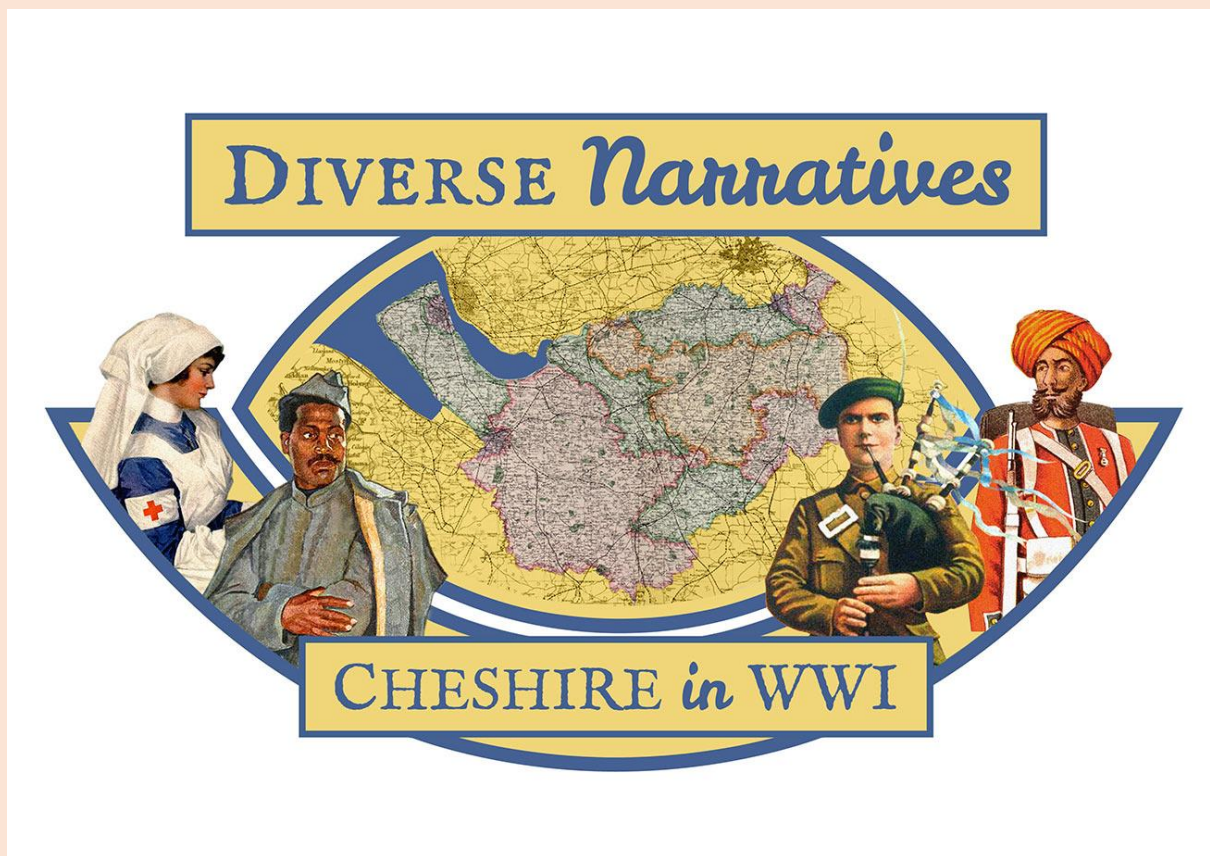


Diverse Narratives: Minority Experiences in Cheshire during the First World War



Heritage Lottery Fund Evaluation Report

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1. Executive Summary

The Diverse Narratives Project began life in 2014 as a university and community co-partnership conceived from a shared ambition to challenge accepted understanding of local histories of the First World War. Based at the University of Chester in the North West of England, the project sought to recover and reclaim 'lost' experiences and hidden histories of the conflict in the county of Cheshire throughout the conflict's centenary. The project aimed to build bridges between the university and local people, offering heritage that developed, enhanced and showcased the skills of community volunteers; that engaged non-traditional audiences; and which reflected the social diversity of wartime and present-day Cheshire.

A Heritage Lottery award in early 2016 enabled the project to deliver on many of its ambitions. A small team based at the university immediately sought to consolidate its network of volunteers by offering skills training, digital research resources, and tangible opportunities for dissemination of the volunteers' research findings. These included developing digital platforms such as a dedicated project website, devising a touring exhibition, and participating in public talks. Volunteer participation in each of these initiatives was crucial to maintaining and growing the university/community partnership. Diverse Narratives began and remained through to its conclusion in November 2018 a truly co-operative, community-driven project.

From the outset, the project leaders were also dedicated to an educational agenda which would engage students at various stages of the educational system. Drawing undergraduate history students into the project as both researchers and volunteers provided an early testing ground for the project's research objectives. Several cohorts of history undergraduates proved the richness of untapped historical sources documenting diverse wartime experiences, many of which were available locally. From these early successes, a very fruitful partnership with the Department of Education at the University of Chester was forged. This relationship opened up dual opportunities; firstly to use Diverse Narratives research to train PGCE students to teach about local history and diversity and; secondly to set up opportunities for these PGCE students to deliver teaching on these topics within local secondary schools.

The legacies of the Diverse Narratives project are many and varied. It has served to forge connections between educators and community groups, between historical sites and commercial environments, and between local histories and a diverse, transnational past. The project leaders would like to acknowledge the debt of gratitude that they owe to the strength of the university/community partnership for helping to deliver on these ambitions.

2. Introduction

In April 2014, the Department of History & Archaeology at the University of Chester hosted a conference focusing on minority experiences during the First World War. This conference brought together lead researchers in the field, demonstrating the complex, challenging and yet rich breadth

of experience during the conflict; much of which has received only limited attention beyond specialist circles.

This conference convinced us that there was a real need for the further study of minority experiences during the war. Both the traditional ‘spaces’ and the traditional ‘actors’ aligned to the conflict needed to be re-thought. This, for a small team of historians at the University of Chester, meant looking at our immediate environs for experiences of the conflict which deviated from mainstream understanding. How did a county like Cheshire experience the war? What role did the region play in internment or offering sanctuary to refugees? How did it cope with labour shortages, with hostility towards so-called ‘enemy aliens’, or with agitation aroused by Irish nationalists? These were all matters afflicting the nation as a whole but which played out in ‘real time’ in the social relations formed and tested at the local level.

However, it also became clear that any further research not only needed to be more inclusive of diverse *histories* but also of diverse contemporary perspectives, voices and audiences. Uncovering histories only intended for dissemination within the academy missed the underlining objective to ‘include’. Convinced of this agenda, a Senior Researcher was appointed in November 2014 to begin building relationships with community groups and individuals throughout Cheshire. Many of the people with whom we formed links were already passionate local history enthusiasts but typically had only limited research expertise or limited access to resources. Under the guidance of the senior researcher, these volunteers received training in historical research, interpretation and public engagement, enabling them, over the course of 12 months to research and write 25 different histories for the project website.

The richness and singularity of many of the stories which emerged was exciting. Yet the project as a whole lacked funding to disseminate these stories in ways which would reach non-traditional and/or digitally illiterate audiences. Our application to the Heritage Lottery Fund argued for the necessary support to enable that dissemination to take place, to facilitate ongoing engagement with our community of volunteers, and for the creation of various ‘legacies’ of that research which would attest to the cultural diversity of Cheshire’s First World War for future generations.

2.1 Importance of the Diverse Narratives Project

The centenary of the First World War has prompted a powerful surge of renewed interest in the conflict from national government, civic institutions, heritage organisations, educators and the public alike. In trying to explain this phenomenon David Cameron, speaking in 2014, insisted that the now temporally distant war nevertheless remained ever-present in British consciousness, enveloping the nation as ‘inheritors of the fights that were won before us’. However, whilst the conflict does indeed represent both a shared history and a shared inheritance, extending this same inclusivity to the ‘retelling’ of this history has been a far more fragmented and imperfect process. Instead the emphasis within the public histories which have emerged – as in years past – has been on the ‘sacrifices’ made by the British Tommy, the women and children left behind at home and the bravery of the nation in a time of turmoil. There has been little space for, nor scrutiny of, the role played by soldiers from the commonwealth and empire, for foreign combatants and civilians

on British soil, for interned enemy aliens and incarcerated POWs, for Irish nationalists, Australian munitions works, Russian-Jewish immigrants and Belgian refugees. These histories have, by and large, fallen outside of the ‘accepted’ and familiar narrative of the war.

The centenary proved to be a catalyst for calls for a far more ‘democratic’ and inclusive history to emerge. As historian David Olusoga has argued, ‘there is a huge and passionate desire by nations and communities who have been sidelined by mainstream history to use the opportunity offered by the centenary to “re-globalise” popular understanding of the first truly global conflict.’ The Diverse Narratives project set out to demonstrate how local history – itself an oft-maligned and sidelined branch of the history discipline – offers just such an opportunity for a ‘re-globalised’ history to materialise. By taking the North West county of Cheshire as its case study, the project actively sought out the histories of otherwise marginalised or forgotten groups. In doing so, it hoped to demonstrate that even seemingly un-cosmopolitan regions have surprisingly rich stories of diversity to tell. By harnessing the passion and enthusiasm of community groups and individuals keen to uncover ‘their’ history, the project looked to facilitate a space in which a ‘new’ history could be co-authored and shared.

Together with a small team of historians from the University of Chester, community partners hoped to realise their vision of offering an alternative view of the First World War; one that was both representative and inclusive. For local communities to ‘invest in’ and take ownership of their heritage, they need to be able to see themselves in past actors, scenarios and environments. Engaging local people in their heritage establishes a culture of shared responsibility and shared ownership. This applies equally to dissemination as it does to active participation. Finding innovative ways to bring this shared heritage to non-traditional audiences was one of the project’s underpinning objectives. Using local history not simply to ‘educate’ but to challenge, change and complicate understanding of the diverse demographics of Cheshire in the past can help to engender a culture of tolerance and understanding in the twenty first century.

2.2 Project Aims and Objectives

The aims of the project as specified in the funding application were to:

- identify, record, interpret and explain local heritage;
- enable local people to develop skills in historical research and heritage preservation;
- to educate and inform local communities about their histories;
- to engage non-traditional audiences in local history and heritage;
- to change attitudes towards and understanding of local history;
- to encourage local people to contribute time to their communities.

The strategies and approaches proposed to achieve these aims and objectives were:

- a series of ‘pop-up’ exhibitions, hosted in commercial and retail spaces, at sites across the county,

- an enhanced research skills training programme for the community of volunteers,
- continue to populate the project website with new ‘stories’ and enhance our on-line presence,
- engagement with local schools to encourage and facilitate the teaching of this local history,
- invite a prominent First World War historian to deliver a lecture at the university on the theme of ‘diversity’,
- host a series of public lectures to disseminate material finds and research findings,
- publish an edited collection specifically addressing the theme of ‘Minorities and the First World War’.

2.3 Project Management Approach

2.3.1 Staffing

The core project team was comprised of three members. Drs Hannah Ewence and Tim Grady, Senior Lecturer and Reader in Modern History respectively at the University of Chester jointly directed the project. However, the third team member managed the day-to-day running of the project. A Senior Researcher was appointed at the commencement of the project for that purpose to help develop the project’s digital profile, to recruit and train volunteers, and to help co-ordinate the touring exhibitions. Whilst the University of Chester supported the creation of a partial Senior Researcher post, a core objective within the application to the HLF was for the extension of the post into 2018 to enable the project to meet and deliver all of its desired aims and objectives.

Besides this core team, the project also hoped to recruit approximately 20 volunteers from various history, heritage and community organisations from across Cheshire who would contribute the majority of the case study research, as well as assisting with the dissemination of that research. The objective was for this to take various forms, including writing up blog entries for the website, making case study videos, giving talks, contributing to publicity campaigns and acting as on-hand ‘experts’ at the pop-up exhibitions.

There was also a clear objective for students from the University of Chester to contribute to the project. It was intended that students in levels 5 and 6 (years 2 and 3) of their History undergraduate degree programmes would contribute researched case studies to the website, some of which would be included in the exhibition display boards. Other students would be enlisted to volunteer at the pop-up exhibitions. Thanks to a planned collaboration with the Department of Education at the university, PGCE trainee teachers would devise teaching materials and lesson plans based on the research conducted by our volunteers, and, in a series of ‘Local History Days’, would deliver these lessons to pupils in schools across the county.

The project also planned to use Heritage Lottery funding to work collaboratively with a specialist heritage organisation, Big Heritage, to help devise and deliver the pop-up exhibitions. The organisation’s specialist team would offer necessary support to transform the large body of detailed research into a succinct and engaging narrative suitable for a heritage context. It was also hoped that they would also provide the project team direct access to their network of contacts, from

commercial spaces to host the exhibitions, through to printing firms to produce the accompanying materials.

2.3.2 Planning & Timetable

The project commenced in November 2014 with the appointment of a Senior Researcher. This initial phase allowed the team time to build a 'brand' and web presence for the project. This first year also saw the project begin to recruit volunteers to be trained in research skills, and to begin to populate the website with case studies. However, the project began in earnest once HLF funding had been secured in January 2016. This injection of funding enabled the project team to devise an exhibition based around the volunteers' research, and to launch the first series of pop-up exhibitions in spring/summer 2016. Two further exhibition tours were planned for July-August 2017 and July-August 2018.

The original Action Plan submitted with the HLF application outlined 23 activities in total, spread reasonably evenly across the 34 months that the project was intending to run. These activities ranged from public engagement initiatives (exhibitions and talks), to education (visiting local schools and training our volunteers), through to commemorative activities.

3. Project Data

3.1 Partner and Collaborator Groups and Organisations

3.1.1 Educational

Department of Education, University of Chester

Alumni Association, University of Chester

Corporate Communications, University of Chester

Students' Union, University of Chester

Museum of Health & Social Care, University of Chester

Catholic High School, Chester

Elfed High School, Buckley

University Academy School, Warrington

Upton High School

Dr Jenny McLeod, University of Hull

Charlotte Czyzyk, Imperial War Museum

Kathrin Pieren, Jewish Museum, London

Jasdeep Singh, National Army Museum

Santanu Das, King's College London

Centre for Hidden Histories, Nottingham

3.1.2 Local History

Friends of Stockport Cemeteries

Family History Society of Cheshire

Peace Strategy Group of East Cheshire Quakers

Northwich and District Heritage Society

Stockport Heritage Trust

Cheshire Local History Association

Macclesfield WW1 Centenary Committee

Family History Society of Cheshire

Cheshire Military Museum

Grosvenor Museum

Stockport Museum

Handforth Public Library

St Werbergh's Great War Study Group

3.1.3 Commercial

Forum Shopping Centre, Chester

Pyramids Shopping Centre, Birkenhead

Grosvenor Shopping Centre, Macclesfield

Market Hall, Stockport

The Market Shopping Centre, Crewe

Port Arcades Shopping Centre, Ellesmere Port

Cockhedge Shopping Centre, Warrington

Winsford Cross Shopping Centre, Winsford

3.1.4 Other

Chester and Cheshire West Council

Handforth Parish Council

Centre for Veterans' Wellbeing

Grosvenor Estate/Eaton Hall

Royal British Legion

Gladstone's Library, Hawarden

The Big Ideas Company

4. Impact and Outcomes

4.1 Secondary School Outreach

One key aim of the project was not only to reach school pupils but to also influence the way that the history of the First World War is taught in secondary schools. While the war remains a central part of the curriculum, it tends to be taught along fairly standard lines, whether this means learning about the trenches of the Western Front or the writings of the so-called war poets. In stark contrast, we were determined to use the project's research to make pupils aware of their own local history, that the war was not a distant conflict fought far from home, but actually took place in Cheshire too. Beyond that, we also wanted to show schools that this local history was also an incredibly diverse one.

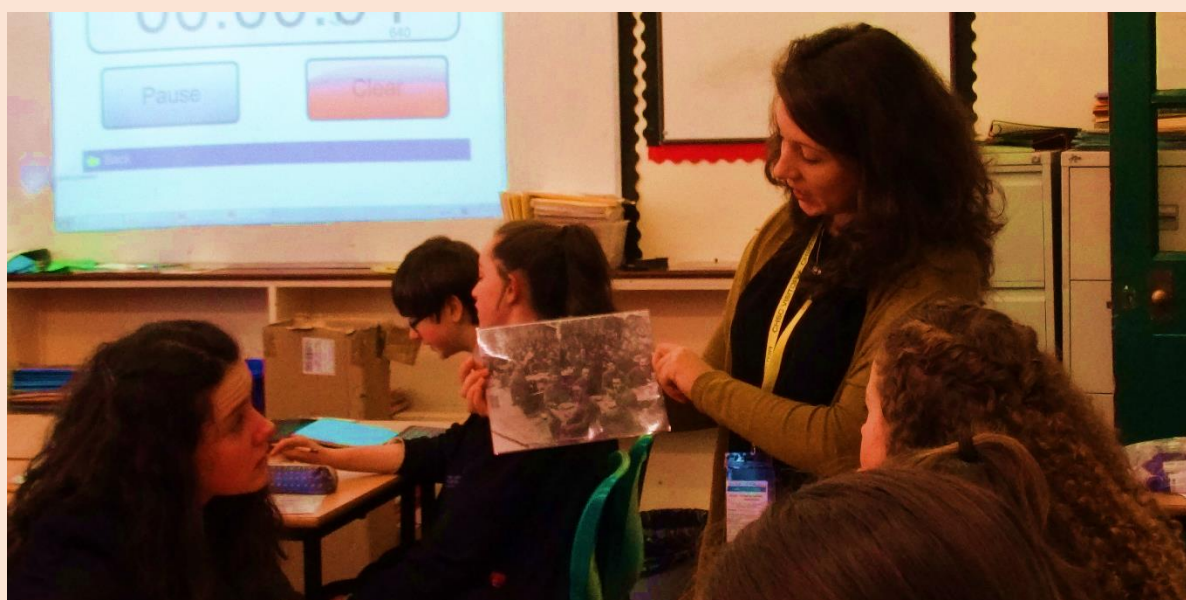


Despite the depths of our ambition, it proved incredibly difficult to find a way to reach schools, who understandably have an existing timetable and curriculum to follow. The solution that we found was to launch a unique partnership with trainee history teachers (PGCE students) based at the University of Chester. We first taught trainee teachers about the experience of minorities in wartime using materials from the project. The trainees then had the knowledge to devise specialist ‘Diverse Narratives’ workshops, which could be delivered direct to children based in Cheshire schools. Over years two and three of the project, we reached some 375 pupils based on the following full-day workshops:

Date	Town	School	Year Group	Nr. Pupils
February 2017	Chester	Catholic High School	8	80
July 2018	Buckley	Elfed High School	7	75
July 2018	Warrington	University Academy School	8	100
July 2018	Upton	Upton High School	8	120

4.1.1 Collaboration with Trainee History Teachers

By working with trainee teachers in the delivery of schools’ sessions, we also managed to reach 30 trainee history teachers across the final two years of the project. Prior to our intervention, the new teachers had only a limited knowledge of the First World War and none had considered local aspects of the conflict. Our initial training workshops gave the student teachers the confidence and necessary skills to engage with local history, with the varied experiences of minority groups and to introduce primary source material into the classroom environment.





4.1.2 Secondary School Education Packs

To run alongside our series of secondary school teaching days, we also produced education packs for schools. These took two forms and have been designed so that teachers could utilise the materials with or without having an accompanying school visit. The first brochure was aimed squarely at school pupils themselves. The colourful 24-sided brochure contains personal stories relating to the project's main groups. At the end of the schools' sessions, pupils received their own copy of the brochure with the hope that this would stimulate further reflection on this particular aspect of First World War history.

Our second education pack has been directed towards teaching professionals. Working with the University of Chester's Education Department, we produced six separate teachers' packs, each covering the history of one minority group in Cheshire. Each pack consists of lesson plans, source documents and accompanying PowerPoint presentation, which teachers can use directly or adapt to their needs. These materials are available for download on the project website.

4.2 Volunteer Workshops

At the start of the project, we held information sessions for the community, during which we outlined this forgotten aspect of the First World War and sought to recruit participants. While there was considerable interest in the broader history, some people were uncertain about taking part in an actual research project. Indeed, only three of those who eventually volunteered to participate had previously conducted any of their own historical research. Demographically, we had two main volunteer groups. The first consisted of retirees, aged 60 years and over; our second main volunteer group involved undergraduate and postgraduate students, aged under 25. Presumably time constraints – family and work – explains why we recruited very few volunteers aged 25-60.

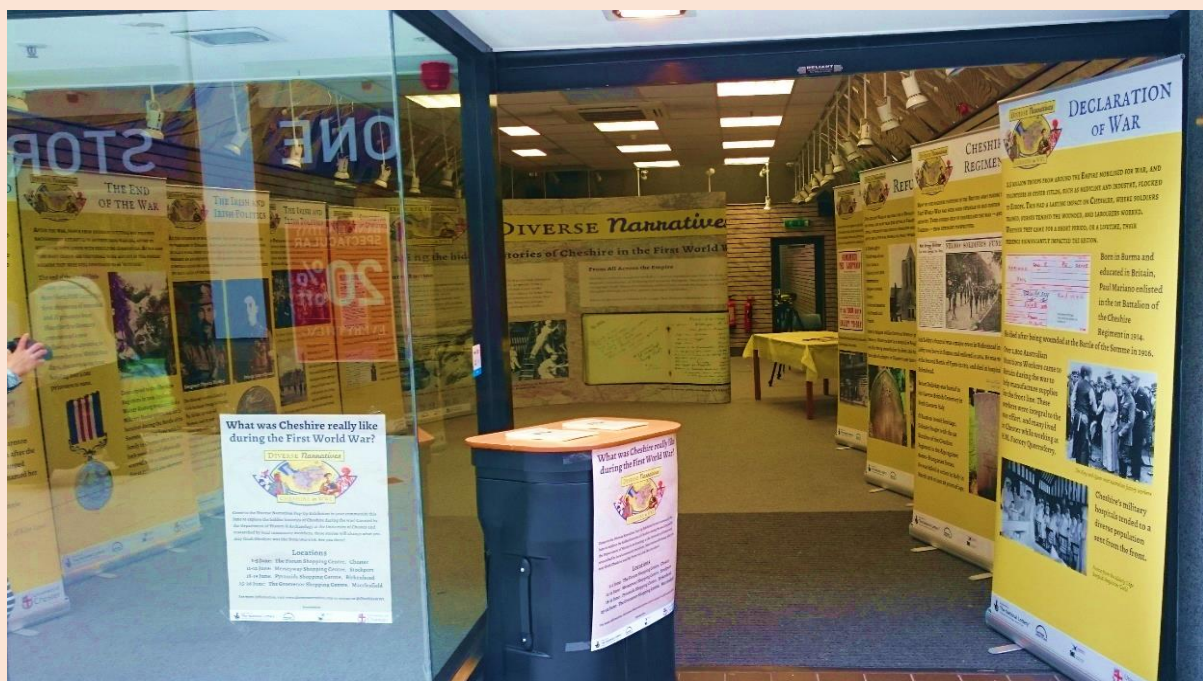
As most of the volunteers had little to no research experience, one of our first tasks was to hold training workshops. Starting in early 2016, we put on regular workshops on the University of

Chester campus, which covered themes ranging from using an archive through to digital repositories. The skills learnt through these workshops empowered the community volunteers, enabling many of them to conduct historical research for the first time. One volunteer, for example, travelled on two occasions to the National Archives in London to conduct research into the Handforth internment camp, while others utilised Cheshire Records Office and digital repositories, such as the British Newspaper Archive.

4.3 Pop-Up Public Exhibitions

Research conducted by the project's volunteers fed directly into a travelling exhibition. From the very start, we aimed to make the project's findings available to a wider public through the creation of a temporary travelling exhibition. In autumn 2015, we began to design an exhibition to tell the story of Cheshire's wartime minorities. Our underpinning idea was that each panel would introduce the history of one different group, whether this be the Jewish soldiers, Belgian refugees or Chinese labourers. To illustrate each story, we also interwove the life histories of the individuals that our volunteers had researched. In this way, the exhibition proved to be a genuine collaboration between volunteers, students and academic historians.

Consisting of 15 individual panels and one large introductory stand, the finished exhibition covered some 30 square meters. To reach a wide audience, we worked with the Big Heritage not-for-profit educational company to display the exhibition in empty retail units. The decision to place the exhibitions inside shopping centres was a reflection of our desire to reach a broad demographic, targeting in particular those people who may not typically visit museums or existing heritage spaces.



In total, we ran 17 exhibitions, which we staggered across the county in an attempt to reach the widest possible audience:

	Date	Length	Town	Venue
1	May 2016	3 Days	Chester	Forum Shopping Centre
2	June 2016	2 Days	Birkenhead	Pyramids Shopping Centre
3	June 2016	2 Days	Macclesfield	Grosvenor Shopping Centre
4	June 2016	3 Days	Stockport	Market Hall and Stockport Museum
5	September 2016	4 Days	Handforth	Handforth Public Library
6	February 2017	1 Day	Chester	Chester Catholic High School
7	September 2017	2 Days	Crewe	Market Shopping Centre
8	November 2018	1 Day	Chester	Chester University Students Union
9	January 2018	2 Days	Ellesmere Port	Port Arcades Shopping Centre
10	January 2018	2 Days	Warrington	Cockhedge Shopping Centre
11	February 2018	2 Days	Winsford	Winsford Cross Shopping Centre
12	March 2018	5 Days	Chester	Chester University, Diversity Festival
13	June 2018	1 Day	Chester	Chester University Alumni WWI Event
14	July 2018	1 Day	Buckley	Elfed High School
15	July 2018	1 Day	Warrington	University Academy School
16	July 2018	1 Day	Upton	Upton High School
17	November 2018	1 Day	Chester	Chester University Remembrance Day



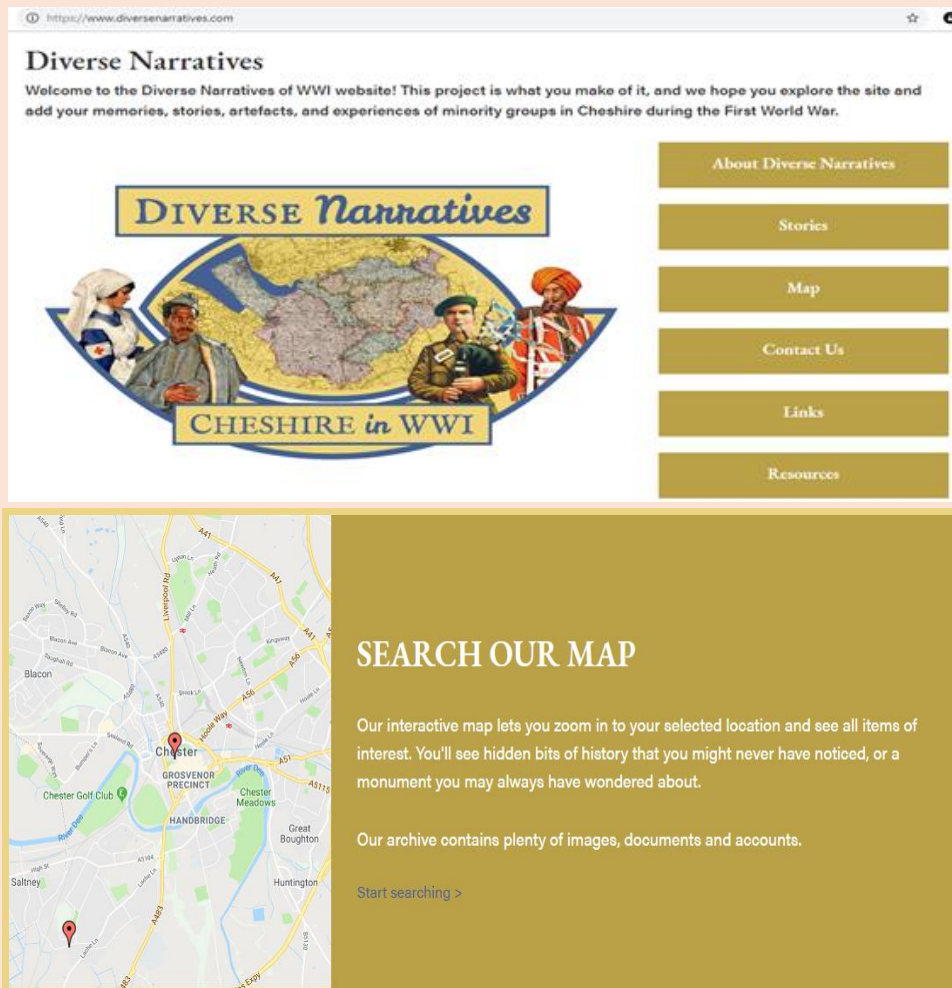
What was particularly important about the exhibition series was that the project's volunteers not only contributed research and materials to the displays, but that they also participated in the running of the events. During the exhibition in the Chester Forum Shopping Centre, for example, seven volunteers took part, meeting with visitors, guiding them through the displays and helping to pack away materials at the conclusion of the event. On other occasions, volunteers assisted

either individually (Handforth, Stockport, Crewe) or were aided by University of Chester students, who took the opportunity to participate in heritage interpretation.

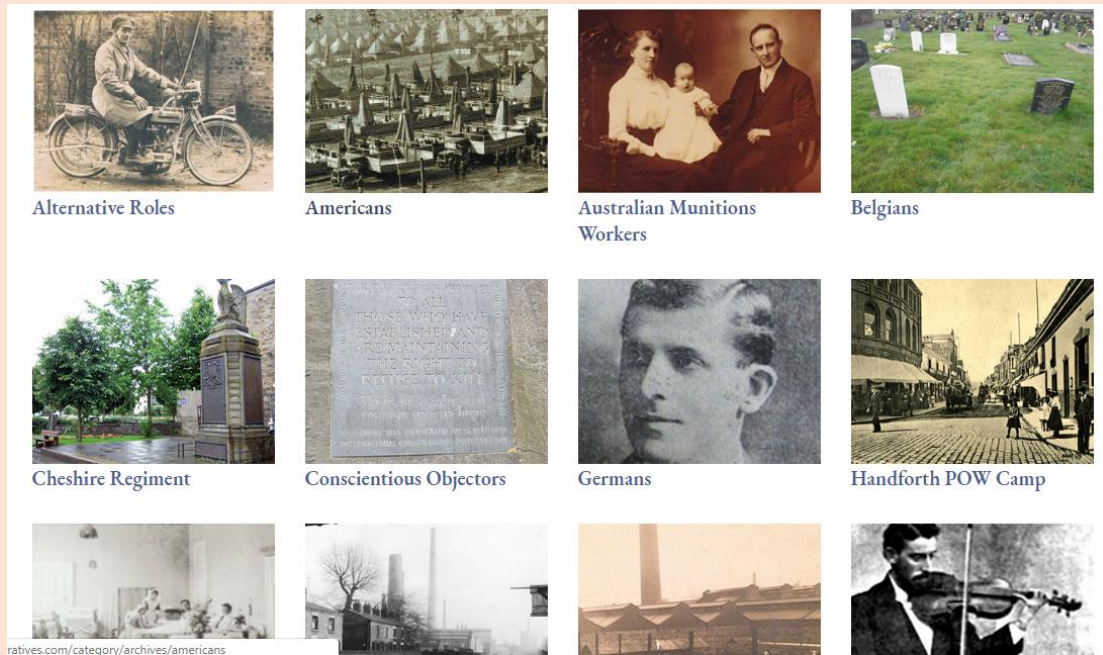


4.4 Project Website

A website was always to be a central component of the project, as a means both to update the public on our latest developments, while also providing a repository of the different stories collected by project volunteers, researchers and history students. The original website, which was powered by WordPress software, provided a good foundation for the project in its early stages: www.diversenarratives.com. Supplementing the main website, we also constructed another WordPress website to focus solely on the history of the Handforth internment camp: www.handforthpowcamp.com. Combined, the two websites hosted some 50 individual stories. The majority of these were put together by our project volunteers.



One crucial aspect of the websites, as originally conceived, was that they allowed for the wider public to respond to the stories posted. This feature resulted in some notable conversations. A Claudia D., for example, explained the history of her great-great uncle, who had been interned as a prisoner of war in the Handforth camp. In subsequent discussions, photographs and letters were exchanged, which allowed for the reconstruction of Claudia's great-great uncle's life story. On another occasion, the surviving nephew of a Belgian soldier, who had died in Chester in 1915, made contact after reading the project's stories. This was a crucial moment both for the project and for the deceased's family, as it brought together an Anglo-Belgian wartime story in one place.



4.5 Belgian Refugees' Gravestones

During the course of their research, one of our project volunteers discovered that two child refugees from Belgium had died during the war in Northwich. The bodies of the two young boys had been placed in unmarked graves in Northwich cemetery. After painstakingly locating the burial plots, it was decided to arrange for a new headstone to be erected, so that after 100 years these two graves could be finally marked. The project volunteer together with members of the Diverse Narratives project team approached Tata Chemicals Europe, which is the successor company of Brunner Mond, whose wartime director had helped many refugees in the Northwich area. Thanks to the diligence of all involved, Tata kindly agreed to fund the new stone marker and to arrange for its erection.



In November 2016, the headstone was officially dedicated in front of an invited crowd, consisting of the Belgian Honorary Consulate, pupils from Winnington Park Primary School and members of Northwich Council. This was an important moment, as not only were the graves of two child refugees finally marked, but it also provided an opportunity to shed new light on the diverse wartime history of mid Cheshire.



4.6 Public Talks on Minorities in the First World War

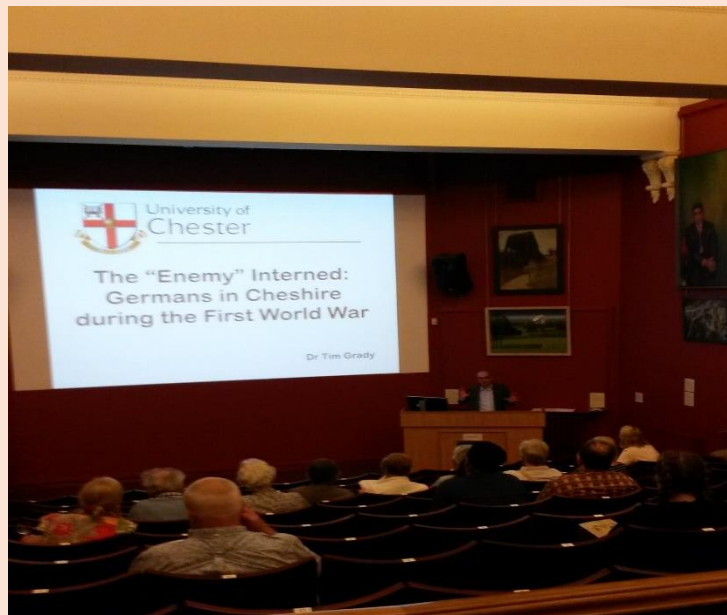
Throughout the life of the project, we have presented aspects of the project through talks and presentations:

- Tim Grady, 'Diverse Narratives: Minorities in Cheshire during WWI', Imperial War Museum North, Manchester, (September 2015).
- Anne Marie Curtis and Hannah Ewence, 'Belgian Refugees during WWI', BBC Radio Merseyside (November 2015).
- Tim Grady, 'Diverse Narratives in Cheshire', Centre for Hidden Histories, Derby, (September 2016).
- Anne Marie Curtis, 'Belgians in Cheshire', Centre for Hidden Histories, Derby, (September 2016).
- Tim Grady, 'Landscapes of Internment: German POWs in Cheshire', Chester (April 2017).
- Hannah Ewence, 'Belgian Refugees between "War" and "Peace"', Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford, (December 2017).
- Hannah Ewence and Tim Grady, 'Minorities and the First World War: From War to Peace', Chester (December 2017).
- Alan Lowe 'Aliens in Mid Cheshire', Northwich and District Heritage Society (March 2018).

- Hannah Ewence and Tim Grady, ‘Diverse Narratives’, BBC Radio Merseyside (March 2018).
- Hannah Ewence, ‘Diverse Narratives – Public Talks’, BBC Radio Merseyside (June 2018)
- Alan Lowe ‘Aliens in Mid Cheshire’, Northwich and District Heritage Society (August 2018).
- Tim Grady, ‘Handforth Camp Cheshire’, Hawick Internment Research Centre (November 2018).
- Tim Grady, ‘The Handforth POW Camp’, Knockaloe Visitor Centre, Isle of Man (March 2019).

As the centenary of the First World War started to draw to a close during summer 2018, we seized the opportunity to present our project findings in a much larger setting. The Grosvenor Museum Chester proved the ideal setting for this work, as the Museum already utilises its large lecture theatre for a series of public events running through the year. The two talks we offered brought the project to life through a focus on two case studies, one on Belgian refugees, the other on German internees in Cheshire. In order to engage the audience, both talks were designed to be interactive. We showcased objects, recreated wartime recipes and played contemporary film clips:

- Tim Grady, ‘The “Enemy” Interned: Germans in Cheshire during the First World War’ (June 2018)
- Hannah Ewence, ‘Refugees in Crisis? Belgians in Cheshire during the First World War’ (June 2018).



4.7 Public Debate on the First World War Centenary

Building on our two interactive talks in the Grosvenor Museum, we also staged a one-off panel discussion on the First World War centenary held in front of a live public audience. The session consisted of five questions that probed the presence of minorities in the First World War centenary commemorations. In order to bring in additional expertise from the academic and public history branches, we invited three external speakers to participate in the discussion:

- Dr Jenny Macleod (University of Hull)
- Dr Kathrin Pieren (Jewish Museum London)

- Charlotte Czyzyk (Imperial War Museum)

The three speakers, who were also joined by Tim Grady on the panel and Hannah Ewence as chair, engaged in a lively discussion about the centenary. The public audience also participated throughout, offering their own reflections and posing their own questions to the panel.



4.8 Project Publications

In 2017, Hannah Ewence and Tim Grady published an edited collection of essays on aspects of this broader history: *Minorities and the First World War: From War to Peace* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). The volume, which is aimed at both an academic and public audience, introduces readers to some of the key concepts in minority studies and applies these to the subject of war and conflict.

Crucially, the project has encouraged a number of other publications both from the project leads as well as from our volunteers:

- St Werburgh's Great War Study Group (ed.), *We Shall Remember Them: Biographies of Men associated with St Werburgh's who gave their Lives during World War I* (2015).
- Alan Lowe, 'They are our sons now', *Our Town: The Northwich Magazine*, September 2016, pp. 12-14.
- St Werburgh's Great War Study Group (ed.), *A War Torn Cheshire Parish: St Werburgh's before, during and after the Great War* (2017).
- John Curtis, 'Belgian Refugees during the First World War', *Cheshire History*, (2018).
- Hannah Ewence, 'From Celebrity to Obscurity: Belgian Refugees in Cheshire', *Immigrants and Minorities*, (2018)
- Tim Grady, 'Landscapes of Interment: British Prisoner of War Camps and the Memory of the First World War', *Journal of British Studies*, (forthcoming).

5. Project Timetable

Since its inception, Hannah Ewence and Tim Grady have jointly led the project with the assistance of a research assistant. From the start of 2015 through until summer 2016, Dr Jessica van Horssen held the post of research assistant. Following Dr van Horssen's appointment to a new external post later in 2016, Dr Nicola Morris has worked as the project's research assistant.

The project has roughly adhered to the timetable as submitted in the original bid. Where the timing has altered, this has largely been a result of circumstances that could not have been predicted, such as the availability of exhibition space, the arrangements of volunteers or the diaries of external speakers. The timetable, therefore, had to be flexible to the demands and pace of research and also to the specific circumstances of our external partners. In the end, our timetable of public activities was as follows.

	Date	Event	Town
1	June 2015	Volunteer Training	Chester
2	September 2015	Talk	Manchester
3	October 2015	Volunteer Training	Chester
4	November 2015	Talk	Radio Merseyside, Liverpool
5	January 2016	Volunteer Training	Chester
6	March 2016	Volunteer Training	Chester
7	May 2016	Exhibition	Chester
8	June 2016	Exhibition	Birkenhead
9	June 2016	Exhibition	Macclesfield
10	June 2016	Exhibition	Stockport
11	September 2016	Talk	Derby
12	September 2016	Talk	Derby
13	September 2016	Exhibition	Handforth
14	November 2016	New Belgian Headstones	Northwich
15	January 2017	Training (PGCE)	Chester
16	February 2017	Training (PGCE)	Chester
17	February 2017	Schools Visit	Chester
18	February 2017	Exhibition	Chester
19	April 2017	Talk	Chester
20	September 2017	Exhibition	Crewe
21	November 2017	Exhibition	Chester
22	December 2017	Talk	Oxford
23	December 2017	Talk	Chester
24	January 2018	Exhibition	Ellesmere Port
25	January 2018	Exhibition	Warrington
26	February 2018	Exhibition	Winsford
27	March 2018	Talk	Northwich

28	March 2018	Talk	Radio Merseyside, Liverpool
29	March 2018	Exhibition	Chester
30	April 2018	Training (PGCE)	Chester
31	June 2018	Talk	Radio Merseyside, Liverpool
32	June 2018	Exhibition	Chester
33	June 2018	Talk	Chester
34	June 2018	Talk	Chester
35	June 2018	Public Debate	Chester
36	July 2018	Exhibition	Buckley
37	July 2018	Schools Visit	Buckley
38	July 2018	Exhibition	Warrington
39	July 2018	Schools Visit	Warrington
40	July 2018	Exhibition	Upton
41	July 2018	Schools Visit	Upton
42	August 2018	Talk	Hartford
43	November 2018	Exhibition	Chester
44	November 2018	Schools art competition – judging	Chester
45	November 2018	Talk	Hawick
46	November 2018	Dedication of new war memorial	Chester
47	November 2018	Primary School Talk	Chester
48	March 2019	Talk	Knockaloe

6. Project Review

6.1 Schools Outreach

We took Diverse Narratives into a selection of schools over two years with two separate cohorts of PGCE students. We gathered feedback from the Associate Teachers for both years, with schools offering us feedback from their staff and students.

6.1.1 Associate Teachers Training at the University of Chester

Overall, the student teachers reported that working with Diverse Narratives had been an enriching experience that added value to their training. Several associate teachers stated that the project had opened their eyes to the range of Cheshire experiences of the First World War. They particularly highlighted that they had been unaware of the existence of a Prisoner of War camp in the county and the range of men of different religious and ethnic backgrounds who fought in the British military. They also believed that these were aspects that their pupils had been previously unaware and noted that ‘they were surprised that this history was part of their heritage’.

Regarding the skills required for the delivery of the material, several of the associate teachers stated that the project had helped them hone their delivery to primary source material and ‘reinforced my belief in the use of primary sources as being key to local studies’. This was not a universal view

however, as a small number felt that they already had the requisite skills and did not need further practice. Others highlighted the fact that they were required by their mentor Dr Mike Bird to work in pairs, and this forced them to develop their team planning and communication skills, which they found challenging. All however, stated that they were supported to acquire some new skills while working on the project.

Several of the associate teachers felt that the tasks they were asked to perform were too time consuming in the context of their studies. However, the tasks were designed in consultation with the PGCE Secondary Programme Leader, Dr Mike Bird, who had no such qualms. Indeed, he believed that the enrichment value of the project for the PGCE programme was sufficient to justify the time commitment. Moreover, as a result of the success of the collaboration between Diverse Narratives and the Department of Education, further joint projects between the Departments of History and Education at the University of Chester are in development.

The general feeling was the project had been interesting and engaging for both pupils and those teaching, bringing to light lesser-known stories based in the local area. Most of the associate teachers stated that they would be prepared to work with Diverse Narratives again given time and opportunity, 'because it is important to help younger generations to understand the different groups of people that were affected by or fought in the war'.

6.1.2 School Pupils

In general, the schools reported that the pupils had enjoyed delivery of Diverse Narratives material, although obviously some pupils were less enthusiastic about history than others. Pupils reported that they had 'learnt a lot' through the workshops with most able to list four items that they had discovered that day. Tasks that were highlighted as particularly enjoyable were using the 1911 census, 'I liked decrypting the census, it was cool' and 'I enjoyed being a detective'. Others enjoyed and learning more about their local area and World War One sites that still exist there.

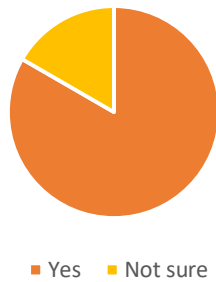
A number of pupils expressed surprise that concentration camps had existed prior to the Second World War and that the British had used them. They also indicated that they hadn't previously thought about minority ethnic groups living in the United Kingdom in the early twentieth century, and consequently hadn't considered that they had played a part in the war, serving in the British military. Many seemed surprised about the history of antisemitism and discrimination against minorities in Britain.

Some pupils expressed the desire to have more teaching on the military campaigns, but more seemed intrigued to learn about 'people who aren't that famous from the war', the 'people who used to live here' and 'how they used to live'. This indicates that the pupils were most engaged by individual stories and these should be used to illustrate broader themes in history.

6.2 Volunteers

A diverse and fluctuating group of volunteers participated in the project, comprising principally of local historians and local history groups and University of Chester staff, students and alumni. Volunteers were variously involved in researching, recording, analysing and cataloguing material, producing marketing and publicity materials, introducing the public to the exhibition and

Did you learn about Cheshire's heritage while volunteering?



answering their questions and using the exhibition to help public explore their family histories. A majority of volunteers indicated that these activities had helped them to learn more about Cheshire's heritage, particularly citing the 'diverse groups around the county'.

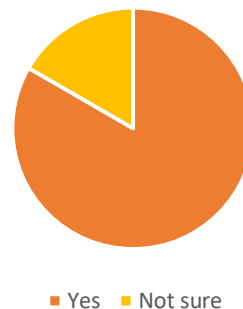
Moreover, over eighty percent of the volunteers stated working with Diverse Narratives had changed the way in which they understand the history of Cheshire during the First World War. In particular,

respondents mentioned the 'presence of Belgian refugees in mid-Cheshire', 'forgotten aspects of the war i.e. the POW camp' and 'the foreign soldiers who were laid to rest' in Cheshire. Responses emphasised that this project had demonstrated how it was 'not only soldiers "at the front" had important roles to play'.

All of the volunteers felt they were able to disseminate this type of information to visitors at the exhibition. The volunteers suggested that 'few of the visitors knew much about Cheshire in WW1' and consequently they could explore the issues together.

All of the volunteers stated that they had enjoyed working on the project. Particular highlights included 'trying to get local societies to participate' and 'meeting visitors from as far afield as South Australia and Austria'. Moreover, all the volunteers agreed that they would be willing to work on similar projects in the future.

Has your time volunteering change how you understand Cheshire in WW1?



Despite Diverse Narratives staff providing training to volunteers, for example in historical research and interpretation and public engagement, none of the volunteers could identify any specific new skills that they had acquired working on the project. This would suggest that outcomes for training need to be more clearly defined and elucidated to participants.

The fluctuating nature of volunteer groups was also an area for concern. While many people were keen to learn more about the First World War in Cheshire this interest was not easily maintained

over a sustained period. Thus, the interest did not convert into significant new material being developed by volunteers. The material that was developed tended to focus very tightly on a specific locality and didn't necessarily relate easily to rest of the project. In future, academic members of the team perhaps need to consider more carefully how to engage local groups and facilitate them in producing a variety of heritage material.

6.2.2 In-depth Interviews

As part of the review process, the Diverse Narratives team approached key volunteers for their experiences on the project, three of whom gave detailed responses to their work on the project.

Alan Lowe: Northwich and District Heritage Society

Prior to the start of the Diverse Narrative project, Alan had written a book *A call to arms* considering the impact of the outbreak of war on the Northwich area. As part of that research he had discovered a group of Belgian refugees that had arrived in Northwich in September 1914. We asked if Alan would pursue this research in collaboration with Diverse Narratives. Although 'at first I was not too keen', having been put off by previous experiences using microfilm, Alan did continue this research. This research resulted in a number of posts to the Diverse Narratives website, the erection of a gravestone for two Belgian boys in Northwich, and a number of public talks.

Alan reported that the support and training he received from Diverse Narratives helped him develop his research skills, particularly with web resources. The project also encouraged him to utilise the material that others were producing and to share his own findings. Alan described the most important thing he learnt on the project to be 'Don't dismiss something because it doesn't sound that interesting', further stating that his research into the Belgian refugees significantly increased his understanding of World War One in Northwich and has encouraged him to consider the possibility of undertaking a postgraduate degree.

Overall, while enjoying the experience of volunteering with Diverse Narratives, Alan would have liked additional meetings of all the researchers to discuss their findings. He felt that this would have enhanced the experience and provided more opportunities for the volunteers to ask questions, and receive support from professional historians.

"The lasting legacy for me is that next week I shall be giving my fourth presentation, with pictures, o the Belgian refugees with the proceeds going to the Royal British Legion. These presentations help me to make my local community aware of the refugees, something that the vast majority ... knew nothing about. The presentations always finish with questions and answers and it is wonderful to see the whole issue of the refugees and the war in general getting a great airing."

Alan Lowe

Pat Ransome: University of Chester Alumni Association

Pat sits on the steering Committee of the University of Chester Alumni Association which over the last few years being pursuing a project to research and commemorate former staff and students who died in the First World War. As part of this, they looked to link this commemoration with other World War One projects across the university, and found that Diverse Narratives fitted ‘extremely well’ with their project and was a productive and valuable collaboration leading to a number of joint displays and cross-promotion.

The Diverse Narratives project ‘provided additional depth to our research’ and ‘a different perspective’. Pat explained that ‘looking at minority cohorts provided a further dimension and an increased awareness of the bigger picture within the local area’. She felt that the two projects were complementary and when displayed together offered students and other visitors an insight into the variety of people who were caught up in the war.

On a personal level, Pat stated that the Diverse Narratives project inspired and equipped her to do her own research into minorities during the First World War. Specifically, she was motivated

“The ongoing legacies are in the continuing interest that the projects have generated in the wider community and the links the University continue to develop with Chester heritage and the Cheshire Museums. I never saw the project as finite. Once committed to the web I am sure that the projects and the stories uncovered so far will continue to generate further interest.”

Pat Ransome

to research a young, local, conscientious objector who was shot for his beliefs and to visit his grave. She particularly values how the projects have uncovered and publicised the stories of ordinary individuals living in extraordinary times.

Dr Michael Bird: PGCE Secondary Programme Leader, University of Chester

Mike became involved with the Diverse Narratives project as he was keen to utilise ‘cutting edge academic research’ in teacher training and professional development in local schools. He perceived that Diverse Narratives had the potential to assist in the development of the local studies

It enriched the PGCE curriculum for our Associate Teachers and helped many of our partnership schools develop their history curriculum for the benefit of their pupils.

Mike Bird

curriculum that is often cited as a ‘blind spot’ and provide much needed opportunities for pupils to engage effectively with primary sources.

Mike assessed the project as being successful in helping schools to develop their history curriculum for the benefit of their pupils and significantly ‘enriched the PGCE’ experience. The project

[Diverse Narratives] “provided a fantastic local prism through which to create an impression of the enormity of national and global upheaval”

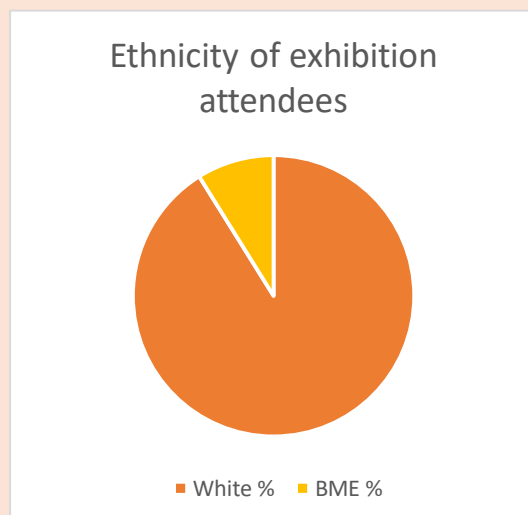
Mike Bird

assisted him in understanding how to ‘materials pedagogically so that cutting edge academic research is accessible to secondary school pupils and history teachers’. A major output of the project has thus been a ‘large repository of extremely high-quality teaching materials’ exploring the Diverse Narratives themes to enhance pupil understanding of the broad impact of the First World War.

Overall, Mike valued his time working with the Diverse Narratives team, especially appreciating the opportunity to collaborate with other professional colleagues. For any future project, he would suggest spending more time and resources in building relationships with schools to shape the delivery and impact of the material.

6.3 Exhibitions

The success and reach of the exhibitions has been assessed through the observations of staff and volunteers who manned the exhibits and the voluntary written feedback of visitors. For logistical reasons, the exhibitions were left unmanned for periods during their display so data collected is partially incomplete.



Firstly, it was noted by staff and volunteers that footfall for the exhibition was higher when the stands were displayed in a public thoroughfare or as an adjunct to another event, for example a public lecture or act of commemoration. When displayed in a shopping precinct more people would briefly stop and read one or more boards if they were displayed in a thoroughfare than were prepared to enter a retail unit. For example, around 143 people entered retail units to view the exhibition in Chester over four days in summer 2016, whereas 203 that stopped to read boards in Crewe over two day where they were

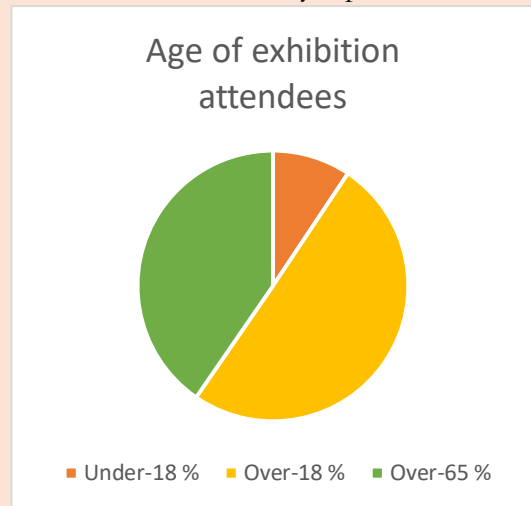
displayed outside the entrance to Wilkos. This suggests that nearly double the number of people were prepared to stop where the boards were place on a thoroughfare.

Those who viewed the exhibition in shopping centres appear to have been broadly representative of the local population. Around 91 percent of those who viewed the exhibition were white, compared to 93 percent of the population of historic Cheshire and Warrington according the 2011 census. A range of ages stopped to view the panels, although older people seemed somewhat more likely to stop and engage with the material. Children were the group least likely to stop and view the material.

Of those who encountered the exhibition at shopping centres, visitors who entered a retail unit to view the exhibition were the most likely to provide written feedback on the exhibition. For example, 19 people provided written feedback on the exhibition at each Chester and Macclesfield, where only a handful provided feedback in Crewe. This would suggest that people who interrupted their day to view the exhibition in a retail unit engaged more deeply with the material. Notably, asking the public to record their feedback on postcards to ‘posted’ in a collection box proved more effective than asking them to record their thoughts in a visitors’ book. This would suggest that we need to think more carefully about how presentation affects the audience’s willingness to engage with the material and how a visual novelty encourages visitors to pick up and complete feedback.

Overall, visitor feedback was positive, with comments stressing that the exhibition been both ‘fascinating’ and ‘thought-provoking’, as people had not previously been aware of these ‘incredibly important’ aspects of the localities’ history. Responses noted the ‘range of nationalities’ and ‘huge diversity’ of people in Cheshire during the war. Many comments highlighted that they had not been aware of specific ethnic, national or cultural groups having a presence in Cheshire, including the Belgians, Indians, West Africans, and New Zealanders. Connections to personal family history were often highlighted. Visitors at the Macclesfield and Handforth exhibitions specifically noted that they were surprised that there had been an internment camp in the area, making comments such as: ‘As a young child in Handforth I never new [sic] of the concentration camp there’ and ‘didn’t know there was POW camps locally’. A couple of responses indicated that they hoped the exhibition would be displayed permanently at a local museum or similar.

The exhibition was also displayed at the schools visited and at a number of public events held at the University of Chester. Here the exhibition was primarily an adjunct to another event such as an act of commemoration or public lecture. The project worked with other groups within the university, including the Alumni Association, the Students’ Union and the Historical Society of the Faculty of Health and Social Care to reach a broader audience of staff, students and alumni. The biggest advantages of these events was the cross-promotional opportunities that they provided, where individuals who did not have a pre-existing interest in the Diverse Narratives project and would not have attended a dedicated event nevertheless took the opportunity to view the exhibition.



The largest of these collaborations was with the ‘We Remember Them/77 Fallen’ has was initiated by the Development and Alumni Relations Office, with the support of the University of Chester Alumni Association Executive Committee. The core remit of the project was to commemorate the lives and service of the 77 alumni who were students or staff at the then Chester College, who lost their lives in World War One, their names being on a plaque in the University Chapel. This culminated in an Act of Remembrance for the 77 alumni of the University which was held on 22 June 2018 followed by lunch where the Diverse Narratives exhibition was displayed.

This event was attended by 110 people in total, of whom 70 were external guests to the University and 46 of those were family representatives of the fallen who had never previously visited the University. Most of those descendants of the fallen travelled a significant distance to attend the commemoration, with 65 per cent travelling from outside the local area but within the UK, and one travelling for the event from Australia.

Total family representatives	From Cheshire	Northwest/ North Wales ¹	Elsewhere in UK (eg Kent, Devon)	Overseas (Australia)
46	11	4	30	1

In addition, two active and four retired members of the British Armed Forces attended the commemoration. A selection of local organisations, businesses and charities were also present, including Chester Students’ Union, Centre for Veterans’ Wellbeing, Grosvenor Estate/Eaton Hall, Royal British Legion, Museum of Health & Social Care, Cheshire Military Museum, Budding Delights Florists, Robert Nicholas: Cabinet Maker and Gladstone’s Library, Hawarden.

Informal oral feedback from those who attended indicated that they were eager to contextualise the experience of the fallen alumni and learn more about Cheshire during the First World War. Many expressed surprise at the diversity of the experiences on display, stating that they had not been aware that all the groups represented were in the UK (and particularly Cheshire) during the war. Most of those who attended took additional explanatory information booklets away with them to read later.

¹ A 30 mile radius of the University of Chester.

6.4 Website feedback

The two websites associated with the project have been an important part of our outreach and dissemination. While initially the websites were designed to attract interest in the project and was populated with the initial parameters of the project and the research of the academic staff, they were designed to become a platform to disseminate the contributions of volunteers. This initial plan was successful and the Diverse Narratives site is populated with over forty volunteer

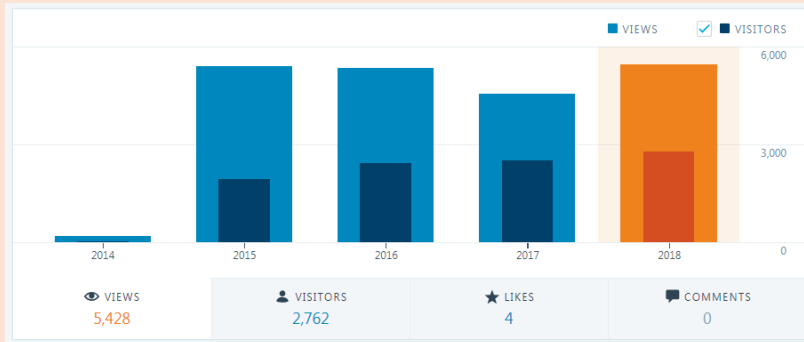


FIGURE 1: DIVERSE NARRATIVES WEBSITE

contributed blog posts and the Handforth site with over twenty pages of information about conditions in the POW camp. The website has proved a useful and popular tool with volunteers to both delve more deeply into the project and display their own findings.

The websites have achieved significant national and global reach of the period of the last four years. Views of the Diverse Narrative website rapidly attained a level of over 5,300 which largely maintained over the period of the project, with the typical visitor viewing the site twice. The visitors to the website predominantly came from within the UK but there has been a significant international contingent, with 776 views from within the United States, 550 from Australia and individual site visitors from as far afield as Thailand, Nigeria and Tajikistan. The most frequently viewed pages after the home page have been those discussing Australian munitions workers, Great War despatch riders, and Gysies in Cheshire during the war. This illustrates the diversity of interests among the volunteers and the public. The events page was also among the top five most visited pages indicating that people were visiting the site to find out more about the exhibitions and talks put on by the project.

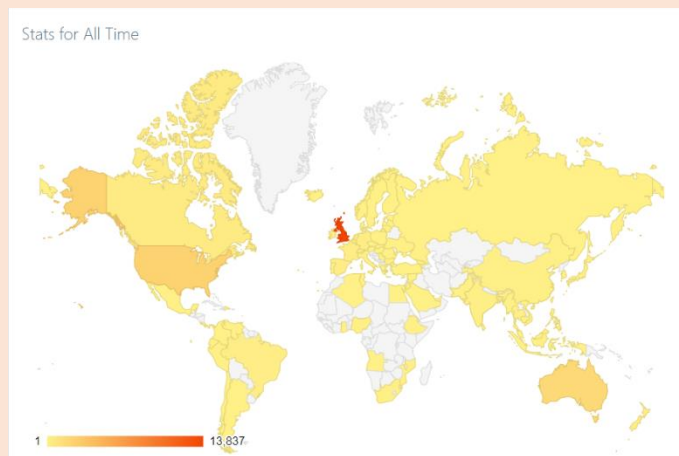


FIGURE 2: DIVERSE NARRATIVES GLOBAL REACH

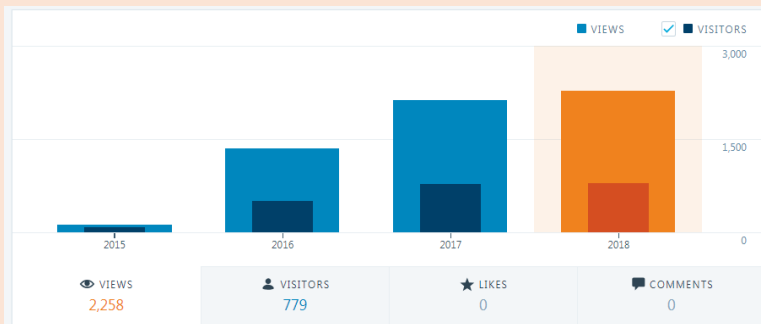


FIGURE 2: HANDFORTH WEBSITE

The Handforth website has similarly reached a significant number of people, with the number of people viewing the site growing steadily over the last three years to over 2,250 in the past year, with the typical viewer visiting the site two or three times. As with the Diverse Narratives site, the majority of

visitors have been from the United Kingdom, with significant numbers visiting from the United States (132) and Germany (103). This highlights how the issue of internment and POW camps of the First World War have an increased public profile, especially within the combatant nations. Visitors also came from as far afield as Japan, Uruguay and Kazakhstan. The most popular pages were those giving an overview of life in the camp, and the distribution of prisoners around the county.

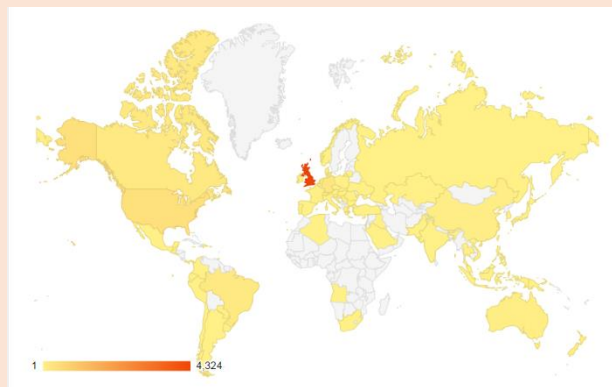


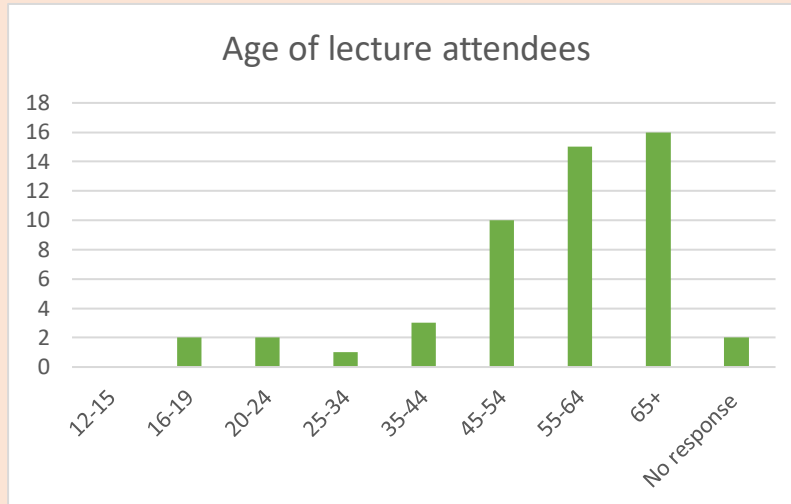
FIGURE 1: HANDFORTH GLOBAL REACH

Although these two sites initially had slightly different focal points, it has become increasingly clear over the course of the project that there would be significant advantages to combining all the information into a single website. Consequently, the decision was taken to merge the two sites to create a single platform to display and disseminate the collected material. This new site will also function as a community archive and heritage portal after the completion of the project. The new site has additional functionality, including a better search function and a clickable map to make the stories more immediately accessible to the public.

6.5 Public Talks and Public Debate

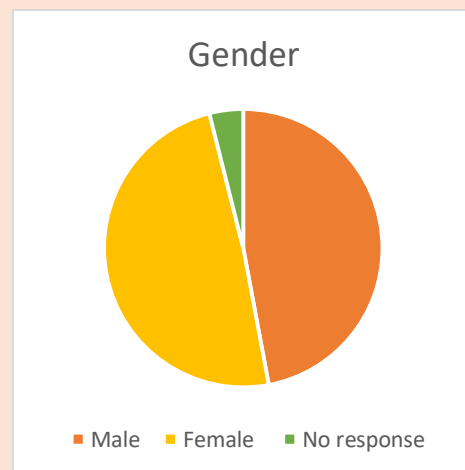
Overall, the feedback from the series of three events held in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester in June 2018 was positive. This feedback was primarily collected by anonymous questionnaires distributed and collected over the three events.

Audience

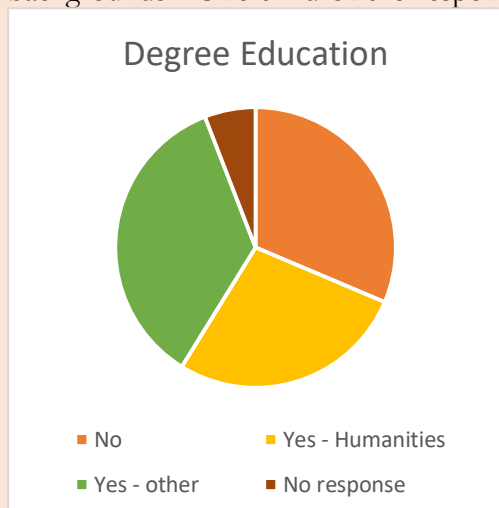


The two lectures attracted audiences of 28 and 33 respectively, while the panel discussion had an audience of 19. In total, 51 people completed a feedback questionnaire on their experiences. These responses indicate that the events attracted a spectrum of people, that broadly represented the local area. People across the

age spectrum attended, although this was weighted towards the older age ranges, with the over-65s comprising the largest single group. This may reflect the early evening time of lectures (5.30 pm for a 6pm start) which was more accessible to those with more flexible work and family commitments. In particular, the format and time excluded those with childcare commitments for primary age children. Bearing this in mind, we were pleased that the events attracted approximately equal numbers of male and female attendees.



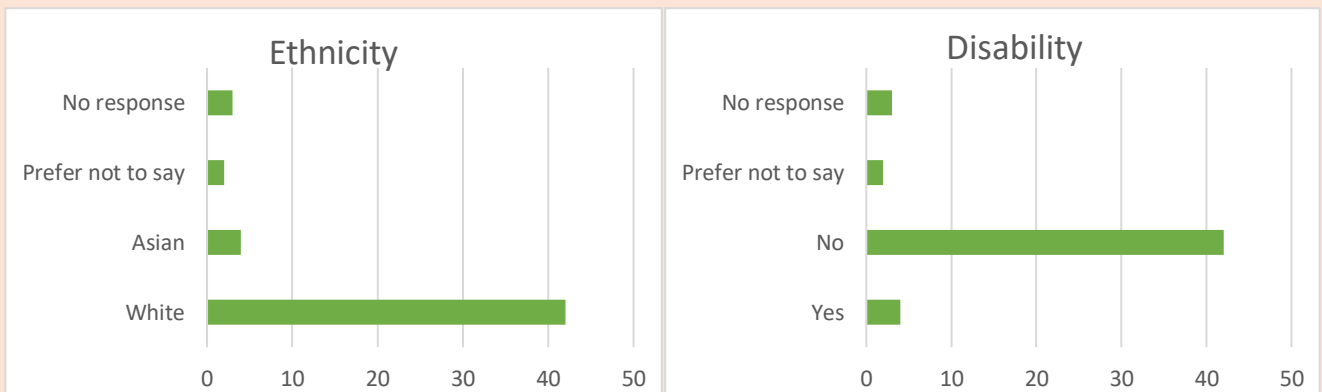
Despite the lecture format and featuring a significant proportion of academics with little public profile, the events attracted people with a range of educational backgrounds. One third of the respondents were not degree educated in any subject, with just



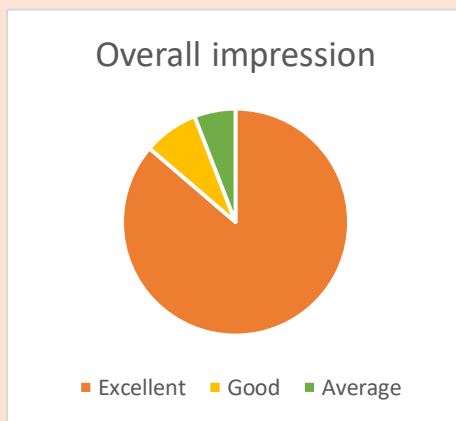
over half of the remained holding a degree in a non-humanities subject. This would appear to demonstrate the level of general interest in World War One outside of narrow disciplinary confines.

Given the primary concern of this project has been minority groups in Cheshire, we were slightly disappointed that the majority of the audience identified as white. Only four attendees identifying themselves as Asian, and no attendees from other ethnic groups. Nevertheless, this constitutes nearly eight per cent of

the total audience, which is broadly representative of the demographics of the local area - the 2011 census showed that the Cheshire West and Cheshire had a population that was 92.69 per cent white, and only 1.57 per cent who were Asian or British Asian. The proportion of the audience who indicated a disability was eight per cent, around half that of the national figure [Office for



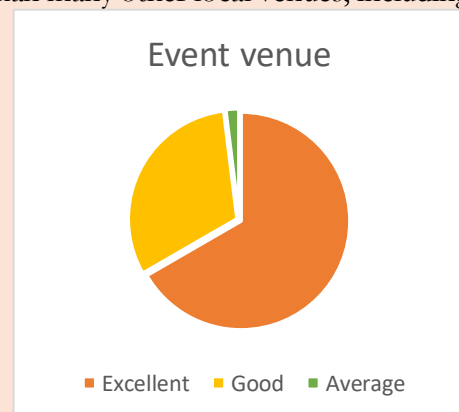
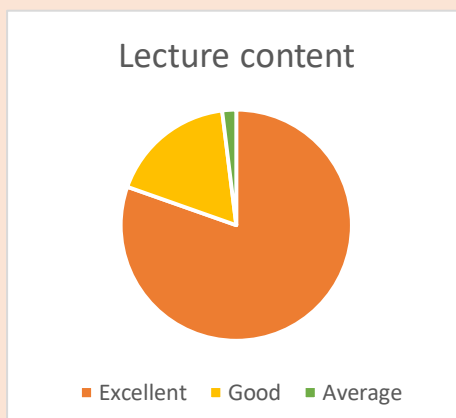
Style and content of events



Overall, the feedback on the style and content of the events was positive, with 79 per cent of respondents rating their overall impression of the events as either good or excellent. Respondents were most ambivalent about the venue for the events, the Grosvenor Lecture theatre with the main city museum, nevertheless all rated at average or above. It is unclear exactly what respondents would have liked to have been improved with the venue: it has a city centre location, is well-served by local buses, and is fully accessible with a T-loop sound system. Local parking is limited, but significantly better than many other local venues, including

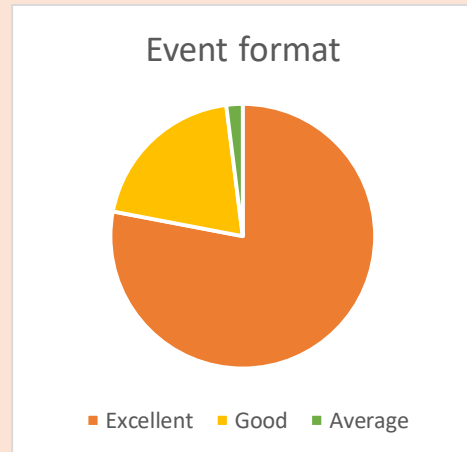
the university site.

The format and the content were positively received by the audience with all but one of the responses indicating that these were good or excellent. Attendees praised the knowledge of the speakers and the depth of research that underlay the talks. With regard to the panel discussion, people were impressed by the ‘range of views’ that were

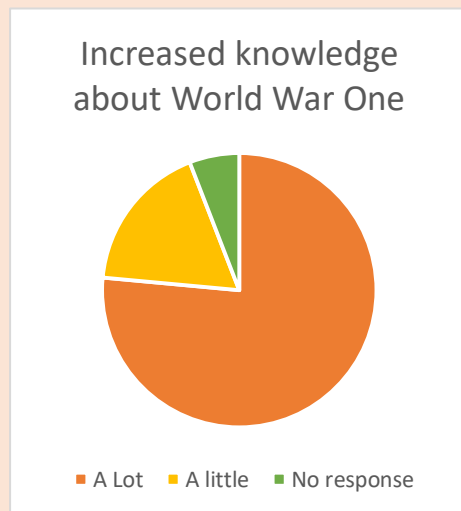


represented, specifically from the academic, museum and heritage spheres, also indicating that the starter questions were ‘well thought out’ and provoked ‘frank’ and ‘interesting discussion’. One respondent suggested that the questions to the panel should have been circulated to the audience in advance to permit them to reflect upon them. While this idea has merit, it is unclear how this might have been achieved, or indeed desired by the majority of the audience.

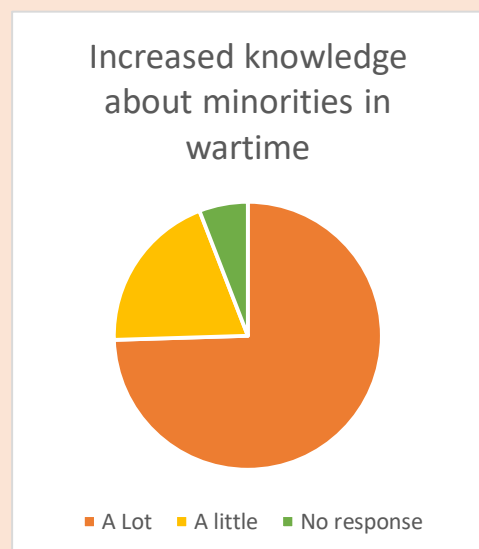
The interaction between the speakers and the audience was particularly commended in the comments, with responses indicating that the most successful aspect of the events was ‘audience involvement’. The first two events were specifically praised for being ‘interactive’ with people appreciating that original documents and artefacts were passed around the audience. Responses to the second lecture particularly noted the ‘Belgian biscuits’ that had been baked by the speaker to an original First World War recipe. Two individuals considered the handouts to be distracting from the talk and ‘overkill’, though this was definitely a minority opinion.



Few of the comments indicated areas for improvement, although three responses noted problems with the sound system technology in the final event with multiple speakers. This clearly was a problem and made things more difficult for the audience. However, this was out of our control being the responsibility of the venue, who did not appear to have on hand a dedicated AV technician. It was also suggested that publicity for the events could have been improved, but without any concrete suggestions as to how. Given that the responses indicated audience members had discovered the event through Twitter, Facebook, electronic mailing lists, the Grosvenor Museum printed programme, the local press, displayed posters and word of mouth further reflection will be need to consider how to improve this.

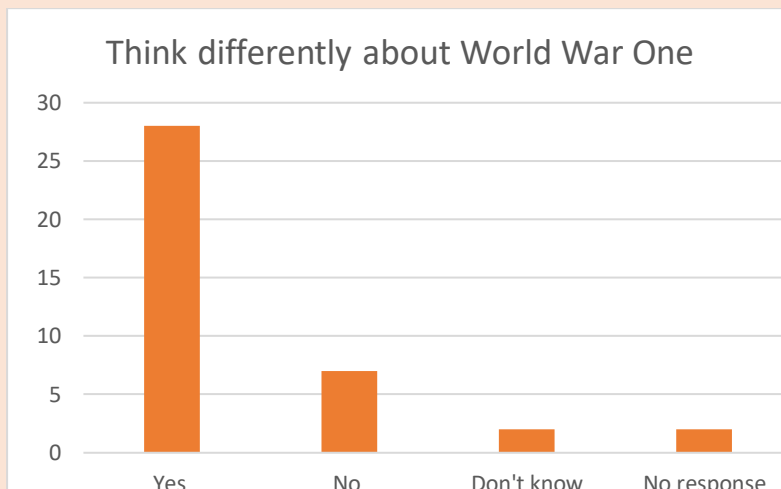


Pleasingly, the majority of the respondents indicated that they had increased their knowledge of the First World War by either ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’ at the events, with a similar number indicating that they had increased their knowledge about minorities in wartime. The responses indicated that prior to the first two events, the majority of the audience had little knowledge of World War One refugees in Cheshire, or of the existence of civilian



internment camps. In particular, comments highlighted that with regard to Handforth internment camp the respondent ‘wasn’t aware that there were quite so many camps and internees’, the ‘locations of internment camps in Cheshire’ and ‘hadn’t realised how many people were involved’. Similarly, responses showed that

they were ‘not aware of the presence of Belgian refugees in Chester/Cheshire’, that they ‘didn’t know how many Belgian refugees there were’ or ‘how the Belgian refugees were treated in Gt. Britain’. Overall, the responses indicated that the audience was keen to hear about minority narratives ‘by revealing experiences of others previously hidden’. For some a personal connection was paramount with one response stating that with regard to refugees they were ‘exceptionally pls [sic] that this topic was covered as this forms part of my family’s past and there’s a lack of knowledge about this’. Several responses suggested they would be interested in further talks on similar topics, including the role of Indians in the war, or hoping that the research would be continued to cover the Second World War. Overall, the majority responses indicated that the events had encouraged them to think differently about the First World War, by making them ‘think about local impact away from battle fronts’.



7. Conclusions

7.1 Lessons for Future Projects

Given the manifold ambitions, outputs and stakeholders involved in the Diverse Narratives project, it is inevitable that some dimensions of the project would, with hindsight, have benefitted from further development, intervention or more considered management. Whilst, for example, a core number of volunteers remained engaged with the project until its conclusion, the commitment shown by other volunteers was more inconsistent. This was in part because of the age demographic of the majority who were typically retirees with a considerable number of other commitments to both family and the local community. Equally, however, Cheshire’s own lack of ethnic demographic diversity across large swaths of the region meant that it was hard to recruit volunteers who openly identified as originating from an ethnic minority background. Given these constraints it was therefore more challenging to maintain ‘investment’ from a volunteer base who did not or could not directly relate to the minority histories we were beginning to uncover.

The centenary period of the First World War which enveloped the project also, ironically, created a challenging climate in which to attract visitors and audiences. Whilst both the ‘minority history’ and ‘local history’ themes were clear strengths of the project which set it apart from the more

traditionally, and arguably more tired histories of the First World War on offer across the centenary, the general public, nonetheless, appeared to display a consider degree of centenary ‘fatigue’. This was particularly in evidence with regards to the audience numbers for some of the public talks and the touring exhibition. The project team attempted a variety of strategies to attract participants, however evidence suggests that the most successful heritage projects in today’s digitally networked climate, need to be able to create and maintain a social media ‘buzz’ around a distinctive ‘brand’. Whilst the project team created a website and utilised social media, we lacked the human resources and digital capabilities to truly propel Diverse Narratives to the forefront of local or national consciousness for any prolonged period.

Arguably the most successful element of the project was the Schools Outreach initiative. This multi-way partnership between the project team, the Department of Education, PGCE students and local schools fulfilled various pedagogic objectives, not least helping to establish a precedent for how both ‘local’ and ‘minority’ history can be successfully delivered at secondary level. Nonetheless, one tangible legacy of this partnership – the development of ‘school packs’ complete with ‘ready-to-go’ teaching materials – has, to date, only been partially fulfilled. Whilst a prototype of each minority case study exists and will be made available on the project website, the project team ultimately lacked the curricular specialisms necessary to develop these prototypes to the standard that they had originally envisaged. It is with regret that the time constraints of the project meant that this particular ambition was ultimately frustrated.

7.2 Legacy Projects

The project may have drawn to a close in November 2018, but its impact will undoubtedly last much longer. On a basic level, the project website – www.diversenarratives.com – will remain online for a further decade. It will also continue to be updated as new information filters in or as members of the public engage with the material therein. On a slightly deeper level, the project has left a profound mark on local schools and community groups. The partnership that the project established between secondary schools, academic historians and trainee teachers continues. Using the model, which the ‘Diverse Narratives’ project pioneered, in June 2019 trainee teachers will be taking items from the Grosvenor Museum’s collections to teach local medieval history to year 7 and 8 pupils. The project’s volunteers also continue to apply the research and historical skills that the project fostered. At St Werburgh’s Catholic Church in Chester, for example, members of the congregation have now established links with the families of Cheshire’s Belgian refugees and have collaborated on a joint publication. Elsewhere, volunteers are now giving their own public talks on aspects of the project’s findings. Later this year, for example, a member of Handforth Parish Council will be talking to a paying audience about the history of German internees in Cheshire during the First World. The project, therefore, has helped to develop a range of research skills, while at the same time deepening public understanding of a complex past.