outcomes of the First World War Engagement Centres, and considers the legacies of their work for the future, and the lessons that colleagues can learn from their work.

We used multiple, mixed methodologies in the research for this project. These included interviews with community and academic researchers who had collaborated on First World War centenary projects; interviews with key figures, including the Programme Director for the HLF First World War Centenary Programme, the Principal Investigators with the Engagement Centres, historians and other academic researchers who were involved in public histories and commemorative events during the Centenary; focus groups; reflective workshops; an online survey and a Mass Observation Directive to gain wider public impressions of the centenary, participation in and observation of First World War centenary projects and commemorations, and (as researchers who were all engaged in First World War centenary collaborative projects), self-reflection. All interviews (including focus groups) cited in this report have been anonymised where possible.

We studied 30 co-produced projects in depth: 15 of which were the outcome of partnerships between projects funded under the HLF's First World War: Then and Now scheme, and 15 of which were the outcome of First World War Engagement Centre funded co-produced projects, which brought together community and academic researchers to work on projects they had developed together. We have included a detailed list of reflections and recommendations at the end of this Report, but summarise our key findings and recommendations here.

## Key Recommendations

1. While the Engagement Centres worked with many different community groups, it could often be difficult to connect with so-called 'hard to reach' or 'never invited' groups. In order to build the strongest possible connections, and to ensure that university-community partnerships reach the widest possible range of people, future projects built around co-production should employ at least one person who can work as a 'pivot', building links between different groups in the community and academic researchers.
2. University spaces can be perceived as unwelcoming and sometimes intimidating by those who are not members of the institution. Future projects built around co-production should ensure that they have access to space outside of the university campus from the outset, as such space can both be a more informal place to hold initial meetings and, if it is in a space used by the wider community, such as a library or heritage centre, may encourage the development of strong, rooted relationships.
3. Universities seeking to work with community partners need to be sensitive to both the different scales and timescales that they often work to, and to make the often quite complex mechanisms used to pay and reimburse community partners simpler, faster, and more accessible.
4. Working with community partners, and building these relationships, is rewarding but also time-consuming for academics who are often already experiencing heavy workloads. A recognition of the need for this time to be funded, and more realistic funding for co-production on the part of funding bodies, is therefore recommended.

5. Working with community partners, and building strong relationships, takes planning. A longer lead-in time from funding bodies would enable future Engagement Centres or similar bodies to have useful structures and connections in place earlier on in their existence.
6. Digital outputs are fragile. When they have been preserved the material found there can be difficult to re-use, as copyright and Intellectual Property Right status can be hard to discern. A lack of planning, resourcing and leadership on digital preservation and stability is notable throughout First World War centenary projects. A greater strategic lead on all digital aspects of co-produced projects is required: both in ensuring that projects are developed according to existing digital preservation guidelines, and that there is a plan for long term sustainability and access.
7. Co-production is not the same as impact. If universities are to continue to support academic staff in developing relationships outside of 'the academy', with the wider social benefits that such collaborations can bring, then the notion of impact as understood in the REF needs to be recalibrated so that co-production of research is acknowledged and rewarded, not just research that quantifiably 'impacts' upon society outside of universities.



# Introduction:

## Reflections on the Centenary

# Introduction: Reflections on the Centenary

Between 2014 and 2019 the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded the work of five First World War Engagement Centres (hereafter Engagement Centres). The Engagement Centres acted as a means of connecting academic and community histories of the First World War over the course of its centenary. The Engagement Centres were:

Engagement Centre	Lead University	Co-Investigator Institutions	Themes
	University of Birmingham	Birmingham City University, Cardiff University, University of Durham, Manchester Metropolitan University, Newcastle University, Newman University, University of Wolverhampton, University of Worcester.	Belief and the Great War;  Cities at War; Childhood, Conflict and Peace; Commemoration; Gender and the Home Front.
	University of Kent	University of Brighton, University of Essex, University of Greenwich, University of Leeds, University of Portsmouth, Queen Mary University of London	Memorials; Commemoration and memory; Life on the Home and Fighting Fronts; Medical history of the First World War; Wartime propaganda and popular culture; Maritime and naval history; Operational and military history.
	Queen's University Belfast	University of Glasgow, Goldsmiths, University of London, Ulster University, University of Wales, Newcastle University.	Museums and exhibitions; Migration and 'moving lives'; Material Cultures and Archaeology; Digital Technologies and digitisation; Performing Arts.

Engagement Centre	Lead University	Co-Investigator Institutions	Themes
	University of Hertfordshire	University of Central Lancashire, University of Exeter, University of Essex, University of Lincoln, University of Northampton, University of the West of England.	Food and farming; theatre and entertainment; Conscientious objection and military tribunals; Supernatural beliefs; Childhood; Family relationships; Cartoons, trench publications and popular culture.
Centre for Hidden Histories	University of Nottingham	University of Derby, Manchester Metropolitan University, Nottingham Trent University, Oxford Brookes University.	Migration and displacement; The experiences of 'others', from countries and regions within Europe, Asia and the Commonwealth; Impact and subsequent legacies of the war on diverse communities within Britain; Remembrance and commemoration; Identity and faith.

Over the course of the First World War centenary, the Engagement Centres worked with a wide range of British community groups in exploring the history and heritage of the First World War. Many of these were recipients of Heritage Lottery Fund awards (referred to as HLF throughout this Report but renamed as National Lottery Heritage Fund in 2019) usually made under the organisation's First World War: Then and Now programme, which funded projects requiring between £3,000 and £10,000 to explore, conserve and share the heritage of the First World War. Approximately 1,900 projects were funded by the HLF through this scheme, with over £15 million awarded in funding. Projects that the Engagement Centres supported through this partnership with the HLF included:

- Muslims in the First World War (*Voices of War and Peace*)
- Shalom Sussex: The Jewish Community in World War One (*Gateways to the First World War*)
- The Shankill Great War project (*Living Legacies*)
- Six Streets Derby (*Hidden Histories*)
- War and Peas (*Glasgow*) (*Everyday Lives in War*)



Printed materials from the 'Shalom Sussex' Project. Courtesy of Strike A Light – Arts and Heritage.

The Engagement Centres also developed a range of co-produced projects, inviting teams of academic and community researchers to bid for funding to develop research and activities related to the centenary. Topics explored by the Engagement Centres and their partners covered a wide range of areas and topics, extending the history of the First World War beyond the familiar trope of the 'white soldier in the trenches of the Western Front'. These included:

- The experiences of Belgian refugees in Britain during the First World War
- The involvement and legacies of colonial troops and wartime labour
- Quaker lives during the war
- Spiritualist communities on the home front
- Women's experiences of war
- Entertainment and leisure
- The role of public parks during the war
- The impact of Zeppelins and air raids on the home front

Further activities conducted by the Engagement Centres included:

- First World War themed workshops for researchers
- Discovery Days
- Training in methods such as archival research, exhibition design and digital preservation
- Community history conferences
- The creation of travelling 'pop up' exhibitions
- Crowd-sourcing projects
- Research festivals
- Study days
- Performances of music, drama and poetry created during the First World War and during the centenary
- Responding to individual requests for information and support



An Engagement Centre Discovery Day Event. Courtesy of the Gateways Engagement Centre.

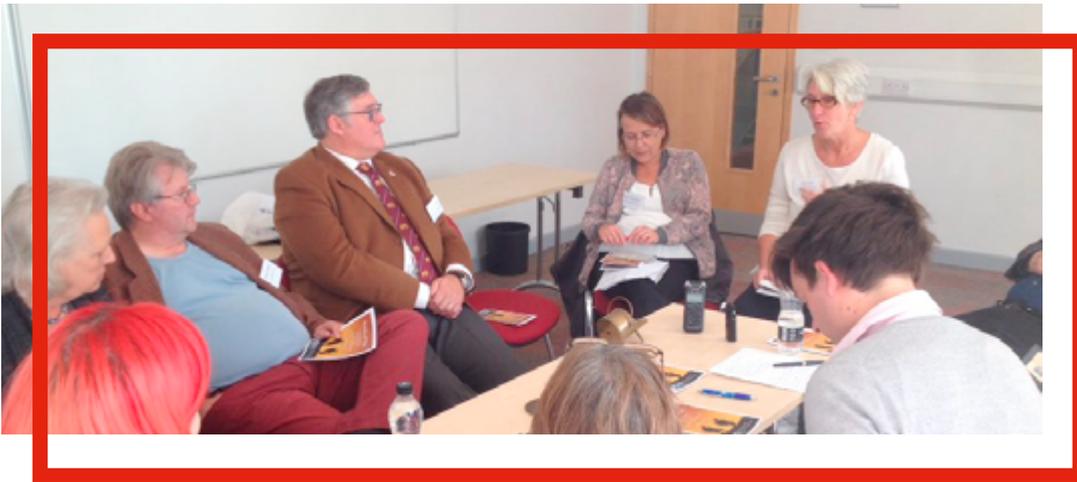
## Reflections on the Centenary

The creation and function of the Engagement Centres can be seen as an experiment in UK Research Council (UKRI) funded collaboration between academic institutions, the HLF and community partners, building on the previous All Our Stories collaboration which ran between 2012 and 2013. Twenty-one universities received AHRC funding to support community-led research projects funded under the HLF's All Our Stories programme. Over the course of what we term 'the long centenary' (January 2014–December 2019), the AHRC provided funding for the Engagement Centres and associated projects, including a series of Research Festivals for academic and community partners (2019). In 2017, the AHRC announced a call for proposals to reflect upon the role of the Engagement Centres, funding the project Reflections on the Centenary: Learning and Legacies for the Future between 2017 and 2021. This Report, co-authored by the Project Investigators, and drawing upon the expertise and experience of Engagement Centre academic leaders and members, community history partners and the HLF, is one of the key outputs of this project.

The main aims of the Reflections on the Centenary project were two-fold:

1. To reflect upon the co-production of knowledge and its legacies associated with the First World War centenary across the UK, with a particular emphasis on the role and work of the five First World War Engagement Centres.
2. To record and consider the multiple ways that the centenary of the First World War in the UK has both drawn upon and shaped attitudes to, knowledge of, and feelings about the conflict more broadly.

This Report is largely concerned with the first aim and, as such, is indebted to Keri Facer and Bryony Enright's report *Creating Living Knowledge* (2016), which explored work conducted under the UKRI's Connected Communities programme (led by the AHRC) since 2010.<sup>2</sup> Facer and Enright developed the concept of the 'participatory turn' to conceptualise this work, and we understand the work of the Engagement Centres to be a part of this; their creation and function driven by the specific historical conditions of the First World War centenary as well as by the shift towards 'engagement' and 'participation' seen within funding bodies and Higher Education institutions in the UK more widely. While we draw upon Facer and Enright's research findings here, we also refer readers who want to explore the work of the Connected Communities programme, and the 'participatory turn' more widely, to their *Creating Living Knowledge* Report.



A Reflections on the Centenary Focus Group. Courtesy of the Reflections on the Centenary Project.

## Methodology

This research has used multiple, mixed methods to gain insights into the work of the five Engagement Centres. While it makes some use of quantitative surveys of community-led projects, 'outputs', participation, and public opinion during the centenary, the key research methods used are qualitative, as these provide us with a means to consider the experience of participatory research at the social and experiential level. These are:

- **Self-reflection:** Of the project team, three were also Co-Investigators, working with two of the First World War Engagement Centres (*Gateways to the First World War; Living Legacies*). Two members of the project team were research associates, working with two of the Engagement Centres (*Everyday Lives in War; Living Legacies*). We thus had personal and professional insight into the internal structures and approaches of three of the five Engagement Centres, and access to activities and events on which they collaborated, and which can be understood as partnership creations. As such, we have sought to continually reflect upon our own practice, and to draw upon our experiences as participants in the Engagement Centres experiment.
- **Online Survey:** From November 2017 to July 2018, we ran a national online survey which invited participants to consider their engagement with the First World War centenary, and their experience (where relevant) of working with HLF funded projects, and with the Engagement Centres. 126 people, all of whom participated in community research or events associated with the centenary, anonymously completed the survey. The survey was promoted via the Engagement Centres, via social media and regional BBC radio, using the Reflections website and Twitter account.
- **Mass Observation Directive:** To capture the thoughts of a broader group of people, not necessarily involved in co-produced projects or in First World War centenary events more widely, we commissioned the Social Survey organisation, Mass Observation, to create a 'Directive' (open ended questionnaire) on the centenary in November 2018. Respondents to this Directive provided 'Day Diaries' for 11 November 2018 and answered a series of open-ended questions regarding their feelings about, and participation in, centenary events between 2014 and 2018. We have also drawn upon an earlier Mass Observation Directive, commissioned in 2014 by the Engagement Centres, to consider how views and knowledge of the First World War may have changed across the centenary.

- **Focus groups:** Between 2017 and 2021 we ran eight focus groups for academics and community partners working with the Engagement Centres across the country: Aberystwyth (dual language Welsh/English), Belfast, Canterbury, Cardiff, Glasgow, Inverness, Leeds, and Stornoway. In addition, we ran eight focus groups for secondary schoolchildren at the University of Kent in 2019, at which they reflected on their experiences of the First World War centenary. In September 2018, we conducted a Focus Group with the Principal Investigators from the five Engagement Centres.
- **Reflective workshops:** We ran our first workshop at the University of Kent in October 2017, which invited community partners to reflect upon and discuss their experiences of working with the Engagement Centres. Our second reflective workshop was held at the National Archives, London in October 2018 and invited academics, heritage professionals, archivists, civil servants, think tanks, and community relations experts to discuss the wider impact of the centenary, and to share mechanisms for capturing and analysing this impact.<sup>3</sup>
- **Interviews:** We conducted fifteen interviews (three per centre) with academics and community partners working on community history projects funded by the Engagement Centres. We also conducted fifteen interviews with HLF project leaders who had worked with the Engagement Centres, again conducting three per Centre. In addition, we interviewed a small number of individuals closely involved with the work of the Centres, including the HLF First World War Centenary Programme Director, who worked alongside the Centres since their establishment. We also interviewed thirteen academics who had expertise in First World War studies, and who had been involved, in a variety of ways, in centenary activities.

As outlined in our interview consent form, all material used in this report has been anonymised aside from where prior permission was given or the seniority of a publicly held position meant anonymity was not possible.

In each of these, our research was guided by the following research aims:

- To document and reflect upon the range of community-led research projects, supported by the five Engagement Centres, between 2014 and 2019.
- To map the legacies of these projects for the community and academic partners involved in these during the centenary.
- To consider lessons that can be learnt from the experience of co-production during the First World War centenary for future projects, particularly those involving academic, heritage and community partners.
- To examine and record methodologies drawn upon and developed during these participatory projects.
- To consider the extent to which the experience of co-production may shape the future working practices of both community and academic partners, and how Higher Education institutions and funding bodies can support such collaboration.
- To reflect upon the relationship between these community-led research projects and representations of the First World War at its centenary on the wider public stage.

## Key terms used

- **AHRC:** The Arts and Humanities Research Council. The UKRI (see entry below) body responsible for allocating government funding for academic projects within the arts and humanities. The funders of the First World War Engagement Centres between 2014 and 2019.<sup>4</sup>
- **Austerity:** A programme of large-scale cuts to local government funding, to the social welfare programme and to central government budgets, introduced by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government in 2010.
- **Community Generated Digital Content (CGDC):** A process of community-facing digitisation in which members of the public make personal collections accessible digitally, contributing to a larger or thematic project.
- **Connected Communities:** A funding programme launched by UKRI and the AHRC that aims to fund research projects and partnerships that develop a deeper understanding of 'communities'. Connected Communities projects are expected to 'draw on the combined expertise, experience and aspirations of individuals working in both communities and universities'.<sup>5</sup>
- **Co-Investigator:** An academic who is a member of a team, working on an externally funded research project, led by a Principal Investigator. The Engagement Centres were each made up of one Principal Investigator and several Co-Investigators.
- **Co-production:** Research produced through collaboration between community and academic researchers and institutions.<sup>6</sup>
- **Co-production projects:** The projects funded by the five Engagement Centres, bringing together academic and community researchers to explore an aspect of First World War history.
- **First World War Centenary:** The period between 2014 and 2019, marking the centenary of the First World War.
- **First World War Engagement Centres:** The five centres established and funded by the AHRC between 2014 and 2019.
- **Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF):** Now National Lottery Heritage Fund. The key national funder of community-based heritage projects during the First World War centenary.<sup>7</sup>
- **HLF projects:** Projects funded by the HLF, the majority discussed here via the First World War: Then and Now scheme, several of which worked with the Engagement Centres.
- **Impact:** Impact was introduced in the Research Excellence Framework in 2014 (REF 2014). It requires academic subject groups to demonstrate, via case studies, that their published research is having a quantifiable 'impact' beyond academia, for example underpinning social change, new learning, or new methods that can be understood as benefitting non-academic groups or organisations (see entry below).
- **Intangible Heritage:** Elements of past societies that have survived today, and which do not take a physical form (e.g., language, customs, cultural memory).<sup>8</sup>
- **Legacies:** The legacies of the projects examined here, and of the wider range of activities led by the Engagement Centres, are wide-ranging. Tangible legacies can include physical legacies (e.g., renovated war memorials, books, pamphlets), digital legacies (e.g., websites, digitised objects), cultural legacies (e.g., drama, film, music, exhibitions), academic legacies (e.g., new ways of working, new relationships, new research partners) and conceptual legacies (e.g., new methodologies, theories, concepts, and ways of working). There are also less tangible legacies, such as the development of new skills, new knowledge, social networks, confidence, and community cohesion.

- **Participatory turn:** The move towards research projects that bring together community and academic expertise, and which have aims and 'outputs' beyond the traditional academic sphere.
- **Principal Investigator:** The academic leading an externally funded research project, and whose home institution will have responsibility for overseeing the management of such a project.
- **REF:** The REF, or Research Excellence Framework is a research monitoring and evaluation exercise which takes place at regular intervals in British universities. Individual academics have their research publications or other outputs (for example an exhibition, website, or film) evaluated by a peer review panel in their discipline and graded between 1-4\*. These grades, together with an assessment of 'impact' and research environment, are used to assess the research quality of a 'research unit' (usually an academic department) within a university. Higher graded departments are awarded proportionally greater funding.<sup>9</sup>
- **Tangible Heritage:** Physical objects created in the past and existing today (e.g., war memorials, statues, military cemeteries, battlefields).
- **UKRI:** UK Research and Innovation is a non-departmental public body of the UK government that directs research and innovation funding, taken from the science budget of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, through seven research councils (including the AHRC) and two additional bodies (Innovate UK and Research England). From 2002 to 2018 it was known as Research Councils UK (RCUK).<sup>10</sup>



A statue of seven blinded soldiers at Manchester Piccadilly Railway station, marking the end of the First World War centenary. Credit: Terry Waller/Alamy Stock Photo.

## The First World War Centenary in Britain

In October 2012 David Cameron, the British Prime Minister from 2010–2016, made a speech at the Imperial War Museum, London, announcing government funding for both the museum's renovation of its First World War galleries, but also for British programmes to mark the centenary of the First World War more widely.<sup>11</sup> Explaining the decision to support centenary events and projects, like the refurbished galleries, at a time of draconian austerity measures, Cameron identified three factors that he believed made marking the centenary of the war important. First among these was the scale of the combatant dead: Cameron gave the figure of over sixteen million war dead in total, with over one million of

these fatalities coming from Britain and the British Empire. Secondly, he emphasised the wider impact of the war on the modern world, highlighting the ways that it had reshaped national borders, strengthened support for ideologies of fascism and communism, brought into being new and destructive forms of military technology, and their corollary, medical advances, and, he claimed, advanced the causes of both female emancipation and racial equality. Finally, he stressed the multiple emotional legacies of the war for individuals, families, and communities, arguing that 'this matters not just in our heads but in our hearts.'<sup>12</sup>

In this speech Cameron both reflected and amplified the existing, dominant cultural memory of the First World War that circulated in Britain in the early 21st century.<sup>13</sup> The military dead of the First World War had been formally commemorated by the imperial state since 1919 with the memorial traditions of Armistice Day and, since 1945, Remembrance Sunday acting as the key date in the imperial and national calendar for remembrance of, firstly, the dead of the First World War, and, since 1945, the military dead of all subsequent conflicts. To commemorative events were added a range of widely shared cultural texts (poetry, autobiography, novels, television, film) that served to reinforce the centrality of the war's dead, and its multiple other victims, to the cultural memory of the conflict. By the early 21st century, the emergence of internet-enabled genealogy services such as *Ancestry.com* served to make the researching and writing of family history widely accessible and further embedded the memory of the war within British culture.<sup>14</sup> By the time of the start of the centenary in 2014, the First World War was familiar to many British people as an event that shaped the 20th century, that still resonated in individual families and communities, and which was largely understood through the experiences of men in the trenches of the Western Front, and through the loss of many of these men.<sup>15</sup>

However, this widely recognised 'cultural memory' of the war as a time when the lives of thousands of young men were sacrificed, especially in the trenches of the Western Front, shared through popular representations of the period such as the television comedy *Blackadder Goes Forth*, the poetry of Wilfrid Owen, and the annual commemorative ceremonies of the 11 November, should not be confused with historical knowledge. *Do Mention the War: Will 1914 Matter in 2014?*, the British Future Report published in 2013 showed that while 66% of participants in its focus groups knew the war began in 1914, only 34% knew that Russia was a British ally, and only 13% knew that Britain entered the war when Belgium was invaded by Germany.<sup>16</sup> However, despite this lack of historical knowledge most participants agreed that it was important to remember the war and to ensure that shared knowledge was passed on to future generations. 84% agreed that schools and museums should do more to ensure that children and young people learnt about the war and 87% hoped that the remembering the war would lead to an 'investment in peace' in order to prevent future conflicts.<sup>17</sup> Thus, at the centenary's outset, the British people, while having little specific historical knowledge of the period, were largely united in the belief that it was important that the war be remembered, commemorated, and studied, and that this knowledge be passed on to future generations.



2014 First World War centenary commemorations at Saltburn, North Yorkshire. Credit: Islandstock/Alamy Stock Photo.

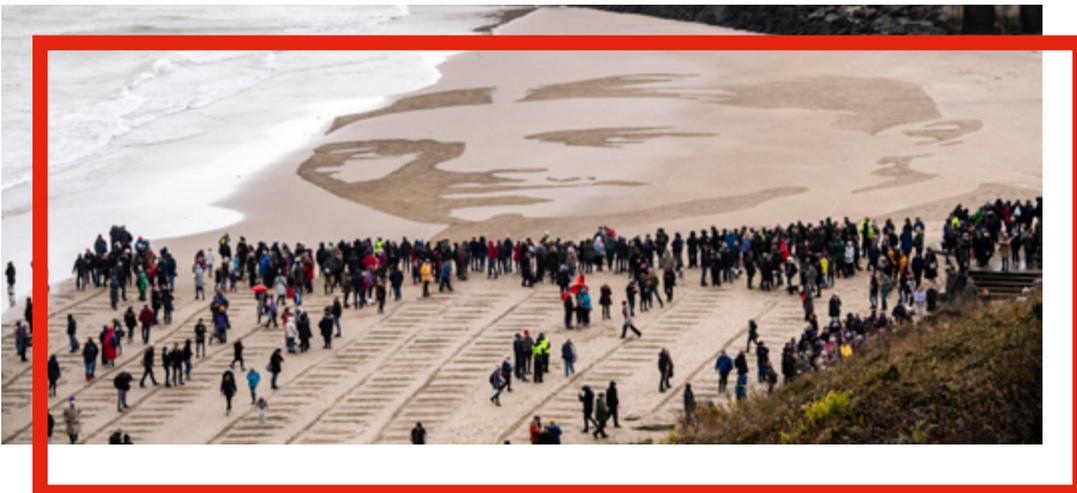
The existence of this widely shared cultural memory of the war provided the British government with an opportunity to create shared 'national moments' during the centenary, and to draw upon these in order to try and reinforce community cohesion and strengthen a sense of British national identity based, in part, on an (imagined) shared past. As there were no surviving military veterans of the war the government's stated aim for the centenary commemorations was to 'connect new younger audiences to the legacy of the war through arts and education initiatives.'<sup>18</sup> More widely, the centenary took place at a time of visible divisions within Britain: alongside the 2015 Independence Referendum in Scotland and the 2016 Referendum on membership of the European Union can be set the economic and social divisions that were strengthened by the government's austerity policy and the twin threats to social stability of political populism and religious radicalism. Government policies of a 'hostile environment' and the emerging Windrush scandal meant that members of many British communities felt unwelcome, and their membership of a wider British community under attack. Government funding for potentially unifying centenary events should be understood within this context; as a means of helping to strengthen the shared sense of identity, and thus of social stability, that seemed increasingly under threat in Britain in the second decade of the 20th century.

Centenary events and the wider centenary programme were organised by a range of different cultural, heritage and educational institutions, overseen by a government appointed First World War centenary committee, with state level events being organised by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the (then) Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), which became the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government in January 2018. Key elements of state-level centenary programming included the Department of Education funded First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours programme. Operating over the course of the centenary, this offered a small number of pupils from all English secondary schools free visits to the battlefields, cemeteries, and memorials of the Western Front in Belgium and Northern France,<sup>19</sup> commemorative ceremonies held at the sites of major battles on their individual centenaries, and a final commemorative service at Westminster Abbey, attended by HM the Queen, Commonwealth leaders and Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the German President.

The devolved nations of the UK also had locally specific programmes of events. The Scottish government's *WW100* programme worked with heritage organisations to deliver events and support a range of projects in Scotland while the Welsh government programme *Cymru'n Cofio/Wales Remembers* developed a range of heritage and

educational projects across Wales. In Northern Ireland the centenary, understood as one element of the 'decade of centenaries' which encompassed the First World War, the Easter Rising of 1916, the War of Independence, Home Rule, partition, and the Irish Civil War, perhaps carried the greatest risk of reinforcing divisions between communities. Here the UK centenary programme ran alongside and in collaboration with the *Decade of Centenaries* programme, itself a collaboration between the government of Ireland and the devolved government of Northern Ireland.

Alongside these state-level events and programmes sat a range of other institutions, organising and overseeing a range of different centenary projects. 14-18NOW was the official arts programming organisation, funded by the HLF, Arts Council England, and DCMS together with smaller funders, which commissioned and oversaw many of the key contemporary public artworks during the centenary, such as *Spectre* (2014), *We're Here Because We're Here* (2016), and *Pages of the Sea* (2018).<sup>20</sup> The First World War Centenary Partnership, led by Imperial War Museums (IWM) and funded by the Arts Council and Culture 24, brought together 4,159 different organisations from sixty-two different countries to collaborate on a range of commemorative activities – these included multiple screenings of the 1916 film *The Battle of the Somme* in 2016, and the 2018 *Women's Work 100* project, which used content from IWM's Women's Work Collection to explore women's experiences during the war. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission worked closely with the government and with other funding bodies to co-ordinate the national and international ceremonies that marked key dates and key battles in the war, notably the centenary of the first day of the Battle of the Somme (2016) and the centenary of the third Battle of Ypres (commonly known as Passchendaele) in 2017. The five Engagement Centres worked with all of these organisations throughout the centenary period, with this Report providing details of elements of this work.



The 'Pages of the Sea' installation at Folkestone Beach, Kent on 11 November 2018. Courtesy of Helen Brooks.

The key relationship for the Engagement Centres however was the HLF. The HLF was a key funder for the centenary, running several different funding programmes which funded a wide range of activities. These ranged from *First World War: Then and Now* through to *Our Heritage*, which provided grants of between £10,000-£100,000, *Young Roots*, which provided £10-50,000 for centenary-focused projects led by young people, and the larger Heritage Grants of over £100,000. By 2019 approximately 1,900 projects had been funded through the *First World War: Then and Now scheme*, which was designed to

support community and heritage groups working on First World War related projects, and applying for awards between £3000-£10,000.<sup>21</sup> The Engagement Centres primarily worked with projects funded through *First World War: Then and Now*. Between April 2010 and March 2018 the HLF estimated some 9.4 million people participated in projects that the organisation had funded, with young people and people aged over sixty being particularly well represented.<sup>22</sup>

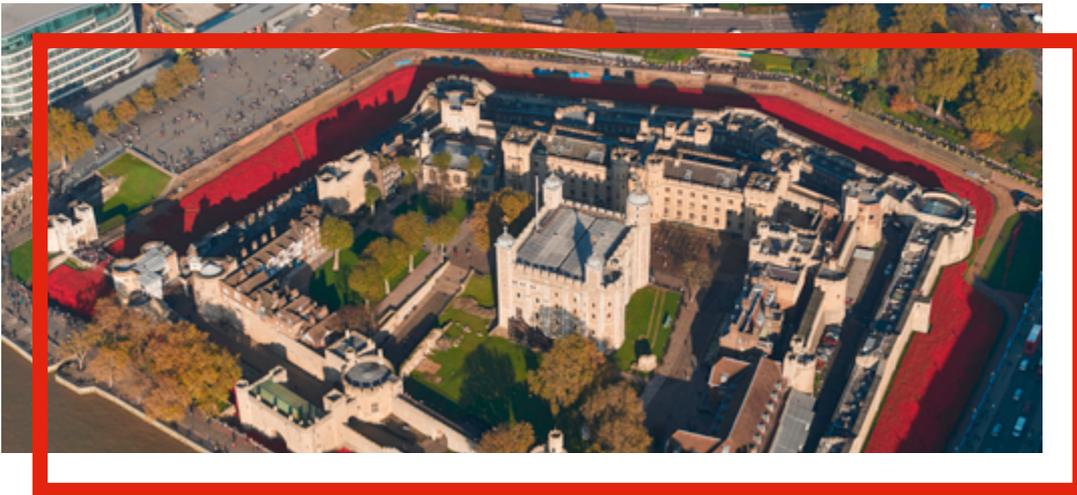


The 'Legacies of the First World War Festival: Diversity' event, held in Birmingham in 2019. Courtesy of the 'Making Histories, Sharing Histories: Putting University-Community Collaboration into Practice' Booklet (Grosvenor et al, 2020).

However, while projects were funded across the country, from Stornoway in the Western Isles of Scotland to the Isle of Thanet in east Kent, only 8% of participants identified as Black or Minority Ethnic, as against 13% of the UK population in the same period.<sup>23</sup> This is part of a wider pattern. Despite an increasing engagement with critical histories in the heritage sector, and attempts to, for example, recast the histories of British stately homes within wider histories of slavery, exploitation, and imperialism, or to record the history and heritage of migration in Britain, people from 'minority' groups remain around 50% less likely than white British to participate in heritage experiences.<sup>24</sup> As the AHRC *Common Cause* Report of 2018 shows, there are profound structural obstacles that universities need to overcome in order to develop community partnerships with colleagues from 'minority' communities. Among these are the low levels of Black and Minority Ethnic staff in universities, particularly at senior levels, experiences of racism recorded by staff and students from these communities, and, stemming from this, 'the perception and reality of universities as white majority institutions lacking openness to ideas and expertise from outside the institution.'<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, while working within this set of structural obstacles, the Engagement Centres strove to develop and nurture opportunities for research into the histories of the First World War 'beyond the Western Front', such as *Stories of Omission: conflict and the experience of Black soldiers*, a book co-created by the community group Recognise Black Heritage and Culture and the Voices of War and Peace Engagement Centre, both working to identify previously 'hidden histories', led by and involving volunteers from Black and other minority ethnic communities.<sup>26</sup>

The wide range of centenary events and projects proved to be extremely popular with the British public. Perhaps the first indication of the high level of engagement that would be seen throughout the centenary was the public response to the installation *Bloodswept Lands and Seas of Red* at the Tower of London in 2014, commissioned by Historic Royal Palaces and created by the artist Paul Cummins and theatre designer Tom Piper. Opening on the 4 August 2014 (the centenary of the date that Britain and its empire entered the war) it was estimated that over five million people visited the installation, which consisted of 888,246 poppies, one for each of the British military dead of the war (including those from the empire who served in uniform), during the four months it was open. The artworks *Waves* and *Weeping Window* from the original installation subsequently toured the UK with support from 14-18NOW, reaching thousands more visitors during the centenary.

There was a huge public appetite for knowledge and commemoration of the First World War in the period that the Engagement Centres were operating. While there may not be another such large-scale moment of national heritage, commemoration, and history-making again until we enter the centenary cycle for the Second World War, this Report aims to give a critical overview of the work of the Engagement Centres in order that all partners and participants in future co-produced projects (including funders, universities, community partners, and academic researchers), on a large or a small scale, can benefit from our reflections on this extraordinary period of history and heritage-making.



An aerial photograph of the Tower of London 'Poppies' installation in 2014. Credit: Commission Air/ Alamy Stock Photo.



## Section One:

# An Overview of the First World War Engagement Centres

# Section One

## An Overview of the First World War Engagement Centres

This section provides an overview of the creation of the five Engagement Centres, their structure, and their different ways of working. It covers the following areas:

- The history of the centres
- The peer review process
- AHRC timeframe
- Regional coverage
- Extending regional coverage

### The history of the centres

In June 2013 the AHRC, in partnership with the HLF, announced a funding call: '*Connected Communities Programme and Care for the Future Theme: Call for Co-ordinating Centres for Community Research and Engagement to Commemorate the Centenary of the First World War*.' The call invited applications for a small number of 'co-ordinating centres' to support community engagement activities to connect academic and public histories of the First World War and its legacy.<sup>27</sup>

The Centres were expected to act as 'beacons for community outreach, engagement and collaboration at a local/regional and a UK-wide scale between research organisations and researchers and community groups, including young people, who are interested in researching and commemorating the First World War, the broader historical and cultural context of the War and its legacy and impact.'<sup>28</sup>

Over the longer term, these Engagement Centres were intended to 'lay the foundation for the creation of sustainable relationships and practices that systematically build dialogue between academic and public historical research.'<sup>29</sup>

This was a joint initiative between the cross-Council *Connected Communities Programme* and the AHRC's *Care for the Future: Thinking Forward through the Past Theme*, and the Engagement Centres were expected to contribute to relevant activities within both the Programme and the Theme. A key focus of the Engagement Centres was to provide support for community groups funded through a range of HLF funding programmes, particularly its new *First World War: Then and Now* community grants scheme launched in May 2013. The Engagement Centres were also encouraged to support other HLF-funded community projects with a First World War-related theme. It was also expected that there would be links to other AHRC activities associated with the centenary and to the broader national programme outlined in the Introduction.

The Engagement Centres were expected to be highly collaborative ‘drawing together research expertise across research organisations and working in partnership with each other, with HLF (both nationally and locally) and a range of organisations in the cultural and community sectors and beyond.’<sup>30</sup> Each centre was expected to co-ordinate ‘an open and inclusive cross-institutional network of researchers, with a particular focus around areas of particular local/regional, methodological, thematic and/or subject areas of expertise.’<sup>31</sup> The AHRC stated that through the call they were seeking:

‘to work in partnership with research organisations in opening up their resources to communities, in developing their strategies for supporting community engagement and partnerships, in developing skills and capacity for community engagement, including amongst early career researchers and in generating exciting collaborative research with communities that builds bridges between academic and public histories of the First World War.’<sup>32</sup>

AHRC funding of up to £2.5m was available to support between five and seven Engagement Centres under the first three-year phase of this initiative. Applications for Engagement Centres could apply for funding of up to £500,000, with the AHRC funding 80% of the full economic costs.

The expected roles of the Engagement Centres were summarised in a diagram which was designed with input by Professor Keri Facer of the University of Bristol, and the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE).

## Summary of the roles of co-ordinating centres



A briefing meeting for potential applicants was held in London in June 2013. There was a tight turnaround for applications as the closing date for research organisations to submit full applications was 16 July 2013, just six weeks after the funding call was announced. The decision letters were received on 13 December 2013, and the creation of five Engagement Centres was announced by the AHRC on 21 February 2014, as follows:

Name of centre	Lead university
<i>Centre for Hidden Histories</i>	University of Nottingham
<i>Everyday Lives in War</i>	University of Hertfordshire
<i>Gateways to the First World War</i>	University of Kent
<i>Living Legacies 1914-18</i>	Queen's University Belfast
<i>Voices of War and Peace</i>	University of Birmingham

Each Engagement Centre was awarded £500,000 between 2014 and 2016, with the possibility to apply for further funding in 2016.<sup>33</sup> The press release underlined that they would be supporting community research projects and connecting academic and public histories of the First World War as part of the commemoration of the War's centenary beginning that year. It reiterated that this was being done 'to support and encourage the extensive interest in exploring the First World War and its legacy among communities across the UK.'<sup>34</sup>

During the initial start-up phase before the formal launch later that year, the Engagement Centres were expected to extend links with 'the diverse programmes of community activities being planned to commemorate the centenary across the UK as well as developing international links' and to complement other AHRC activities related to the centenary, including its collaboration with the BBC's *World War One at Home* project.<sup>35</sup>

**Professor Mark Llewellyn, AHRC Director of Research:** 'The centenary of the First World War provides an occasion not only to commemorate its pivotal role in shaping the twentieth century but also to reflect on and reassess its legacy for the present. The distinctive combination of arts and humanities researchers and community groups working together to explore heritage has proved to be a powerful one. Through collaboration these new Engagement Centres will develop and foster rich and fascinating perspectives on the commemoration, including its meanings for contemporary culture and society.' (AHRC Press Release, February 2014)

**Carole Souter, Chief Executive of HLF:** 'We know just how valuable access to university researchers can be for communities exploring their local heritage. It provides them with additional skills and confidence to bring an extra dimension to their projects. HLF has already funded hundreds of community projects exploring aspects of the First World War and we're excited to see how these will develop further with the help of this unique partnership.' (AHRC Press Release, February 2014)

**Professor Andrew Thompson, Leadership Fellow for AHRC's Care for the Future theme:** 'The centenary of the First World War provides a major opportunity for historians to reflect on its impact at the time as well as its lasting legacies, and to do so in such a way as to fully engage the public in that process. Together, the 100th anniversary of the war, and the formation of these Engagement Centres, promises to bring new insights into the complexities of commemorating a conflict, the interpretation of which has never been settled, and which continues today to provoke different and diverse reactions in the public and the political domain.' (AHRC Press Release, February 2014).

## The peer review process

The AHRC's Peer Review College has members from higher education institutions and independent research organisations in the UK and overseas, and from outside academia. Members provide expert reviews of grant proposals across the range of the AHRC's schemes within their areas of expertise. The reviews inform panels and, ultimately, the AHRC's decision-making processes. Membership of moderating and assessment panels is also drawn largely from the College.

Following the call for First World War Engagement Centres, eighteen consortia applied to the AHRC. The subsequent peer review process was undertaken by a final assessment panel whose membership consisted of staff from the AHRC, HLF, and academics with relevant expertise.

## AHRC timeframe

The short amount of lead-in time was cited as one of the first major issues in establishing the Engagement Centres. The successful Engagement Centres were sent a letter in mid-December 2013 informing them that the Centres would start on 1 January 2014, and all five Principal Investigators felt the AHRC did not factor in a sufficient length of time before the start of the centenary period, meaning that much of the initial six months of the Engagement Centres' existence was spent on organisation and preparation. If the Engagement Centres had been created in July 2013 they would have been better placed to engage fully with commemorations of the start of the war (August 2014). This short lead-in time also, potentially, meant that it was harder for the Engagement Centres to build initial links and connections with diverse partners. As *Creating Living Knowledge* demonstrated, successful research partnerships often build on existing relationships, which can take time to develop. Thus, those community groups with existing connections to universities can be privileged.<sup>36</sup> The advisability of having a longer lead-in time for any future Engagement Centres was something that all Principal Investigators agreed upon.

## Lack of regional coverage

Once the Engagement Centres were announced it quickly became apparent that country and English regional coverage was uneven. Two of the Engagement Centres were based in the Midlands, one was in the Home Counties, one in the South East, and one in Northern Ireland. In this first call there was no representation in Scotland, Wales, the South West, or North of England. This was problematic on several levels, but particularly so for the HLF whose organisation and administration were distributed across the UK by region. The HLF, as a funder with National Lottery players' money, was keen to see that there was roughly a comparable level of coverage across the country. It is worth noting that when the HLF first thought about the Centenary, they envisaged something more like the *All Our Stories* project which involved 21 Universities.<sup>37</sup> This might have enabled a better initial geographical spread, aligned with the way the HLF operated and distributed its funding.



An Engagement Centre Study Day event held in Inverness in March 2017. Courtesy of the Gateways Engagement Centre.

## Extending regional coverage

Soon after the Engagement Centres were established, they were asked to extend their initial, regional reach, to encompass as much of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as possible. In part this was achieved by the AHRC providing extra funding (£150,000 per Engagement Centre) meaning that they could bring in new Co-Investigators from other parts of the country.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the Engagement Centres could reach out to communities that may have been missed through the original regional focus. For example, *Voices of War and Peace*, based in the Midlands, brought in Co-Investigators from Cardiff, Durham and Newcastle, *Living Legacies* in Belfast employed a Co-Investigator in Glasgow, and *Gateways to the First World War* in Kent was able to bring in Co-Investigators based in Leeds and London. *Everyday Lives in War* had Co-Investigators in Lancashire, Lincoln, and the West of England and *Hidden Histories* employed an Impact Advisor at the University of Derby. The inclusion of Co-Investigators from other regions of the country enriched the work of the Engagement Centres as they often brought with them networks and contacts from their local areas. One interviewee in Yorkshire, an area that was not originally covered by the five Engagement Centres commented enthusiastically on the opportunities that the appointment of regional Co-Investigators offered to HLF projects:

'Also, the Centre had organised regional events. There was one in Leeds, which involved other projects – HLF funded projects in Doncaster and Hull and elsewhere. And we learnt from those other projects. The one from Doncaster was doing work with refugees and asylum-seekers in Doncaster. Doing research with them on the Belgian refugees from the First World War from 1914, who came to Doncaster. So, to me, that was an interesting project' (HLF Project Leader, Interview, February 2018).

The supplementary call showed that the AHRC were conscious that across the five centres there were 'a number of key gaps in coverage of areas likely to be of interest to a wide range of community groups across the UK.'<sup>39</sup> These gaps were said to have taken several forms including thematic and geographic coverage. Some of these gaps represented significant parts of the UK where there was strong and distinctive community interest in the centenary of the First World War, such as the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, which offered potentially rich and interesting areas of engagement between academic and public histories such as *Visualising the Iolaire* in the Western Isles.<sup>40</sup> The geographic gaps included Scotland and Wales (where there were substantial and distinctive national programmes relating to the centenary and specific requirements in relation to community engagement, for example, in terms of the Welsh Language Act (1993)), the North of England (in some parts of which there has been particularly strong interest in HLF funding for community projects), London, South West, and East Anglia. The AHRC and the HLF were also conscious that there were other gaps in larger regions where Engagement Centres were located which were not covered by each Engagement Centre's original regional foci. The supplementary call emphasised that it was important that 'communities in more geographically remote areas have opportunities to engage with the centres as well as those in major population centres.'<sup>41</sup>

The additional funding was intended 'to encourage the centres to reach out to diverse communities across the UK, to take account of the different and distinctive contexts, histories, languages and community cultures which relate to the commemoration of the First World War and its legacy across the UK and in a broader international frame and to be open and responsive to approaches from communities from across all parts of the UK.'<sup>42</sup>

Building on these geographically diverse links, all the Engagement Centres were able to work with HLF-funded projects across the country. For example, Living Legacies and Gateways to the First World War collaborated with projects in the Western Isles, the Highlands and Wales; *Voices of War and Peace* worked with community partners in Manchester, Cardiff and Newcastle; *Everyday Lives in War* supported projects in South West and North West England and Scotland; and *Hidden Histories* worked with the 'Away from the Western Front' project, which involved volunteers from communities across country in its wide-ranging research into wartime experiences beyond France and Flanders. Thus, despite the initial focus on offering academic support to, and building partnerships with, community research projects in their regions, the Engagement Centres were able to collaborate on co-produced projects across the country and help to ensure the kind of nationwide participation in the First World War centenary envisaged by then Prime Minister David Cameron in 2012:

**David Cameron, British Prime Minister 2010–2016:** 'Our ambition is a truly national commemoration, worthy of this historic centenary. I want a commemoration that captures our national spirit, in every corner of the country, from our schools to our workplaces, to our town halls and local communities. A commemoration that, like the Diamond Jubilee celebrated this year, says something about who we are as a people.'<sup>43</sup>

However, there were tensions caused by the shift from the initial, regionally specific model for the Engagement Centres, which would have seen a range of Engagement Centres working with community-based projects that were geographically closest to them, to a model which saw the Engagement Centres as having a national reach. In part these were problems of resourcing: a national reach entailed more time spent on travel, and greater financial costs. This shift also meant the Engagement Centres were now supporting projects across the four nations that were most closely aligned with each Engagement Centre's areas of expertise, inevitably impacting upon their ability to build partnerships, especially in the early days:

'Someone might have contacted *Gateways* because they're in Kent, and they're referred to *Living Legacies* in Belfast, or up to Birmingham, or wherever, because that's where there's expertise in that particular area. That was confusing for people, I think.' (HLF First World War Centenary Programme Director, Interview, February 2020).

The confusion that this could cause was illustrated by the comments of one HLF project leader in a 2019 focus group, describing their initial attempts to contact an Engagement Centre:

'We didn't know about 'Gateways' until a good deal later – until we'd actually finished our oral history film. And, it was probably in the last year of our project in fact. So, it was only last year that we came across your website. And, I have to say [laughs] that we kind of misinterpreted it. We looked at the Hidden Histories one, because, of course, the story of the Chinese Labour Corps is a hidden history. So, we said: oh, well, we'll go to them and see whether they would ask us to screen the film. You know, we didn't realise that you were actually trying to enable community groups to conduct their projects' (HLF Project Leader, Cardiff Focus Group, July 2019).

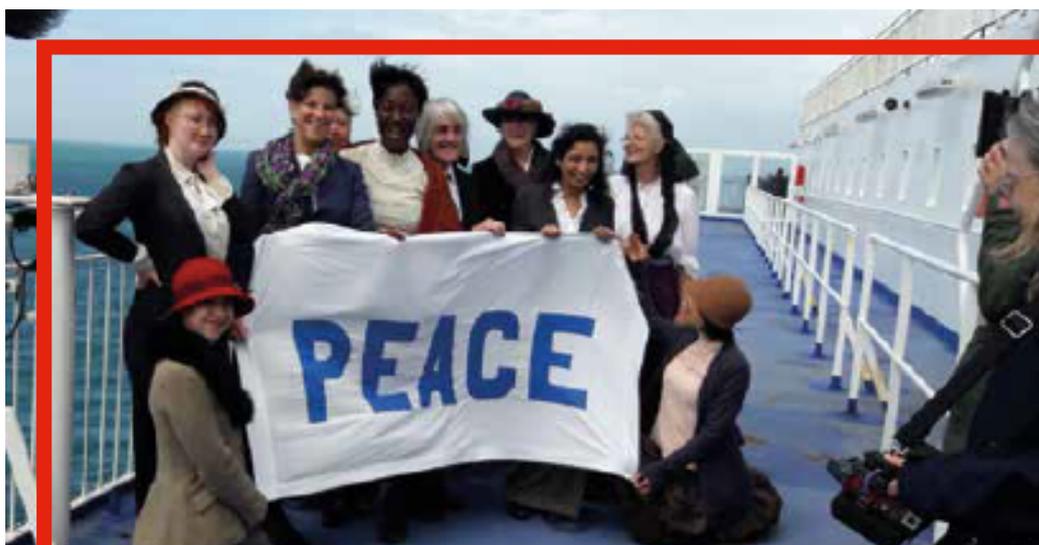
Although these problems were mitigated by both AHRC funding that enabled the Engagement Centres to employ Co-Investigators from other parts of the country, and their efforts to put community partners, so far as possible, in touch with experts geographically close to the site of their projects, links between Engagement Centres and geographically distant HLF-funded projects were, by their very nature, harder to build and to maintain.

The supplementary funding, and the opportunities offered to extend the work of the Engagement Centres was obviously welcomed. However, it added an initial lack of clarity around the organisation and work of the Engagement Centres. Applying, and then re-applying for funding was time-consuming, and detracted from the work that the Engagement Centres, and especially the Principal Investigators who were submitting the supplementary funding bids, were doing to establish themselves at the start of the funding period. This also added to the workload of Research Officers in individual institutions, and to Finance Officers, as applications had to be approved, and contracts redrafted, to include the work of new Co-Investigators in other institutions.

The difficulties caused by the revisiting of the initial scheme so soon after funding had been awarded was exacerbated by the short lead-in time, which saw the Centres start work in January 2014, just two weeks after being informed of their successful application. There was, however, an acknowledgement among the Engagement Centres that ‘in some ways, they (the AHRC) were probably experimenting [...] They were developing conclusions from things they’d already done. So, drawing the map might have done it quicker?’<sup>44</sup> The rapid changes of the early months meant that the Engagement Centres, and the Principal Investigators, developed their own methods for working together quickly and effectively:

‘It struck me that I think I would have moved more quickly to the idea of – I’m asking questions up the chain, and I’m not getting rapid responses. And then I’d sort of ask the group, what do you think this means? And then, eventually, tell people up the chain, this is the way we’re doing it! If you’ve got any problem with it, shout out! I think I would have moved more quickly to – let’s think of what our definition is – let’s operate by it. But, almost as a matter of courtesy tell people above us in the chain that’s how we’re doing it, and give them the opportunity to shout out, but not to have wasted some of that time whilst you’re waiting for the clarity to come out.’ (Engagement Centre Principal Investigator Focus Group, September 2018).

This Report demonstrates the ways that the Engagement Centres and their funding body learnt to manage, nurture, and develop the wide-ranging opportunities for new partnerships, extended and new networks, and co-produced projects that were enabled by the wide-ranging public enthusiasm for the First World War centenary and the funding made available to community groups by the HLF. The Report now surveys the range of work undertaken by the Engagement Centres and highlights some of the ways in which they worked with a range of communities, perspectives, and ideas that collectively offered new ways of looking at and understanding the history of the First World War.



The ‘Women’s Peace Crusade 1917-1918’ project. Courtesy of the ‘Making Histories’, Sharing Histories: Putting University -Community Collaboration into Practice’ Booklet (Grosvenor et al, 2020).



## Section Two

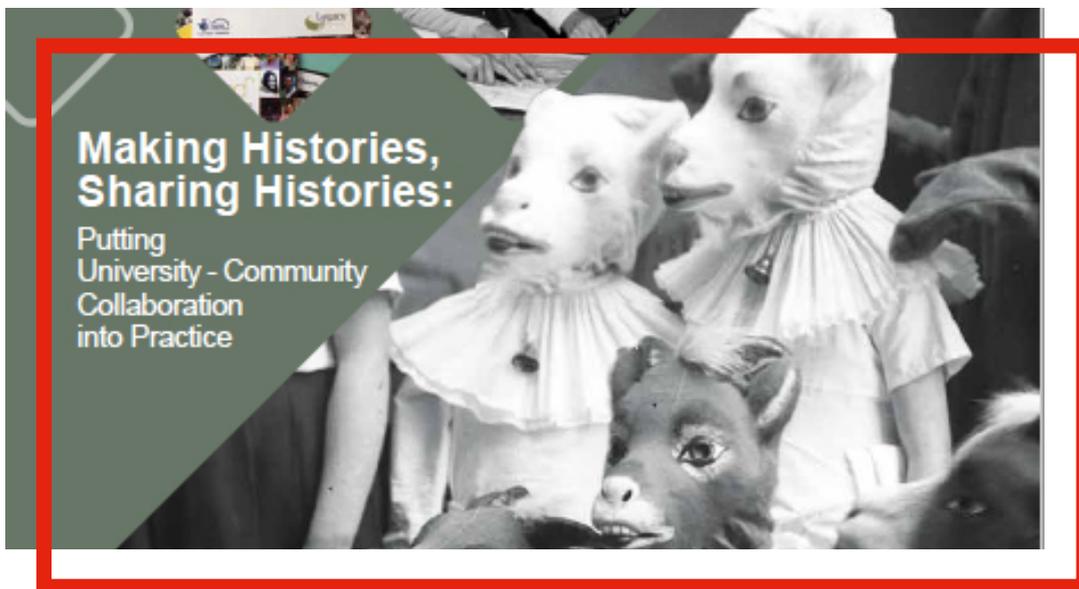
# Engagement Centre Co-production Projects

# Section Two

## Engagement Centre

### Co-production Projects

This section covers the co-produced projects that were funded and overseen by the Engagement Centres: projects that brought together academic and community researchers to work on specific areas of research that were separate from, but often complemented, the HLF-funded projects that the Engagement Centres worked with and supported, discussed in Section Three.



Front Cover of the 'Making Histories, Sharing Histories: Putting University -Community Collaboration into Practice Booklet. (Grosvenor et al, 2020).

### Centre ambitions and philosophy of co-production

'Finding ways of working in partnership with communities on projects exploring [the First World War] and the Centenary yielded not only fascinating new insights into the war's impacts and legacies but also provided new insights into "engaged research" practices of wider relevance to the heritage and research sectors.'<sup>45</sup>

Over the duration of their funding, the five Engagement Centres worked with 'more than 400 groups to successfully apply for over £1 million worth of funding across over 80 projects.'<sup>46</sup> Part of this cumulative total consisted of several collaborative research projects, identified by the Principal Investigator of *Living Legacies* as having the potential to 'shape the centenary of the war.'<sup>47</sup>

Realising the Engagement Centres' extensive public engagement ambitions manifested in part through what became known as 'co-production' projects, designed to connect academic and public histories.<sup>48</sup> Whilst this Report section goes on to consider the concept and its application in more detail, Larissa Allwork's terminology of a co-productive methodology as **"research that is collectively produced in a spirit of egalitarianism by academics, practitioners and the public for shared mutual benefit" offers a helpful upfront explanation**.<sup>49</sup> Two of the Engagement Centres have since shared their practice and lessons learned around collaborative working via a co-authored open-access publication, which we urge anyone planning co-production to read.<sup>50</sup> Looking back over collective achievements in September 2018, one Engagement Centre Principal Investigator deemed the outcomes of their sponsored co-produced projects as 'one thing that worked really well for us'.<sup>51</sup>

The plan for implementing co-designed research emerged out of the AHRC-funded 'Connected Communities' Programme in 2010, an initiative that set a goal within Higher Education towards pursuing 'research with, by and for communities'.<sup>52</sup> Delivering co-produced projects saw each Engagement Centre channel portions of their dedicated AHRC funding to enable academic members of their networks to work with community partners. Academic and community partners then set about designing, developing, and delivering projects that focused on aspects of the First World War (namely its history, heritage, or memory of the conflict).

The philosophy driving this partnership approach was two-fold. The project application process was a vehicle to establish and enhance individual/shared Engagement Centre networks, forging tangible links with academics at Higher Education institutions located around the UK. It offered a chance for each Engagement Centre to extend its presence and reach thematically, since the subject matter of any awarded project had to align with the Engagement Centres' originally outlined themes. But on an equal footing was the mantra articulated by one Principal Investigator, that 'co-production is co-production with communities.' There was a shared and strong determination to push beyond traditionally passive or more top-down outreach activities, such as talks in a local library. Rather, the intention was to harness, influence, and enhance (predominantly local) community-led enthusiasm for commemorating the First World War at its centenary, achieved through feeding in specialist knowledge and university expertise as part of that collaborative process. These Engagement Centre-sponsored projects accordingly offered an alternative – and crucially, more research-focused – pathway for interacting and exploring the conflict's legacies.

Projects had to meet expected, traditional academic funding criteria, fostering and disseminating knowledge, which would lead to high-quality outputs. Proposals also had to outline upskilling opportunities and the perceived mutual benefit for the project partners. One interviewee interpreted this as:

'there was always research, but the community aspect wasn't pushed to the back burner. It wasn't just something that got relegated to one weekend, this was built into the project' (Academic Partner, Interview, November 2017).<sup>53</sup>

Combined proficiency was designed to enable interests and outputs to be shared in partnership. But co-produced projects remained ultimately academic research projects, shown not least by the fact that awarded funding went directly to universities rather than community organisations, the application form having been completed by the Lead Academic with their dedicated hours towards the project costed in. Output details were often geared around impact-driven agendas of measurable or discernible value to the broader Higher Education sector.<sup>54</sup> This ethos was not considered necessarily effective or fair:

'...the way that funding works is generally the academic has to produce the idea of what research will be produced and write it up in a way that will be granted research funding money. But then when you take it to people quite often, they're like 'well why would I want to know about. This isn't what I'm interested in. These are the things that are actually affecting us'. So trying to think of co-produced research, you need to co-produce the research from the design of films right from the outset and see that through, which is one of the challenges' (Academic Partner, Interview, February 2018).

An unclear relationship between impact and engagement meant that any activities had to champion research and the deepening of knowledge as primary, prioritised outcomes.

## Centre-HLF relations

The specialised nature of funding arrangements for Engagement Centre co-produced projects meant they were distinct to the initiatives supported by the HLF, mainly through their 2013-19 *The First World War: Then and Now grant* scheme. Interactions between the Engagement Centres and the HLF are examined in Section Three of this Report; here we consider the correlation between the expansion of co-produced projects with the Engagement Centres' rising confidence, especially as they grew into their work over the course of 2015. The format and delivery of co-production was, by 2017, the time of the Engagement Centres' second funding phase, much more familiar considering the first round of collaborative projects reaching completion. By this point, more co-produced projects were being funded as entities in their own right without the requirement of existing financial backing.

As the centenary unfolded, all Engagement Centres hosted or held workshop events to sketch out their broader work for public audiences, including 'First World War Discovery Day' forum-style events, organised in partnership with local HLF Offices, with the aim of forging new links between projects and Engagement Centres. One Engagement Centre Principal Investigator suggested that it was these events which established the drive behind co-production projects. They observed '...what you would find in lots of events we had in 2014/15/16, where we had individuals coming along, who wanted to engage, but there was no mechanism for them to be part of a community as such'.<sup>55</sup> Another Principal Investigator agreed:

'I think that's where you need to kind of almost both accidentally, and kind of serendipitously, and opportunistically create a new model didn't we? Once we realised that there was no way of using the co-production funds solely to keep working with HLF groups – I mean, I don't remember the AHRC very clearly and formally saying "oh well then, you can use that money to create your own groups" in effect. But, once we started doing that, I think we achieved something really good and really interesting. We were using that co-production fund to create some great projects and bring people together' (Engagement Centre Principal Investigator Focus Group, September 2018).

Whilst applications from HLF-funded groups were 'particularly welcomed', the form for co-production funding stressed that any collaborations would need to add distinctive value or extend existing projects. Having benefitted from HLF funding streams, several projects did apply and secure financial backing from an Engagement Centre, usually in order to enhance their output or deliver a specific element. One example was the *Meeting in No Man's Land* initiative that received a substantial HLF grant in 2016, along with input the same year from the *Everyday Lives in War Centre*.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, the *From Great War to Race Riots* creative heritage project run by *Writing on the Wall*, a creative arts community organisation based in Liverpool, combined an HLF grant for community archiving with longstanding support from the *Centre for Hidden Histories* to investigate correspondence within the Lord mayor's archive concerning the post-war plight of black soldiers, seamen and factory workers in the city.<sup>57</sup> The Engagement Centres' task of connecting interested community representatives to scholars with matching subject expertise in order to

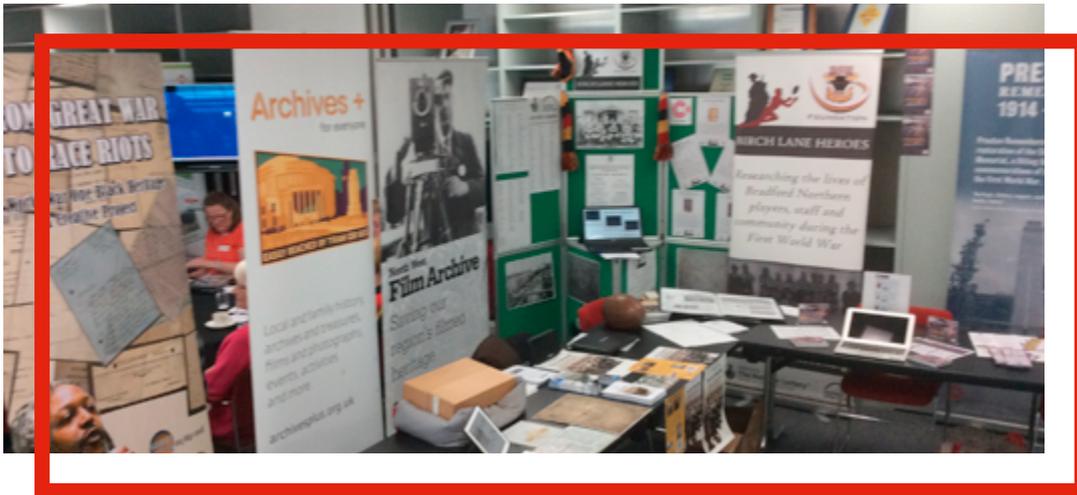
enhance heritage projects proved to be a lengthy one. Working with the HLF applications that grew out of events like 'Discovery Days' was one way to fulfil that original objective, but the Principal Investigator observations above suggest that co-produced projects could offer a more effective pathway for the Engagement Centres to implement and integrate subject expertise into appropriate activities (which could further form the basis of valuable REF Impact Case Study material).



Descendants represent their family histories of war in an art workshop for the 'Meeting in No Man's Land' project. Courtesy of Mike Roper and Age Exchange.

The notion of knowledge-sharing between community groups and affiliated researchers, via cross-sector partnerships, certainly coalesced as a strong presence over the course of numerous projects. Many were iterative rather than purely expert researcher-led, so achieved a goal of empowering volunteer researchers who were able to gain from their experiences. Input from community partners also secured links for academics to a wide range of audiences and practitioners. The second phase of co-produced projects from 2017 led to a concerted Engagement Centre-wide effort to diversify the range of community perspectives on offer. Additional funding gave priority to projects that looked to engage and empower minority or marginalised groups via projects designed to uncover more 'hidden' or under-represented histories of the war. Again, the opportunity on offer lent itself to widening types of participation and involvement; one Academic Lead noted in the case of their project:

'...librarians and archivists are very pleased when people come to them and want to make use of their resources...dealing with secondary school students, not part of their usual audience group. So, for them, it was new, and they hoped, of course, to bring in more people, a chance for them to show that they can do' (Academic Partner, Interview, October 2017).



Pop-up exhibition displays featured at an Engagement Centre-led event. Courtesy of the Gateways Engagement Centre.

## Centre approaches to co-production

The Engagement Centres adopted a range of approaches in structuring how individual projects were funded, both in terms of duration as well as how they chimed with defined specialist subject areas. One Engagement Centre chose to streamline their support by funding a small number of projects to a higher value, as a way of maximising quality and far-reaching outputs. A healthy proportion of projects involved academics outside of History. Over their range – covering topics such as supernatural beliefs, childhood, migration, and displacement through to material cultures and maritime and naval history – many of these determined Engagement Centre themes were aimed at championing lesser-known histories or perspectives. *The Voices of War and Peace* Centre pursued existing links with community partners within its local area. Its Principal Investigator commented:

'I think *Voices* is probably different from everybody else's...so, it's very much been focused on Birmingham and the first bit was very much West Midlands orientated, until we were told to expand ourselves. In 2012, we set up in the City a group of community organisations, museums, activists and so on. Saying, you know, in 2014, there'll be a commemoration of the First World War...in some ways, it was communities who set the agenda for the *Voices* Centre' (Engagement Centre Principal Investigator, Focus Group, September 2018).

The testimony and perspectives of partners likewise showed that arrangements with individual Engagement Centres varied widely. Most cited their working relationships as positive and enriching experiences, in part because of the unusual devolution away from funding councils:

‘...it was much more of a relationship of talking to colleagues in Birmingham, who were running the [Engagement] Centre...there was a lot more contact from them. They were interested all the time in what we were doing, and what we were feeding back. But, not in a kind of a monitoring way, but much more in a kind of positive frame, and thinking about how they could help us...and they came down to visit a few times, and were immensely supportive, and linking us up with other things that they knew about. So, I would say that was a really positive aspect to the project – the devolved [Engagement] Centre, and that added – certainly added value to our project (Academic Partner, Interview, August 2018).<sup>58</sup>

For another *Voices of War and Peace* representative, a key factor lay in benefitting from Engagement Centre connectivity – in terms of being proactive to team up with other projects run by other commemorative programmes, so that one was ‘amplifying your work and drawing in so many more people’. However, one Principal Investigator commented less favourably upon what they felt was ‘a tyranny of distance’. The geographical spread of projects inevitably inhibited a sense of overall cohesion as a *modus operandi*; ‘suddenly, we’re working geographically farther afield. So, we cannot get people together so readily. So, I think that needs to be understood in terms of the general way we’re set up’.<sup>59</sup>

In its outlook, co-production meant a new model, so introduced new ways of working. Working with grass-roots groups meant a focus on breaking down divisions or potential obstacles between what was seen to be within and beyond a university. Whilst outputs had to be designed and recorded within the proposal parameters, they offered an often-attractive opportunity for both academic and community partners to trial new approaches, especially where these partnerships involved creative or arts organisations. Aims formed around finding ways to work together, to produce ideas and think about novel outputs generated from collaboration. Unfamiliar but more organic ways of working were applied to engagement with certain First World War subject matter or themes. One Academic Partner reflected positively on the experience:

‘...it was very productive. I learnt a lot about engagement personally. I learnt about the creative possibilities of doing history and doing research...we learnt a lot about working with a creative organisation, because I think that’s the – both the joy, but the challenge for us, as academics is to think well, how does our sense of research and insight get translated into something else, and vice versa...rather than let’s just claim an impact here, because we’re doing stuff with a public organisation’ (Academic Partner, Interview, February 2018).

Again, support from the Engagement Centres proved vital in endorsing this heightened sense of creativity. One Academic Partner identified flexibility as something they had needed throughout the research process, musing ‘there’s no right or wrong way in terms of what comes first and what comes second...when it comes to these sorts of projects, the formulas don’t always work’.<sup>60</sup> Another Academic Partner agreed, commenting on how academics do their work and the fact that ‘we weren’t exploratory about our relationships with groups before’:

‘I suppose if you were a marine biologist and you go work with someone in the sea, you know what they can do. But you get the kind of – someone who calls themselves a public historian, or a media archivist, you know that’s – what are we going to do with you? And we’ve worked with creative businesses in the past – cultural organisations – and there has been a frustration on my part before, about what CAN we actually do, you know? How DO you add value, or add to what people want? And, I think, again, because of the instrumental nature of how organisations work, is that they often do want to see something really quick and tangible’  
(Academic Partner, Interview, February 2018).

Innovative, interdisciplinary practice and models of working with groups all showed how the Humanities could facilitate co-produced projects on a significant scale. One Principal Investigator argued ‘a very strong and lasting legacy’ of the Engagement Centres’ combined activities was around ‘practices and modes of co-production and public engagement...something which can be of use to the Arts and Humanities Research Council, to HLF, to our universities’.<sup>61</sup> A DCMS-commissioned First World War Centenary Legacy Evaluation Report published in September 2019 noted the scheme’s benefit in terms of HEIs learning about non-HEI engagement, through working with local organisations and the public, ‘providing all involved with a reciprocal learning opportunity’.<sup>62</sup> Another Engagement Centre Principal Investigator concurred:

‘I think this is a positive thing, has enabled me and my colleagues, to think more seriously about public engagement, how it works, and what models which we might promote or propose for the future. I think public engagement – which is really a core of what we’ve been doing – has, at the end of it, actually delivered’  
(Engagement Centre Principal Investigator, Focus Group, September 2018).

To illustrate the quantity of co-produced projects delivered by any one Engagement Centre, Allwork’s article notes that the *Centre for Hidden Histories* at the University of Nottingham supported seventeen ‘Research Development Fund’ projects between 2014 and 2016, with a further six funded from 2017.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, the *Everyday Lives in War Centre* enabled fifteen projects over three separate funding rounds, including six delivered in 2017.<sup>64</sup> *Gateways* delivered seven projects, *Voices of War and Peace* 17 and Living Legacies 12, although quantities were affected by varied levels of partnership with HLF-projects.<sup>65</sup>

Tangible and multidisciplinary project outputs likewise ranged significantly, in line with the divergent approaches and subject themes employed by each Engagement Centre. The most frequently produced were publications (in the form of booklets as well as online media), exhibition displays, multimedia productions including documentaries, participation at public open days or heritage events, digital apps, and walking tours amongst others. Similarly, community partners covered a broad array of organisations, incorporating community heritage organisations, youth theatres, libraries and archives, visitor centres, historical associations, schools, and creative arts or community-film making companies. A few projects integrated undergraduate input via existing or newly established degree modules.



A performance of 'The Medal in the Drawer' at Belfast City Hall in 2015. Courtesy of the Living Legacies Engagement Centre.

## Volunteering

Keith Lilley, Principal Investigator for the *Living Legacies* Engagement Centre, has described the notion of citizen history as 'a means of harnessing volunteer research inputs into academic projects and programmes – with collaboration and peer-to-peer training ideally – leading to mutual benefits for both academic and community researcher.'<sup>66</sup> At the heart of any co-production philosophy is the participatory role played by community partner volunteers.



A volunteer training day held at the Keep Archive in Brighton. Courtesy of the Gateways Engagement Centre.

But the differences between volunteer roles, and paid work on a project could lead to tensions. Our data showed that a significant number of academic and community partners expressed uneasiness around how volunteerism was understood within the context of their projects. Comparing the involvement of employed heritage staff with that of volunteer input, one Project Lead commented:

'...it all depends on how you define a volunteer, which is an interesting question. So, the curator of the [institution], is he a volunteer or is he doing it professionally? He was a major partner in the thing. He volunteered an interest but was he a volunteer. I'm not sure. Were his staff who helped volunteers or were they persuaded? I think they were volunteers if I'm being honest. I'm not sure about the curator, because this is his job, so that's a bit of a grey area' (Academic Partner, Interview, April 2018).

Areas of contention surfaced around how to acknowledge participant time being given voluntarily towards a particular project versus how this sat with the guiding ethos of co-production. An Academic Partner declared their project's very existence had come to fruition directly from the work of a volunteer, observing '...he gives his time. And would not, I think, see himself as a volunteer, but as – this is how we've stated it officially as well, as we are the two lead project partners...so we're equal.'<sup>67</sup> Enthusiasm proved a common denominator across various interview conversations, where Academic Partners both recognised and applauded the existing subject expertise held by their volunteering counterparts.



A volunteer engages with a First World War project via a Virtual-Reality headset. Courtesy of the Living Legacies Engagement Centre.

Looking back over their achievements, representatives put their project successes down to a few principal reasons. One highlighted the flexibility of co-production in giving volunteers enough free rein to channel the project:

'It's also, sometimes, letting volunteers have the capacity to go off and feel like they're doing the research themselves, rather than being micro-managed. It's them that will tell you the changes. I was researching, and I've found this. And it's good, sometimes to let them run wild, because they're amazing. They'll be amazing in what they actually find and what they bring back. Without volunteers, you don't have a project. And that sounds really simplistic. But it's a very important point! Look after them. Treat them well. But, also, make sure that we recognise the work that they do, the effort that they put in. If you create a project, make sure there's something at the end to celebrate the fact that they've created this amazing piece of work' (Community Partner, Interview, May 2018).

Granting volunteers enough of a sense of freedom to study what was of interest to them was therefore important, evened out by the presence of a dedicated co-ordinator who would set target milestones. One representative spoke of the importance of their volunteer group as a '...remarkable set of people, with remarkable database/IT research skills', in existence before their project commenced, which fuelled the chance of future success (Academic Partner). Another co-ordinator added:

'I wasn't developing my own networks; I was essentially plugging into other networks of people who had done similar or at least historical research before... what I was doing was taking advantage of that. What the volunteers were doing was taking advantage of that and just ploughing our own furrows so to speak' (Academic Partner, Interview, April 2018).<sup>68</sup>

Volunteers or independent researchers often became involved with projects on the back of a general interest or thirst for that subject matter (many initiatives found that overall numbers quickly whittled down to a core group). Prior experience of working with volunteers was valuable. A high proportion of projects were driven by pre-existing connections to a topic or an interest in locality – especially aspects of local history – as a primary motivation for volunteer involvement.<sup>69</sup> Some ventures sought to inspire a cross-generational shared interest in history, bringing together a tech-savvy dynamic of the ‘usually older, local history researchers, the family researchers, and then younger people with their different media and different ways of going about it.’<sup>70</sup> Retired individuals tended to revel in the sense of purpose and social benefit derived from involvement, on the basis of their being able to commit more time and having the necessary resource available to do so. Interestingly one academic mooted the idea that their project’s volunteers were skilled but ‘often quite lacking in confidence’, so attention was channelled towards boosting that.<sup>71</sup> Again, this meant projects had to acknowledge distinguishing contributions and articulate the different voices involved. Quite a few ventures accordingly held ‘end of project’ events to celebrate their achievements, while post-project surveys revealed the importance of ‘new friendships’ formed via like-minded interests, as a key outcome from project participation.

That said, quite a few projects found it tricky to balance meeting grant requirements whilst also encouraging and sustaining the commitment of participants who were giving up their own time. Academic Partners considered some of the difficulties and politics of working with local stakeholders; whilst valuing unquestionable enthusiasm, a few felt that the short lifespan of projects – ‘a finite datum life of them and finite requirements, aims, objectives, outputs’ – sat in noticeable contrast to the life of non-academic community groups who ‘sometimes live with this forever, you walk away and they’re still doing it.’<sup>72</sup>



Roundtable discussions take place at an Engagement Centre co-production event. Courtesy of the ‘Making Histories, Sharing Histories: Putting University-Community Collaboration into Practice’ Booklet (Grosvenor et al, 2020).

## Co-production in practice

As already outlined, the ethos of co-production sat at the heart of the vision for the Engagement Centres, enabling community organisations and academics to come together to explore issues relating to the history, heritage, and commemoration of the First World War during its centenary period. For many involved, this was something to celebrate:

'I think it's a fantastic way [for]...people in the community...to bring out something that they've done. And they want to feel proud. Also, not just something that's going to be shown at the local community centre – something that is maybe shown in, you know, a well-versed academic field – when they can go into this arena and see their work exhibited. They can talk to – now that their work's being shared – amongst academic fields as well. Because, sometimes, when it comes out there, it then hits another level. You know, that's the prize. I've done it myself. That's the prize of where I started at, you know a pub quiz! I don't know – ten years ago now? A pub quiz to now seeing work that's exhibited on the Internet' (Community Partner, Interview, February 2018).

Not only does this type of activity enhance positive university and community relations, but it also contributes to a key Higher Education priority of widening participation:

'I grew up about less than two miles from the University of Birmingham...well, I now attend events at BCU and City University as well...like to actually be dropped, you know, into the academic field there...it does give people a chance to actually connect with these institutions that [surround them]...it's really useful for people to understand that universities aren't these hallowed turfs that people can't go and tread...I'm now attending university, which is sort of an output of me first doing a community project years ago' (Community Partner, Interview, February 2018).

The Engagement Centres offered opportunities for both academics and community partners alike. For the former, they were a platform through which those with less public engagement experience could be given the chance to learn about partnership working and the types of challenges they present:

'I have done it now and I can have a much better sense of what, and how groups function...I would feel more confident to approach a group...we all learnt a lot from the process' (Academic Partner, Interview, May 2018).

There were clear benefits for academics to work with external stakeholders within their communities offering:

'a different perspective on what it is that you do, and what it is that you find...this is a way of bringing people in at an early stage, whereby you get much more chances, not only to look at things deeper, or potentially in a different way and get a new perspective. But, also, it gives you the chance to tell more people about what it is that you do [as an academic researcher]' (Academic Partner, Interview, October 2017).

All of those who worked with and through the Engagement Centres during the centenary, whether academics or community partners, emphasised the importance of trust in building and sustaining these types of collaborations. It was those academics who had already worked with community organisations (or vice versa), whether on a First World War related topic or not, that produced the most enduring and successful partnerships during the centenary: 'Everything went...very well in lots of ways because they were [co-production] strategies that we'd used before, and we'd...co-produced with the archive before'.<sup>73</sup> For another Academic Partner:

'I'm used to talking the language of community partners and not actually making it very complicated in terms of what the AHRC wants to hear and in a way that made the whole collaboration much easier. I have been working with community partners before...All my life really and so we didn't have a problem setting up the ground for what we wanted to do together' (Academic Partner, Interview, August 2018).

These types of relationships cannot be 'magic[ed]...into existence if they're not there' and raise questions about what needs to be done in the pre-project design stages to help ignite and nurture these embryonic relationships.<sup>74</sup> Clearly co-production does not appear out of nothing:

'had they [community partners] not already been in existence – had they not already been kind of galvanised at an earlier stage...then they wouldn't have been available... [The project] worked so well because of...these relationships...you couldn't just invent them' (Academic Partner, Interview, February 2018).

The significance of a 'pivot person' with links to the community who can assist the academic/university to build connections was crucial. Without that person it 'just wouldn't have been possible'.<sup>75</sup> Equally, academics need community partners to act as brokers otherwise they can seem alien and outsiders. Community partners provide 'connections' and 'integrity to me as a researcher'.<sup>76</sup> In order to allow 'clear straight-faced negotiation' between both parties about what is and is not possible, training should take place based on the theory and practice of participatory methods.<sup>77</sup>



Partner organisations welcome attendees to an Engagement Centre Study Day event. Courtesy of the Gateways Engagement Centre.

In relation to developing equal partnerships in collaborative research, interviewees highlighted trusting community organisations, addressing funding barriers, and power dynamics as key:

‘Nobody can do their [community organisations]’ job other than them and so when we talk about collaborative research or co-design or co-production, it is like going beyond these titles and actually really co-designing projects as in going to somebody with an idea that’s one sentence or one question mark and then devising a sort of strategy and log frame together. It is difficult because we often don’t speak the same language [terminology] we don’t call things by the same name but once you’ve established a mutual sort of ground of understanding then it becomes really interesting because then those projects are not only doing this because they want the money, they’re actually doing it because they believe it would contribute to growing their communities and expanding their networks and their own organisations. So, when that becomes the case you can do a lot with just six months of funding. If you just go with a log frame that’s imposed on you by your funder and you tick your research boxes, then that doesn’t really go anywhere. So, trust the community partners, they know better.’<sup>78</sup>

However, co-production did not come without its challenges, notably around the issues of funding, equity, motivation, and communication.

## 1. Funding

One Academic Partner felt:

‘the guidance [from the AHRC] was flawed from the outset. The problem was they asked us to work with very hard to reach communities...And several of our groups...were not incorporated in any way, which made them ineligible for HLF... directives to find hard to reach groups but they had to be established enough so that they either at least were already incorporated or had even already received [HLF] funding...these things seemed to me to be completely incompatible’ (Academic Partner, Interview, December 2017).

There was an inherent tension between the amount of funding available via the Engagement Centres and the need for universities to cover their costs in full. Academic partners found themselves minimising their time costing (e.g., 2-3 hours) to keep costs down for relatively small pots of funding. But this was unrealistic in terms of marrying with the needs and expectations of the institution they worked for. At the same time the community partners saw the grants as a large amount of money, leading to awkward questions like: 'why is the university taking x amount of money for lightbulbs or time at your desk?'<sup>79</sup> As another Academic Partner highlighted:

'when you work with Arts organisations, they cannot believe the slice that Universities take up. I mean, they are – every single time, we want to do anything that pairs us up with a partner, they're shocked at the estates. I mean, you know, the size of bits and the amount of money that doesn't even go into your individual salary, you know. So, the hours on the project were very short' (Academic Partner, Interview, February 2018).

Alongside increasing the amount of money available and reducing the slice taken by institutions, we recommend that co-production should be in place from the beginning of the grant application stage. Greater involvement of community partners in developing bids would help establish at the outset, a realistic range of likely costs from the community perspective.

## 2. Equity

Perceived or actual imbalance in costings between academics and community partners contributed to concerns over involved power dynamics. One Community Partner felt the Engagement Centre they were associated with were 'riding on the coattails' of the community project's success and that 'at no point did we feel that we were getting any academic expertise, or anything like that. Never did we feel that!'<sup>80</sup>

There is a need to confront the reality of the power imbalance inherent within the structure of AHRC Engagement Centre funding. As it was the academic partner that had to apply for funding, rather than the community partner, this could make it 'quite an unequal partnership'.<sup>81</sup> If the community partner were not sufficiently involved in designing and conceptualising the project this could exacerbate feelings of power imbalance: 'the way the collaboration worked out was not what I was expecting...because [the] writing of the project, the conception of the project was done by the academic partner'.<sup>82</sup> Engagement Centres needed to make a conscious choice to 'push back against some of that narrative of the academic being the dominant partner in terms of getting the money, being responsible for the budget centres, and treat the community organisations almost like a resource for the academic knowledge to be used'.<sup>83</sup>

Equally, the power imbalance could tip in the opposite direction. If a community partner had a clear idea of what they wanted to do in a certain amount of time, then it made co-production and co-research a 'bit of a misnomer'. It was not 'friendly cooperation' or 'a loose process' where both parties were able to set the agenda; the academic, in this case, had to make the choice to sit back and take a more passive role – 'It was not our project'.<sup>84</sup>

Thus, the importance of equity between academic and community partners is paramount:

'it's ensuring that the voice – you know, whoever's around the table, whoever they are – that their voices are articulated – you know, heard – and their contributions are acknowledged' (Academic Partner, Interview, February 2018).

### 3. Motivation

Successful co-production during the centenary depended, in part, on the motivations of those getting involved. Some community partners were concerned that academics wanted to develop a centenary-related project with them to jump on the 'impact bandwagon' reducing it to a 'ticking the box exercise' without thinking it through in substance.<sup>85</sup>

Academic partners also raised questions about how far-reaching the Engagement Centres really were because, on the whole, they tended to attract the type of people from the community who were doing/would do this type of work already. In other words, they were 'already self-selected'.<sup>86</sup> One Academic Partner suggested the events that were most popular with community members were those that reassured them/confirmed what they already knew:

'I think five years ago the Engagement Centres perhaps had a view of extending those historical imaginations and thinking...it's a toughie because people are interested in it because they are interested in it...They have a view...And a lot of knowledge...Cultural memory [of the war] has shifted in one or two places [during the centenary] but not in a wider sense' (Academic Partner, Interview, May 2018).

Overall, age impacted on the degree to which co-production could be successfully nurtured. Children were perhaps more receptive to the idea of 'producing' creatively and independently because they were still within the school-system. Adults, on the other hand, could be more passive learners who wanted to hear more 'from people who know, rather than to write things, create things'.<sup>87</sup>

### 4. Communications

Communication was fundamental to the success of any collaboration between the Engagement Centres and community organisations. Academics particularly had to be mindful of the language employed to ensure it was always audience 'appropriate'. It was crucial to 'create a language and a dialogue between both groups [academics and community partners] so that we're clear in understanding what the project will be' (Community Partner).<sup>88</sup> It was not only the outputs of the project that were co-created, but also the ways of working and communicating.

This was not always easy, and several interviewees noted the difficulties of maintaining positive and productive communication between Engagement Centres and community partners. Misunderstandings and tangents – people going off on a different route to what was anticipated – had to be carefully managed. Engagement Centre-community relations involved 'quite a lot of...management; what I'm saying is, it sounds lovely on paper, doesn't it, you know the co-production of knowledge? But it's harder in practice'.<sup>89</sup>

Language also needed consideration in terms of how participants from outside the academy were 'labelled'. For one Academic Partner:

'I'm not a great fan of the idea of citizen-cartographers, or citizen-historians. I think it's slightly patronising. I don't think it's necessarily meant to be...we're supposedly trying to bring down the divisions between... 'us and them'...but actually, I think it reaffirms to some extent the 'us and themness' of it!' (Academic Partner, Interview, February 2018).

Attitude mattered as much as what was said. Academics should not treat community partners arrogantly, as if they ought to consider themselves lucky and grateful for university involvement:

'[Community groups/partners] don't need us; they've got their own channels to get their own funding so if you're really serious about working with community partners we need to really start from scratch. We need to completely change the way academics approach people. There's this arrogance that we bring with us that is extremely damaging to the kind of relationship we do with community partners...if we're interested in actual real impact.'<sup>90</sup>



Poppy wreaths and crowds at the Cenotaph on the one hundredth anniversary of the First World War Armistice, Whitehall, London. Credit: Paul Brown/Alamy Live News.

## Initial conclusions

Engagement Centre-community partnerships during the centenary raises an important, broader question about the nature of co-production: **does the perceived value of co-production depend on what is produced?**

For example, if you engage volunteers from the community to help complete information for a research database, can this genuinely be considered co-creation? Or is it a more didactic and instructive activity for the benefit of the academic as opposed to the Community Partner?<sup>91</sup>

## For one Academic Partner:

'I really struggled with the definition of what co-production research means...I think one of the things that all of the groups [involved in the five Engagement Centres] have struggled with...is there is very little talk of outputs...but there is however talk of co-production. So, the question then becomes "what is it that they want co-produced". So, if we're talking about co-producing articles what does that really mean? Can we really expect these [community] organisations to have meaningful input into an academic article? That seems kind of unlikely. To the extent that they're producing research that then we're writing up, I'm not really sure that that qualifies as co-production...find out what you can for us, bring it back to us and then we'll make meaning out of it in the form of academic articles, that doesn't really seem to be co-production' (Academic Partner, Interview, December 2017).

For academics, something more attuned to the 'bigger-picture stuff' related to 'research with a more scholarly outcome' might matter more to them than to community partners. The latter, instead, might prefer something 'much more tangible...visual' that can be more easily shared with the local community. Is that a more legitimately co-produced outcome that community partners can see and say, 'this is what [I've] helped...produce?'<sup>92</sup>



A map of Belfast displaying data from 'The Geography of Service and Death' project. Courtesy of the Living Legacies Engagement Centre.

Many local groups wanted the academic to come and share their expertise, to 'tell them what to do, and they then go away and do it. And that is not really what the AHRC understands by co-production.' Nevertheless, it does have value, especially if it helps local groups develop a sense of security about what they are undertaking. Expert validation 'is a form of co-production, though it's not necessarily what the AHRC would understand by co-production. And I think that's a problem.'<sup>93</sup>

In turn, this raises larger questions about the relationship between impact, engagement, and knowledge exchange. Many academic partners expressed disappointment that the types of activity they engaged with via the Centres would, most likely, not count towards a REF Impact Case Study:

'It would have been much better for me in retrospect in one way to say "no, I won't do any of this stuff I'll just get on with my book" because for us as academics it doesn't seem to be on the radar properly...proper engagement is not impact. Proper engagement is where you facilitate other people and you hold events to get things growing which are not your research...[UKRI] need to figure that one out...a bit more in terms of the relationship between engagement and impact...Good engagement, one would say by definition is not impact. Because it's their impact that they have for themselves, not the impact of your research on them' (Academic Partner, Interview, May 2018).<sup>94</sup>

While a project may have brought people together, allowed them to network and connect, and – ultimately – made an impact on their lives, 'in terms of looking at it in a purely impact, history type way, intellectual, academic, it doesn't really fit' As we go on to discuss in the next section, engagement and impact are not the same thing, and for valuable work such as the projects discussed here to continue, the notion of impact, as embedded in the current REF framework, needs to be reconsidered.



A project volunteer-training event. Courtesy of the Gateways Engagement Centre.



## Section Three

# Partnerships with Heritage Lottery Fund Projects

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## Partnerships with Heritage Lottery Fund Projects

'I...want to celebrate those stories of success that there are, both at the level of a community group and a community project that's had a wonderful relationship with one of the [Engagement] Centres and with particular staff. You know they feel it's enriched their project and added a dimension. You absolutely want to celebrate those.'<sup>95</sup>



A First World War-themed Bake-Off event held in 2016 at Avoncroft Museum (Worcestershire), forming part of the 'War in the Vale' project. Courtesy of Maggie Andrews.

From the inception of the Engagement Centres, it was expected that they would each develop a close working relationship with the HLF, the key nationwide British funding body for community-based projects marking the centenary of the First World War. This section of the Report focuses on these partnerships and relationships, reflecting on how they developed and the work that was produced between 2014 and 2019. The concept of 'co-production', discussed in Section Two with relation to the co-produced projects funded by the Engagement Centres, was also absolutely central to these projects, originating as they did with HLF-funded community groups rather than in academic interests and research. Equally, the discussion of 'impact' in this Section applies to the co-produced projects discussed in Section Two. This section therefore traces some of the complexities and demands of co-production for both community and academic partners, the multiple ways that academic researchers could participate in such projects, and the limitations of 'impact' as currently understood in universities.

## Models for HLF-academic co-production

For the HLF, the key model for its relationship with the Engagement Centres was All Our Stories, the collaborative programme that had run between 2012 and 2013, designed to 'explore, share and celebrate local heritage'<sup>196</sup> The original All Our Stories community projects were funded by the HLF while a parallel All Our Stories funding application call by the AHRC *Connected Communities* programme invited academic partners to apply for funding which would enhance 'outreach and engagement between research groups in the arts and humanities and community groups and organisations interested in exploring their local histories and heritage.'<sup>197</sup> Approximately 2,000 community projects were funded by the HLF, whilst 21 universities were funded by the AHRC to work with some of these projects in the 'co-creation' of knowledge. The NCCPE, established in 2008 to support public engagement in the Higher Education sector, acted as a 'brokering agent' between community groups and academic partners, a role which, as we shall see, often turned out to be central to successful partnerships developed during the centenary period.



A representative from Living Legacies welcomes attendees to an Engagement Centre event. Courtesy of the Gateways Engagement Centre.

Thus, when the AHRC issued the call for Engagement Centre applications, outlined in Section One of this Report, models for successful projects that brought together community and academic partners were already in existence. However, the AHRC's report on this model of working, *Creating Living Knowledge* (Facer and Enright) was not published until 2016, meaning that its important recommendations regarding best practice, and the diversity of practice, for academic-community co-production, were not available in either the AHRC's own early planning stages, or the first years of the Engagement Centres. Thus, Facer and Enright's useful reflections on both models for best practice, and for building successful partnerships between academic and community partners, were not always clearly drawn upon in either the planning stage or the early days of the Engagement Centres.<sup>98</sup> As this Report shows, this impacted on the Engagement Centres' work, particularly in their first years of operation: while they were able to develop new methods of working they also suffered from the length of time spent both making initial contact with community groups and setting up models for working that enabled successful co-production and were understood as productive within the 'Impact' and 'research output' driven model of research that dominates the British Higher Education sector. In addition, the AHRC's decision to fund five Engagement Centres, rather than a larger number of smaller partnerships as seen in *All Our Stories* clearly diverged from this earlier model and meant that the Engagement Centres worked differently, building partnerships and activities with a wide range of different projects and organisations over the course of the centenary rather than focusing on one or two collaborative relationships.

Over the time of its existence, approximately 1,900 projects were funded through the HLF *First World War: Then and Now* scheme. The HLF estimates that around 10% of these were working with the Engagement Centres in 2018, the highest percentage at any point during the centenary.<sup>99</sup> However, outside of formal working relationships, where Engagement Centres worked closely with HLF projects, for example by supporting the initial planning phases, or by providing specific training for volunteers or partnership around events, there were numerous instances of less quantifiable yet mutually beneficial ways in which Engagement Centres and HLF projects worked together. For example, each of the Engagement Centres ran numerous 'First World War Discovery Day' events, in which community partners with completed or ongoing HLF projects presented their work to audiences made up of the wider public and of those considering developing their own projects. Country and regional HLF Officers often attended these events, providing informal advice to those considering the development of projects under the *First World War: Then and Now* scheme, and academic speakers highlighted the ways that the Engagement Centres could support such projects. Nonetheless, the lack of a 'brokering agent' such as the NCCPE may have meant that so-called 'hard to reach' or marginalised communities were less likely to attend such events, thus remained under-represented in Engagement Centre-supported projects.<sup>100</sup>

We go on now to look at some of these projects and the working relationships developed between HLF-funded community partners and Engagement Centres in more depth, to outline the different approaches to co-creation taken by the Engagement Centres, and to consider the benefits and constraints of working with academic partners as expressed by community partners.



'A Seminar in the Street', held on Thiepval Street in Belfast, May 2019. Courtesy of the Living Legacies Engagement Centre

## Early days: Making connections and establishing partnerships

Each of the five Engagement Centres worked with a range of HLF-funded community projects. In the absence of a formal brokering process - such as that undertaken by the NCCPE in the *All Our Stories* collaboration - country and regional offices of the HLF worked with the Engagement Centres to bring academic and community researchers together, to raise awareness amongst community researchers of the existence of the Engagement Centres, and to provide a platform for already established centenary projects to share their work and to inspire further funding applications.

One early issue that was encountered was one of data protection. Part of the HLF's remit was to work with and support projects funding applications, providing feedback that would help to ensure success. Data Protection thus meant that the HLF were unable to share the contact details of groups in the Engagement Centre's geographic area, or area of research expertise, who were considering applying for funding from the HLF *First World War: Then and Now* scheme. As one community heritage officer working with an Engagement Centre explained, this made building relationships and co-producing projects from their initial stages more difficult. While the gradual development of networks, and of relationships between members of the Engagement Centres and community groups, together with activities that took place outside of university grounds such as 'First World War Discovery Days' helped to overcome this initial issue, data protection legislation potentially meant that projects that might have benefited from involvement with the Engagement Centres from the outset were not able to access this unless they took the initiative to approach the Centres:

'So, when those people have those first ideas, before they've made their application to the HLF, especially those people who are at the enquiry stage – when they've just got their ideas... and we're not allowed their details, because of database protection issues. So, we're working closely with the HLF, but they can't get over that. They cannot – they can't – they can't put us in touch with those people directly... Some people do come directly to us because they've been told to do so. But, then there's barriers involved there - there's some people who won't want to come to a university – approach a university. So, that's a challenge!' (Community Heritage Officer, Engagement Centre, Focus Group, Kent, September 2017).

Given these constraints, the HLF country and regional offices and the Engagement Centres worked closely together to organise events for people interested in developing projects and applications to the HLF, so that the expertise of those involved with the Engagement Centres could be drawn upon as early as possible. These 'First World War Discovery Days' were held in a range of different sites, ranging from university buildings to community centres, museums, archives and libraries in an attempt to ensure that a wide a range of people were able to attend. *The Voices of War and Peace* Engagement Centre at the University of Birmingham recognised from the outset the importance of being based outside of the university campus for community partners; a physical and spatial embodiment of the necessity of breaking down the perceived distance and sometimes perceived power relations between universities and their communities, as discussed in Section Two and in Facer and Enright's 2016 Report:

Facer and Enright argue that a key legacy of collaborative and co-produced work such as that undertaken by the Engagement Centres and their partners is 'the creation of a new public knowledge landscape where communities, and the universities that form part of those communities, can collaborate to question, research and experiment to create new ways of understanding, seeing and acting in the world.'<sup>101</sup>

The Principal Investigator of Voices was determined to work away from the university campus. With space in Birmingham's central library where the Centre Co-ordinator was based, the *Voices* Centre was able to reach potential community partners without them having to visit university buildings, understood as unwelcoming by some members of the wider community.<sup>102</sup>



A panel speaking at an audience event for 'The Orange Lilies' project in 2017. Courtesy of Strike A Light – Arts and Heritage.

The Engagement Centres worked hard to find mechanisms to identify and engage with a range of community partners. This was especially important during the first phase of funding, from 2014 to 2016. A conference held at the National Archives in 2016, 'Dissenting Voices and the Everyday in the First World War', led by *Everyday Lives in War*, acted as a useful means of both highlighting the existence of the Engagement Centres among community groups, and bringing a range of researchers together – including those interested in carrying out independent research into the First World War, allowing them to network and develop collaborative ideas in an informal setting. In Belfast, *Living Legacies* worked with the Community Relations Council of Northern Ireland (NICRC) to connect with communities that may have otherwise been 'hard to reach'.<sup>103</sup> Running events across Northern Ireland and more widely, *Living Legacies* managed to engage with project partners both from across the different communities in Northern Ireland and further afield in the UK. *Gateways* organised a range of public talks, and information and training events, aimed at reaching new audiences and building links between academic researchers associated with the Engagement Centre and the wider community. While some of these utilised university buildings, others took place in community halls, museums, archives, and libraries.<sup>104</sup> *Hidden Histories* held a series of community workshops in community 'spaces not traditionally associated with universities' including Arts Centres, cafes and libraries.<sup>105</sup> As the HLF's First World War centenary Programme Director reflected, good practice here included 'the openness, the welcome, the willingness to meet people on their patch, rather than the university.' As the centenary went on, all five Engagement Centres functioned effectively as 'resource points' that were approached by both individual researchers and those developing applications for funding to the HLF, able to help with academic expertise, to put researchers in touch with people and organisations with particular knowledge in their area, and to offer guidance and training for project organisers and participants.



A Gateways Centre representative at the Broadwater Farm Community Centre in Tottenham, London. Courtesy of the Gateways Engagement Centre.

A key element for all five Engagement Centres in these early stages of operation was the need to build relationships with community groups that were based on mutual trust and confidence in one another. The development of such relationships was a central, yet time consuming, element of all of the successful projects the Engagement Centres partnered with, yet was perhaps especially central to the HLF projects, which unlike the co-produced projects discussed in Section Two that were funded by the Engagement Centres and developed with academic partners from the outset, relied upon the development of a successful working relationship between community groups and academics who had often had no prior contact. In the absence of a brokering organisation the Engagement Centres worked with a range of other institutions, including the HLF but also others such as local galleries and museums, local history groups, the Red Cross, and the NICRC, to build effective relationships. For at least one Engagement Centre member 'a key lesson was that projects based on university and community partnerships need to build time into their project plans for this key learning and partnership building period.'<sup>106</sup> The development of these relationships needed what two of the Engagement Centres defined as 'empathetic listening' – the necessity for academic partners to recognise the power dynamics that are both embedded within communities and are entangled in academic-community partnerships, and to both 'make sense for different voices' and to 'hear what they say'.<sup>107</sup>

All five Engagement Centres worked to find effective means of both identifying and reaching out to potential community partners, responding to approaches from community groups, and developing effective models for the co-production of knowledge. As multiple previous studies have identified, successful co-produced projects need 'specific and dedicated management' and an investment in 'significant time, both to build the relationship and to plan and review the project'.<sup>108</sup> Each Engagement Centre recognised the importance of employing at least one person who could dedicate the majority of their time to building these relationships, and who could act as a first point of contact for community groups interested in working with academics through the Engagement Centres. While these appointments took slightly different forms and had different titles (e.g., Community Heritage Researcher, Community Liaison Officer, Project Officer) they were described by one Principal Investigator as 'the foot-soldiers' for the Engagement Centres who were 'literally being out in the field'.<sup>109</sup> These appointments proved to be central to the development of good working relationships with numerous projects. Each

Engagement Centre accordingly employed someone whose 'role went beyond the usual expectations of research administration and was vested with a variety of responsibilities dedicated to maintaining the relationship between university and community, and in making projects successful.'<sup>110</sup> These 'blended professionals' - whose work combined elements of traditional academic research with expertise in the administration of research and the ability to work with community researchers - played a central role in the functioning of the five Engagement Centres, crucially acting as trusted points of contact for community partners, and as bridging agents, able to build links and relationships between academic researchers and community partners.<sup>111</sup>



A representative from the 'Not Far From the Front' project presents at a Discovery Day event in Hastings, 2017. Courtesy of the Gateways Engagement Centre.

As noted above, the development of such relationships was time-consuming and had not been factored into the initial hours allocated to academic staff working with the Engagement Centres as Principal and Co-Investigators. As one Principal Investigator noted, the work of building relationships with community researchers was 'a time-consuming process of public engagement', and that initial resource allocation for the Engagement Centres (from both the AHRC and individual universities) was inadequate: 'I completely underestimated how much time I'd need to dedicate to this.'<sup>112</sup> The time that they were able to dedicate to building strong partnerships, and the experience in public histories and community projects that the community liaison officers brought to the Engagement Centres proved to be invaluable, as they were able to travel to meet with community partners, to act as a first point of contact with the Engagement Centres, and then respond to requests for feedback on applications for funding and planned activities. As one HLF project leader who worked with both *Hidden Histories* and *Voices of the First World War* told us, the support of community liaison officers could be essential: 'there was a lot of pressure on me... but... having a strong base, like (the community liaison officers),... that was great to have.'<sup>113</sup> In short, they were crucial to the successful building of partnerships for the Engagement Centres, undertaking both the practical tasks necessary for the development and operation of co-produced projects, but also the 'emotional labour' that is central to the successful maintenance of any relationship:

'I think having a supportive person available, locally, who you could sort of say: what shall we do about this? As we need to deliver that and we're not quite sure how to do it. So, that really helped having someone sort of regularly there, or at least on the end of the phone' (HLF project leader, Interview, February 2018).

## Co-production in practice: Two models

Over the Centenary, the Engagement Centres worked together and separately to both build effective partnerships for co-production, and to find mechanisms and models for these partnerships. In practice it is sometimes difficult to disentangle the work that the Engagement Centres did with HLF-funded projects from the co-produced projects funded by the Engagement Centres, and indeed the multiple other activities that the Engagement Centres undertook, such as crowd-sourced research projects, First World War Discovery Days, public talks and conferences and the time-consuming but often overlooked tasks of responding to email queries and individual requests for information. Public talks, for example, could be driven by the interests of either HLF project partners or Engagement Centre funded co-produced projects, but would also attract individual attendees from the wider area, who might then themselves go on to contact the Engagement Centre for further information, and perhaps investigate HLF funding. First World War 'Discovery Days' run by each of the Engagement Centres in locations across the country not only showcased the work of successful HLF-funded projects but included talks by academic researchers alongside presentations by local HLF Officers on the process of applying for funding and from Engagement Centre members on ways to work with the Engagement Centres. While working with HLF-funded projects had been the driving force behind the establishment of the Engagement Centres, it was recognised from the outset that not all projects or researchers would be able to access HLF funding, and that the Engagement Centres would work to support community projects as widely as possible.



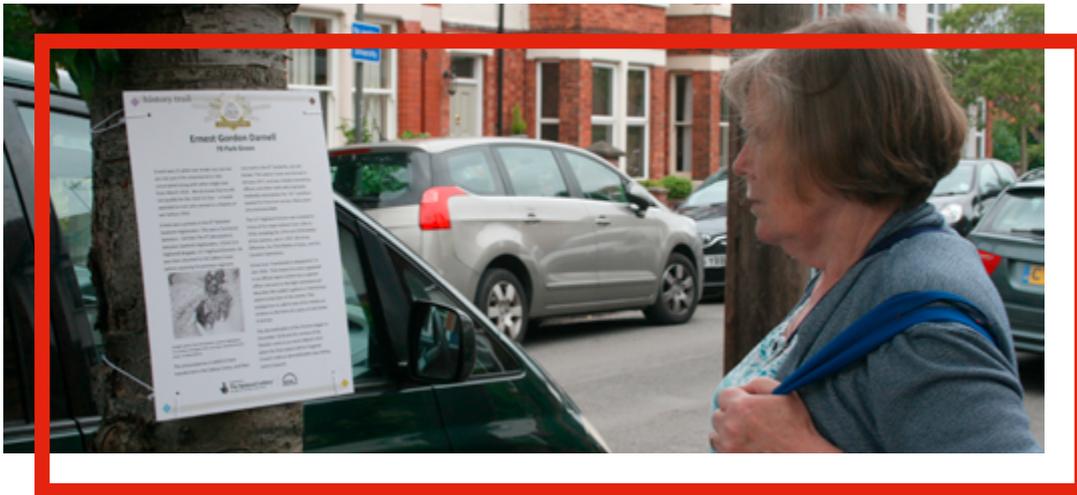
A crowd-sourced project investigated post-war battlefield tourism through researching newspapers and other documents. Courtesy of the Gateways Engagement Centre.

The Engagement Centres found that they were regularly approached by community researchers, who had attended a public event such as a talk, 'Discovery Day', or exhibition, and who were interested in applying for HLF funding. However, some of these were individual researchers who, whilst they had an interesting history project, did not meet the criteria for HLF funding, which does not fund individual researchers.

While events such as 'Discovery Days' could help some researchers develop their projects in ways that meant they were eligible for HLF funding, others simply wanted to investigate the history of the First World War so sought the help of the Engagement Centres to do so. The 'Dissenting Voices' conference organised by *Everyday Lives in War* in 2016, worked well to support some of the researchers who were not applying for HLF funding, both giving them a platform through which to share their research, and providing opportunities for networking.<sup>114</sup> Other events, such as crowd-sourcing research days supported by Gateways created opportunities for individual researchers to develop the 'embodied legacies' associated with more formal co-production projects as discussed by Facer and Enright:<sup>115</sup>

'It was at the end of the project that I'd done at the British Library – you know, it was two people at the end of that week said to me, umm do we have to give these in now? It was their library tickets. I said, no, it's valid until whenever – and, you can probably renew it then. And then both of them said, does that mean we can come back in and look at other books? Yes, you don't – you don't – it doesn't stop here and now... That was just a wonderful moment!' (Principal Investigators Focus Group).

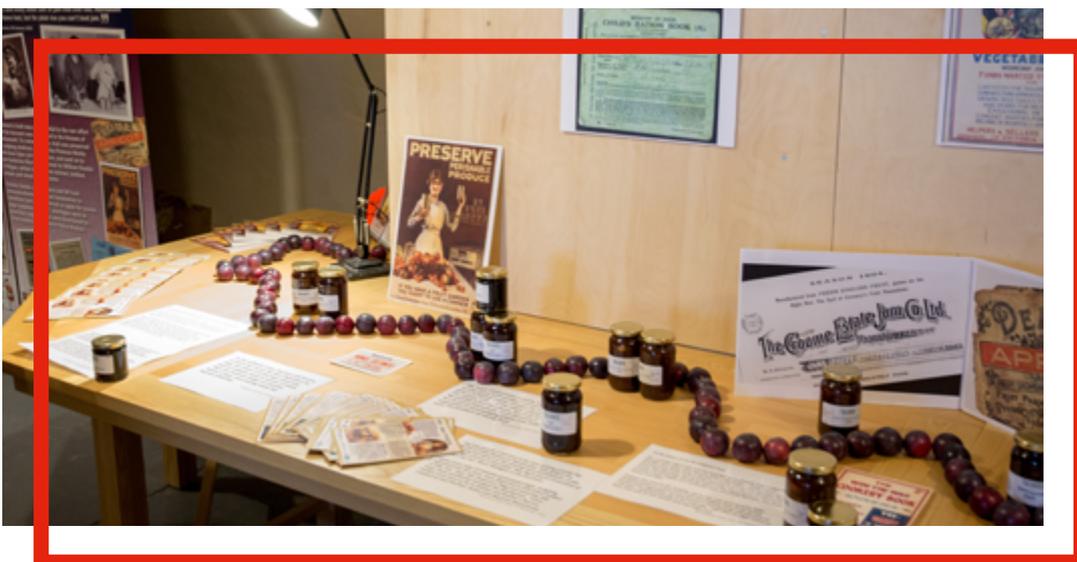
Overwhelmingly participants in and co-ordinators of centenary projects funded by the HLF who worked closely with the Engagement Centres reported that this had been a positive experience. Some of these, such as *Strike A Light* and *In-Roads Productions* in Sussex which both worked with *Gateways* on three separate HLF-funded projects apiece during the centenary, were well established and experienced community heritage and arts organisations, well-versed in applying for funding, and working with a wide range of individuals and communities. Others, like *Six Streets Derby*, which worked with Hidden Histories, were community and neighbourhood groups, working on a funded history and heritage project for the first time. Yet others, such as *East Belfast and the Great War* were created during the centenary, led by individuals with a particular interest in and knowledge of, their topic. HLF-funded groups then had a range of different needs and perspectives, alongside different skills and knowledges to offer to the Engagement Centres.



A member of the public studies a pop-up display panel from the 'Six Streets Derby' First World War centenary project. Courtesy of the Six Streets Derby Group.

The ways in which the Engagement Centres worked with HLF-funded projects were almost as diverse as the areas explored by the projects themselves. They could involve organising talks by academics with specialist knowledge, such as Dr Jenny Richardson's talk on female munitions workers for the *Billy Youth Project* in Tottenham, North London, who ran the HLF-funded project *Sharing Stories of World War One Munitions Factories in North and North East London*. They included engagement with material history, as seen in the *Voices of War and Peace* partnership with HLF-funded projects in Worcestershire and Herefordshire:

'They had a trip to Eckington Manor, which is a cookery school, where Mark Stinchcombe is the Head Chef, and he won MasterChef Professional the year before. So, they did a food demo and talked about World War One rationing. And, we provided them recipes, and they did the World War One recipe, and then they did another tasty, modern equivalent. So, they had a very fancy sort of afternoon there' (HLF Project Leader, Interview, March 2019).



Part of the 'Croome Plumlines' exhibition display, held at Croome Park (National Trust) in Worcestershire between 2016-2019, which looked at First World War-era food. Courtesy of Maggie Andrews.

They included help with organising exhibitions, using archives and training in oral history, such as that offered by *Gateways to Inroads* Creative Learning's HLF-funded project *Brighton and the Spanish Flu*.<sup>116</sup> Partnerships could also take the form of practical and financial support for projects: for example, Hidden Histories helped to enrich the experiences of volunteers with the *Six Streets Derby* project by organising and funding trips to the Railway Museum at York and the Imperial War Museum North, Salford.<sup>117</sup> They also included technical support, such as the digitisation of family objects and artefacts of the war that members of the public bought along to events organised by the HLF-funded *East Belfast and the Great War* project.<sup>118</sup> But simply to focus on what the Engagement Centres 'provided' to the HLF projects would be to misunderstand the nature of collaboration and co-production. While some projects did develop in a way that utilised the 'traditional 'top down' or 'linear' impact model as widely understood within Higher Education, the more common working model can be understood as 'flat', in which there were exchanges of knowledge and expertise from both parts of the partnership, and from which the academic partners learned and gained as much as the community partners. This can be understood using the model of 'sedimented histories' as explored by Lloyd and Moore, but we first set out some of the ways that projects utilised the traditional 'impact' model of research collaboration.<sup>119</sup>



A dance workshop for the 'Breaking the Silence: Spanish Flu' creative learning project, Inroads Productions. Courtesy of Sara Clifford.

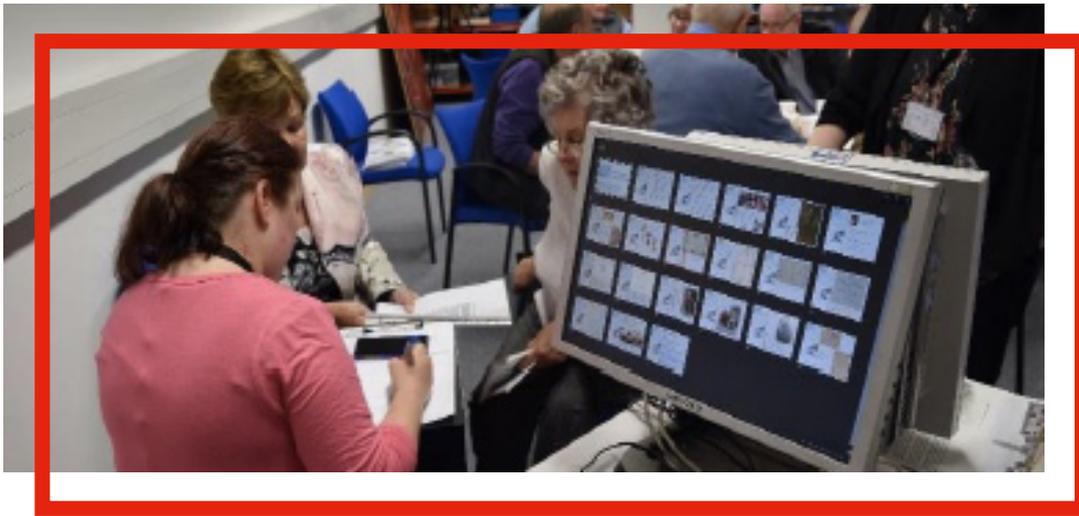
## Impact and co-production. A problematic relationship?

The concept of 'impact' as a formal mechanism for assessing university research is part of the REF exercise, which assesses the quality of research across the British Higher Education sector. Within the REF, impact is understood as 'an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia.' Forming 20% of REF evaluations in 2014, in the most recent REF exercise, REF 2021, the assessment of impact is worth 25% of all academic department's submissions.<sup>120</sup> While the aim of encouraging academic research that has a value outside of academia is, in many ways, laudable, it can also be an uneasy fit with the work of co-production, and the development of effective relationships that underpin and sustain this work. The creation of 'REF Impact Case Studies' by academics demands that they show their academic work has had an impact outside of academia that is both measurable and quantifiable. In practice this has often been understood by university research managers as 'linear and direct' impact which demonstrates how important an individual's research or a research project, has been in shaping elements of life outside of academia.<sup>121</sup> This linear model of impact sits uncomfortably with the model of co-production which shaped the creation and work of the five Engagement Centres, as it separates out the 'academic' from the 'community' researcher, and positions the academic research alone as impacting on a co-produced project:

'Co-production means that we need a different definition of impact. Co-production is centrally about impact. But impact is not a separate stage or endeavour, it is built into research processes. There is a strong argument that the communities involved or effected by this research should be involved in defining impact.'<sup>122</sup>

This does not mean, of course, that academic research could not shape a project. Indeed, community partners understood the role of academic researchers as contributing knowledge and offering training:

'But, the other thing it does is – the other point that I was going to make is it helps train the amateur historian. You know, one of the things that the amateur historians get out of it in working with academics is academic – umm, working professionally on dealing with the data and all of that. They're learning – we're learning techniques by working with academics' (HLF funded Project Leader, Interview, October 2019).



Digitising First World War-era objects at an Antiques Roadshow-style event in Northern Ireland. Courtesy of the Living Legacies Engagement Centre.

In addition to the detailed knowledge of their research field that academic partners could contribute to co-produced projects, their ability to access the specialised resources of the university was valued. As mentioned above, Living Legacies utilised an 'antiques roadshow' model that encouraged members of the public to bring artefacts so that their provenance could be identified and they could be scanned and digitised, with the images and a description stored on databases held by Queen's University Belfast:

'For all intents and purposes we hired them for the day to come along and provide this facility...They collected all this information and they provided it to me digitally, maybe a couple of weeks later, after it had all been catalogued and collated back in their offices' (HLF funded Project Leader, Interview, January 2018).

The expertise that academic researchers could bring, and sometimes the experience of applying for funding, could be beneficial to projects from the outset. At times this academic input and subject specific expertise worked to take projects in new directions: members of one project described how attending an academic talk at their local library as they were beginning to develop their application to the HLF changed their thinking about the project:

'He talked about post-traumatic stress and things...That was really fascinating. But, you know, not something we had begun to think about then. Because we were still into thinking, oh, which regiments would our men be in, or something. Because we weren't thinking about the impact of the whole of the war' (HLF funded Project Leader, Interview, January 2019).

Specific knowledge of the First World War could be drawn upon to help community partners narrow down their areas of interest and develop targeted funding applications:

'They wanted to apply for this HLF pot. And they wanted to look at everything in their area at first. And they honed it down to one thing they thought would be interesting, and they ended up looking at munitions factories in their area, 'cos they knew there had been some particular factories there. Now, I suppose what really struck it with me – because, I was thinking okay, they didn't really have a focus at the beginning, they've created this focus. Are they going to pull people in? And it was one of the most effective community workshop days. We invited speakers in... They had an exhibition. They brought it in. And the turnout for that was absolutely amazing.' (Engagement Centre Community Liaison Officer, Focus Group, Kent, September 2017).

But the linear model of co-production was also perceived as problematic. One HLF project leader discussed at length the way that they understood co-production to favour an academic approach that did not necessarily mesh with the interests of the community group, and which might try to change these:

'So, and I just wonder – it's a bit like, I suppose my perceptions of public history, it's what historians do to people, rather than engaging them. It's what people should have, and it's good for them. They should like history. Rather than actually, they might just like medals and the mud and excess and that's far enough' (HLF funded Project Leader, Interview, January 2019).

The project leader here had identified the power relationship that is built into the linear model of impact, and which understands the academic researcher to be the holder of power in the relationship with the wider community, which they 'act upon' and help to shape through the 'impact' of their research. As another project leader succinctly put it, 'whose history is it anyway?'.<sup>123</sup> This power relationship stems from the ways in which universities, driven by the need to create Impact Case Studies for the REF, imagine impact as a 'one way' process. The experience of the Engagement Centres and their community partners during the First World War centenary demonstrates that successful co-production largely relies on a quite different understanding of impact. We go on now to consider this.

## Co-production and sedimented histories

'Impact is two way – impact is not something that academics 'do' or 'give' to communities. The transactional or donor-recipient model where a single knowledge producer (university/academic) impacts on an external community or organisation is not relevant to most situations. Co-production impacts on academic knowledge and practices as well as the non-academic world.'<sup>124</sup>

In the co-production model, power and knowledge are often understood as being held, and exchanged, by both community and academic researchers. This was expressed in one focus group by an Engagement Centre Principal Investigator:

'It was actually a member of a community group that said to me, one day – we were sitting around, and he said... we all have expertise. He said, nobody's an expert, we all have expertise. And that changed my thinking about all of this in a profound way. I thought, actually, you don't need to think about one person having expertise and, you know, this person having to transfer it. It was that we all had something to contribute, and it was all different. And I really liked that so much. So, that was a really powerful and rewarding thing for me' (Engagement Centre Principal Investigator, Focus Group, Kent, September 2017).



'Windmill Youth Theatre' rehearse for a performance of the 'Breaking the Silence: Spanish Flu project with Inroads Production. Courtesy of Sara Clifford!

Co-production in the case of First World War centenary projects can be usefully considered as the process of creating 'sedimented histories', defined by Lloyd and Moore as 'the process of putting stories into circulation while also respecting the diversity of interests and priorities that created them.'<sup>125</sup> As Lloyd and Moore note, the creation of these sedimented histories relies upon 'relationships of trust' as the stories being told may be in conflict with one another, something seen with regards to understandings of the First World War at its centenary by the *Everyday Lives in War* Engagement Centre which became 'aware of radically different perspectives held by individuals and groups across the region.'<sup>126</sup> These different perspectives were encountered by at least one of the community groups that worked with the Engagement Centres when they developed a project on Conscientious Objectors with a local school:

'It was 2014, it was right at the start of the centenary celebrations, and all of a sudden this romanticised notion of the First World War was being fuelled in the media, and I thought "oh no, nobody is going to want to touch this". Conscientious Objectors, you know if I'm bringing up something then they're not going to want to really deal with this. Everyone wanted to talk about it, absolutely everybody to talk about it, except the parents of the children. They went bonkers, absolutely extraordinary... "We don't want our child learning about this rubbish, this is wrong". And I'm like "gosh"' (HLF funded Project leader, Interview, April 2018).

Helping to create an effective working relationship that enabled co-production, and that recognised the different interests of community partners, both between and within groups, in a way that enabled the development of 'sedimented histories' meant that academic partners had to be ready to take on a number of roles, and to work with non-academic partners in a variety of ways. As Lloyd and Moore reflect: 'For some groups we are a sounding board, a way of testing what might be achievable...For others we are a signpost to new sources, different questions and fellow enthusiasts, or...full partners in exploring a theme or story.'<sup>127</sup> While the AHRC originally envisaged the Engagement Centres working as 'full partners' on HLF-funded First World War projects, offering support and partnership throughout the lifetime of the project, experience across the Engagement Centres in fact demonstrated that successful co-production could take many different forms, ranging from a reply to an email or phone call, a meeting over a cup of tea, financial support, organising speakers and training, or collaborating on final 'outputs' such as exhibitions, booklets and websites:

'Having some in-kind support, so for example, at a couple of events we've delivered Gateways, you know, funded the refreshments or certain things that kind of meant you know, our budget wasn't quite so tight. That made it really helpful. Then *Gateways* were also organising parallel networking events, so we got to plug-in to some of those. And those were really helpful actually...and also cheerleading, I think! You know, saying that's a really good bid, you did a really great job, you know. When you don't have that internally – that's a really nice feeling too, I think' (HLF funded Project Leader, Interview, February 2018).



Volunteers participate in a themed craft workshop. Courtesy of Nicola Bengé & Strike A Light –Arts & Heritage.

Where there were pre-existing relationships between community partners and academic researchers, these could be a helpful means of developing effective partnerships during the centenary. These existing relationships often (but not exclusively) relied on geographical proximity. For example, the leader of one HLF-funded project discussed the benefits of working with a research fellow based in the *Everyday Lives in War* Engagement Centre. They had worked together previously on a separate project, and the trust-based working relationship developed there carried over into this project. As the Research Fellow explained, good interpersonal relationships could be key to the success of a collaborative partnership:

'But, it is often –it's about flagging up resources –go and see the people over there –that sort of thing. And this confidence building. I think a lot of it is saying people ask a question and you sort of come back and say, that's a really good question and then that just gives them a bit of confidence to think OK, this will work' (Academic Research Fellow, HLF funded project, Interview, January 2019).<sup>128</sup>

Again, some of the benefits of co-production for community projects were less tangible. As the Project Leader explained: 'The Engagement Centre? Yeah, I think it's – you know, that idea of a collaboration and, I see it very much as a confidence builder for community groups.'<sup>129</sup> An effective working relationship both underpinned co-produced research projects during the centenary and benefitted both partners. As the HLF Programme Director for the First World War reflected towards the end of the centenary: 'some of the academics who've been involved, and early career researchers...giving them the dimension of engagement with community has enriched their work.'<sup>130</sup>



Engagement Centre representatives.  
Courtesy of the Gateways Engagement Centre.

When the partners in co-produced projects work together based on shared and different expertise, new and valuable perspectives and approaches can be created. A striking example of the power and import of local and specialised knowledge, largely unavailable to academic researchers, can be found in the one HLF funded project that worked with the *Voices of War* and Peace Engagement Centre. The leaders of this project were serving Officers with the British Army, and felt that the partnership and support offered by the Engagement Centre helped them to gain funding and to structure and deliver the project successfully. The driving force behind the project, however, was their own experiences as serving soldiers. This was contrasted favourably to academic knowledge of warfare:

‘(We) have both been on operations...we understand how that feels... having served for as long as we have, it was always about making people understand the emotional struggle of the soldiers...we wanted to talk about the emotions of the soldiers, because a lot is done about valour and bravery, very little is done about, you know, how you actually feel on a day-to-day basis’ (HLF funded project leader, Interview, March 2019).

The project worked with schoolchildren from Birmingham, taking them to visit the Western Front, where the British Indian Army served, and to the Chattri Memorial in Sussex, where the bodies of Indian soldiers who died while receiving hospital treatment in a nearby town were cremated, followed by a shared meal of dishes that soldiers in the British Indian Army would have eaten, at a local school. Thus, the benefits of the emotional and immersive elements of the project were emphasised over academic knowledge, providing a 'way in' to the world of the soldier for the schoolchildren that participated. This was driven by the knowledge and experience of the community project leaders, rather than the 'academic perspective' they encountered during their time working with a London university in 2015.



Engagement Centre representatives and dance performers gathered at an event commemorating the centenary of the Battle of Passchendaele (Belgium) in July 2017. Courtesy of the Gateways Engagement Centre.

## Initial conclusions

The relationship between Engagement Centres and HLF projects over the duration of the First World War centenary is impossible to summarise in one phrase or sentence. Indeed, the different ways of working, the different ways that relationships developed and the differing ways that Engagement Centres did or did not shape the projects can be seen as a strength of the Engagement Centre model, which was, in relation to more typical academic research projects, diffuse and unstructured, enabling different Engagement Centres to trial and utilise a range of approaches and working models.

The role of a brokering organisation, that could help to build links between the Engagement Centres and the wider community, was absent from the early days of the Centres' work. Instead, they each developed techniques and strategies for connecting with community groups: organising 'Discovery Days', establishing a presence at commemorative events held in local and national arts, heritage, and community institutions, building on established relationships, and setting up websites, mailing lists and newsletters. The key initiative, however, was the employment of one individual at each Engagement Centre who could act as the first point of contact for community groups and who was able to spend time away from university buildings and campuses. The role of these colleagues was absolutely central to the work of the Engagement Centres, and often to the establishment of the working relationships that underpinned co-production with HLF-funded projects.

The work of the Engagement Centres demonstrated how there is no 'one size fits all' approach to successful co-production. While the development of a relationship of mutual trust and respect between academic and community partners is key, the work that academic partners can undertake within co-production is wide ranging and multi-faceted and should not be simplified into a range of 'tasks' or represented as particular 'outputs'. It is fundamentally different from the REF driven 'impact' model that dominates Higher Education institutions today and cannot be approached as a means to showcase the impact of a particular piece of academic work. Indeed, the experience of the Engagement Centres and their HLF-funded partners showed that successful co-production is most often experienced as a fluid and multi-layered exchange of knowledge and expertise, which benefits both members.



## Section Four

# Engagement Centre Events and Activities

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## Engagement Centre Events and Activities

### Introduction

Not all the activities of the Engagement Centres sit under the umbrella categories of 'co-produced projects' and 'HLF project partnerships'. In this section we highlight a selection of the wide range of supplementary activities undertaken by the Engagement Centres over the course of the centenary.

The commemorations of the centenary of the First World War witnessed sustained levels of engagement and participation over a six-year period by a wide range of communities. Between January 2014 and December 2020 the AHRC provided over £5.5 million of funding to the Engagement Centres to support community groups interested in researching and commemorating the First World War. The five Engagement Centres worked with over 400 different groups across the country. By providing advice, support, and training they enabled these communities to undertake projects, to formulate project ideas, and submit funding applications. These projects featured a range of activities from digitisation to dramatisation, from archiving to life skills, and the Engagement Centres provided a wide range of training, building new, sustainable connections both between the universities and community groups, and between community groups themselves. This work underlines that community engagement goes beyond the groups the Engagement Centres worked with directly – it extends to large numbers of people who were reached through events and outreach work. Over 500 events were run directly by the Engagement Centres, involving over 250,000 participants, and the Engagement Centres supported more than 600 further events run by others.<sup>131</sup>

### Cross-centre collaboration

The Engagement Centre teams met on regular occasions from the very start of the centenary period. All Engagement Centre teams attended a two-day event in January 2015, held at the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Birmingham. Sessions including presentations, workshops and panel discussions were hosted by several partners, including the HLF and History Pin. This gave those academics working with the Engagement Centres an early opportunity to meet one another and talk about their hopes and plans for the centenary period.

Each Engagement Centre drew on the expertise of its members to develop research and relationships specific to itself. For example, *Hidden Histories* worked closely with schools to better understand the experiences of pupils and teachers during the centenary; *Living Legacies* ran roadshows where members of the public could bring First World War items to be discussed and digitised; *Gateways* built links with colleagues at the In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres, Belgium to run a collaborative series of talks on the history of the First World War; *Voices of War and Peace* drew on its strong links with community groups in Birmingham to deepen the knowledge of, and participation in, First World War centenary activities in that city, and *Everyday Lives in War* worked with the Finborough Theatre, London to revive a ‘forgotten’ play of 1913.

All five Engagement Centres consistently demonstrated a strong desire to collaborate with one another. As evidenced by the number of events held, cross-centre collaboration was effective throughout the centenary period. For example, *Voices of War and Peace* and *Everyday Lives in War* collaborated on the ‘Beyond the Battlefields Exhibition’ (2017-18) which toured Britain, showing photographs taken by Käthe Buchler of life on the home front in First World War Germany, while *Gateways* and *Living Legacies* held a community history research day on the Isle of Lewis and Harris in 2018. This showcased work supported by *Living Legacies* on the loss of HMY *Iolaire* off the Isle of Lewis in 1919, and offered research development workshops led by the *Gateways* Community Heritage Researcher. These kinds of collaboration were enhanced by regular meetings of the Principal Investigators to discuss their work. This served to keep them in touch with one another, compare working methods, and to collaborate on several initiatives and plan events as far in advance as possible. All the Engagement Centres worked together in an effective manner, usually with one or two Engagement Centres taking the lead at various times.

In September 2015, the Engagement Centres collaborated on a ‘Roadshow’ co-ordinated by the Community Heritage Researcher at *Gateways*.<sup>132</sup> This featured three free and open events featuring speakers, workshops, stalls and networking opportunities at the Imperial War Museum North in Manchester, the City Museum in Leeds, and at Newcastle University. The aim was to encourage attendees to explore their community’s connection with the First World War and meet up with others already doing so. The roadshow brought together community groups and other organisations working on projects around the heritage of the First World War, or who were interested in developing a project.

The roadshow events provided opportunities to share experiences, explore possible sources of funding (especially via the HLF), exchange ideas, and learn about free support and resources, including how and where projects could showcase their findings online. The roadshow was co-hosted by the five Engagement Centres, with information provided for visitors about each Engagement Centre’s network of expertise in First World War research that could help when developing community projects. At each event there were also opportunities to learn how to digitise, record and preserve communities’ stories and memorabilia.

In addition to the core team of Principal and Co-Investigators at each Engagement Centre, a national network of experts was created to offer specific advice and guidance on community project applications. Where project applicants were looking for advice on a particular area of research the Engagement Centres worked to put that person or group in touch with someone with expertise in that area. As well as First World War history,

members of the network had specialist knowledge of literature, language, archaeology, performance arts, and digital technologies. Network members helped in a range of different ways, from providing advice on sources and archives, to playing a mentoring role in projects and applications for funding.



A screenshot of the interactive 'Visualising the Iolaire' project app. Courtesy of 'Visualising the Iolaire'/Iain Robertson and Iain Donald.

## Early Career and Postgraduate Researchers: FWWNetwork

The Engagement Centres supported the FWWNetwork, a supportive and responsive research network for early career and postgraduate researchers working on any aspect of the First World War. The steering committee was originally drawn from the members of a Postgraduate Research (PGR) Network linked to IWM North, which acted as a meeting place for discussions and collaborative projects among postgraduates attached to universities in the north of England, and a member of the FWWNetwork was invited to join the regular meetings of the Engagement Centres with the AHRC. The network attracted members from across Europe and further afield, and continues to seek to draw together postgraduates, early career researchers, and any others interested in studying the First World War.

The Engagement Centres worked with the FWWNetwork to further enhance links between the research expertise of the ECRs and PGRs in supporting co-designed and co-produced research projects. In 2018, with funding from Phase Two of the Engagement Centres, the FWWNetwork offered its members the opportunity to apply for a Collaborative Research Grant of up to £1,000 each to support a project with a group, individual or organisation from the general public or heritage sector. Members of the Network also worked with the Engagement Centres to deliver two international conferences, to run a series of training workshops, a shared workshop with the *War Through Other Stuff* Early Career Researcher Network, and to provide opportunities for members to share their expertise. The Engagement Centres also helped promote the activities of the FWWNetwork through their own networks and websites and helped to provide training tailored to the needs of the ECRs and PGRs in the FWWNetwork.<sup>133</sup>



Academics and project representatives at an Engagement Centre Roadshow, held in 2015. Courtesy of the Gateways Engagement Centre.

## Documentary film: *Untold Stories of World War 1* (2018)<sup>134</sup>

In addition to working with a range of community groups, supporting new researchers and engaging with individuals interested in the First World War through a range of public events, and participation in state-level Somme100 commemorations in Manchester in 2016, the Engagement Centres worked to reach wider audiences, and to showcase the opportunities for collaboration that existed. Presented by television historian Dan Snow and produced by the media company History Hit, *Untold Stories of World War 1* gave an overview of some of the pioneering research projects carried out by the Engagement Centres between 2014 and 2018. The full documentary was made available to watch online from 1 November 2018. The projects featured in the film included:

### ■ **Recovering First World War Theatre**

A project led by Dr Helen Brooks from the University of Kent. Volunteers helped to research every play written for performance between 1 August 1914 and 31 December 1918 which are held at the British Library and create a public database.

[www.gatewaysfww.org.uk/projects/recovering-first-world-war-theatre](http://www.gatewaysfww.org.uk/projects/recovering-first-world-war-theatre)

### ■ **Beyond the Battlefields: Käthe Buchler's Photographs of Germany in the Great War**

A unique series of images made by photographer Käthe Buchler (1876-1930) in Germany before, during and after World War One, and which are part of the collection of the Museum of Photography in Braunschweig - where Buchler lived and worked.

[everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk/2017/10/beyond-the-battlefields-kathe-buchlers-photographs-of-germany-in-the-great-war](http://everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk/2017/10/beyond-the-battlefields-kathe-buchlers-photographs-of-germany-in-the-great-war)

### ■ **Untold Stories: Birmingham's Wounded Soldiers from WW1**

A look at the untold stories of soldiers returning to Birmingham from the Great War with serious physical and psychological injuries. It mapped the sites of hospital treatment and convalescence that were set up in the city and explored what happened to the soldiers after their treatment ended.

[peoplesheritagecoop.blogspot.com/p/untold-stories.html](http://peoplesheritagecoop.blogspot.com/p/untold-stories.html)

- Ballykinler Military Training Estate This excavation project revealed new information about the camp's function as a First World War training establishment.  
[www.livinglegacies1914-18.ac.uk/MaterialCulturesandLandscapes/BallykinlerExcavation](http://www.livinglegacies1914-18.ac.uk/MaterialCulturesandLandscapes/BallykinlerExcavation)

## Research Festivals: March – November 2019

The end of the period of funding for the Engagement Centres was marked by a series of five two-day Research Festivals hosted across the UK. Each festival had a distinct theme, providing space for reflections on public history and heritage, and showcasing the diverse collaborative work created around First World War-related subjects over the centenary period. The Research Festivals additionally looked forward - aiming to encourage and inspire attendees to consider potential future work and collaborative potential, with a particular focus on how community organisations and academics might continue to work together on various aspects of the past. The Festivals had a budget for bursaries to cover the costs of community organisations being able to attend and present their work, allocated on a first-come first-served basis.



Programme for the  
'Shared Heritage'  
Festival, held across  
Northern Ireland  
in May 2019.  
Courtesy of the  
Living Legacies  
Engagement  
Centre.

The aim of each Research Festival was to enable participants and attendees to better understand the challenges and opportunities of collaborative work around history, heritage and commemoration. A series of panel discussions, informal workshops, film screenings, guided walks, and performances were designed to provide informal and friendly fora for stimulating conversations around co-produced knowledge and critical responses to history and heritage. Open invitations were extended and advertised, with the target audience comprising community organisers, heritage and creative workers, academics, local historians, and members of the public. Each Festival held a 'Policy Breakfast', enabling funders, local politicians, community and cultural organisations, creative practitioners, and academics to discuss the legacy and impact of the Engagement Centres.

Festivals were geographically dispersed, to enable as many community groups to attend as possible. They were held in Birmingham, Cardiff, Belfast, Glasgow, and London:

- **22-23 March 2019 – Birmingham**, theme 'Diversity', Midland Arts Centre
- **18-22 May 2019 – Northern Ireland (multiple venues)**, theme 'Shared heritage'
- **5-6 July 2019 – Cardiff** – theme 'Community activism', Cardiff West Community High School and the Cardiff Millennium Centre
- **30-31 August 2019 – Glasgow**, theme 'Women and War', Glasgow Women's Library
- **7 November 2019 – London**, theme 'Communities, Commemoration, Collaboration', Woburn House Conference Centre

Reflections ran focus groups at three of these Research Festivals (Northern Ireland, Cardiff and Glasgow), offering participants an opportunity to look back over their involvement in the First World War centenary, and to reflect upon their motivations for this involvement, and their experiences of working with the Engagement Centres. Motivations were wide ranging. For example, a participant in the Glasgow focus group in August 2019 demonstrated the ongoing emotional resonance of the First World War when she discussed her motivation for involvement in an HLF funded project on British women's attempts to join the Women's Peace Congress in Hague, (the project worked with *Everyday Lives in War*):

'Because, you know, it's very easy to identify, to a certain extent, after... demonstrating against the Iraq War - and ever since I've been an adult - demonstrating against wars. So, straight away, it sort of rang all those bells' (HLF Project participant, Focus Group, Glasgow, August 2019).

A participant in the Cardiff focus group reflected on how working with academics from the *Everyday Lives in War* Engagement Centre had shaped the work of his organisation:

'I would say that the First World War - the First World War Engagement Centre has also had a massive effect on Age Exchange. It's now - and, it's part of our strategy, as a charity, to develop work in Veteran support. So, it's actually had a huge effect on where we're going, and how we're using reminiscence in a different way' (HLF Project Leader, Focus Group, Cardiff, July 2019).

The Research Festivals also gave some participants the opportunity to discuss how the different expectations, funding structures and time frames of academic research and community heritage projects could make an effective working relationship difficult:

'And, academia's been extremely difficult to link with, though we did work with five Universities across – through 'Gateways to the First World War... You know - the whole red-tape of academia! Terrible! Absolutely terrible!' (HLF Project Leader, Focus Group, Belfast, May 2019).

Other Project Leaders however used the space of the Research Festival to explore the benefits of collaborating with academics through the structures of the Engagement Centres:

During the First World War, we've worked with – we're based in Sheffield – Sheffield Hallam, Sheffield University, The University of Nottingham, The University of Kent, umm Leeds – have I left anybody out? And now, Belfast, with Queen's as well! So, through our work and through the connections that we have with the communities that we work with – umm, I would say that our experience over the last four/five years, with working with Universities is really positive (HLF Project leader, Focus Group, Belfast, May 2019).

The Research Festivals enabled participants to meet, to share and experience one another's research projects, and to consider the multiple legacies of the First World War centenary.

## Initial conclusions

Over the course of their funding, which mirrored the 'long centenary' of 2014-2019 (when the HLF *First World War: Then and Now* funding stream also ended) the Engagement Centres developed a range of strategies and activities to support and enable the widest possible engagement with the past. In addition to the two key areas of activity: funding and supporting co-produced projects developed by community and academic partners and working with a range of HLF-funded First World War projects, the Engagement Centres worked collectively and individually to provide access to research on the First World War, and to encourage public participation in the large-scale public history and heritage project that the First World War centenary became.

At a local level, all of the Engagement Centres ran public-facing events throughout the centenary such as public talks by academic researchers, film screenings (for example, supporting Imperial War Museums' 2016 re-issue of the 1916 film *The Battle of the Somme* through screenings and talks), exhibitions, and archive events. They provided support and encouragement for new and emerging academic researchers through their support of the FWWNetwork. And working together at a national (and international) level they worked together to produce the documentary film *Untold Stories of World War One* and a series of five Research Festivals.



## Section Five

# Digital Legacies

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## Digital Legacies

### Introduction

As the centenary drew to a close the need to look forward and to learn – not only from the research conducted during the centenary but also from how co-production worked at such a critical historic juncture – became key. This Report, surveying the work of the Engagement Centres, is one element of this reflection. But another crucial element, and one that future researchers will look to, is the digital legacies of the centenary. The following section of this Report turns to consider its digital conservation and legacies.



A 'Digital Upskilling Day' workshop, held in November 2017. Courtesy of the Living Legacies Engagement Centre.

### The digital centenary

At the launch of the centenary, there was an expectation that the widespread and inclusive public-facing and community led activities to be commissioned and supported would offer unprecedented opportunities for creating and sharing digital content and using digital approaches for engagement. This was one of the first major commemorations of the digital age, and the expectation was that it would result in the development of an unprecedented quantity of digital content. Speaking in 2012 about the Welsh Government's plans for commemorating the centenary, Carwyn Jones, then First Minister of Wales stated: 'we must ensure that the stories of our grandparents and great grandparents are made available through digital resources for future generations to better understand and learn lessons from such a transformational event in our history. There are so many tales to be captured'<sup>135</sup>

The potential for creating, sharing, enriching, and using digital content, was explored in a vast number of centenary projects, so much so that the UK Government's Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) Committee report on the impact of the centenary commemorations noted that, 'the First World War is now the most digitally documented period in history'.<sup>136</sup> The commemoration activities of the FWW centenary resulted in an unprecedented amount of digital cultural production, which ranges from outputs created by universities and memory institutions to the digitised heritage of community groups and the historical artefacts of personal collections shared by individuals and families.<sup>137</sup>

Centenary projects with substantial digital focus fall into several key categories: digital archives, crowdsourcing initiatives (also known as citizen science), community generated digital content (CGDC), and community-led projects to create digital outputs. These are all reasonably well-established methods in digital humanities/digital heritage. At the core of many of these initiatives are either a process of digitisation – of converting analogue source materials to digital – or of generating born digital material, such as community generated (or 'crowdsourced') content. Digital content created encompasses the full range of primary sources: text in all its substrates; images; moving image and objects.<sup>138</sup> In some cases, digital content was created as secondary output of research or scholarship carried out using more traditional methods, such as using a database or blog to document archival research.

## Digital archives

Digital archives are collections of digitised source materials, often delivered at a large scale. Their primary purpose is access to original materials in an enhanced form for searching or browsing, and they frequently re-unify disparate and fragmented collections. Digital archives are exemplified by *Rhyfel Byd 1914-1918 a'r profiad Cymreig/Welsh experience of the First World War 1914-1918 (Cymru1914.org)*,<sup>139</sup> an integrated collection of open digital materials relating to the impact of the First World War on all aspects of Welsh life, from the archives and special collections of Wales, developed with an aim of creating greater access to previously hard-to-access archives and special collections.<sup>140</sup>

The project was funded by the JISC e-content programme as a mass digitization initiative. A primary aim of the digital archive is to enable use and re-use of the digital collections it holds: throughout the centenary, content from *Cymru1914.org* was used in other centenary projects: Paul O'Leary at Aberystwyth University used the content to develop a digital exhibition *The Great War and the Valleys*,<sup>141</sup> exploring the impact on civilians of 'Total War'. Bedywyr Williams's public artwork *Traw*, commissioned by 14-18-NOW,<sup>142</sup> used digitised images of unknown recruits and conscripts from Llandeilo and Ammanford from the D.C. Harries Collection of glass plate negatives held by the National Library of Wales.<sup>143</sup> Data in the archive was also used to visualise newspaper references to Belgian Refugees in Wales from 1914-18.<sup>144</sup>



Digital interactions with First World War archival material at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. Courtesy of the Living Legacies Engagement Centre.

## Crowdsourcing projects

Accessible computing and image capture technologies and web 2.0 technologies have engendered projects using Crowdsourcing, which uses digital methods for social engagement to achieve large and focused goals that would not be achievable without a collective approach. Projects created by initiatives such as *Galaxy Zoo* have involved asking a disparate, connected community to carry out tasks relating to correction and transcription; contextualisation, i.e., adding further information about the context of a resource; adding to a collection; classification, or co-curation.<sup>145</sup>

During the centenary, Crowdsourcing methods were used to 'personalise' and memorialise in greater depth individual stories of the First World War. A major example is Imperial War Museums' *Lives of the First World War* initiative, which collected 7.7 million individual stories of those who helped the British War effort, via an online platform that brought together materials from museums, libraries, archives and family collections from across the world in one digital platform - encouraging the exploration of the life stories of service personnel and those who served on the home front. The project ran from 2014-19 and is now archived by IWM,<sup>146</sup> and via subscription at FindMyPast.com.<sup>147</sup>

## Community Generated Digital Content

Crowdsourcing methods also underpin the creation of Community Generated Digital Content (CGDC). This is a process of community-facing digitisation in which members of the public make personal collections accessible digitally, contributing to a larger or thematic project. This is supported at physical workshops led by experts in digital data collection, at which scanning, or image capture equipment is accessible. Many CGDC projects also offer the public an opportunity to upload content to a thematic or geographically relevant website. The use of community content generation in First World War projects was pioneered by the Oxford University-based Great War Archive project from 2008-14<sup>148</sup> and the methods and approaches developed by Oxford were adopted at scale across *Europe by Europeana 1914-18*.<sup>149 150</sup>

A Welsh project funded by JISC, *Welsh Voices of the Great War Online*<sup>151</sup> ran from the summer of 2010 to early 2011, gathering material from the Welsh public relating to the First World War. Content gathered from this project was extremely diverse and included contemporary letters and diaries, visual material, such as photographs and sketches, and physical memorabilia, from decorated items brought home from places such as Mesopotamia [Iraq] to German weapons picked up on the field of battle. This material was catalogued and made available via *People's Collection Wales (PCW)*, funded by the Welsh Government as a collaboration between the National Library of Wales, the National Museum Wales, and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales to build an online 'People's Museum of Wales' of digital content about Wales and its people. Much of PCW's content is CGDC, and it also promotes digitisation skills and information literacy around the country.<sup>152</sup> Crowdsourcing methods were also used to develop some content in *Cymru1914.org*: the project ran five community digitisation events around Wales, requesting materials from members of the public to complement and enrich the developing digital resources, and these materials were also archived by PCW.<sup>153</sup>

## Local and community history projects with digital outputs

A key component of the digital landscape of the centenary is the proliferation of community-based projects, often addressing local histories and profiles of the impact of the War on a specific area while bringing people together. In the UK, much of this activity was funded by the *Heritage Lottery Fund First World War: Then and Now* programme.<sup>154</sup> Examples of projects with digital data gathering and publishing by communities include projects like the Tynemouth Commemoration Project<sup>155</sup>, which digitally recorded the employment, military service and burial details of local casualties. A focus of these projects was often local war memorials and exploring the details stories of the names on these monuments by bringing together evidence from a range of sources, such as the Flintshire War Memorials project which carried out community engagement and research working with the County Record Office and the Local Voluntary Council. These projects were often very small scale: the Flintshire project had a budget of £10,000.<sup>156</sup> Many similar projects have uncovered hidden and unknown histories, creating digital outputs that have been archived in a variety of ways, but usually as standalone websites.

The development of such open, co-produced digital projects was a hallmark of the centenary, and while large scale transnational initiatives such as Lives of the *First World War* and *Europeana 14-18* were developed, much of the digital activity that can be seen was local and small scale, evidencing an enthusiastic embrace of digital technologies to create projects with digital outputs, created both in response to gaps in the available digital historical record. Collectively, these projects generated a significant volume of digital content.

Projects funded through HLF were to contribute to a physical legacy, enabled through management and sustainability of First World War cultural heritage; a people legacy, realised through knowledge sharing and skills development, and a digital legacy, facilitated through digital sustainability activities to preserve the centenary's digital content for future generations.

The Heritage Lottery Fund First World War Centenary Programme Director, has suggested that:

'The digital legacy is by far the most challenging to secure. [...] Professor Lorna Hughes has noted that the First World War is now the most digitally documented period in history, thanks not least to the vast amount of material on community websites, but it is not clear that this material will be discoverable or useable in 5, let alone 50 or 100, years' time.<sup>157</sup>

Concern was noted throughout the centenary about the digital legacy:

'I mean, there was a lot in terms of supporting local activities. But, because many of those were grants of under £10,000, there wasn't really a full monitoring of what was going on. Or a sense of what the return should be. And, I think the big challenge, which I think, fortunately is now being addressed is how that material should be collected. I mean, so much of that was online, but nobody wanted a responsibility, curatorially for that! So, the Europeana project for example, which was being hosted by Oxford – but who is hosting these other websites? What will happen to them and where will they go?' (Interview, Historian, January 2019).

## The AHRC Engagement Centres: digital activity

Many activities funded by the Engagement Centres had digital outputs, including co-produced projects and those funded in responsive mode: these projects in many cases fell into the categories outlined above. The Engagement Centres also supported academic or community projects with secondary digital outputs.

*Living Legacies* had a digital emphasis in their mission, because of the existing 'use of digital and multimedia approaches' at the Centre for Data Digitisation and Analysis at Queen's University, Belfast, which would 'enable NI communities to reach a much wider audience and engagement, giving new voice to the enduring past legacies of the FWW in Ireland, as well as building a lasting future legacy of the commemorative period itself'. The aims of *Living Legacies* in their 2014-17 funding phase included provision of 'up-skilling community researchers, for example through training in digital techniques and workshops on curating and archiving'. In their 2017-19 phase, their aims of co-producing research resulting in a series of arts and humanities outputs, from scholarly works to websites and digital data.<sup>158</sup> This was manifest in a programme of 21 workshops to develop CGDC at community focused workshops all around Northern Ireland.<sup>159</sup> *Living Legacies* also specifically funded a number of projects with a digital heritage focus, such as *Campbell College's Men Behind the Glass*,<sup>160</sup> *Visualising the Iolaire*,<sup>161</sup> *Welsh Memorials to the Great War*,<sup>162</sup> *Dear Mrs Pennyman*,<sup>163</sup> *Defence Heritage Project*,<sup>164</sup> and *Battlebags and Blimps*.<sup>165</sup>

The Engagement Centres' websites, in their current, static form at May 2021, include details of the projects each Engagement Centre developed or co-produced. Of these listed projects, 69 have some kind of digital output, categorised as:

- Website with digital/digitised content, or a description of the project
- Blogs
- Interactive website
- Database
- CGDC
- Geographic/mapping projects
- Apps
- Other outputs in digital form (film, publication, e-book/booklet, learning resources).

## Assessing the digital centenary: understanding digital preservation

The centenary created an unprecedented opportunity for community groups and memory organisations to share and document the experience of the war. It has arguably been the longest and most diverse programme of cultural activities around a specific theme held in the UK, and a significant by-product of these activities, and in some cases their stated purpose, has been the creation of newly accessible digital information. This expansive digital collection is rich and varied, a latent asset to scholarship and a form of memorialisation in its own right. But as the programme of centenary anniversaries, and the programmes that funded the centenary, came to an end, so the processes and networks which sustained these digital outputs face significant threats of digital loss.

The University of Glasgow, working on both the *Living Legacies* Engagement Centre and through the *Reflections on the Centenary* project (Lorna M. Hughes was a co-Investigator on both projects) scoped the digital preservation and sustainability challenges for the digital outputs of the centenary, through six key activities:

1. Building a **framework** to assess the likelihood of digital sustainability of community facing outputs.
2. Using this framework to **assess the likelihood of sustainability** of a sample of projects funded through the HLF's *First World War: Then and Now* programme.
3. Scoping the **infrastructure and existing digital archiving solutions** available to centenary projects, and gaps in policy and provision.
4. Using the findings of this analysis to **develop a set of guidelines for** digital preservation for community centenary projects.
5. Carrying out a series of interviews with practitioners in CGDC to understand the **fragility of CGDC**.
6. Reviewing the **co-produced digital outputs** of projects developed with the Engagement Centres.

The findings of these activities are summarised below.

## A Framework for digital sustainability

SDRF (Sustainability of Digital Resources Framework, see Figure below) is a qualitative and quantitative framework to assess the long-term digital sustainability of projects with digital outputs, that evaluates holistically the digital sustainability landscape of a specific project, based on observations, interviews, and data analysis. The framework uses a range of existing sustainability criteria as metrics: the project is scored in its adherence to each of these criteria. The score reflects how well each requirement is met; for example, current status of content types is scored 2 points if the content type is well maintained (i.e. kept in secure storage, archived, kept in the most sustainable manner), 1 point is awarded if the content is publicly available, but perhaps hosted on a website rather than maintained in a secure environment, such as an institutional repository, zero awarded if it is not applicable, and -1 point is given if the content type is not maintained. This range of scores (-1 to +2) applies to all metrics, although not all dimensions have the same number of metrics: some metrics are weighted as more important than others.

Sustainability assessment dimensions	Content	Technology	Preservation	Promotion
Assessment criteria & Indicators	<p><b>Currency</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Updates</li> <li>■ Current status</li> </ul> <p><b>Relevance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Project objectives</li> <li>■ Project history</li> <li>■ Audience</li> <li>■ Value</li> </ul> <p><b>Authority</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Organisation details</li> <li>■ Ownership</li> <li>■ Partners</li> <li>■ Agreements</li> <li>■ Ongoing support</li> </ul> <p><b>Quality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Availability and location</li> <li>■ Impact</li> </ul>	<p><b>Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Type</li> <li>■ Development platform</li> </ul> <p><b>Maintenance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Responsibility</li> <li>■ Planning</li> </ul> <p><b>Usability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Design</li> <li>■ Browsing</li> </ul> <p><b>Findability &amp; Optimisation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Searching</li> <li>■ Green</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ongoing support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Funding</li> <li>■ Staff</li> </ul> <p><b>Best practice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Documentation</li> <li>■ File formats</li> <li>■ Persistent identifiers</li> <li>■ Web harvesting &amp; archiving</li> </ul> <p><b>IPR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Copyright</li> <li>■ Trademarks</li> <li>■ Terms &amp; Conditions/ Disclaimers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Channels</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Events</li> <li>■ Documents</li> <li>■ Social media</li> <li>■ Web</li> <li>■ Public media</li> </ul>

Figure showing the SDRF dimensions of sustainability criteria.

The metrics are grouped into different categories, defined as “dimensions”: Content, Technology, Preservation and Promotion. The SDRF outlines 26 assessment areas and 73 criteria, taken from extant frameworks. Final scores are calculated across all metrics and can be used to identify shortfalls and single points of failure for digital projects.

## Use of the SDRF to identify key pressure points in digital sustainability

We used SDRF to look at a selection of 42 completed HLF *First World War: Then and Now*-funded projects with a digital output, variable in size, geographic location, funding received, scope and types of digital output produced. The results are not an evaluation of project quality or achievement, but an overview of their likelihood of sustainability. The Framework can identify pathways to better practice and promote understanding of the sustainability challenges: used at an early stage, while a project is still funded, it could also be used to identify areas where intervention may be possible.

The summary results are below against some key metrics in the Framework.<sup>166</sup>

### **Ongoing financial support (maintenance of digital output):**

- No information: 28
- No: 8
- Partly: 4
- Yes: 2

### **Ongoing financial support for staff:**

- No information: 28
- No: 7
- Partly: 5
- Yes: 2

### **Metadata for digital content produced for discoverability:**

- No information: 9
- No: 18
- Partly: 10
- Yes: 5

### **Sustainable file formats used:**

- No information: 17
- No: 1
- Partly: 12
- Yes: 12

## Digital content archived?:

- No information: 0
- No: 29
- Partly: 9
- Yes: 4

Overall, the likelihood of digital sustainability was poor.

## Scoping digital archives and pathways for centenary content

The issues of sustainability, preservation and impact of digital materials produced as part of the First World War centenary activities, and the scale of the challenge, were addressed at *The Bits Liveth Forever? Digital Preservation and the First World War Commemoration*, a workshop organised collaboratively with the Digital Preservation Coalition, on 15 May 2019. The workshop was hosted by Imperial War Museums' War and Conflict Subject Network. The workshop addressed a key challenge: **'at the outset of the centenary, there was no agreed digital legacy plan. In many cases, organisations have been creating digital content and utilising social media for the first time and have little or no history of archiving this sort of content'** (Liz Robertson, Imperial War Museums, quoted in the workshop report).<sup>167</sup>

The event brought together representatives of key stakeholder organisations responsible for digital archiving to discuss the existing network of digital solutions that could provide pathways to some sort of long-term digital future for centenary outputs. The workshop also explored gaps in policy, skills and institutional capability.

This network of solutions included:

- **The UK Web Archive (UKWA)** based at the British Library, has been archiving websites with permission since 2004. An automated collection (web crawl) of identified 'targets' that are in scope (i.e., websites in the UK) is performed at least once a year, with snapshots of some targets – most notably news websites – collected more frequently. Once snapshots are collected, the identified targets are indexed to allow for full text searching and made openly available via a website interface (webarchive.org.uk), provided that an open access agreement with the content owner exists. The UKWA has a curated collection of websites related to the First World War and centenary events. The collection also includes 'resources about the history of the war; academic sites on the meaning of the conflict in modern memory and patterns of memorialisation and critical reflections on British involvement in armed conflict more generally'. A sub-section of this collection includes open access archival copies of websites of 522 HLF-funded First World War centenary projects created during the 2014-2018 period.<sup>168</sup> However, the UKWA only captures a 'snapshot' of websites, and not any degree of interactivity. Certain material is not collected, including content that requires user authentication for access, Adobe Flash content, most audio and video materials, as well as most social media (with the exception of selected tweets).

- **At The National Archives, the UK Government Web Archive** captures, preserves, and makes accessible all material made publicly available on the web by UK Central Government, but excludes materials produced by the devolved governments or local government bodies. It has collected a small number of official websites relating to the centenary.<sup>169</sup> The National Archives **Discovery** service<sup>170</sup> offers 32 million descriptions of records held by The National Archives and more than 2,500 archives across the country, including over 9 million records are available for download: this includes 11,600 records relating to the First World War held by official archival organisations.
- **The People's Collection Wales (PCW)** developed a policy of offering digital archiving to centenary content funded by HLF Wales: to date, it contains over 5,000 items related to the First World War.
- **IWM** hosts the **War and Conflict Subject Specialist Network** which supports skills and networking and continues to support the community that were involved in IWM's First World War Centenary Partnership.<sup>171</sup> It also hosts **Mapping the Centenary**, a DCMS-funded portal containing links to projects funded during the centenary that still have a live web presence.<sup>172</sup>
- Another mapping resource is **History Pin**, which was promoted by HLF and AHRC as a discovery mechanism for First World War content: as a portal, it only provides access to websites, rather than hosting data.<sup>173</sup>
- **The National Library of Scotland**<sup>174</sup> and the **Public Records Office of Northern Ireland**<sup>175</sup> have archived some community generated content, based on projects developed by communities relating to their remit and collections.
- The Living Legacies Engagement Centre was funded by the AHRC to build a **digital archive hosted by Queens University Belfast**, offering an archival home to some community generated content: HLF funded projects have the option of depositing their data with this resource. One resource accessible through this database is East Belfast and the Great War, which has access to documents collected at community workshops.<sup>176</sup>

This list of potential sustainability solutions shows that no one organisation provides a comprehensive digital archive (let alone a Trusted Digital Repository) for community projects: the workshop also showed that there was little clarity about what digital sustainability solutions were available for co-produced projects. The limitations and restrictions of existing solutions were not clear, leading to ambiguity around what is considered permanent and open. For organisations that provided partial solutions, there were no opportunities pool training opportunities offered by different institutions (especially memory organisations) and make them available to communities of practice for cross-pollination and capacity and capability building: **throughout the centenary, community groups were encouraged to think about the opportunities of digital, but not to engage with the responsibility and overheads of creating sustainable digital content.** Funders were not focused on resource requirements for planning, developing and implementing sustainability solutions for centenary projects. There was little consensus around expectations, requirements, responsibilities, solutions and gaps.

Another lost opportunity is that even where data has been saved, it is fragmented, and difficult to link or use in a cohesive way: it is locked in local silos with few opportunities to connect resources and integrate digital narratives across projects dedicated to similar themes:

‘But, for me, one of the things would have been – like an obvious example – is across the country you see people do research into local war memorials, or local servicemen, which has then been put either on a myriad of individual or town websites and is lost [laughs]! Or has been put into a book somewhere which is still on somebody’s computer.’ (Historian interview, February 2019).

## Guidelines for sustainability

Another outcome of our research was a guide, *Saving the Centenary’s Digital Heritage: Recommendations for Digital Sustainability of FWW Community Commemoration Activities* which contained advice on creating and managing sustainable digital outputs based on scoping of centenary digital projects, developed by the University of Glasgow in 2019.<sup>177</sup>

## The fragility of CGDC

We collected information about the ways that CGDC was collected, curated, exposed and used during the centenary, in order to examine the sustainability of community-generated histories. The project also looked at the relationship between the development of community-generated content (including incentives and motivations to contribute) and the value of such activities for engagement with cultural heritage, primary sources and history. The study found many parallels between community-generated digital content and the earlier establishment of community archives and ‘people’s history’:

‘A high point is really how it has...unearthed quite a lot of grass-roots material from families. And sort of the photographs that have been sort of – finally have been digitised and had them made available. So, I think that in a way – that money that went into this- and in a way and has made quite a lot sort of, I think grass-roots perspective accessible.’ (Historian interview, February 2019).

While many of these initiatives simply present personal collections and content alongside ‘official’ archives, collections, and narratives, they can also present an opportunity to explore the potential of community histories and content to challenge notions of professionalism and the authority of the ‘expert’ voice. This potential was highlighted in the review of *Europeana 14-18, Workers Underground. An impact assessment case study – Europeana 1914-1918*, published in 2016.<sup>178</sup> This noted used a number of ‘lenses’ to measure the value of the resource. A key aspect was the value of knowing the resource existed, expressed in several quotes in the assessment: ‘let it be preserved for generations to come, one after the other. My family will rejoice that somebody remembers them. Another evaluation lens is legacy: the evaluation captured moving testimonies about how publishing photos online was leaving a trace and preserving materials for future generations. Long-term use and re-use of the content was a priority for many users (61%).

However, this is a concern, as a major fragility of Digital Community Generated Content is its long-term sustainability. As an organisation, Europeana currently recognises the importance of the Europeana 1914-18 collections as important institutional assets, and has the capacity to sustain them, but this is an almost unmanageable challenge for other, smaller, community based digital archives that have developed First World War content and face similar sustainability and interoperability issues. Our study found that CGDC has replicated the sustainability issues facing analogue community archives (for example, oral histories on cassette and video tapes; grey literature on deteriorating paper). Digital community archives and CGDC have been listed as 'Critically Endangered' on the Digital Preservation Coalition's 'Bit List' of 'Digitally Endangered Species' facing 'material technical challenges to preservation: there are no agencies responsible for them or those agencies are unwilling or unable to meet preservation needs.'<sup>179</sup> We undertook a series of interviews with a range of stakeholders involved in projects collecting CGDC, looking at the methodologies employed for digitisation: design, organisation, structure, format, collection methods, communities involved, challenges, obstacles and lessons learnt. We also asked about curation, re-use, and sustainability, and data preservation and management guidelines used.

Our interviews confirmed that the development of projects, and participation by the public, was usually driven by a desire to memorialise local histories and to preserve the memory of family members. Staff of memory organisations interviewed confirmed that the key stimuli for offering centenary-related content to digital initiatives are a wish to be involved in a process of connectedness, sharing and generosity. However, creating durable, re-useable, and sustainable resources was almost impossible for most CGDC projects. Some interviewees reported that they simply had not intended to archive the material over the long term: one respondent noted:

'We didn't think we were storing anything. And again, we're not an archive, we're not storing any data, really. We're just holding bits of information, and 2000 pieces of digital objects—material for our participants. But we're not an archive, as such' (Partner Interview).<sup>180</sup>

The task of sustaining the material is made complex by the methodologies of creating CGDC mitigating against good practice in creating digital content, as seen in the table below:

<b>Selection</b>	Content is not selected, but depends on what the public have
<b>Metadata</b>	Limited, must be gathered in situ, and often incomplete: privacy and rights issues
<b>Interface</b>	Discovery and access issues
<b>Sustainability</b>	Long term digital access infrequently factored into the development of content
<b>Use</b>	fragmented and siloed content; resides on locally managed websites
<b>Credit</b>	licenses, ownership and copyright statements are frequently incomplete, preventing re-use of content.

Reflecting on Oxford University's Great War Archive project in a piece written in 2009, Stuart Lee noted that community collection requires resourcing beyond supporting the public 'during the submission stage and making the material available – it also, we would argue, requires sustaining the community into the future by answering questions, providing further information, and assisting teachers and researchers'.<sup>181</sup> **The fragility of CGDC, and the sustainability challenges it raises, were identified long before the start of the centenary, yet there was little reflection on this by projects engaging with community digitisation.**

## The Digital Legacy of the Engagement Centres

**Interviewer:** Where was the blog hosted?

**Historian 1:** It was on WordPress. I'll send you the link.

**Interviewer:** Lovely. I mean, I assume it's now redundant? It's not been updated anymore?

**Historian 1:** No, it's not being updated anymore.

**Interviewer:** But have you archived it? Have you kept it for future posterity?

**Historian 1:** I think it still exists. I don't know how to archive a website, to be honest!

**Historian 2:** Yeah, we should think about that! (Academic Partner Interview, December 2017).

The following table shows the total numbers of projects highlighted on the Engagement Centre websites, the number of digital outputs, the total number of digital outputs that are currently accessible, and the total that are no longer available:

Centre	Total projects listed on website	Projects with a digital output	Total digital projects still accessible	Total digital projects no longer accessible
Hidden Histories	11	1	0	1
Voices of War and Peace	27	17	10	7
Everyday Lives in War	15	2	2	0
Gateways	58	31	22	9
Living Legacies*	18	12	8	4
Total	129	63	42	21

\* We worked from current versions of the Centre websites developed during the funding period, but we looked at the data available on the archived version of the Living Legacies website ([www.livinglegacies1914-18.ac.uk/Old-Site/www.qub.ac.uk/sites/LivingLegacies1914-18/CommunityResources/CommunityProjects/index.html](http://www.livinglegacies1914-18.ac.uk/Old-Site/www.qub.ac.uk/sites/LivingLegacies1914-18/CommunityResources/CommunityProjects/index.html)), as the Engagement Centre website is currently in a process of re-design.

There are some qualifications to these figures: for 9 projects of the 129, no project outputs are mentioned or described in any detail (*From World War 1 to World Conflicts Today; From Flanders to Helmand: Chaplaincy, Faith and Religious Change in the British Army, 1914-2014; Minding Black Histories in War Time; Refugee Tales; Justice not Charity, Was Their Cry; Cap a pie, The Riddle of Cleenish Island; War and the Moral Outdoors; and The Ballykinlar History Hut*). It may therefore be possible that there is a greater number of digital outputs than has been possible to establish from the Centre websites. These projects may not have discernible outputs because of the lack of an updated web presence on the Engagement Centre website, independent management of external websites, or lack of updating of website records by the Engagement Centres. These figures also do not include the 21 workshops to develop CGDC organised by Living Legacies, as they are not defined as 'projects' on the Centre's website.

This table is of course a snapshot of the status the projects and their outputs, and will change very quickly, but as a representation of the volume of digital activity by the Engagement Centres, and the legacy of that activity, it is a helpful breakdown, and highlights the challenges of ensuring the Engagement Centres' digital outputs and legacy.

Of the projects with digital outputs, a variety of digital tools and methods have been used. Project websites were the most frequently used approach, followed by digital publications (books, booklets, films). Blogs were the third most popular output. Websites tended to be simple, informative sites, but 4 projects published CGDC, 5 databases were developed, and 2 Geodata projects were developed.

To find project outputs sometimes required effort: a number of completed projects are not linked via the Engagement Centre website, and finding the outputs required using a search engine and looking for the project by name, or cross checking against the list of funded projects on the HLF website, or at a university staff page. In some cases, the link is broken on the Engagement Centre website. Projects that could not be easily discovered from Engagement Centre websites include Visualising the *Iolaire*, *Recovering the First World War Theatre*, *Women and Leisure During the First World War*, and *Battlebugs* and *Blimps*.

Generally, the reliance on external websites and blogs is problematic in terms of long term sustainability: blogs won't be captured by the UK Web Archive, and the project websites are often Facebook pages or general project sites, where the World War One project is hard to find in the middle of a large amount of content (for example, the Untold Stories project is archived on the People's Heritage Co-op community resource, but as the project happened some time ago it required some searching on the project blog to find information about the First World War project. In some cases, websites with unique web domain names associated with a particular project) for example, *Connected Histories: Muslims in the First World War*: - [www.connectedhistories.org/ww1m/](http://www.connectedhistories.org/ww1m/)) are no longer live, potentially because the domain name has expired when the project ended. Similarly, some projects rely on Facebook pages for access, which is a commercial service that could change its access conditions and make the resources unavailable.

Looking at the projects individually, in addition to the discoverability and hosting issues, it is possible to see concerns in a number of aspects addressed by the SDRF. Copyright and IPR status of content is sometimes hard to discern; there is little evidence that sustainable file formats have been used; and there is very little detailed metadata or description of content, and project documentation was seldom detailed. The biggest challenge to the digital sustainability of these projects is, of course, that they received a small amount of funding, and that this was very time limited. The projects did not have the 'luxury' of planning for digital sustainability: there was certainly no funding available for ongoing maintenance, including bug fixing and migrating data to new formats. What staff resourcing was possible was also time limited.

The data shows that the Engagement Centres oversaw, co-produced, or were adjacent to a large number of projects that produced digital outputs, but that the long-term visibility of these outputs is challenging. Based on the figures in this table, 33% of the digital outputs are no longer accessible. Given that the AHRC funding ended 18 months before this analysis, this does raise some concerns about what will be available once a further year has passed, or longer.

However, as we have seen, this challenge of long-term sustainability is true of the digital outputs of the centenary in general. At the *Reflections* workshop at the National Library of Wales in 2021, a number of projects funded by the *First World War: Then and Now* programme noted that their websites were sustained by volunteer effort, and when those with an interest in the project retired or moved on, the projects would be neglected. Even larger scale centenary projects have become digitally extinct: the *Devon Remembers* project, funded by the HLF with support from the South West Heritage Trust, Devon County Council, Torbay Council and the University of Exeter is no longer maintained; and *Cymru1914.org* is currently not accessible due to funding issues at the National Library of Wales, although the data will be migrated to a new platform in 2021.

There are many reasons the Engagement Centres may have found it challenging to engage with the requirements of digital sustainability. Digital humanities projects face structural issues in sustaining digital outputs beyond the three years mandated by UKRI: staff are funded only while a project is 'live', and universities may not have resources to keep content live any longer than the mandated period, especially resources that are interactive.<sup>182</sup>

The business and funding model for co-produced Engagement Centre projects also mitigated against long term sustainability by a university host. While the AHRC funding for community projects was allocated to the centres at 100%, it did not generate overheads. So while there may have been some kind of expectation that the university hosting the Engagement Centre would sustain these projects, the funding for any co-produced project was probably insufficient to pay overheads required for long term digital support. The Engagement Centres were not funded to provide a digital infrastructure: the portal for digital content created by Living Legacies was funded and developed late in the programme (it was announced in 2019 and is under development in 2021). As noted above, other potential digital sustainability solutions (and their limitations) were not clear.

Another challenge was that the Engagement Centres did not factor in a period at the start of their funding to focus on digital preservation, nor did they mandate the use of existing guidelines for digital projects. Many of these existed, including the HLF's own guidelines for digital projects: a current iteration can be seen at 'Heritage Fund Digital Guidance for Projects'.<sup>183</sup> As noted at the *Bits Liveth Forever* workshop, the challenge is not a lack of digital preservation guidelines, but a lack of awareness of practical issues and solutions: in many respects, what is required is a practice led engagement with any guidelines. In 2019-20, *Saving the Centenary's Digital Heritage: Recommendations for Digital Sustainability of FWW Community Commemoration Activities* were taken forward by IWM's *War and Conflict Subject Network* and disseminated at a series of workshops. They were discussed in relation to digital projects currently in development. The opportunity to discuss project development with digital preservation experts was identified as a positive intervention for projects that participated in these events, and there is a sense that this could have been helpful had this been something the Engagement Centres had capacity to take forward, possibly through offering a greater degree of digital engagement and support in this area.

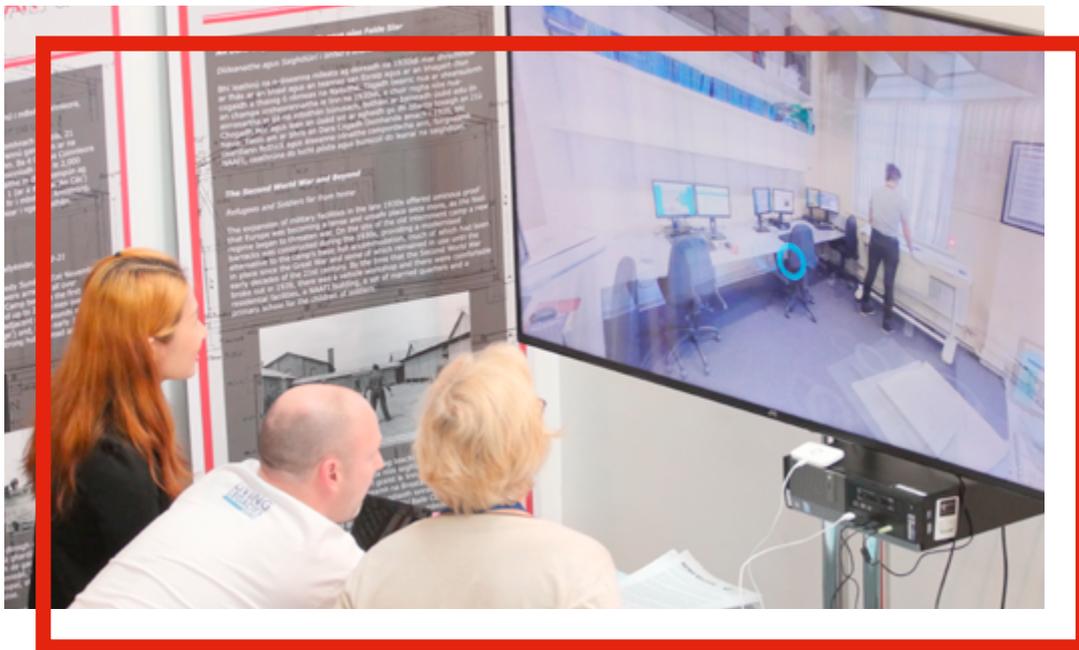
A key issue was that the UK lacks a digital archive for this kind of digital data: there is no solution such as the Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI), a national digital repository for Ireland's humanities, social sciences, and cultural heritage data.<sup>184</sup> DRI is a Trusted Digital Repository that promotes the long-term preservation and access to digital data. The Netherlands has the Data Archiving and Networked Services (DANS) which provides similar services.<sup>185</sup>

A model similar to the AHRC's Arts and Humanities Data Service, closed in 2008, could have been a possible option for preserving content co-curated with a university partner.

Another challenge was simply that the sheer volume of activity carried out by the Engagement Centres meant that the momentum was to keep going and create more projects, rather than to reflect on the need for digital sustainability and to address ways to embed good practice. As noted above, creating CGDC can be incredibly compelling and the inclination was to continue to develop projects, rather than to pause and engage with the long-term perspective.

Ultimately, the roots of these challenges can be attributed to the way that the Engagement Centres were established and funded at the outset. A key interviewee noted that discussions about preserving the outputs of the centenary had been held at a high level as early as 2012, especially collecting and preserving digital outputs.<sup>186</sup> However, none of the UK's major heritage organisations were funded or mandated to take this task on. As discussed above, a patchwork of existing solutions, not designed for the purpose of archiving the mass outputs of an event as large as the centenary, were all that was available, and there was 'encouragement' to use these resources, rather than any specific requirement. A need for a strategic lead on digital preservation was identified but not implemented. The irony remains, that had the centenary been less 'digital', its outputs may have been sustained for the longer term:

'The Heritage Lottery Foundation should look at the heritage that was actually created in the last six years, and put some money into preserving that digital legacy, because it's more fragile than the paper base. I mean some of the historians say it's more fragile than the paper-based archives. It disappears! And that's kind of frightening even in civic terms, umm, you know, in cultural continuity'. (HLF Project Leader, Cardiff Focus Group, July 2019).



Engaging with First World War content through digital technologies. Courtesy of the Living Legacies Engagement Centre.

## Initial conclusions

A question that is often asked is, what could have been done differently to preserve the digital legacy of the centenary?

The obvious answer would have been to address the significant gaps that still exist in policy, skills and institutional capability: an optimal solution would have been developing a purpose-built, autonomous, public-funded, digital cultural heritage repository, which would provide the definitive space for accessing and preserving digital outputs such as those generated by the FWW centenary commemoration activities (but not exclusively). Existing models for such a solution exist in other countries, and they should be scoped with regard to implementing a similar solution for any future national centenary. However, the austerity agenda of the period under review is an important context for the centenary: without additional funding, the opportunity to create a linked and sustainable national collection of digital content related to the First World War could not have been realised.

Notwithstanding the lack of funding, expertise exists in memory institutions around sustaining digital heritage, and a greater degree of collaboration with national archives and libraries - which have digital sustainability within their statutory responsibilities - could have provided a greater degree of long-term digital support. Most importantly, a greater degree of empowered leadership on digital sustainability, and the political will to create a digital legacy, could have made a difference<sup>187</sup>.

However, there is a sense that digital engagement supported community engagement at a greater and richer degree than would have been possible otherwise: significant crowdsourced outputs like *Lives of The First World War* showed what was possible at scale, and the breadth of engagement by the Engagement Centres showed the effectiveness of digital technologies to support participation. Perhaps the most important legacy is that of a tremendous amount of digitally enabled participation and co-production, and that this outweighs the digital ephemerality of the centenary.<sup>188</sup>



Volunteers conduct online archival research at the Keep, Brighton. Courtesy of the Gateways Engagement Centre.



# Overall Conclusions and Reflections

## Overall Conclusions and Reflections

During the centenary period, the Engagement Centres developed a range of innovative, interdisciplinary practice, and models of working with groups. Together, these showed how the Arts and Humanities can facilitate co-produced projects on a significant scale.

In this final section, we highlight how, taken as a whole, the work of the Engagement Centres demonstrates some of the opportunities and issues for academic-community relations, and co-production, in the future.



The 2015 'Dartmoor Life in the First World War' exhibition held at Princetown, Devon. Credit and © Peter F. Mason and the Dartmoor Trust.

## Opportunities

- Several projects developed because of the centrality of a particular archival collection. In these cases, the First World War was secondary with the centenary providing an opportunity to 'do something with this fantastic material' (Academic Partner).
- Contemporary themes were also a driver. Several co-produced and HLF-funded projects that the Engagement Centres worked with used the past to explore present-day issues, such as refugees, racial diversity, and EU relations, via the prism of First World War history.
- However, the Engagement Centres (and the AHRC by choosing to fund those Engagement Centres) were ultimately responsible for which themes and opportunities were supported, illustrating 'the impact that people in the [Engagement] Centres have, when they determine certain themes' (Academic Partner).

## Funding

- While some experts had favoured an approach to the centenary based on 'a big national effort' the Engagement Centres highlighted that a de-centred approach made sense: 'It's been proven okay if you do fund lots of little projects, you try and coordinate them via centenary centres which has a tremendous logic...it's perfect...it's collaborative and it divides up the cake...the sum of the parts has been far greater through that strategy' (Academic Partner).
- Those projects that had started, via other funding streams and/or associated activities, prior to the Engagement Centres were particularly successful. Experience, networks, and foundations were already in place, laying the groundwork for successful community/university partnerships.
- However, the Engagement Centre funding system for co-production could have been made more accessible to community partners who wanted to apply for support. Academics working with the Engagement Centres were there to help community partners on co-produced projects 'negotiate the funding application processes' in universities. Yet there was some irony in the fact that they were 'being paid by the people who made the process so difficult. And they think it's easy and straightforward, it's only ten pages. But to most people in [a small community museum] or somewhere that's a big thing to get over' (Academic Partner).
- Likewise, universities seeking to work with community partners need to be sensitive to different financial experiences and expectations. Whilst academics and research offices may be used to managing relatively large sums of money, this is less often the case for community groups, and can lead to anxiety: 'So, that was quite traumatic and big for them, because neither group had ever had ten thousand pounds. In fact, they're all older people, most of whom, even in their workplace probably never had a budget of equivalent value. So, they were quite nervous about it. They were a bit scared of the amount of money. They were worried that the HLF were going to come and repossess their socks if it went wrong!' (HLF Project Lead).
- The difference in resources available to community groups and universities needs to be considered. The latter have recourse to large sums of money whereas the former rely on funding from projects to cover costs including volunteer expenses. Payment delays can create significant financial concerns: 'When you say okay each one [youth volunteer] is going to get a travel pass for the day and refreshments, that's added up to £10 for each youngster but you don't have that £10. Yeah, you dig from your own pocket, not to let other people down and claiming the money [back from] the university was not easy' (Community Partner).
- This issue was exacerbated by the differences in accounting and payment systems between community organisations and universities, which led to further delays and excessive bureaucracy. This could negatively impact on relationships 'because you end up just sending emails back and forth about reimbursements and money when you could be spending that time talking about aims, activities and impact. Black and minority ethnic communities should be trusted to find a target audience and beneficiaries they want to work with and be supported to work within their own structures. Often what we do is we come and impose our own mechanisms onto community partners. We say we're listening, but we're not really' (Academic Partner).

- There were sensitivities around the issue of payment from universities to community organisations: 'The University Finance Office did not know how to handle this and could not be persuaded to do things. They believed that research was something funded by money coming into the university and being spent in the university. As soon as we had to send money out to some of the partners – the groups and so on, there was no mechanism for doing it' (Engagement Centre Principal Investigator).
- Participants also noted the difficulty of funding restrictions that deemed projects working with overseas partners ineligible for support.
- Conducting these projects within the broader context of the UK government's 'austerity programme' highlighted the difficulty of undertaking heritage projects when other areas of public service (including local government and education) are under strain. This led to enthusiasm not being translated into reality in terms of project support and dissemination: 'Lincolnshire County Council said they were going to put it [project exhibition] on their website but owing to cutbacks this hasn't happened...Local government is really struggling in this area' (Academic Partner). 'Because the thing at the moment with schools is that they struggle to come out to the theatre. They don't have the money and the resources. So, the massive – I suppose, the massive kind of barrier is the cost of coaches to get to places' (HLF Project Partner).

## Partnership working

- The most successful relationships were those based on trust. Community organisations needed to work with academic partners they could rely on. Equally academic partners needed reliable community partners in order to acquire the integrity required for 'meaningful engagement with people and communities' (Community Partner). 'It went really well I think because I'd done a lot of preparation...and also because I'd been in contact quite heavily with the University' (HLF Project Partner). But as noted in this Report and elsewhere, marginalised communities are less likely to have existing contacts with universities, meaning that they are potentially less likely to be able to take advantage of the opportunities available.

- However, challenges to successful partnership working emerged in three key areas:
- *Deadlines, pace and priorities*: ‘Everybody works at a different pace...we [academics] have strict dates and they don’t always coincide with the community group timings’ (Academic Partner); ‘We’ve got to get our project finished by x date, but the penny doesn’t always drop for a lot of retired people who don’t really have that sense of urgency’ (Community Partner).
- *Communications*: these were often more successful – and less prone to misinterpretation – if done face-to-face rather than email or over the telephone. But this was time-consuming, involving ‘a lot of trips down there, which was a whole day of my time. I had to allow an hour and a half each way. That’s three hours just in the travel and then maybe three hours with them’ (Academic Partner).
- *Local politics*: ‘the enthusiasm of our community partners at times was a bit of a double-edged sword...while it was fantastic that they would pick up an idea and run with it occasionally that had to be reeled in a little bit...And there was, shall we say mild animosity, between two factions [community groups]’ which required ‘a certain element of diplomacy and tact...without getting involved in what was a petty local dispute’ (Academic Partner).
- Engagement Centre-funded projects also revealed the complexities of undertaking historical research with people who are alive. Ethnographic research can put pressure on delicate community-academic partnerships: ‘As a historian you might want to analyse what one of the participants of the workshop is saying but at the same time you don’t want to alienate them, make them feel exposed or stupid. Or judged!’ (Academic Partner).
- There is a risk when a particular locality is the focus of repeated study – perhaps because of its ethnic diversity – leading to ‘petri dish’ fatigue amongst the community. Projects had to have community buy-in to avoid feelings of exploitation and extraction. Equally, projects had to consider what the community was getting out of the relationship; going away and writing an academic paper was not enough.

## Flexibility

- Flexibility was key. Academic partners had to accept that the scope of their engagement with the project was likely to change: ‘You have to be nimble, I think. You’ve got two choices with this kind of engagement work, I think. You can do what you want to do and what you think might be historically most valuable or you can work with the group. And I think there are compromises to be made’ (Academic Partner).
- The best outputs were not necessarily ones planned and specified in the grant application but allowed to develop ‘organically...based on the skills and the interests of the participants’ (Academic Partner).
- Some projects were victims of their own success. ‘I would give that as a word of warning to any other project – that, whenever your project does become known [and] popular, people will ask you to do things. There’ll be radio and TV presentations – write this for us – write that for us! Can you do this? Can you do that? It becomes difficult’ leading to potential delays in delivering key objectives to funders’ (Community Partner).

- Tensions sometimes emerged between the strict requirements of a structured grant application to the Engagement Centre's co-produced project funding scheme, and what volunteers wanted to do. Volunteers not interested in the project's objectives equated to waning enthusiasm. Project leads had to give volunteers 'the freedom to study what they wanted...but also [try] to guide people on what the project is aimed towards.' (Community Partner).
- There was a need for flexibility in the overall project delivery. Regardless of the plans made at application stage to deliver in a certain way, there had to be elasticity for on-the-project learning and adaptation to take place. Flexibility was also required around project end dates - in most cases more time was needed to get things finished, not necessarily asking for more money.

## Volunteers and Volunteerism

- Interest in the First World War was not necessarily the driver for volunteer involvement. Instead, many volunteers were primarily motivated by a desire to find out more about their local area; meet new people; and/or to learn something new.
- Projects enabled an intergenerational sharing of expertise. Older members of the community brought a wealth of 'pre-existing knowledge of the area' allowing younger members to get a sense of how the city has changed over time. Younger volunteers were more experienced in IT and social media: 'having the students mixed together with some of the older parties...brought a really interesting mix of experiences and skills' (Community Partner).
- Participation in a range of centenary projects offered an opportunity for broader skill development including 'gaining confidence...and the opportunity to handle archive material' (Community Partner). New and unexpected skills were sometimes developed: 'We had – the majority of the young people that we had engaged with that particular activity were young men, young boys – teenage boys. Some of them actually went out and bought themselves a sewing machine as a result of the project' (HLF Project Partner). For young people, it was also a chance for them to consider their post-18 education, for example 'why it is that you study History at university' (Community Partner).
- For volunteers to feel their time is being well-spent activities have to be 'tight and well-organised' (Community Partner).
- However, projects that required research visits to archives with untrained volunteers were demanding and 'daunting. It is an all-day process...You tell your project volunteers to go on the [National Archive] website and read it, and they'll probably be turned off by it, because it is a lengthy process with regards to understanding how and where to access records. In the National Archive, you have to use gloves on some of the materials. Understanding how to photograph it as well. And these are all time-consuming if you want to organise a session just on that. It's just very, very time-consuming. I suppose what you can possibly do, is put volunteers off. It's then not a project just researching, it's a project of learning other skills, which is it's Catch-22, but it's part of the remit. Volunteers will come out. Your output is your volunteers will come out with more skills than they didn't have. But, again, you do have to find the fine balance' (Community Partner).

- It could be difficult to get full community buy-in, especially for projects that wanted to work with schools and young people. Teachers and students have substantial pressures on their time highlighting the 'difficulty of actually carving out time in a packed curriculum to do this type of extra-curricular stuff' (Community Partner). 'Approaching schools is really tricky, it's actually really hard...schools have got so many pressures on at the moment' (HLF Project Partner). Again, this highlights the ways in which existing relationships can help to make a project successful.
- On the other hand, volunteer enthusiasm occasionally had to be curbed. Some project leads had to spend 'a lot of time trying to cross reference and check...the historical facts...[As] adults it's kind of difficult to say to them "you've got to check your sources; you've got to check your accuracy" and this sort of thing. It's not like school kids that you can teach that this is historical methods...You have to try and take that raw enthusiasm and mould it, and that can be tricky sometimes to do' (Academic Partner).
- Projects cannot rely on people contributing their time for free. In one case, reliance on young volunteers became problematic: 'If young people were going to come to the workshop, they were missing other things...they're all mostly in precarious situations so they need to earn a living' resulting in workshop attendance being unpredictable and sporadic (Academic Partner).
- Project timing needs to be considered, owing to potentially reduced interest over the summer period or the Christmas holidays.
- Energy was hard to sustain over longer projects. 'In order to keep a project going, you've got to keep people energised. You've got to keep people hungry for wanting to learn more...you've got to keep...energy levels up. Otherwise, your project will fall apart' (Academic Partner). 'There were no deadlines per se, but we kind of had targets that we were looking towards if we wanted to get it done on time. You'd maybe go for days without hearing from some of them' (HLF Project Partner).

## Digital Sustainability

- The Centenary generated an unprecedented amount of digital activity around one historic event. Community groups, memory organisation, and academic projects all embraced the potential of the digital for content creation, scholarship, and inclusive engagement. The Engagement Centres also oversaw the development of digital content in a variety of formats.
- However, for a number of reasons, the digital legacy of the Centres is precarious. Just as there was no strategic oversight of digital content generation for the wider Centenary activities, there was no clear guidance, policy or strategy for the digital outputs created by the Centres: while guidelines existed for the creation, management, and preservation of digital outputs, there was a discernible gap between policy and practice, and a lack of empowered advocacy.
- There was no access to an overarching national digital content repository for centenary outputs for the UK: the Centres would have benefited from such a service. At the very least, closer engagement with memory organisations that do provide digital preservation services (the Web Archive, The National Archives, national libraries, or the People's Collection Wales) would have created a greater awareness of existing solutions.

- The Centres and their projects did not have access to sufficient funding for digital preservation and sustainability of projects, given how small many of these projects were. On reflection, funding a smaller number of sustainable projects, with greater resourcing, may have been preferable to funding such a large number of smaller, ephemeral activities.

## Impact

- Impact does not necessarily mean the same thing to all parties (funding councils, universities, academics, community partners and volunteers).
- Further questions were raised about how RCUK demand 'proof of impact'. For academics working with communities that have political sensitivities, this can be challenging. Participants may not be willing to commit to paper that an event has changed their views on certain topics, even if they have. Consideration needs to be paid to 'how feedback is sought from communities, which may actually feel they have something to lose by saying that their views have been changed' (Academic Partner).
- Co-production is not the same as impact. If universities are to continue to support academic staff in developing relationships outside of 'the academy', with the wider social benefits that such collaborations can bring then the notion of impact as understood in the REF needs to be challenged. At present the time devoted to nurturing successful community-academic partnerships is not reflected in the criteria used for developing REF Impact Case Studies: 'It would have been much better for me in retrospect in one way to say "no, I won't do any of this stuff I'll just get on with my book" because for us as academics it doesn't seem to be on the radar properly...proper engagement is not impact' (Academic Partner).



A Discovery Day event in Hastings, 2017. Courtesy of the Gateways Engagement Centre.

There are thus a range of barriers and difficulties for partners to negotiate in order for successful co-production to take place. We hope that the reflections on these processes in this Report provide useful information for future collaborations to develop successfully. And this is important: the Engagement Centre activities between 2014 and 2019 were not just about building connections and developing research in this particular period in history, nor were they simply an exercise in history, in looking backwards to learn about the past. They were also forward-looking, demonstrating the importance of the Arts and Humanities as disciplines that can enrich people's lives in numerous ways. As funding for Higher Education continues to be under intense pressure, and successive governments favour the growth of STEM subjects over the Arts and Humanities, we hope that this Report illustrates the wider importance of the Arts and Humanities for inclusive, diverse, and culturally wealthy communities. We conclude with the reflections of one of the participants in our focus group held at Glasgow Women's Library in 2019 who had worked with the Engagement Centres on three HLF-funded projects:

I think the legacy that – for me, what I see in all the children and the volunteers that have taken part, is how it's inspired them. It's changed their lives! And you can see that NOW! You can see them being – all of a sudden, they're taking part in something – they're doing an extra-curricular activity. They're – all of a sudden, they've discovered an interest in art that they didn't know was there. They've discovered an interest in writing. They want to be involved in the media. They are absolutely fascinated by History - there's all these things that we couldn't have anticipated before we did the project. So, and that's absolutely brilliant. I think that's an amazing legacy (HLF Project Leader).

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The Heritage Lottery Fund changed its title to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in 2019. However, we use the older name throughout this Report as this was its title for the vast majority of the period covered.
- <sup>2</sup> Keri Facer and Bryony Enright, *Creating Living Knowledge: The Connected Communities Programme, community-university relationships, and the participatory turn in the production of knowledge* (Bristol: University of Bristol, 2016).
- <sup>3</sup> *Capturing Commemoration* (University of Essex, 2019) available at [http://reflections1418.exeter.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/57551\\_Capturing-Commemoration-Symposium-Report.pdf](http://reflections1418.exeter.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/57551_Capturing-Commemoration-Symposium-Report.pdf).
- <sup>4</sup> See <https://ahrc.ukri.org>
- <sup>5</sup> Facer and Enright, *Creating Living Knowledge* (2016), p. 10.
- <sup>6</sup> For more on heritage and co-production see Helen Graham and Jo Vergunst (eds.), *Heritage as Community Research: Legacies of co-production* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2019).
- <sup>7</sup> See <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk>
- <sup>8</sup> For more on intangible heritage see Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa (eds.), *Intangible Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2009).
- <sup>9</sup> See <https://www.ref.ac.uk/>
- <sup>10</sup> See <https://www.ukri.org>
- <sup>11</sup> Not all the funding announced here came direct from central government. Much of the funding for Centenary projects and events came from other bodies such as the HLF and Arts Council England.
- <sup>12</sup> David Cameron, 'Speech at Imperial War Museum on First World War centenary plans', 11 October 2012: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/speech-at-imperial-war-museum-on-first-world-war-centenary-plans>
- <sup>13</sup> See Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2005).
- <sup>14</sup> Lucy Noakes, 'My Husband is Interested in War Generally': Gender, Family History and the Emotional Legacies of Total War', *Women's History Review*, 27:4 (2018), pp. 610-626; James Wallis, "Great-grandfather, what did you do in the Great War?" – The Phenomenon of Conducting First World War Family History Research' in Bart Ziino (ed.), *Remembering the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 21-38.

- <sup>15</sup> Emma Hanna, 'British Contemporary Memory of the First World War', *Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine*, University of the Sorbonne, October 2014, available at [https://www.cairn-int.info/article.php?ID\\_ARTICLE=E\\_MATE\\_113\\_0110](https://www.cairn-int.info/article.php?ID_ARTICLE=E_MATE_113_0110)
- <sup>16</sup> British Future, *Do Mention the War. Will 1914 Matter in 2014?* (London: 2013), p.5, p.29.
- <sup>17</sup> British Future, *Do Mention the War* (2013), p.22.
- <sup>18</sup> Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, *Lessons from the First World War Centenary* (London: House of Commons, 2019), p.3 available at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcmds/2001/2001.pdf>
- <sup>19</sup> First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours programme <https://www.centenarybattlefieldtours.org/>. Catriona Pennell, 'Taught to Remember? British Youth and First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours', *Cultural Trends*, 27:2 (2018), pp. 83-98.
- <sup>20</sup> Emma Hanna, '*Pages of the Sea: A UK Case Study*' in Shanti Sumartojo (ed.), *Experiencing 11 November 2018: Commemoration and the First World War Centenary*, (London: Routledge, 2020)
- <sup>21</sup> Evaluation of First World War Centenary Activity, HLF, <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/publications/evaluation-first-world-war-centenary-activity>
- <sup>22</sup> Evaluation of First World War Centenary Activity, HLF, <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/publications/evaluation-first-world-war-centenary-activity>
- <sup>23</sup> Evaluation of First World War Centenary Activity, HLF, <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/publications/evaluation-first-world-war-centenary-activity> While we use the term 'Black and Minority Ethnic' here, we recognise that it is a contentious descriptor. However, as it is currently widely used within public and policy discussion that addresses racial discrimination in the UK, and in the absence of alternative, widely recognised terminology, we use it here.
- <sup>24</sup> Historic England, 'The Heritage Sector and Minority Groups', (2017) available at <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/debate/recent/why-is-a-diverse-and-inclusive-workplace-essential/heritage-sector-and-minority-groups/>
- <sup>25</sup> David Bryan, Katherine Dunleavy, Keri Facer, Charles Forsdick, Omar Khan, Mhemooda Malek, Karen Salt, Kirsty Warren, *Common Cause Research: Building Research Collaborations between Universities and Black and Minority Ethnic Communities* (University of Bristol and Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2018), p.11 available at [https://cpb-eu-w2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.bristol.ac.uk/dist/a/358/files/2018/09/CC\\_Enablers\\_Barriers\\_final\\_sp-2c2f4bh.pdf](https://cpb-eu-w2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.bristol.ac.uk/dist/a/358/files/2018/09/CC_Enablers_Barriers_final_sp-2c2f4bh.pdf)
- <sup>26</sup> 'Stories of Omission: Conflict and the experience of Black soldiers', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diiMJStDNVw>

- <sup>27</sup> For consistency, aside from where it is used in direct quotations, we refer to the 'co-ordinating centres' as Engagement Centres throughout.
- <sup>28</sup> AHRC, Connected Communities Programme and Care for the Future Theme: Call for Co-ordinating Centres for Community Research and Engagement to Commemorate the Centenary of the First World War, June 2013.
- <sup>29</sup> AHRC, Connected Communities Programme and Care for the Future Theme, <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/calls/connected-communities-programme-and-care-for-the-future-theme-call-for-co-ordinating-centres/>
- <sup>30</sup> AHRC, Connected Communities Programme and Care for the Future Theme: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/calls/connected-communities-programme-and-care-for-the-future-theme-call-for-co-ordinating-centres/>
- <sup>31</sup> AHRC, Connected Communities Programme and Care for the Future Theme: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/calls/connected-communities-programme-and-care-for-the-future-theme-call-for-co-ordinating-centres/>
- <sup>32</sup> AHRC, Connected Communities Programme and Care for the Future Theme: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/calls/connected-communities-programme-and-care-for-the-future-theme-call-for-co-ordinating-centres/>
- <sup>33</sup> Four of the Engagement Centres were successful in this second funding round, with the *Centre for Hidden Histories* applying successfully for funding until 2017.
- <sup>34</sup> AHRC Press Release, 21 February 2014: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20200923114229/https://ahrc.ukri.org/newsevents/news/worldwaroneengagementcentres/>
- <sup>35</sup> AHRC Press Release, 21 February 2014: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20200923114229/https://ahrc.ukri.org/newsevents/news/worldwaroneengagementcentres/>
- <sup>36</sup> Facer and Enright, *Creating Living Knowledge* (2016).
- <sup>37</sup> For more on this 2012-2014 funding programme, see <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/publications/all-our-stories-evaluation>
- <sup>38</sup> It had initially been expected that up to six Engagement Centres would be funded by the AHRC. As five were funded, extra resources were subsequently made available to employ further Co-Investigators to help to ensure national reach, and opportunities for community project support and co-production across the four nations of the UK.
- <sup>39</sup> AHRC closed call, 'First World War Engagement Centres: Supplementary Call to Enhance the Reach of the Centres to Diverse Communities across the UK', February 2014.

- <sup>40</sup> *Visualising the Iolaire* was overseen and funded by the *Living Legacies* Engagement Centre. See <https://iolaire.itch.io/the-iolaire>
- <sup>41</sup> AHRC 'First World War Engagement Centres: Supplementary Call'
- <sup>42</sup> AHRC 'First World War Engagement Centres: Supplementary Call'
- <sup>43</sup> David Cameron, 'Speech at the Imperial War Museum', 11 October 2012.
- <sup>44</sup> Principal Investigators Focus Group, (September 2018).
- <sup>45</sup> 'Inclusive Heritage in Practice – Lessons from the Living Legacies 1914-18 WW1 Public Engagement Centre', p. 2 available at <http://www.livinglegacies1914-18.ac.uk/project-cases/>
- <sup>46</sup> Page 5, Relationship Brokering: *Reflections on Community Engagement from AHRC's World War One Engagement Centres*, Internal Report produced for AHRC (2020).
- <sup>47</sup> Keith Lilley, 'Commemorative Cartographies, Citizen Cartographers and WWI Community Engagement', in James Wallis and David Harvey (eds.), *Commemorative Spaces of the First World War: Historical Geographies at the Centenary* (London: Routledge, 2018), p.117.
- <sup>48</sup> The 'Reflections' project team conducted interviews with at least three co-produced projects per Engagement Centre between 2017 and 2020.
- <sup>49</sup> Larissa Allwork, 'Sedimented Histories' and "Embodied Legacies' (2020), p.68. Allwork worked for the *Centre for Hidden Histories* at the University of Nottingham.
- <sup>50</sup> Ian Grosvenor, Sarah Lloyd, Nicola Gauld and Anna Hammerin, 'Making Histories, Sharing Histories: Putting University – Community Collaboration into Practice', <https://everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk/2020/11/making-histories-sharing-histories-putting-university-community-collaboration-into-practice/>
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- <sup>161</sup> <https://iolaire.itch.io/the-iolaire> 'researchers from Abertay University and the University of the Highlands and Islands have developed an online application that provides a virtual map of the disaster. It details those that died, identifies the communities directly and indirectly impacted, while also documenting how people have been memorialised on the island.'
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The 'Shrouds of the Somme' installation in the Olympic Park, London in November 2018.  
Credit: Ink Drop/Alamy Live News.