

# Your Community in the First World War: A Road Show

## Report to FWW Engagement Centres and the AHRC

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- **Manchester, Imperial War Museum North 8<sup>th</sup> September 2015**
- **Leeds City Museum 9<sup>th</sup> September 2015**
- **Newcastle University 10<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

This roadshow was co-hosted by the five AHRC funded [First World War Engagement Centres](#).

### Overview

The three events aimed to bring together community groups and other organisations who are working on projects around the heritage of the First World War, or who are interested in developing such projects in order to share experiences, exchange ideas, learn about resources and explore possible sources of funding. In collaboration with a broad range of community project representatives, local historians, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the First World War Centenary Partnership, Lives of the First World War, Historypin, Yarn and the Centre for Data Digitisation and Analysis (CDDA), the combined centres realised these aims in an industrious and enjoyable few days.

Each event offered fascinating talks and a variety of stalls and exhibits. The centres planned for some undirected networking time as well as roundtable discussions which were both very lively and buzzing with conversation. The roundtable discussions went well, with the usual situation in which a few participants made most of the contributions. In some cases, the conversations left the confines of the prepared topic but were more valuable to the group as a result. These sessions could be developed to encourage participation further and to reflect the needs of the people in attendance.



The CDDA have a report of the Digitisation workshops [here](#)

Collaboration between the centres worked very well. Combined banner stands were used (and remain available for future events) and a united front was presented. This made developing new contacts much easier as centre staff were able to respond to subject queries with reference to the most suitable centre for the topic.

### Reflection by Engagement Centre representatives

The events were well attended with nearly two-hundred people participating overall. Attendees were mostly drawn from the same narrow demographic stratum (white, over fifty) that usually attends such events. This may be partly because it is this stratum that dominates the centenary community and partly because this group is most likely to be available to attend on weekdays. A school-age group made an excellent contribution to the Manchester event and it may be worth exploring ways to increase the diversity of participation. This is a stated goal of the HLF and could be considered a duty of the Engagement Centres too.



Centre staff experimented with live tweeting the events. This worked rather well and the Engagement Centre Twitter accounts attracted several new followers as a result. A key lesson is that it is important to establish a hashtag for each event and encourage tweets by highlighting this to attendees. Centres elected to use #ww1engage, following the style of the combined website.

In-session feedback from groups included the fact that engagement centres are poorly advertised and not easily understood by the community. A pithy but comprehensive summary of the centres' work would be useful for wider public use. One solution would be for a PowerPoint presentation to be made available on the ww1engage website for any centre to use when required at both cross-centre events or otherwise.

## Attendee Feedback

Thirty-one feedback forms were returned at Manchester, thirteen at Leeds and twenty five at Newcastle. There was a mix of respondents, community groups, museum staff, academics etc

A clear majority of respondents (17/31 at Manchester, 10/13 at Leeds and 20/25 at Newcastle) reported that the networking opportunities were the most valuable aspect of the events. Suggestions for improvement centred on giving more time (and more resources) to the discussion sessions. Five respondents at Newcastle suggested a shorter lunch break to accommodate this.

Three requested more time for discussion, one suggested having breakout sessions in the morning and afternoon.

Networking helps to establish networks where none exist and is an example of something that the centres can do as part of the public engagement remit. For some, the lengthy lunch break was useful for this, however, for some others, perhaps those who didn't wish to take part in casual conversation, the lunch break felt a little too long.

On the topic of planning the events, one respondent suggested that a half day would have been sufficient. Another suggested offering the guided walk directly after lunch -avoid the early afternoon black hole. Another said perhaps to have not quite so many presentations in a row (although they enjoyed them!)

Respondents requested more information in advance so that they would be better prepared for discussions, a means of identifying individuals/projects. Perhaps a list of attendees and what their interests might be. Three of the participants at Manchester expressed an interest in receiving a list of contact details after the event. One said that they would have liked to have chosen the discussion to take part in.



Five (Manchester), six (Leeds) and two (Newcastle) reported that the room was too noisy.

Other comments and suggestions:

- I really enjoyed meeting all the very interesting and distinguished attendees but I couldn't help wondering why there weren't more young professionals and students present. That's my demographic and I learned a lot from this event so it's regrettable that not more got to have that opportunity.
- I attended the digitisation workshop at lunch and therefore missed opportunities to network over lunch
- Would be better to talk about the mechanics of running projects
- Email contact lists to participants, e.g. from networking group. Better location signs for discussion groups
- Every group to have 30 seconds to outline their project. so we can hear from everyone in the room
- Very academic speeches in the morning maybe split the day up with the table discussions throughout the day.
- Workshops with funders e.g. going through good applications examples, not just project outcomes at the end

Positive comments included:

- I enjoyed discussion part as I could express my thoughts and give ideas.
- Wide range of subject matter and excellent speakers
- Excellent: The speakers and projects showed the wide range of projects being done

- Excellent speakers - interesting range of subjects. Interesting questions. Good atmosphere. Attendees clearly very engaged and keen.
- Talks and briefings provided a great snap shot of work and research currently taking place in the region. Good opportunities to network.

## Suggestions and Recommendations

- Combined centre collaboration worked very well. Similar events in 2016 would be recommended
- Efforts should be made to attract attendees from outside the usual demographic group
- Offer more expansive advertising to reach beyond the usual centenary participants
- Weekend events to be considered to make it easier for working people to attend
- Discussion element to be developed and made a core component of public engagement
- Allow more time for discussion, perhaps with fewer topics but on more challenging subjects
- Advertise the discussion topics in advance
- Devise a facility for attendees to share their details prior to and after the event, perhaps online
- Develop optional lunchtime activities for people who don't wish to network
- Encourage social media sharing
- Agree a twitter hashtag for events and highlight it to the audience
- Offer practical sessions, for example on applying for funding from the point of view of successful projects

