CASE STUDY REPORT

Fieldwork date: 9.2.15

Project: Flintshire War Memorials
Funding Stream:
Funding Amount: £10,000
Location: Flintshire, Wales

Summary

'Flintshire War Memorials' is a one-year project, the aim of which is to research the stories of those individuals named on war memorials and tell their stories on a website. The project is volunteer-led, and involves 24 volunteers undertaking research on different memorials, and writing narrative for the website.

Volunteer time is a central aspect of the project, and all volunteers sought involvement in the project (rather than being recruited by the project). Training for volunteers is an important aspect of the project, both in terms of research but also in terms of working with a website.

As well as the work surrounding the development of the website, this project also involves talks and presentations to a range of community groups, interest groups and schools in the Flintshire area. These are undertaken by the project leads, and are very well received, as the project does not need to advertise its work in any way. All requests come via word-of-mouth recommendation.

HLF funding has enabled the project to grow at a much faster rate, has drawn more people in and turned it into a community project. It has enabled support to be given to many more volunteers, improving the level of training and support provided. It has also enabled the group to purchase equipment for giving talks and presentations.

Background

- The Flintshire War Memorials project started as a hobby for the two project leads. On walking past their local war memorial, they decided to start researching the people listed in order to find out their individual stories. From that initial interest the project has grown. They started the research, and sharing the stories with others. As interest grew, they started providing talks to local groups and via these talks and word-of-mouth, volunteers started coming forwards to get more involved.
- The project was underway when the group decided to approach HLF for funding. It was recommended to the group by a local MP following a talk the MP had attended.
Support received

The group received support from HLF whilst the application was in development, but since the grant was awarded, the group has had minimal contact from HLF.

Engagement

- The group conducts talks and presentations to local community groups. The group also works with local schools (primary and secondary) supporting the schools' engagement in the project, supporting research via the website and conducting talks in schools. The project leads have been involved in BBC events.
- The project has not conducted particular targeting of groups, as existing demand for talks and presentations has exceeded their capacity. They have been keen to work with schools in order to share the project with those of different ages.
- Flintshire War Memorials has engaged in partnerships with local schools, supporting their WW1 memorial projects via the web resource. This project has also worked with another WW1 memorial project, sharing information and skills. This project has developed a good working partnership with the Records Office.

Making a difference

How the project achieved outcomes for heritage

*Heritage will be identified / recorded:* The central outcome for heritage achieved via this project has been the collecting and recording of individual stories of those listed on war memorials, leading to a different aspect of heritage being identified and recorded. This has involved researching individual stories, but also wider family and community stories. All this work has culminated in the production of a website, which is continually being added to. Currently, the website has 1830 pages of information, which attracted 125,236 visits in the 2014 calendar year.

One volunteer researcher outlined the importance of gathering this information together in one accessible place:

> "I get a sense that all this information has been sort of in drawers, with ancestors of the soldiers, maybe on a website that's not always accessible to anybody. I think it needs to be somewhere that's available forever really."

(Volunteer researcher, Flintshire War Memorials)

*Heritage will be better interpreted and explained:* As well as gathering the stories on the website, the project involves sharing these heritage stories with others via work with schools and talks / presentations. During 2014, 20 such talks took place, to various audiences from school groups to WI groups and University of the Third Age talks.

The future of the web resource is secure, as the partnership with the Records Office means that the resource can be housed there into the future.

*Heritage will be in a better condition:* This project has enabled an existing heritage resource to be improved. The Records Office holds a collection of cards, which provides the
names of all people from the Flintshire area that served in WW1. The research being undertaken as part of the Flintshire War Memorials project has enabled gaps which exist in this collection to be filled.

How the project achieved outcomes for people

People will have developed skills: A central outcome for people has been the experience of the project leads and volunteer researchers within the ‘Flintshire War Memorials’ project. The project leads referred to the skills they have developed, including specific skills surrounding the development and maintenance of the website, as well as presentation/public speaking skills. The project leads also talked about the skills they have developed around training and supporting volunteers.

The project leads also discussed the support/training sessions they held for the volunteer researchers on the project.

“We try to bring them all together, so that they all get to know each other, so they can chat quite freely to each other about things, and that’s worked. And when we’ve done that, we’ve usually done a bit of training as well” (Project lead)

This level of support and training was described by some of the volunteer researchers as being a vital aspect of the project

“They are wonderful, absolutely. I don’t know how they do it. But they say ‘no, ring anytime or drop them an email’. So that’s helpful.”

(Volunteer researcher, Flintshire)

Research and IT skills: The four volunteer researchers referred to the research skills they had developed through their involvement in the project. They had all received training from the project leads, as well as taking part in training days at the Records Office, as described by one of the project leads,

“With the money [from HLF] one of the things that we’ve bought is time at the county records office... we’ve bought time there for our research team, time there with their staff and with the contents of their treasure trove” (Project lead)

As well as the research skills developed, the volunteers had received training surrounding the website, and can now input information on the site.

Self-confidence: one volunteer researcher in particular referred to the self-confidence she had developed through her involvement in the project. The support and skills the project has given her has been life-changing, and has led to other opportunities

“I was lacking in a bit of confidence at the beginning, and it was very nice the way [the project leads] did it, it was so informal. I would have found it quite difficult going to a training session in the normal way, but it was like, ‘Oh will you have a cup of coffee, you know, and are there any questions. And they took it slowly, it was small sound bites’

(Volunteer researcher)

People will have learnt about heritage: Both the project leads and the volunteer researchers referred in their interviews to the amount they have learnt about individuals who served in WW1 and the context surrounding their involvement (such as the history of
different regiments). They also referred to the amount they had learnt about the communities at the time of WW1.

Two local teachers were interviewed as project stakeholders (one from a local primary school and one from a local secondary school). Both teachers referred to the amount of learning that their pupils had achieved, largely as a result of having access to the 'Flintshire War Memorials' website.

"Last year they came to school, and gave presentations to pupils, and also gave them advice about how to contribute towards the website, and also gave me valuable advice really about how to research different ex-soldiers in the area. So really, if it wasn't for [the project leads] I don't think the project [at the school] would have started. Because they've found so many things, and they've also been so helpful, giving advice and everything"  (Stakeholder, Flintshire War Memorials)

One local community stakeholder talked about attending a talk by the project leads, and spoke about the quality of the talk:

"It was probably the best talk I'd been to in the years that the society's been in existence. Because they are so thorough in their research...and many of us have recollections of stories about people in the family who were involved in those conflicts, so it came alive for us really. And as I say, their particular talk was amazing, and we were enraptured"  (Stakeholder, Flintshire War Memorials)

A second local stakeholder talked about her experience of attending a talk, and the impact this had had on her group (WI)

"Also, which was really lovely, when they gave us the talk, our WI tend to be the upper age group, and some of them came with their daughters, so talking about the past really sparked something, memories in them, which was really good"  (Stakeholder, Flintshire War Memorials)

**People will have changed their attitudes and/or behaviour:** The project has enabled those involved to learn more about WW1 through the experience/history of individuals that served in the War. This has given people a very different perspective, and thus has challenged some to think differently about the conflict.

**People will have had an enjoyable time:** The interviews with volunteers and stakeholders conveyed the extent to which those involved have enjoyed the project. The volunteers referred to their attachment to the project, and the degree of ownership they had over their piece of research. Those who had been involved in the project, either through attending talks or working in partnership (such as the schools) praised the project very highly.

**People will have volunteered time:** 'Flintshire War Memorials' is run by volunteers, so there has been a great deal of volunteer time committed, through the project leads and the 25 volunteer researchers. The time people committed varied from a couple of hours a week to a number of days each week.

How the project achieved outcomes for communities
More people and a wider range of people will have engaged with heritage: The funding from HLF has enabled the project to grow, and reach many people. It has enabled 20 public talks to take place, and 25 volunteers to be engaged and trained.

A number of people interviewed talked about the importance of communities learning more about their past, and how this helped to develop a sense of community.

In the interviews people referred to the way that the project (the website, the talks and individual volunteer experiences) was bringing the past to life, and really demonstrated the importance of remembering the past.

A number of interviewees referred to the way in which memorials had become a list of names, and that people didn't really think about them as real people. This project was challenging that, and in so doing, was reminding people about WW1 and the importance of learning and remembering.

One stakeholder talked about the way in which this kind of project has been an important catalyst for her feeling of belonging:

"Because I wasn't born in the village, it makes me feel, the stories that Viv and Eifion spoke to us about, make me feel more part of the village as well, because I feel connected, I feel connected in some ways that these people on the war memorials, well they're like real life people because you read about them on the internet, and they were part of the village community, so I think that's really lovely"

(Stakeholder, Flintshire War Memorials)

Lessons learnt

**The level of work required to support a large team of volunteers:** the project leads talked about the extremely positive experience they have had of supporting the volunteer researchers, and talked about the amount they had learnt in terms of the work involved in providing good support.

**Managing a funded project:** the project has been very successful, and the project leads suggested that it would have been useful to have a greater degree of flexibility with the funding, particularly in terms of allowing it to be carried-over into the next financial year, thus enabling some activities to go on beyond the first year.

Alternatively, they would have liked to see some support from HLF in terms of the possibility of continuation funding, due to the challenges faced by established projects (rather than new projects) seeking additional funding. They feel there is still work to be done on this project, and are disappointed that there wasn't the opportunity to have a dialogue with HLF about the possibilities for the future.

Vignette
Claire

Claire is a volunteer researcher, who became involved in the Flintshire War Memorials project after hearing about it through a friend. Having recently retired, Claire talked about the lack of confidence she felt, not knowing how to access volunteer opportunities, and the worry she felt at lacking the necessary skills and experience that might be required.

Claire spoke to one of the project leads, who suggested that she become a volunteer with the Flintshire War Memorial projects as a way of developing skills and gaining experience and confidence.

"[the project lead] invited me to her house, it was very informal, and I was quite nervous, you know, because I hadn't done anything like that before. And they were wonderful, put me at my ease, you know. They showed me what to do to work with the website, it was just a small time, just an hour, and then I slowly built my confidence up. She just gave me the rudimentary things to do to research the memorial. And once I'd done that in my own time, she then asked me back to their house to put the information on to the website."

(Volunteer researcher, Flintshire War Memorials)

She talked about the experience of becoming a volunteer as life changing

"So that's really helped me, you know, with my confidence. I'm meeting amazing people, got lots of connections with war forums, really feel like I'm making a difference."

Claire has become a committed volunteer, and has developed a great deal of knowledge about one particular memorial. She says that her experience of learning so much about the individuals on that memorial has changed her. Sarah talked about the importance of telling the real, full stories, so that the massive loss to communities is remembered and understood.

"To actually write their stories, that's not just a list of facts on a sheet, an actual story where you feel an empathy with the soldier. And that's something that's very strange because once you start researching these soldiers you get an empathy with them... They're people aren't they? It's sort of, in a way, like resurrecting their memory, isn't it? It'll be there forever if anybody wants to read it, it will be there."

(Volunteer researcher, Flintshire War Memorials)