

Shared Experience Workshop Report (Part II) **Reflections on University and Community Research Partnerships**



Shared Experience Workshop, Derby

On 19th September 2016, university and community participants in research projects funded by the Centre for Hidden Histories convened for a 'Shared Experience Workshop' at Derby Riverside Centre. The day was organised by Impact Fellow, Dr Larissa Allwork, Community Liaison Officer, Mike Noble and Centre for Hidden Histories, Principal Investigator, Professor John Beckett. If the first report in this series highlighted the impact of the Centre for Hidden Histories, this second report will focus on the reflective process of learning from the Centre's experiences. This reflective process is important because it contributes to the Centre's aim of mapping out some best practice guidelines for the realisation of university/community partnerships which draw directly on grassroots experiences. These experiences highlight specific benefits, needs and challenges presented by the AHRC's creation of the First World War Engagement Centres, in partnership with the Heritage Lottery Fund, in order to mark the 1914-1918 centenary.

During the afternoon session of the Shared Experience Workshop, participants were split into four groups: (1) Collaboration and Partnerships; (2) Communities, Education and Skills; (3) World War One History and Heritage; (4) World War One and Public Engagement. Groups were asked to discuss their allocated theme for twenty minutes. To provide guidance, each one of these themes was additionally structured by six key questions, which participants could address, negotiate or reject depending on the direction taken by their discussion. Each group was then asked to report on their findings to the workshop. Short question and answer sessions followed each group presentation. These question and answer sessions also facilitated further discussion of key themes by workshop participants. This report will highlight the main findings of presentations as well as key issues raised in the wider workshop discussions. This report is based on an audio recording of the afternoon session as well as hard copies of the written presentations created at the event. All participants were asked to sign informed consent forms. Whilst by necessity being limited to reflecting the views of those who chose to participate in this process, it is hoped that these findings can stimulate further dialogues about best practice in academic/university partnership projects.

Group 1: Collaborations and Partnerships

Mike Noble (Community Liaison Officer, Centre for Hidden Histories)

Professor Panikos Panayi (History, Leicester DeMontfort University, Academic Partner, 'Knockaloe in Local, National and Global Context')

David Stowe (Independent Scholar, Community Partner, 'In the Wrong Place, At the Wrong Time')

Questions guiding Collaborations and Partnerships discussion:

1. *How was your university/community partnership formed?*
2. *What did academics expect from working with community groups?*
3. *What did community groups expect from working with academics?*
4. *What specific benefits has your project encountered as a result of your university/community group partnership?*
5. *What specific challenges has your project encountered as a result of your university/community group partnership?*
6. *If you had the opportunity to start the collaboration again, what would you do differently?*

Presentation Summary

This group focused on exploring the benefits and challenges encountered in university and community research partnerships. The group noted that both university and community partners take different approaches to collaboration which are dependent on the project or position of the university or community partner involved. For example, given its multi-partner consortium structure the approach to collaboration taken by the 'In the Wrong Place at the Wrong Time' project is quite different to the single partner structure represented by Panayi's outreach work to the Knockaloe Internment Camp and Patrick Visitor Centre.



Patrick Schoolrooms, Isle of Man

Benefits of these projects to both university and community partners include a sense of legitimacy. Community partners benefit from the academic legitimacy lent by universities. Universities benefit from the local knowledge and experience of community practitioners as well as the professional expertise in public engagement offered by museums, charities and heritage organisations. Academic Panayi also pointed to how a key benefit of his community project was that it allowed him to generate a new perspective on his research. Whereas his work had focused on national histories of internment, his community partner project on Knockaloe allowed him to look in-depth at one local example. Stowe also pointed to how working on 'In the Wrong Place at the Wrong Time' had intellectually challenged him in a positive way, enhanced his research skills and given him access to a new audience for his research, namely undergraduate and postgraduate students.



Independent scholar, David Stowe.

Stowe summarised the importance of his experience in the following way: ***“My opinions have been valued...This was important to me to get the message across to show that I am a capable and competent***

researcher, I know I have respect from Claudia (Sternberg), but it also meant a lot coming from students as well.”

The group also identified key challenges in the realisation of university and community partnerships. These often cohered around a set of concerns relating to fundamental disjunctions between academic and non-academic time-scales, organisations and discourses. Often more time needs to be dedicated to the structure and planning of projects. This is because once projects are being implemented it is clear that academics and community groups work to very different time-scales and with a different set of expectations in relation to the outcomes of the project and the time needed for these outcomes to be achieved. Stowe would have liked more project milestones to assist him in delivering his project. Another issue commented on was that university and community group structures can be misaligned, leading to organisational and financial frustrations and complications. Finally, comments were made in relation to the use of language by universities and community groups. Language is often used to reinforce ingrained intellectual hierarchies. For example, academics give a ‘lecture’, while independent scholars give ‘talks’. Stowe also commented on the linguistic impenetrability of some academic writing on heritage and public history. As Noble put it, effective university/community partnerships need to, “***...translate academic into human.***”

Workshop Discussion



The discussion focused on how university and community partnerships had been formed and also identified the qualities that are essential to a successful partnership. An insightful comment which met with a great deal of agreement came from **Judith Garfield, MBE**:

“The key is having that personal relationship with the academic. I have tried working with academics in the past but it hasn’t really worked...there needs to be this personal connection and mutual respect.”



Garfield’s university partner **Professor Kurt Barling** also spoke on the importance of strategic partnerships in achieving the impact of these projects:

“The reality is, if you are quite strategic about plugging into partners who have networks that is the way in which you get greater impact...The partnership has to be strategic.”

The ‘hidden’ time needed to do these projects was also discussed. Sometimes these projects involve a lot of meetings, especially in the initial stages and can take a long time to come together in the proposal stage. These projects are a significant time commitment for both academics and community partners. Sensitivity is needed to the time constraints acting on both university and community partners, and where possible a reduction in unnecessary meetings and ‘red tape’ would be welcomed.

Recommendations:

Mutual respect is the fundamental building block of any successful university/ community partnership.

University and community partnerships need to be strategic to maximise 'impact' for both parties.

Research project plans should take into consideration the fact that university and community partners often have different expectations of project time-scales and outputs. These expectations need to be addressed from the outset.

In presenting research to community partners, academics need to be sensitive to using language which will communicate most effectively with their target audience.

Group 2: Communities, Education and Skills

Dr David Amos (Independent Academic, Community Partner, 'World War One Controversies in Coal')

Professor Paul Elliott (Geography, University of Derby, Academic Partner, 'Derby Green Spaces in Wartime')

Louise Page (Professional Playwright, School of Arts and Media, University of Salford, writer and consultant, 'Hidden Strangers')

Questions guiding Communities, Education and Skills discussion:

- 1. Why was studying a 'hidden history' of World War One important for the community represented by your project?*
- 2. How did you achieve successful academic and/or community engagement with schools as part of your project? (Only answer if relevant).*
- 3. What challenges have your projects faced in engaging with schools? (Only answer if relevant).*
- 4. What skills have community participants and/or academics developed as a result of your project? (eg. website design, presentation skills, media training, learning languages).*
- 5. Did you engage in a personal or family history as part of your project on World War One?*
- 6. Have you noticed any additional personal benefits from working on your project? (eg. Has it helped you meet people in your local community? Have you developed new friendships or intellectual partnerships? Has it helped you enhance your CV or get a job?).*

Presentation Summary



Paul Elliott and the 'Derby Green Spaces' Tapestry

This group commented that promoting the study of 'hidden histories' was important as a validation of community histories. This validation occurred in a diversity of ways, one of which was related to marginalised UK regional histories which exist independently of London and the South. As **Louise Page** commented: "The North has its own history and has a right to its own history." In terms of the involvement of young people and community members, it was observed that projects provided people with a framework and

an activity to become involved with the academic study of the history of the First World War. For example, **Elliott's** collaboration with Spiral Arts engaged people to work on the tapestry and this led them to learning about the history of the First World War.

Even if teachers were enthused by the ideas underpinning projects, the group did note the challenges of university/community partnership working with schools. These challenges to engagement included the stipulations of the National Curriculum, time-tabling restrictions in secondary schools and various forms of necessary 'red tape' such as DBS checks. The highlighting of these challenges was extensively discussed by the Shared Experience Workshop in the question and answer session afterwards.



Spiral Arts community participants working on the 'Derby Green Spaces' tapestry.

Page, Elliott and Amos all agreed that a good thing about all their projects was that they were intergenerational, promoting the sharing and discussion of knowledge of the First World War between different age groups and communities. This has meant that some of these projects have led to a greater sense of community cohesion.

Networking and team-working skills have been enhanced, while in some instances it was observed that

uncovering a marginalised family history can lead to political engagement in the present.

How academics benefit from community engagement work was also noted. As a result of her project, Page has received further employment opportunities. For example, she was invited to speak at the Grantham Science Festival (21-25 September 2016). **Page** also commented on how enjoyment is also an important factor in academic participation in these projects: "**Something for a lot of us working in universities that gets lost under that work pressure and that target**

pressure is just to be enjoying the work. That was very uplifting for us and took us into new ways of thinking.”

Discussion

The Communities, Education and Skills discussion was dominated by the question of how to engage effectively with primary and secondary schools. This reflects the fact that schools engagement is a key element of many Centre for Hidden Histories projects. Echoing many of the key challenges identified in the Communities, Education and Skills presentation, issues associated with schools outreach raised during the discussion included content and time-tabling pressures as a result of the National Curriculum; clashes between school and university term-dates and high teacher work-loads which can undermine their willingness to take on extra-curricular projects. Lack of space owing to busy timetabling can also be a factor in hindering the realisation of projects, particularly those which require a certain type of space such as a drama studio or large hall.



Soldiers of Empire 'Pop-up' exhibit

Barling and **Garfield** have been successful in engaging with schools via their pop-up exhibition, 'Hidden Heroes – Soldiers of Empire'. By September 2016, it had travelled to eight secondary schools and had been viewed by six primary schools. Of working with primary and secondary Schools, Garfield noted that it is important to bear in mind the differences between the two types of schools.

Primary schools are often quite willing to make visits to community centres, archives and heritage centres. It is much harder, however, to attract student visits from secondary schools. In order to reach secondary school students, it is therefore necessary for educators and community partners to go into schools. For Garfield, it is very important to find the right teacher in a school to help take the project forward. It is also important for proposed projects to tap into the enthusiasm of teachers and be relevant to the location, community interests and curriculum of the school in question. Other key factors are being sensitive to the timetabling and spatial restrictions placed on secondary schools. For example, the 'Hidden Heroes' exhibition was designed as a pop-up that could quickly be put up in a canteen or foyer. Support materials such as education packs were published online, so that teachers and students could access these documents, and utilise them in conjunction with the exhibition.

Barling also stressed the importance of presenting teachers with accessible historical material which is relevant to the age group in question. This encourages teachers who have access to an exhibition over the course of a week, to organise an activity in relation to an exhibition such as 'Hidden Heroes'. For Barling, effective schools outreach is also about effective research design. It is necessary for schools liaison to be put, *“...right in the planning stages of how you are going to deliver your project.”*

Alison Jones made the point that an alternative pathway for heritage engagement with secondary schools is through schemes that tap into the external outreach that schools are often expected to perform. For example, work experience or activities for the Arts Award or Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Professor Jane Chapman commented on how it would be useful for the Centre for Hidden Histories to research these issues into schools engagement further and compile best practice guidelines on effective strategies for schools engagement.

Recommendations:

Effective schools outreach requires long-term planning within research projects and good relationships with key decision-makers within school management and subject departments.

Sensitivity and a willingness to work around National Curriculum requirements and the demands of student time-tabling are essential to the successful realisation of schools based research projects.

Group 3: World War I History and Heritage

Professor Jane Chapman (School of English & Journalism, University of Lincoln, Academic Partner, 'African, Caribbean and Asian Contributions to the Great War')

Judith Garfield MBE (Eastside Community Heritage, Community Partner, 'Hidden Heroes: Soldiers from Empire in the Middlesex Regiment')

Dr Tim Grady (History and Archaeology, University of Chester, Academic Partner, 'Handforth')

Alison Jones (Knockaloe Internment Camp and Patrick Visitor Centre, Community Partner, 'Knockaloe in Local, National and Global Context')

Questions guiding World War I History and Heritage discussion:

1. Do you feel that your project has successfully uncovered a 'hidden history' of World War One?
2. What challenges have you faced as a practitioner of World War One history?
3. What are the benefits of working with the Heritage Lottery Fund?
4. What are the challenges of working with the Heritage Lottery Fund?
5. What is best practice in working with heritage organisations? (eg. museums, libraries, archives, memorial centres etc.) If possible, please cite examples from your own experience on this project.
6. What are the challenges of working with heritage organisations (eg. museums, libraries, archives, memorial centres etc.)? If possible, please cite examples from your own experience on this project.

Presentation Summary



World War I descendants being taken around Knockaloe.

Every member of the First World War history and heritage group felt that they had uncovered a 'hidden history' as part of their research, and the group hoped that facts which have been uncovered might go onto challenge or nuance pre-existing historiographies. The group suggested that challenges faced as practitioners of World War One history included tight project time-lines and also for academics, adapting to the public orientated demands of working as part of a First World War Engagement Centre. For example, research has not just involved members of the Centre for Hidden

Histories conducting work in the archive, but has also involved academics answering spontaneous public enquiries in relation to personal family histories, heirlooms and artifacts. However, as **Professor Jane Chapman** commented,



Professor Jane Chapman

this is seen as a positive development in 'impact' terms because, *"It means that the community out there are recognising you and what you are doing."* Another challenge identified was dealing with the emotions that are sometimes triggered in family historians who are researching difficult First World War era topics, which reveal traumatic biographies of suffering, injury, internment or death.

The Heritage Lottery Fund was praised as an important source of funding for the sector. **Garfield**, who has won funding for 45 HLF projects, noted that what is particularly good about the HLF is that it likes challenge, difference, public engagement and skills training. The group as a whole noted that as with other large organisations, a problem associated with working with the HLF can be a lack of communication. It was also observed that there are key challenges facing the heritage sector more broadly. These include lack of funding, over-work and in some cases a lack of technical resources. These financial and technological challenges are often especially acute in the case of small, regional museums.

In terms of best practice, good communication was seen as essential in working with heritage organisations. It was also noted that that university and heritage partners should recognise and respect the strengths of their respective methodologies. **Chapman** noted that museums and heritage organisations do have tremendous expertise and it is great when they add value to a project by contributing relatively unknown documents or objects. This can really help to bring history alive in a public engagement context. However, museum protocols and the cost of insurance can be a disincentivising factor in universities borrowing archival materials for exhibition and display.

Discussion

Following concerns expressed in the presentation about the availability of technical equipment to smaller and less-well funded heritage organisations, the discussion

focused on how the technological resources of universities could be mobilised to assist community partners.

Beckett noted how universities can offer community partners access to equipment, such as Grassmoor Primary School's visit to the University of Nottingham's Digital Humanities Centre (13 June 2016).



Grassmoor School students at University of Nottingham digital humanities day.

Chapman commented that there can be issues with using/lending equipment as it is often the case that university services or departments expect their division to be reimbursed for the use of this equipment. This is an additional cost that needs to be factored into funding bids.

Amos mentioned that another issue can be community partners needing training in how to structure successful funding bids.

Barling brought the discussion back to the University requirements of the National Student Survey, which focuses on the student experience and employability, and how these drivers of student satisfaction could benefit engagement with community partners. Barling advised that academics should look at disciplines which require students to engage with the public, such as journalism, performing arts, television production and film: *"If you tie that up with equipment and a student, that resource can be deployed to the benefit of community groups."*



Garfield affirmed the importance of providing practical experience as a route into work for university graduates. Garfield pointed to the example of graduate trainees who were taken on at Eastside Community Heritage as part of the Heritage Lottery Funded programme, 'Skills for the Future'. Garfield commented of the year long course which results in an NVQ in Cultural Heritage: *"Our passport trainees who have all done a year with us and then a month in a museum are all now in employment. Our most recent trainee has just got a job at The National Army Museum. The one before that at English Heritage...Having that hands-on experience is something that you need to sell to your students...That is what the sector needs and wants...Those placements and that experience are actually vital."*

Recommendations:

Good communication is essential to any university/ community partnership.

Undergraduate and postgraduate courses can offer opportunities for enhancing the student experience and employability through heritage placements and community engagement.

Group 4: World War I and Public Engagement

Professor Kurt Barling (Media, Middlesex University, Academic Partner, 'Hidden Heroes: Soldiers from Empire in the Middlesex Regiment')

Professor John Beckett (History, University of Nottingham; Principal Investigator, Centre for Hidden Histories)

Dr Claudia Sternberg (Legacies of War, School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds, Academic Partner, 'In the Wrong Place, At the Wrong Time')

Ann Marie Curtis (Community participant, St Werburgh's Great War Study Group, 'Belgians in Cheshire' project)

Questions guiding World War I and Public Engagement discussion:

1. *How far has your project engaged with the media?*
2. *What challenges do projects face in engaging with the media?*
3. *Do you feel that the Centenary has been commemorated effectively in the UK?*
4. *Based on your own experiences, are there differences between the national commemoration of World War One and local grass-roots commemorative practices?*
5. *Is the contemporary political context for the commemoration of this history important?*
6. *Have any of your projects achieved any impact on public policy?*

Presentation Summary



Local reporting of 'Hidden Heroes' exhibition.

This group noted different levels of media involvement across projects. Regional media such as local newspapers and radio were key in communicating projects to local communities. Group members also noted their engagement with creating a range of media forms including short films and websites. **Barling** observed that a challenge to engaging with the media can be the fact that academics can be cynical about journalists and reluctant to engage with them. Barling, a former BBC broadcast journalist, stressed the importance of university and community partner projects having a clear communications strategy from the outset: *“When you start a project that is the moment when you think about how you sell your stories.”* It is also important that this communications strategy draws on

the public relations resources and experience of universities and community partners. It is key to coordinate with university press officers and public relations teams at the beginning of a project and discuss potential public engagement pathways. In addition, publicity and the needs of university branding as well as media training opportunities for academics and community partners need to be addressed.

Barling also observed how in constructing a communications strategy it is crucial to think about channels and outlets who may be interested in reporting about projects. It is necessary to not just target one media agency (eg. BBC); but instead think about targeting specific media for particular target audiences. It is also important to consider your project in its broadest context for potential news stories. Different outlets want different things. However, ultimately media agencies are always looking for content: ***“In the end newsrooms are desperate for content. You may think that they are difficult to get hold of. But the reality is that they are desperate for interesting content. Even though local radio has been cut back, they have still got acres and acres of space...The key is your project should not just look at the minutiae in the archive. It should be about how can we best share this and what are***



From Heritage Corner's performance 'Hut 21', part of the 'In the Wrong Place and at the Wrong Time' project.

the best media outlets within which to share this.” (Kurt Barling)

In terms of the differences between national and grass-roots commemoration, agencies like the Centre for Hidden Histories were seen to be ***“bringing the national picture down to local levels.”*** (Anne Marie Curtis) There were divergent opinions in terms of how effectively the Centenary had been commemorated in the UK. **Claudia Sternberg** felt that the commemoration had been effective because it encompassed diverse forms of expression, ranging from exhibitions and local/community projects to outputs across the arts, and because it had opened or created archival resources. **Curtis** felt that the Centenary had been commemorated frequently but not always effectively. This had to do with maintaining the quality and aim of the commemorative output. However, **Curtis** did praise the **Centre for Hidden Histories AHRC First World War Engagement Centre** noting that, *“I like ours because it’s about minority groups, it’s hidden histories and it’s not jingoistic. I’m as patriotic as anyone, but you need to be able to see the bigger picture.”*



An exhibition board from 'The Belgium Connection'.

The group noted that the contemporary political context for First World War commemoration was very important. The group identified a number of contemporary political echoes which uncomfortably resonate with 1914. These include the West’s participation in or observation of conflicts across the globe, national and ethnic tensions in Europe and the current refugee crisis. As

Curtis, who is working with Dr Hannah Ewence (University of Chester) on a project about Belgium refugees during the First World War, commented:

“How many people would have envisaged the number of refugees that we have coming into this country. My particular group was concentrating on Belgium refugees, and the similarities between them coming in at Folkestone and the people coming in from Calais is just absolutely amazing. There are certainly echoes there. And also our own particular heritage. We need to know that although we are an island nation, we are not a nation completely set apart, we function within the rest of the world. There have been waves of immigration from the Norman conquest onwards, at least.”

In the case of the majority of Centre for Hidden Histories projects, policy impact is an ongoing process. Following the opening of the ‘The Soldiers of Empire’ exhibition at Bruce Castle Museum and a London comprehensive school, David Lammy MP invited Barling to a meeting with the Minister of Culture and Media to talk about integrating issues of diversity into culture and media outputs. Of the significance of this experience for the Centre for Hidden Histories, Barling noted:

“We can play at the top table if we get the right connections. And I suspect that the Minister was actually quite open to the idea that if you want to deal with social cohesion, if you want to deal with diversity, if you want to make our cultural outputs inclusive, you can’t ignore these stories.”

Discussion

In **Louise Page’s** view, the ultimate policy impact is likely to come from the collective power of all of the projects combined, and this policy impact may well grow further over the next five years. For Page, what has been positive about the First World War Centenary has been its diversity of representation. *“It’s not what it looked like it could be at the beginning, which was ‘Tommy’s in Trenches.’”*



Pupils based at the Berlin school who will be participating in the 'In the Wrong Place, at the Wrong Time' project.

Claudia Sternberg proposed that the First World War Engagement Centres as a collective could build on their experiences and push for impact on wider policy. A crucial consideration would be in relation to education and schools. In particular, a methodology for university/community partner engagements with secondary schools needs to be debated, discussed and recommended at the policy level. **Sternberg** also noted that another area where institutional and/or funder involvement in the work of the First

World War Engagement Centres would be useful is in relation to the internationalisation of projects. Many Centre for Hidden Histories projects deal with international themes, but do not necessarily feature an international partner. This is

partly due to Heritage Lottery Fund restrictions which sponsor UK based projects, although bodies such as the Arts Council support, for example, international touring projects. Lobbying by the First World War Engagement Centres and intervention at a higher level could help to internationalise these projects, facilitating international cultural diplomacy and bi-lateral partnerships, based on mutual recognition of a shared history which shapes our understanding of collective identities and international relations in the present.

Jane Chapman: As we are coming to the end of Phase 1 of the First World War Engagement Centre's, this is the moment to consider how the work we have achieved so far can shape policy in the future, especially education policy: *"We shouldn't wait until 2019, I think we should be beginning to prepare what we want to say now."*

Recommendations:

University/Community partnerships need to construct a public engagement and impact strategy from the outset.

University/community partnerships can utilise problems identified and evidence collected during their research process in order to find pathways to influence government policy.

**Dr Larissa Allwork
Impact Fellow, Centre for Hidden Histories, November 2016**

Summary of Centre for Hidden Histories Shared Experience Workshop Recommendations

1. Mutual respect is the fundamental building block of any successful university/ community partnership.
2. University and community partnerships need to be strategic to maximise 'impact' for both parties.
3. Good communication is essential to any university/ community partnership.
4. Research project plans should take into consideration the fact that academics and community partners often have different expectations of project time-scales and outputs. These issues and expectations need to be addressed from the outset of research projects.
5. University/Community partnerships need to construct a public engagement and impact strategy from the outset.
6. In presenting research to community partners, academics need to be sensitive to using language which will communicate most effectively with their target audience.
7. Effective schools outreach requires long-term planning within research projects and good relationships with key decision-makers within school management and subject departments.
8. Sensitivity and willingness to work around National Curriculum requirements and the demands of student time-tabling are essential to the successful realisation of schools based research projects.
9. Undergraduate and postgraduate courses can offer opportunities for enhancing the student experience and employability through heritage placements and community engagement.
10. University/community partnerships can utilise problems identified and evidence collected during their research process in order to find pathways to influence government policy.