CAPTURING COMMEMORATION

Reflections on the First World War Centenary in Britain

LUCY NOAKES, CATRIONA PENNELL,
EMMA HANNA, LORNA HUGHES,
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Lucy Noakes
Catriona Pennell
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Lorna Hughes
James Wallis

INTRODUCTION

Britain and the Centenary of the First World War

Introduction: We Will Remember Them

Each year, on the Sunday closest to 11 November, Britain remembers its military war dead. Around the country people gather together at local war memorials, laying wreaths of poppies, and observing the two-minute silence at 11 a.m. In London the same ceremony is held at the Cenotaph in Whitehall, watched by crowds who line the street, and followed by audiences on national television and radio. Each element of the ceremony of remembrance is carefully choreographed, and follows, so far as possible, the programme established at the first commemoration of Armistice Day on 11 November 1919. Apart from a pause in commemoration during the Second World War, with the service moving to the Sunday closest to 11 November in its aftermath, the rituals of remembrance have been a widely observed element of the national calendar for over a hundred years. However, 2018 saw a significant difference in this ceremony: the formal participation of some of the descendants of those who had fought and sometimes died in the First World War, and of others who wished to commemorate them.

This 'people's procession', also known as 'the nation's thank you', attracted ten thousand participants, selected by ballot from the far larger numbers who had originally applied to take part. Interviewed afterwards, many of these participants expressed their desire to be part of a public event marking the centenary of the Armistice, and also to make the experiences and legacies of individuals caught up in the conflict visible on the public stage. Many were marching in memory of family members that they

Figure 0.1. The Cenotaph on 11 November 2018. Image courtesy of James Wallis, reproduced with permission.

had never known. One man was there to commemorate his grandfather, a stretcher bearer who had worked to bring the wounded back behind the lines, often under fire, while a woman was there to honour her grandfather who had lost his left arm just before the war's end, and 'what he did for freedom'.[1] Some wanted to commemorate individuals with whom they had no direct familial relation but to whom they nonetheless felt a sense of connection: one woman marched in memory of John Parr, the first recorded casualty, killed aged just 16, and who had been a pupil at the primary school where she worked.[2] Another group marched to collectively remember the Labour Corps, one commenting that 'it's so great that everyone is being remembered, not just the soldiers'.[3] As they marched, members of the public lined the route, applauding and calling out 'thank you' as the parade passed.

We open this study of Britain's commemoration of the centenary of the First World War between 2014 and 2018 with this description of an event that came towards its close, because it encapsulates the ways the centenary captured the imagination and the feelings of so many of the British people, drawing upon and (at least for its duration) strengthening the cultural memory of the conflict that is a key element in the national narrative of British history. The centenary may have been planned by the state, but its success lay in the importance that many individuals and communities attached to the experience and legacies of the First World War. As Ronald Quinalt noted in his study of the growth of centenary commemorations in the nineteenth century, such events can be rich sources for the study of

contemporary preoccupations.[4] In Britain, the First World War was understood as significant for multiple reasons, which we will explore later in this introductory chapter, but alongside its perceived historical significance was a widely shared emotional attachment to the war and its legacies for individuals, households and communities. The People's Parade of 2018 gave voice to the deep emotional resonance of the First World War for many people in twenty-first-century Britain, and helps to illustrate why so many chose to participate in the wide-ranging programme of events that marked the centenary period. Indeed, the emotive power of the First World War could be heard in Prime Minister David Cameron's speech of 2012, in which he confirmed that the government planned to mark the conflict's centenary. Describing his own fascination with the First World War, and despite his own family's stories of conflict stemming from the Second, Cameron argued that commemorating the war was important because 'it matters not just in our hearts but in our heads; it has a very strong emotional connection. I feel it very deeply'.[5] Individual and collectively shared understandings of the First World War at its centenary were often fashioned and driven by this emotional connection, which itself shaped not only participation but also the form and nature of many of the events and projects that, together, made up the centenary. While the history of the First World War, and particularly the history of combatants on the Western Front, remains popular in Britain, it is the strong feelings that this history often engenders that underpinned the centenary and, we argue, mean that it is best approached through the lens of critical heritage studies.

This introductory chapter explores both the dominant cultural memory of the First World War in modern Britain and the relationship between history and heritage. With Laurajane Smith, we argue that heritage can be understood as 'a set of practices tied up with the activities of remembering and commemoration' that draw upon the past in order to 'help make sense of the present'.[6] The centenary itself then can be understood as a period of remembering, which had the potential to help make sense of the present and, by so doing, to shape the future. Unlike acts of commemoration and remembrance that take place at the level of the nation state, such as the wave of commemorative rituals and national symbols that Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger associated with the creation of modern European nation states in the nineteenth century, many of the events and projects that collectively made up the centenary were created at the level of community, of neighbourhood, school, and interest group.[7] They were often experienced as a leisure activity rather than a formal learning event, and focused on what UNESCO has termed 'intangible cultural heritage' alongside and often in place of more traditional 'tangible' heritage sites such as buildings, monuments and battlefields. As such, they tell us about contemporary collective

understandings of the past, and the ways in which this past has the potential to 'contribute to social cohesion'.[8] We go on now to give an overview of some of the key organisations and events that shaped British centenary commemorations of the First World War.

'The Nation Remembers': Commemorating the First World War

While a shared remembrance and commemoration of war has long been a part of British public life,[9] the number and scale of events to mark the centenary of the First World War far outstripped anything that had been seen previously. Commemorative events took place across the four nations that make up Great Britain and Northern Ireland, encompassing separate histories and identities, and different relationships to the history and heritage of the First World War, ranging from local community activities to formal, state-level commemoration. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) commissioned over 2,500 hours of programming across television and radio, both national and local.[10] Museums across the country, from Stornoway in the Western Isles to Brighton on the south coast of England, held popular exhibitions recounting the local experience of war. New educational programmes were organised for schools, and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded five public engagement centres in British universities to enable links between academics and community partners exploring the war.[11] In contrast to the traditional ceremonies of war remembrance enacted every November across the country, the First World War centenary attempted to touch on the experiences of civilians who had experienced the war as well as members of the military, and thus set itself the task of not only involving as many people as possible, but also of extending historical knowledge of both the conflict and its aftermath.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), which oversaw the British state's programme of centenary activities, worked with 'a broad ecology of public and civil society organisations' to deliver an ambitious programme of events to mark the centenary.[12] These included, but were not limited to: 14–18 NOW, a commissioning body for arts and culture projects; the AHRC; the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC); the BBC; the Imperial War Museums (IWM); and the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF).[13] The national governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales all had their own centenary programming bodies, with the Community Relations Council in Northern Ireland working with the governments of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to develop a programme of events that marked the 'decade of

centenaries' between the Ulster Covenant and Home Rule Bill of 1912 to the division of the island and the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922. The DCMS estimated that around £230 million was spent on the centenary by the government and the NLHF, with other government departments and civil organisations also providing funding for activities.[14] At a time of public spending cuts, and an overall policy of 'austerity', which saw cuts in welfare, education and local authority spending, the decision to fund a programme of commemorative events is a clear indication of the importance attached to the First World War centenary by the British government.

The national programme of commemoration began with a series of events that marked Britain's declaration of war on 4 August 1914: a Service for the Commonwealth at Glasgow Cathedral; a ceremony at St Symphorien military cemetery, which holds the graves of the first and last British soldiers to be killed in the conflict, attended by representatives from Britain, France, Belgium, and Germany; and a Service of Commemoration at Westminster Abbey, London. On the same day '14–18 NOW' sponsored the first large-scale participatory event, *Lights Out*, which, echoing the words of the then-foreign secretary, Lord Grey, on the eve of war, invited people to extinguish all but one light or candle between 10 and 11 p.m. This focus on formal and sometimes less formal remembrance of the war's dead continued to mark centenary events organised at the level of the nation state. Dates understood as central to the experience, legacy and memory of the war were chosen for acts of remembrance and commemoration, usually marking the centenary of battles that had a particularly high casualty rate, such as the disastrous landings of the Gallipoli Campaign of 1915 (marked on 24–25 April 2015), commemoration of the Battle of Jutland (31 May 2016) and the Third Battle of Ypres, more often known as Passchendaele (30–31 July 2017). The marking of the Battle of Amiens (8 August 2018) was an exception to this rule, the battle being remembered as an offensive that helped to bring an end to trench warfare, rather than a moment of especially high loss for the British.

Key amongst these national acts of commemoration was the centenary of the first day of the Battle of the Somme, observed on 1 July 2016, when almost twenty thousand British and imperial troops were killed. This remains the highest loss recorded by the British military in one day, and was marked by a series of events, including an overnight vigil at Thiepval, where many of the dead are buried and where those whose bodies could not be recovered are remembered on a memorial. As the first day of the Battle of the Somme is so central to British cultural memory of the First World War, symbolising for many the scale and impact of wartime loss at home as well as on the military front, it was also marked by a two-day Festival of Remembrance in Heaton Park, Manchester. The city and its surrounding

mill towns saw heavy losses amongst the 'Pal's Battalions' from the area who were fighting on the Somme that day; the festival included historical talks, opportunities to research family history, and re-enactments. The Halle Orchestra and Choir, based in Manchester, provided an evening concert of wartime music from Britain and Germany; and a 'pathway of remembrance', made of tiles designed by members of the public, was refashioned in 2018 to create a permanent crowd-sourced memorial to the dead of the Somme in Heaton Park. Alongside remembrance of the British dead, the centenary of the Somme thus included events designed to reach across national borders, and to incorporate individual acts of remembrance into the formal, state-led commemorations.

14–18 NOW commissioned 107 artistic and cultural events throughout the centenary.[15] Some, like *100: The Day Our World Changed*, a collaboration between Wildworks Theatre and the Lost Gardens of Heligan, which remembered the men from Cornwall who went to war, had a local focus, whilst others were experienced across Britain, with events taking place simultaneously in different locations.[16] The individual acts of remembrance that made up *Lights Out* on 4 August 2014 were accompanied by light sculptures in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh and London, and the Battle of the Somme was marked by Jeremy Deller's *We're Here Because We're Here*, which saw the soldiers of the Somme 'reappear' in sites across the country. The centenary of the Armistice was commemorated by Danny Boyle's *Pages of the Sea*, in which members of the public traced the faces of some of the dead onto beaches around the country, for them to be washed away by the incoming tide.

One of the most widely visited and well-known artistic installations commemorating the First World War was organised not by 14–18 NOW, but by Historic Royal Palaces. *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red*, an installation at the Tower of London by Paul Cummins and Tom Piper, marked the outbreak of war by filling the moat around the Tower and its walls with 888,246 ceramic poppies between July and November 2014. Each poppy marked a life lost in the British and imperial forces, and the Tower of London estimated that five million people visited the installation during the four months it was on display, with many more seeing part of the installations as it toured the country during the centenary. Each day at sunset the names of 180 of the dead, nominated by the public, were read out, the roll call followed by the Last Post, which is traditionally played at British military funerals and acts of remembrance.[17] Although *The Guardian*'s art critic dismissed it as a 'fake, trite and inward-looking . . . UKIP-style memorial' it was exceptionally popular, with many of the ceramic poppies being purchased by the public.[18] Respondents to a visitors' survey reflected on both the significance of the centenary as a point at which firsthand memory

vanishes, with the 'duty' of remembrance being passed on to the next generations, and the legacies of the war for families being discussed:

> I am seventy-one. I never knew my grandparents; my mother never saw her father as he was at the Western Front and died there. We are the last generation to really feel the effect of losing our loved ones and the consequences of it. The centenary of the war is a great time and the last time our generation have of passing on the truth, the stories, the horrors and senselessness of it to the next generations.[19]

Public remembrance and family legacies came together in public responses like this, demonstrating how the afterlife of the First World War in families, households and communities helped to drive participation in the public events designed to mark the centenary. If, as Rodney Harrison has argued, heritage can be understood as 'a creative engagement with the past in the present' that can help to shape 'our own "tomorrow"', such responses demonstrate the importance of individual and collective investment in engaging with the past, and the 'tomorrow' that is hoped for.[20]

As 'theatres of memory and places of heritage making' that have a particular cultural authority as conveyors of an 'authorised heritage discourse', museums were key sites for the commemoration of the First World War.[21] More prosaically, they are places that people visit for entertainment and leisure, but also sites of education and trusted providers of information. As Britain's leading museum for the history of both world wars, the IWM was central to the centenary, both at its physical sites and via digital sites and networks. The IWM was central to the First World War Centenary Partnership, a network of 4,159 organisations from around the globe that the IWM, in collaboration with Arts Council England and Culture24, ran. The museum provided resources, including access to their digital archives and networking events, to these diverse organisations, and helped them to reach a wider audience.[22] It also ran the *Lives of the First World War* project, a crowd-sourced history site that it managed in conjunction with the genealogy organisation Findmypast. Over 160,000 people participated between 2014 and 2019, contributing family histories, stories from newspapers, and archival research to build a freely accessible database, hosted by the museum, that told 'the stories of individuals from across Britain and the Commonwealth who served in uniform and worked on the home front'.[23] A widely shared understanding of the IWM as an 'official' site of memory originally imagined as 'an embodiment and lasting memorial of common effort and common sacrifice' undoubtedly drove participation in the centenary projects it oversaw. Perhaps for many of those who participated in *Lives of the First World War*, the inclusion of family or local stories was both a means of reaching a wider audience and a means of

legitimisation, a way in which the wartime lives recounted there 'become part of "our" history'.[24]

But the best-known means by which the IWM marked the First World War centenary was in the opening of new First World War galleries at its main London site in July 2014; within a year, over 1 million people had visited.[25] These new galleries, which were double the size of those they replaced, took a narrative form, guiding the visitor from the outbreak of war to its aftermath, and focusing on the experiences of some of those who had lived through, and sometimes died in, the conflict. The IWM was careful to include representations of the lives of those who experienced the war in the Empire as well as in Britain, as civilians and workers, and as combatants whose war took place away from the Western Front, while keeping the Battle of the Somme, with its 'dominant position in our memory of the war', as its centrepiece.[26]

The emphasis on personal experience tells us something of British understanding of the First World War at its centenary; that it is largely taught and communicated through individual accounts, such as those of the war poets whose work is widely taught in British secondary schools. As the review in the *New York Times* commented, this approach can be an effective means of immersing and engaging the visitor, but comes with the risk of failing to communicate wider political issues: 'Why did the German High Command decide to go to war when it did? We won't learn that from soldiers' letters home'.[27] With its incorporation of a range of voices and experiences, its positioning of the Battle of the Somme at its centre, and the use of individual experience to convey the totality, and brutality, of the war, the exhibition both reflected the knowledge and expectations of its British visitors, and attempted to tell them something new about the war's global reach.

The range of commemorative events at the level of the nation and the state, discussed further in Chapter 2, were important both as ways for people to engage with the centenary and as a means of shaping the four-year period of commemoration, marking out key events of the war and demonstrating what was deemed worthy of remembrance at the level of the nation state. However, many people's experience of the centenary took place within their community. Although 'heritage often tends to conflate community with place', many of these projects were not primarily shaped by geography, but by communities of identity, bringing together people with a shared sense of self or heritage.[28] The NLHF, the body that distributes income from the National Lottery in order to 'conserve the UK's diverse heritage, to encourage people to be involved in heritage and to widen access and learning', supported First World War centenary projects 'on an unprecedented scale'.[29] By October 2018, the organisation

estimated that it had awarded £96.5 million in grants to 2,155 community heritage projects marking the war, involving approximately 9.4 million volunteers.[30] While some of these projects ensured the restoration of sites understood to be of national significance, such as HMS Caroline, the last surviving ship of the Royal Navy's First World War British Grand Fleet, the majority were far smaller and not necessarily focused on the restoration of 'tangible heritage', considering instead topics as diverse as food on the home front, women workers in munitions factories, and the experiences of Belgian refugees.[31]

One of the key aims of the commemorative programme, announced by David Cameron in 2012, was to ensure that future generations recognised the significance of the First World War for British society.[32] With this in mind, a national education programme was created, with battlefield tours for schoolchildren as a central activity. Led by the Institute of Education at University College London, this £6.3 million programme saw 8,500 pupils and teachers, from two thousand English secondary schools, undertake guided tours of battlefields in France and Belgium. Upon their return the pupils were expected to reach out and 'engage with at least 110 people in the local community'.[33] This number was chosen in order to reach 880,000 people, close to the number of British and imperial combatants killed during the war. Visits to battlefields have been a central means for British people to engage with the First World War, almost since its conclusion.[34] The bereaved were the most frequent visitors in the interwar years, visiting the graves of their loved ones who had been buried in the Imperial War Graves Commission's new battlefield cemeteries, or the memorials to the missing that commemorated those whose bodies had never been recovered or identified.[35] The largest of these 'pilgrimages' was that organised by the British Legion in 1928, which saw over 11,000 participants, with some 26,000 day trippers joining them for a ceremony of remembrance at the Menin Gate memorial in Ypres, itself dedicated the previous year.[36] Remembrance and tourism always overlapped in visits to battlefields, with a growth in British battlefield tourism prompted by the 'memory boom' of the late twentieth century, and thousands visiting the Menin Gate on 11 November 2018 alone.[37] The popularity of battlefield tourism during the centenary, and the decision to focus schools' activities on the battlefields of France and Belgium, together demonstrate the centrality of the Western Front, and the soldiers who fought and died there, to British cultural memory of the First World War at its centenary. However, it must be acknowledged that the focus on the 'British experience' at the expense of placing it within the sorts of transnational frameworks that many academic historians now examine, ran the risk of solidifying a very insular understanding of the war within a more constrictive cultural memory. It is to this cultural memory, and the

ways that it both shaped, and was shaped by, the centenary of the First World War, that we now turn.

'Blackadder Goes Forth'? Cultural Memory and the First World War

Helen McCartney has argued that British cultural memory of the First World War[38] focuses on 'the image of the. . .soldier as victim' with the war itself widely understood as 'a byword for futility'.[39] This emotionally powerful and widely shared perception of the conflict, dominant in Britain since at least the early 1960s, worked to ensure extensive engagement with, and participation in, commemorative events and projects. Indeed, in his 2012 speech announcing the government's centenary plans, David Cameron gave voice to the affective power of this memory when he stated that 'this matters not just in our heads but in our hearts'.[40] By thus positioning the emotional appeal of the centenary at its heart, the speech both articulated the dominant cultural memory of the war in early twenty-first-century Britain, and helped to set the tone for the coming commemorations.

However, cultural memory can never be simply 'imposed'; even when it is found in cultural texts with significant power and authority, such as a speech made by the British prime minister on the eve of the First World War centenary, it must still resonate with its audience. For the cultural memory of an event like the First World War, now moving out of lived experience to become part of history and memory, to gain purchase, individuals and communities have to recognise something of it in their own histories, memories and stories. Cultural memory gains power not only from a familiarity with its narrative acquired through cultural texts and sites of heritage, but also because it resonates with the stories told in more personal and private spaces. As Marianne Hirsch has shown in her work on the legacies of the Holocaust within families, family history can sometimes compel people to engage with the past, and the First World War was popular with family historians long before its centenary.[41] The centenary was perfectly positioned to benefit from the growth of family history and genealogical research that has been seen in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. A range of searchable databases, such as the CWGC's *Find War Dead* facility, and the National Archive's *British Soldiers of the First World War,* together with popular commercial family history sites like *Ancestry* and *My Heritage*, have made genealogical research into the lives of ancestors during the First World War accessible to many. As an event that forced the state to take an expanded interest in people's lives, not only recording births, deaths and marriages, but also assessing pension rights and family structure, the First

World War has left a legacy of formal records, accessible through local and national archives, that complement the war stories often passed down through generations and have long been 'a boon for amateur historians embroidering family trees with details of individual lives'.[42] *Lives of the First World War*, discussed above, together with a multiplicity of other commemorative projects undertaken by individuals, by community groups and by arts and heritage organisations, and discussed in the pages of this book, were beneficiaries of this interest in family experiences of the conflict.

Individual lives that were often unknown outside of their immediate family or community thus found a place in the wider commemorative projects that marked the centenary. Some of these worked to disrupt the focus on soldiers' experiences on the Western Front, which has been so central to British understandings of the First World War. An exhibition at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery for example, *War Stories: Voices from the First World War* (12 July 2014 to 1 March 2015), told the story of the city in conflict through the lives of thirteen individuals, including 'a young girl born in 1914 . . . and a gardener imprisoned for his pacifist beliefs', alongside 'an Indian soldier wounded on the Western Front and taken to hospital in the Royal Pavilion, soldiers from Brighton, including a Brighton and Hove Albion footballer (and) nurses'.[43] Family and individual histories such as these have both shaped, and been shaped by, representations of the First World War that circulate on the public stage; as Tanya Evans has noted, 'family historians' affective engagements with the past provides us with insight into how history is understood, imagined and discussed'.[44] Despite the appearance on the public stage of the wartime experiences of civilians like Emma Glass, who died with three of her children in an air raid on Camberwell, South London in 1917, and Ella Howitt and Clara Butt, munitions workers from Bolton who were found drowned in 1918, their bodies having 'the appearance of having walked into the canal', the majority of those whose stories were recovered and shared during the centenary had seen military service.[45]

The dominant cultural memory of the First World War has endured in Britain since at least the early 1960s, and is described by Daniel Todman as: 'Men stuck, for four years, in the most appalling conditions, living in trenches scraped into the ground, surrounded by mud, rats and decaying corpses . . . thrown forward in ill-conceived assaults that achieved nothing'.[46] Despite efforts by family historians, heritage professionals and academic historians, it continued to dominate public understandings of the conflict at its centenary. Cultural memory is never simply a straightforward retelling of the past. Instead, it is shaped by contemporary needs, interests and preoccupations. In 1960s Britain, when the memory of the war as tragedy began to dominate public understandings, anti-war and anti-establishment attitudes coalesced

around both opposition to the Vietnam War and to the threat of nuclear conflict, while the growth of social history and an interest in 'history from below' combined to produce an understanding of the First World War that focused on the experiences of soldiers in the trenches rather than political aims or military strategy, both of which were understood to have failed to prevent war, and to protect individual lives. The 1960s saw the fiftieth anniversary of the conflict, marked by the BBC's landmark 1964 documentary series *The Great War*, which drew heavily on interviews with veterans, and the increasing popularity of Wilfred Owen's war poems, nine of which were set to music by Benjamin Britten in his 1962 composition *War Requiem*. The satirical musical *Oh! What a Lovely War*, created by Joan Littlewood and the Theatre Workshop at Stratford East Theatre in London, with the 1969 film version directed by Richard Attenborough, further embedded the idea of the First World War as a conflict in which the 'lost generation' were sacrificed to the ambitions of an unimaginative and uncaring military and political elite. This cultural memory of the war thus provided a 'usable past' for critics of the social order, and political leadership, in the present day.

This resilient cultural memory of the war as tragedy continued to dominate popular British understandings of the conflict in the following decades. The popular BBC situation comedy *Blackadder Goes Forth* (1989), adaptations of Vera Brittain's 1933 autobiographical *Testament of Youth* (1979; 2014), the novels *Birdsong* (1993) and the *Regeneration Trilogy* (1991–95), individually adapted for television and film, and the children's novel *War Horse* (1982), adapted as a Hollywood film and an award-winning National Theatre production, all drew upon and amplified an understanding of the war as a tragedy with multiple legacies of trauma and loss for those who survived, and for the bereaved. In a 2014 Mass Observation Directive on understandings of the First World War commissioned by the five AHRC Public Engagement Centres, respondents listed 'mud', 'blood', and 'futility' as the words that most often came to mind when thinking about the war.[47] Found both in public sites of representation, and in more private reflections and histories, this understanding of the war as tragedy dominated cultural memory of the conflict as Britain began to mark the centenary.

At times this cultural memory not only shaped the kinds of stories that were told, and representations of the war during its centenary, but served to occlude historical fact. For example, Maggie Andrews, recounting a local history exhibition, described how it told of the trauma of a mother whose son was conscripted to fight in 1915, aged just sixteen.[48]

While there are records of under-age children fighting in the war, conscription was not introduced in England, Scotland and Wales until 1916, and until 1918 it applied only to men aged between eighteen and forty-one.[49] Another historian, looking back over the centenary in 2019, commented

Figure 0.2. WITV Plumlines Exhibition, Croome Park. This exhibition focused on the home front during the war. © Maggie Andrews, reproduced with permission.

that 'an essentially fictitious version of the First World War continues', a narrative summarised by another historian as 'futility and trenches . . . tragedy and death'.[50] This focus on futility and tragedy was understood by the then-education secretary, Michael Gove, writing in the *Daily Mail* in 2014, as meaning that Britain had failed to learn what he understood to be the correct lessons of the conflict: the perils of globalisation and migration, the potential of swift technological and social change to disrupt the social order, and – perhaps most tellingly – the dangers of a 'fragile confidence in political elites'. For Gove, the centenary offered an opportunity to counter what he saw as 'an unhappy compulsion to denigrate virtues such as patriotism, honour and courage' with the Battlefield Tours programme for schools singled out as a means of enabling 'young people from every community the chance to learn about the heroism, and sacrifice, of our great-grandparents'.[51] Michael Gove's misunderstanding of the power of cultural memory, and the deep purchase that legacies of loss and grief during the war and in its aftermath still maintain today, meant that his hope that a new understanding of the conflict as a just war that Great Britain and its allies won through a combination of individual bravery and strong leadership was doomed to failure. The emotional power and wide reach of an understanding of the war as a period of largely tragic and futile loss

ensured that this cultural memory would not change substantially during the centenary.

The power of this cultural memory shaped many of the commemorative events and projects that made up the First World War centenary, but it also drove participation in them. Smith's idea of heritage as 'a cultural and social process, which engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways that understand and engage with the present', is a useful means of approaching the relationship between cultural memory and heritage during the centenary.[52] Smith understands heritage as something active, in which meanings are made and changed not only by heritage professionals, but also by those who engage with it, both as audiences and as active participants. Both 'tangible' and 'intangible' heritage can thus be understood as sites of active meaning-making, in which the concerns, interests and needs of the present shape social understandings of what elements of the past are valuable and meaningful. This idea of heritage as active, as something that emerges from 'the relationship between people, objects, places and practices', allows us to move away from the idea of historical objects and events having an *inherent* value, and instead to interrogate the contemporary forces that imbue them with this value, and insist on their importance.[53] At the start of the centenary Cameron's speech at the IWM clearly set out why his government believed it was important: its emotional and affective power today, the necessity that future generations recognised its importance, and its role in shaping the modern world in its aftermath.[54] The centenary of the First World War was thus envisaged as a nation-building event, in which a shared understanding and appreciation of the nation's past would help to ensure social cohesion in both the present and the future.

The enormous number of centenary projects, performances, exhibitions and other events, created by individuals, by communities, by organisations and at the level of the local, the nation and the state, demonstrate the ability that the First World War had to capture the imagination and interest of people across early twentieth-century Britain. But they also demonstrate the active nature of heritage, and the ways that the meanings of the past in the present cannot be controlled or contained by those who hold power. While Michael Gove may have hoped that the centenary would provide an opportunity to recalibrate knowledge and understanding of the First World War as a just war, fought by 'conscious believers in King and country, committed to defending the Western liberal order' and commanded by patriotic leaders 'grappling honestly with the new complexities of industrial warfare', the cultural memory of the war as a futile tragedy both dominated commemorations and motivated the participation of many.[55] At the same time, the centenary enabled a widening of public knowledge about the war: heritage projects that focused on topics such as Sikh soldiers, munitions

workers, and Belgian refugees served to include groups whose wartime experiences were less well known in the shared programme of commemoration. The tensions that we can see here, between the desire to create new histories and research lesser-known areas of the war, the hope that the centenary would be a nation-building event, and the enduring affective power of the dominant cultural memory of the war ran throughout the centenary, and are traced through the pages of this book.

Reflections on the Centenary of the First World War

In 2017, towards the end of the First World War centenary, most of the authors of this work were the recipients of funding from the AHRC to undertake a project designed to chart the activities and impacts of the centenary in Britain. Our project had, as outlined in an article by two of our authors, multiple aspects.[56] We examined the ways that academic 'experts' interacted with public researchers, with particular importance given to the aforementioned AHRC-funded Engagement Centres. Additionally, we charted the wider cultural memories and understandings of the conflict by focusing on 'how existing ideas shaped centenary projects, and how these projects might impact upon the war's cultural memory in the future'.[57] To achieve these goals, the authors undertook a range of data collecting and analytical activities:

> The study used a range of different research strategies to investigate these fields: an online survey (126 respondents); seven focus groups with adults who participated in First World War public history projects, and eight with teachers and schoolchildren; two reflective workshops, one held with members of the public and one with heritage professionals; forty interviews with project representatives and community history research groups; one Mass Observation Directive on the centenary in November 2018; visits to numerous public history events such as talks, exhibitions and performances, and participant observation conducted at a number of remembrance events.[58]

Our initial conclusions from this project, that 'these public histories were both highly participatory and diverse, bringing together large numbers of people to research and communicate the experience and legacies of the First World War' are now greatly expanded upon within the pages of this book.[59] In its detail, this book contributes to and expands other recent academic studies of the First World War centenary. By taking a 'full centenary' perspective, looking at collaborations and activities across the period 2014 to 2018, it goes beyond existing literature that focused either on the eve of the centenary or its final Armistice moment.[60] Examining a

broader range of examples and case studies from across the British Isles, it can test assumptions revealed by more discreet studies into visitor behaviour at centenary-related museum exhibitions in one English region.[61] As the first in-depth exploration of Britain's centenary experience, it complements other international case studies, enabling comparison and cross-reference.[62] It enables a deeper interrogation of provocations made by scholars of Human Geography and Critical Military Studies around the processes and implications of (mis)representing, remembering, and forgetting race and empire, and uncritical militarised expressions of gratitude to British military dead.[63] Finally, it shares calls made by Jenny Macleod to use the centenary of the First World War as a basis for future-facing discussions about lessons learned for forthcoming national war anniversaries, and underscores the need for scholars to 'work together, to reach beyond the academy, and prepare to help to shape events for the better'.[64]

*   *   *

The first chapter surveys the relationship between the First World War centenary and national identity through a focus on events and projects at three distinct but interwoven levels: the nation state of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the 'four nations' of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the multiple and overlapping communities that make up these larger collectives. It argues that the endurance of family memories and stories of the First World War helps to explain both the emotional appeal of the First World War which underpinned the scale of the centenary in Britain, and also its relationship to histories of the war. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's concept of national identity, it considers and problematises the ways in which the First World War was imagined at these separate but interconnected levels as a means of identity and community building, following Smith's assertion that 'the idea of identity tends to be unproblematically linked with concepts of heritage'. Furthermore, it concludes that while a shared sense of the past can be an effective means of building community identity and cohesion, this did not necessarily equate to a unifying sense of national identity during the First World War centenary.

Chapter 2 examines the work of organisations who planned, funded, created and disseminated public commemorative activities in Britain and on the Continent. It explains how the British government's DCMS sought to coordinate with key organisations such as the Royal British Legion, the CWGC, the BBC, and the arts organisation 14–18 NOW, to produce commemorative activities and events. It discusses concepts, politics, and transculturalism, the importance of storytelling, the use commemorative art as both counter-monument and anti-monument, and of how public

participation and voluntarism in local communities were key to many national initiatives.

The third chapter provides an overview of the engagement, output and outreach of museum and heritage institutions across the United Kingdom during the First World War centenary period. Spanning the work of national organisations to temporary (or more piecemeal) local initiatives, it outlines some of the ways in which museums and organisations sought to encourage new audiences – visitors as well as volunteers – to interact with themed historical subject matter. As a result, this chapter considers pertinent questions around the renewed purpose behind exhibiting First World War-era objects in different settings, the use of memory and witnessing as an act of remembrance, and community projects that addressed colonial experience during the conflict, alongside issues of funding and the (digital) longevity of created resource content.

Chapter 4 provides an in-depth examination of the different ways the First World War centenary was either portrayed, represented or stored within digital forms. Many of the activities undertaken across the United Kingdom were either partially or totally contained online or in other digital mediums. Public projects, research outputs, and museum exhibitions all found themselves, to varying degrees, placed in both physical and digital spaces. This chapter charts both the nature and processes through which the First World War centenary appeared within these spaces, as well as addressing some of the concerns regarding the long-term viability and survival rates for material that only ever existed online. There remains an ongoing, and justified, concern that much of the digital material created during the centenary has either already been lost or may not have a long-term future. How can we hope to retain this knowledge, and benefit from its examples in the future, if we cannot guarantee its survival?

Overall, this book is designed to make its readers think about Britain's commemoration of the First World War moving forward, and it draws to a close by looking towards the future. The final chapter, Chapter 5, focuses on the experiences and importance of young people during the centenary years. Between 2014 and 2018, youth in Britain played a prominent role in commemorating the First World War. Against an overview of the educational backdrop, this chapter reviews a selection of top-down and bottom-up centenary activity aimed at young people. Through the prism of their major objectives – to educate, remember, create and connect – it examines different formats and patterns of delivery, who was involved, and the methods of funding from a range of examples. Despite greater opportunity for alternative perspectives of the war to emerge from bottom-up activities, too much deviance from the accepted narrative of the war led to push-back against what were perceived to be potentially 'radical' and

disruptive approaches, thus confirming the hierarchical power relationship between adult and child and an established cultural memory of the First World War.

As this book's Conclusion will outline, the aims and purposes of our research are multifaceted. The focus upon understanding and recording the activities during the centenary is obvious. This was a public history event that will impact how historians undertake their work for decades to come. But we are also keen to make clear that none of this took place in a vacuum. This work can potentially be read as a social and cultural history of public history work during a time of great political upheaval. Furthermore, with the centenary of the Second World War now distinctly on the horizon, this work also serves as a potential blueprint for those who will seek to undertake similar work between 2039 and 2045. At its heart though, this book is a monument to the importance of collaboration – collaboration between historians and the public, between local and national institutions, and between diverse communities. It is for this reason that we all appear here as co-authors as we reflect on how the country experienced the centenary events individually and collectively. An emphasis on collaboration also explains our broad approach towards methods and approaches. The collaborative and engaged nature of so much of the centenary work was one the defining features of the period 2014 to 2018. This book is testament to the co-produced nature of the centenary, not only in the way it has been written but also in the rationale for why we focused on the areas that we did, shining a spotlight on the range of different participants, audiences, professionals, and community and family historians working together, and the projects that came from their interactions. Certainly, there was a range of television, radio, and state-sponsored public art that was part of the centenary, and while such traditional outputs of course respond to audience interest and demand, this relationship is harder to unpack. This book sets out to specifically evaluate and critically reflect on the community–academic collaborations that came out of the centenary, rather than provide an overview of how the First World War appeared across a vast array of cultural outputs during the centenary. As such it is both a look back on the centenary but also a contribution to discussions and considerations of such a pronounced period of national commemoration. We are excited by what analysis and critical reflection this book inspires regarding commemoration of the First World War and – more importantly – of other national commemorative events more generally.

Notes

1. Jackson, 'Remembrance Day'.
2. Ibid.
3. 'The People's Procession – A Nation's Thank You'.
4. Quinalt, 'The Cult of the Centenary'.
5. Cameron, 'Speech at Imperial War Museum'.
6. Smith, *Emotional Heritage*, 1.
7. Hobsbawn and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.
8. For the UNESCO definition of intangible cultural heritage, see UNESCO, 'Intangible Cultural Heritage'.
9. DCMS, '100 Years on from the Armistice'.
10. Ellison, 'World War One on the BBC', 125.
11. 'World War 1 Engagement Centres'.
12. Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services, 'First World War Centenary Programme', i.
13. Each of the authors worked with the First World War Public Engagement Centres during the course of the Centenary. The AHRC funded us to examine the work of the centres, and our report, 'Reflections on the Centenary of the First World War: Learning and Legacies for the Future', can be found at https://reflections1418 .exeter.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Reflections-on-the-Centenary-of-the -First-World-War-Learning-and-Legacies-for-the-Future.pdf, last accessed 24 June 2025.
14. CSES, 'First World War Centenary Programme', ii.
15. The original 14–18 NOW website is no longer available but information on the initiative can be found here https://artinpublic.art/programs/14-18-now, last accessed 13 June 2025.
16. Wildworks Theatre, *100: The Day Our World Changed*.
17. 'The Tower of London Remembers'.
18. Jones, 'The Tower of London Poppies'.
19. Cited in Kidd and Sayner, 'Unthinking Remembrance?', 74.
20. Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, 4.
21. Smith, *Emotional Heritage*, 2; Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 4.
22. Imperial War Museum, 'First World War Centenary Partnership'.
23. Imperial War Museum, 'Lives of the First World War'.
24. King's Dedicatory Speech, Crystal Palace, 9 June 1920. Cited in Condell, 'The Imperial War Museum', 149; Noakes, *War and the British*, 34.
25. Todman, "Something About Who We Are", 518.
26. Cornish, 'Imperial War Museums', 515.
27. Rothstein, 'Revisiting the Nightmares'.
28. Berger, Dicks and Fontaine, '"Community"', 337.
29. National Audit Office, *Heritage Lottery Fund*, 4; Brookfield, 'The People's Centenary', 119.
30. Brookfield and Weber, 'HLF Evaluation Methods'.
31. For a selection of projects supported, see National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), *First World War Centenary Projects*.
32. Cameron, 'Speech at Imperial War Museum'.

33. First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours Programme. One of the co-authors of this volume, Catriona Pennell, served on the programme's Academic Advisory Board and led the pupil evaluation from 2014 to 2019.

34. Pennell, '"To Leave a Wooden Poppy Cross of Our Own"', 173–89.

35. See Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism*.

36. Connelly and Goebel, *Ypres*, 111.

37. Winter, *Remembering War*; Boffey, 'Thousands Gather'.

38. *Blackadder Goes Forth* was the fourth and final series of the popular BBC sitcom *Blackadder*. It was largely set in the trenches of the Western Front, and originally aired in 1989.

39. McCartney, 'The First World War Soldier', 219.

40. Cameron, 'Speech at Imperial War Museum'.

41. Hirsch, 'The Generation of Postmemory'.

42. Ziino, '"A Lasting Gift to His Descendants"', 125.

43. Brighton and Hove Museums, *War Stories*.

44. Evans, 'Emotions of Family History', 311.

45. Imperial War Museum, 'Lives of the First World War'.

46. Todman, *The Great War*, xiii.

47. 'Mass Observation First World War Directive', November 2014.

48. Andrews, 'Tropes and Trench Cakes', 509.

49. The upper age limit for conscription was raised to fifty-one in the final months of the war. Conscription was never introduced in Ireland, although many Irish men fought as professional soldiers and as volunteers.

50. 'Reflections on the Centenary of the First World War', historian interviews, 2019.

51. Gove, 'Why Does the Left Insist on Belittling True British Heroes?'.

52. Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 2.

53. Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, 4.

54. Cameron, 'Speech at Imperial War Museum'.

55. Gove, 'Why Does the Left Insist on Belittling True British Heroes?'.

56. Noakes and Wallis, 'The People's Centenary?'.

57. Ibid., 57.

58. Ibid., 57–58.

59. Ibid., 58.

60. Mycock, 'The First World War Centenary in the UK'; Sumartojo, *Experiencing 11 November 2018*.

61. Cubitt and Moody, 'Centenaries, Museum Audiences and Discourses'.

62. Monger and Murray, *Reflections on the Commemoration*.

63. Haigh, '"Every One (Re)Membered"'; Wellings, Sumartojo and Graves, 'Commemorating Race and Empire', 7–20.

64. Macleod, 'Looking Forward'.

CHAPTER 1

Commemoration and National Identity

The centenary of the First World War was, as we discussed in the Introduction to this book, imagined as a nation-building event, in which the citizens of twenty-first-century Britain would come together through a shared understanding, and remembrance, of the First World War and its pivotal place in modern British history. This would be driven by the emotional appeal of the conflict and its legacies as much as by historical understanding: as David Cameron said in his 2012 speech at London's Imperial War Museum, 'this matters not just in our heads but in our hearts; it has a very strong emotional connection'.[1] However, the centenary came at a time of increased and heightened social, cultural and political division in Britain: in September 2014 Scotland held its long-awaited referendum on independence, which saw 55 per cent vote to remain in the United Kingdom, and 45 per cent vote to leave, while in June 2016 the UK as a whole voted to leave the European Union by a margin of just under 4 per cent, with 51.9 per cent voting to leave, against 48.1 per cent voting to remain.[2] A closer look at voting patterns revealed some stark internal differences. In Scotland, the cities of Glasgow and Dundee voted decisively for independence while the rural areas of the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway, the cities of Aberdeen and Edinburgh and the island archipelagos of Orkney and Shetland, voted equally decisively to remain.[3] The 2016 referendum on EU membership saw even more striking divisions. While England and Wales voted to leave the EU, Scotland and Northern Ireland were equally determined to remain, voting to remain by 62 per cent and 55.8 per cent respectively.[4]

The fissures that became so visible through the two referenda, and indeed in the drawn-out and often angry debates that followed them, had

their immediate origins in the period preceding the centenary, particularly the hardship that followed from the 2008 Financial Crash and the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government's policy of austerity from 2010 onwards. But their deeper roots lay in in the shifts and changes of late modernity, which brought de-industrialisation, population change, and a subsequent sense of loss and instability to swathes of the United Kingdom. These were played out particularly in the debates surrounding the 2016 referendum on EU membership, and the voting patterns of different areas. Post-industrial and poverty-hit cities like Stoke-on-Trent in the English North Midlands, the old mining areas of Mansfield and Bolsover, and the agricultural town of Boston, Lincolnshire, which had seen inward migration by agricultural workers from Eastern Europe, all voted decisively to leave the European Union. Cities with younger, more highly educated populations, and in particular London, the cosmopolitan, multicultural capital of the United Kingdom, voted equally decisively to remain.[5] According to the polling company YouGov, households with an annual income of less than £20,000 were almost twice as likely to vote to leave the EU in 2016 than those with an income over £60,000.[6]

The economic recession that followed the financial crisis of 2008, and the austerity measures introduced by the coalition government of 2010–15, which saw cuts in local authority budgets, in education and in welfare spending, have often been diagnosed as being at the root of the vote to leave the EU, as voters looked for change, and for renewal.[7] The Britain that commemorated the centenary of the First World War between 2014 and 2018 then was riven by deep and often antagonistic divisions of belief, of identity, of locality and of nation.

Raphael Samuel, the radical historian of class and nation, wrote in 1995 that 'Britishness' is 'always in the making, never made'.[8] He was following in the path carved out by J.G.A. Pocock in 1975, who had rather presciently suggested that future historians may well describe the United Kingdom as an entity that existed between the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries, an argument popularised by Tom Nairn, writing during the oil crisis and increasing support for independence for Scotland in the 1970s, who argued that a post-imperial UK was an anachronism.[9] By the late twentieth century, 'Britishness' appeared to be in decline, with national identity instead increasingly shaped by membership of one of the constituent nations of the United Kingdom, rather than the nation state. In England, often perceived as the weakest of the national identities making up Britain, people became more likely to describe themselves as English, rather than British, between 1992 and 2011.[10] This growing identification with Englishness was visible in 1996, when the UEFA European Football Championship was held in England, and when flags of St George, the English national flag previously

largely the preserve of the Far Right, started to replace the Union Flag at England games.

The election of a Labour government the following year saw referenda in both Scotland and Wales on the devolution of some legislative powers to both nations, resulting in the creation of the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales in 1998. The Northern Ireland assembly, created as part of the Belfast Agreement, was established in Belfast in the same year. By the early twenty-first century, the collective identities of Englishness, to a lesser extent, and Scottishness, Welshness and Ulster Unionist or Irish to a greater extent, had largely replaced Britishness as markers of nationhood and belonging.[11] The loyalty to institutions, including the monarchy, parliament, the rule of law and the Empire, which Krishan Kumar has argued underpinned a loyalty to Britain as an overarching nation state in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the subsequent dominance of Britishness as an identity, was in steep decline.[12]

The investment by the British state in the centenary of the First World War, its insistence on the importance and legacies of the war years for modern Britain, felt in families, as well as at the levels of locality, nation and state, can, we argue in this chapter, be understood as an attempt to shore up Britishness, to engage in its making, at a time of crisis and division. In some ways it echoed the nation-making narrative of the opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics, which presented an inclusive and celebratory narrative of British history that included the industrial revolution, the 'Windrush generation' and the creation of the National Health Service as key, unifying moments in Britain's national history. The relative weakness of the state as an institution that could command a widespread sense of identification and commonality meant that away from the state-level events such as commemoration of particular wars or battles, or the artistic acts of remembrance discussed in the previous chapter, most people who participated in centenary events experienced these at the local or community level. These sat within the overarching framework, and cultural memory, of the war as expressed and strengthened at the level of the nation state. While the hundredth anniversary of the First World War may have been imagined as an opportunity to strengthen the 'imagined community' of the United Kingdom, it was the four nations that make up Britain, and the diverse communities within them, that shaped much of the centenary.

Commemorating the Centenary: A 'Four Nations' Perspective

Opening their discussion of heritage in pluralist societies, Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge argued that 'contemporary societies use heritage

in the creation and management of collective identities'.[13] The 'imagined community' of the nation, famously defined by Anderson, is imagined because 'the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members', and a community because 'regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship'.[14] Such imagined communities coalesce around shared ideas of the national past, key 'moments' that serve both to distinguish members of the nation from others, and to remind contemporary citizens of what they are imagined to hold in common. Of course, such national myth-making can also act, sometimes deliberately, to exclude members of the nation whose family origins lie elsewhere.

As we show in this book, British commemoration of the First World War often worked hard to include many members of the nation whose wartime heritage and history had previously been marginal to dominant understandings of the conflict. But in Britain the past that had come to dominate the cultural memories at the heart of the imagined community of the nation often meant 'English', rather than 'British'. The majority of key events and figures in the national past – the defeat of the Armada in 1588 by Queen Elizabeth I's Navy, Shakespeare, Winston Churchill and the Second World War – each of these are a part of English history, or largely imagined as such. Other important moments in the making of modern British history, such as the 1746 Battle of Culloden, the rebellion of the United Irishmen of 1798, and the Merthyr Rising of 1831 are largely remembered and commemorated in their home nations of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales respectively. There is little space for such events in the calendar of the wider nation state of the United Kingdom. The commemoration of the First World War was an opportunity for the British state to try to create a shared national heritage of the war that included not only diverse communities within Britain, but the separate histories, memories and experiences of the four nations that make up the United Kingdom.

While the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) was the lead British government department for the centenary, each of the three devolved nations ran their own First World War centenary programme, with First World War advisory panels sitting in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, while a British advisory panel was convened by the UK government. The very absence of a separate advisory panel for Britain is suggestive of the degree to which, while Englishness has grown as a marker of identity since the 1990s, it remains subordinate to Britishness, at least in the eyes of the British government. Looking back over the centenary in 2019, the DCMS reflected that it had successfully achieved its 2012 objective of building 'a truly national commemoration, worthy of this historic

centenary'.[15] As set out in the Introduction to this volume, this had entailed working with a complex 'ecology of public and civil society organisations' including the Imperial War Museum's Centenary Partnership, the NLHF and the heritage bodies of each of the four nations.[16] The advisory panels of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland worked with many of the individual and separate bodies in their respective nations to create centenary programmes in each nation.[17]

In Scotland the commemorative programme overseen by the devolved administration was grouped together under the title 'WW100 Scotland'. As the programme wound down at the end of the centenary period, the chair of the advisory committee, Professor Norman Drummond, noted 'how important it is to use memory as a tool for the living'.[18] The projects convened by WW100 Scotland displayed a desire to capture and pass on this memory of Scotland's war for future generations, creating a time capsule containing material produced during the centenary and stored in the Lady Haig's Poppy Factory at Canonmills, Edinburgh, to be opened on the bicentenary of the war, in August 2114.[19] Other projects often looked outwards, highlighting and strengthening links with both the Commonwealth and other nations alongside a focus on 'passing on' knowledge and understanding of the war's impact to younger and future generations. The outward and international nature of many of the Scottish events, such as the commemoration of the sinking of the American troopship *SS Tuscania* near Islay in the Inner Hebrides in 1918, chimed with twenty-first-century Scottish ambitions for independence, and for an international standing separate from that of the United Kingdom.

In Scotland, itself divided between supporters of independence and Unionists, Highlands and Lowlands, post-industrial Clydeside and elsewhere, the centenary offered an opportunity to commemorate a shared national past. As David Ditchburn and Catriona M.M. Macdonald noted at the start of the centenary period in 2014, any assumption that the commemoration of a British, and imperial, war would naturally strengthen British identity in Scotland, or consolidate a hybrid British-Scottish identity at a time of heightened awareness of independence, was misguided.[20] While the 2014 Independence Referendum had shown that a majority of voters preferred to remain a part of the United Kingdom, many of the projects overseen by the Scottish Advisory Committee told a Scottish, rather than a British, story of the war. WW100 centenary projects like the multimedia production *Far, far from Ypres* and the creation of a map showing each of the memorials to Scottish service on the Western Front, helped to craft a memory of the conflict that drew on events and memories from all regions, but that could be brought together to create a sense of the war's impact and legacies shared by all in Scotland.[21]

'Cymru'n Cofio Wales Remembers 1914–1918', the Welsh centenary programme, highlighted inclusion and community, with an emphasis on the Welsh, rather than the British, experience of war.[22] As in Scotland, multiple agencies came together to organise and coordinate events. The overall emphasis was on the shared history of Wales, and on the links between Welsh communities and international events: 'The history of Wales is rich and complex. Past centuries have shaped our nation and honed our identity, and include events with global resonance that had a massive impact on our own communities'.[23] Like Scotland, Wales has its own internal divisions, and the existence of a shared sense of national identity, to paraphrase Samuel, is 'always in production'. Indeed, in 1989 the Welsh Affairs Committee of the House of Commons had bemoaned the 'absence of a "one face" Welsh identity', finding instead 'an elusive and fractured experience in a ruptured historical process'.[24]

The centenary provided an opportunity to develop a common memory of the First World War that could help to shape a sense of shared national identity. Of the projects highlighted in the Cymru'n Cofio Wales Remembers 1914–1918 overview of the centenary, none considered the wartime experiences of the large Welsh diaspora in England, centred particularly on the port city of Liverpool and the capital London, where members of the Welsh community had campaigned to establish the 15th Battalion (London Welsh) Royal Welch Fusiliers, described by Lloyd George as 'the embodiment of the martial spirit of the men of Wales'.[25] Instead, the focus was on the experiences of those whose home sat within the borders of Wales. Individuals and groups were asked to identify 'what was important to their community, whether the care of their local war memorial, tracing the histories of those who were lost, or researching the effects of war on their area'.[26]

Two of Wales's leading cultural institutions, the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth and the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff, received direct funding from the Welsh Assembly to deliver overarching national commemorative events such as exhibitions, talks and performances that framed these local projects within the wider narrative of Wales's war. A key element of the centenary in Wales was the dedication of a Welsh national memorial, in the form of a cromlech surmounted by a large bronze dragon, on Pilckem Ridge, Flanders, where many Welsh soldiers had fought and died in the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendale) in 1917. Other activities, focused on the regional rather than national level, included *When Dai Became Tommy*, a 2015 exhibition telling the stories of the miners of South Wales who became tunnellers on the Western Front, and *Dark Clouds Over the Woollen Industry*, an exhibition exploring 'the desperation of the woollen mills for contracts . . . and the use of Welsh national identity for recruitment', organised by the National Wool Museum in Carmarthenshire.[27]

But as in Scotland, many of the projects and commemorative activities overseen by Cymru'n Cofio remembered elements of the war that could be shared by as many people as possible in Wales. Key amongst these were the multiple events commemorating the Welsh language poet Hedd Wynn, who was posthumously awarded the Bard's Chair at the National Eisteddfod after he was killed in the Third Battle of Ypres in 1917. These included the restoration of Yr Ysgwm, his home in Snowdonia, workshops for primary schools on his life and work, the National Library of Wales exhibition *Fallen Poets*, on Wynn and Edward Thomas, the digitisation of the manuscript of his poem *Yr Awyr*, a multimedia poetry show, and the recreation of the Black Chair awarded to Wynn at the 1917 Eisteddfod.[28] With 58 per cent of people identifying as Welsh, rather than Welsh-British in the 2011 Census, the centenary emphasis on Wynn as emblematic of Welsh loss worked to symbolically strengthen and unify a shared national identity within the 'imagined community' of the Welsh nation.[29]

In Northern Ireland the use of the past to build and develop a shared sense of national identity in the present, seen in the government-led centenary activities in Scotland and Wales, was more complex. Memories of the First World War had more often divided, rather than united, communities in the decades preceding the centenary. For many in the Unionist communities of Northern Ireland, service and sacrifice in the First World War were the cornerstones that held up the legitimacy of the Northern Irish state after the rest of the island gained Free State status in 1922. The service of the 36th (Ulster) Division, which had its roots in the Ulster Volunteer Force, and suffered huge losses on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, was central to this Unionist memory of the war, and 'First World War commemoration in Ireland was immediately and unambiguously political and had served an important purpose in reminding all involved of the contribution of Northern Ireland to the defence of Britain and empire'.[30] Nationalists meanwhile, both north and south of the border, remembered the 1916 Easter Rising, and the execution of many of its leaders by the British state, with equal fervour.

At the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998, the British prime minister, Tony Blair, stated his hope that the agreement would allow 'the burden of history (to) at long last be lifted from our shoulders', and indeed interest in the history of Ireland's First World War began to gather pace among the Irish public from the 1990s onwards.[31] Like Scotland and Wales, Northern Ireland had its own Programme Committee, but in an attempt to ensure that a shared memory of the war could be developed that would help to build bridges between the divided communities of Northern Ireland, and between Ireland and the United Kingdom, this included representatives from the Republic of Ireland's Department for Foreign Affairs. The committee led

Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the commemoration of the key events and experiences of the First World War as part of a longer and wider 'decade of centenaries' that stretched from the signing of the Third Home Rule Bill in 1912 until the end of the Irish Civil War that followed the establishment of the Free State, in 1923. Commemoration of individual events within the 'decade of centenaries' had the potential to disrupt, rather than unify, and the Community Relations Council of Northern Ireland and the NLHF produced a set of guiding 'principles for remembering' that advised projects to understand that 'different perceptions and interpretations exist', and to try to ensure that events and activities strengthened understanding rather than division.[32]

The year 1916 was key for commemorative activities in Ireland. In the Republic it was the Easter Rising that was the focus, with widespread media coverage and three days of formal commemoration centred on Dublin. North of the border Belfast City Council divided its funding for the 1916 anniversaries between the Rising and the Battle of the Somme. However, commemoration was centred on the largely nationalist area of West Belfast, with a procession along the Falls Road ending in Milltown Cemetery, where many leading nationalists were buried. Arlene Foster, the Unionist first minister did not attend, telling the BBC: 'It would be wrong as a Unionist to go and commemorate a rising [that] took place against the State of the United Kingdom and, indeed, gave succour to a lot of violent republicans during the years of the Troubles here in Northern Ireland'.[33]

Despite the effort to create a series of commemorative events that would unite, rather than further divide, communities within Ireland, some events, it appeared, were too deeply embedded within some identities to be widely shared. In the post-conflict landscape of Northern Ireland, heritage has the potential to disrupt, as well as unify.[34] The tensions that were apparent around the centenary of the Easter Rising, so closely linked to nationalist history, memory and identity, were less evident in commemorations of the Battle of the Somme in July 2016. While the losses of the first day of the battle had been especially visible in Unionist memory and identity, there was a willingness on both sides of the traditional political divide to commemorate its centenary, and to recognise the losses in the nationalist communities of Ireland alongside those of the Unionist. A large parade was held in Belfast in June 2016, the 36th (Ulster) Divisions advance on the 1 July 1916 was re-enacted in Woodvale Park, and Creative Centenaries organised a programme of lectures, exhibitions and film screenings to mark the centenary of the battle.[35] Although the memory of the Battle of the Somme remains especially important to Unionist communities, the Decade of Centenaries did see some wider engagement with this memory, its position within the wider programme of commemorative events illustrating

the attempt to bring together diverse and often conflicting histories in an attempt to build a more unified present.

Despite hopes that the centenary would provide a platform for expressions of 'Britishness', and of a nation united by its shared past, the commemorative programmes overseen by the governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland focused, logically, on their own histories. Across Great Britain and Northern Ireland, three of the four nations used the centenary of the First World War to develop cultural memories, and tangible and intangible heritage that could underpin a shared national identity in each of them. The absence of an English advisory committee to oversee a programme of events that marked an English, rather than British, narrative of the war years, is important. It indicates the extent to which Englishness, while a far stronger identity than it was towards the end of the twentieth century, remained entangled with Britishness, perhaps articulated through political action and belief, such as support for leaving the European Union, rather than through a collective consciousness of a shared English, rather than British, history and heritage. Northern Ireland struggled to create a unifying narrative of the First World War despite the cross-border programme to mark the Decade of Centenaries and the creation of 'principles of remembering' to guide events and activities. In Wales, and particularly in Scotland, where devolution had seen the strengthening of Welsh and Scottish national identities, the centenary programmes helped to create widely shared national narratives of the war. The next section of this chapter turns to look at commemoration in communities, where many of the events that marked the centenary were created and experienced.

A Shared Expertise? Community Commemoration

The concept of community lay at the heart of much commemorative practice across Britain: communities of the nation, communities of the city, town or village, and communities of shared identity and experience were each both the subject of heritage projects and commemorative events, and imagined as bodies of belonging that would be strengthened through such projects and events. Rodney Harrison has argued that heritage 'often appears as a positive term', and this is equally true of community.[36] As Raymond Williams noted in *Keywords*, 'unlike all other terms of social organisation – state, nation, society, etc. – it seems never to be used unfavourably'.[37] In Britain, the concept of community has frequently been linked to 'left-wing social and labour movements where common interests and social ties were expressed in terms of community'. As such, it has been widely understood in relation to heritage as 'a counter-image to the

conservative aristocracy biased traditional heritage of the "authorised discourse"'.[38] Imagined as a means by which individuals could come to know one another, building inclusive and supportive social bonds around a set of shared values and beliefs, and stretching both backwards and forwards in time, creating 'imagined communities' across generations, commemorative projects were understood to be an effective means of strengthening communities at a time when they were believed to be under threat.

The belief that communities were under threat was neither new nor unique to early twenty-first-century Britain. Rather, the supposed loss of community has long been a concern of both politicians and academic researchers. Sociologists including Zygmunt Bauman and Anthony Giddens have argued, respectively, that the age of 'liquid' or 'late' modernity means that previously cohesive communities now exist as collections of isolated individuals, while successive governments struggle to find ways to mend the resultant 'broken society'.[39] Given the anxieties about the survival of community, and the understanding of community as an almost uniquely positive form of collective, with the potential to build and repair the social bonds frayed by the forces of modernity, it is perhaps not surprising that community projects came to sit at the heart of British centenary commemoration of the First World War.

The historian Jon Lawrence has compellingly demonstrated that paying careful attention to the lives and voices of the 'ordinary people', people who were the subjects of so many studies demonstrating the decline of community in postwar England, shows us, in fact, that 'community hasn't died, but it has changed'.[40] The appeal of community-based commemorative projects during the centenary supports this view. Several million of these supposedly 'ordinary people' chose to participate in community projects exploring an aspect of the First World War, their participation at once demonstrating that the desire for community and a sense of connection with others remains powerful in early twenty-first-century Britain, and paradoxically, that anxieties about the supposed demise of communities ensured generous funding for community-centred projects during the centenary.[41] During the centenary, many thousands of projects explored the experience and legacies of the First World War for their community, and many of these were funded by the NLHF. The scale of this support was unprecedented: by March 2018 the organisation estimated that they had awarded £94.2 million to almost two thousand projects across the UK. Over 9.4 million people participated in this programme – over 10 per cent of the British population.[42]

The NLHF ran a number of separate programmes to which communities and organisations could apply for funding for centenary projects and activities: the *Heritage Grants Scheme*, which offered funding of over £100,000 for

heritage projects; *Our Heritage*, which provided funding of up to £100,000 for heritage projects; *Young Roots*, which offered funding of up to £50,000 for projects led by young people in partnership with a heritage organisation; and *First World War: Then and Now*, which funded centenary projects between £3,000 and £10,000. It was this final funding scheme, aimed at smaller, community-focused projects, that enabled the largest number of people to be involved as active participants in the centenary, rather than consumers: by 2018 over 7.1 million people had been part of a project funded by *First World War: Then and Now*.[43] Although the NLHF had hoped that the scheme would be inclusive, and would appeal not only to people from across Britain, but also to those from social and cultural groups who tend to be under-represented in visitor numbers to traditional heritage sites and museums, engaging non-white people in the scheme remained a challenge, with only 8 per cent of volunteers not identifying as white, compared to 13 per cent of the population. Young people under sixteen and people of retirement age, however, were especially well represented.[44] The majority of the centenary projects explored in this chapter were funded under this scheme.

To understand the motives behind, and the processes of, commemoration at the level of community, we have to turn away from traditional 'top-down' understandings of both commemoration and of heritage. Neither the concept of commemoration as one element of the 'invention of tradition' analysed by Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger in their influential study of the ways that nation states hegemonically create and utilise shared symbols and rituals, nor the idea of heritage to be found in those bodies that oversee 'a set of professional practices that are authorised by the state and motivated by some form of legislation or written charter' help us to understand the multitude of community projects, activities and events that marked the centenary.[45] Instead, these were often collaborative projects in which heritage professionals, academics and others worked with the wider public to research and produce heritage projects that contributed to the commemoration of the First World War in ways that were particularly meaningful to different communities. In practice, many of the projects we examine here can be understood in terms of 'sedimented histories', defined as 'the process of putting stories into circulation while also respecting the diversity of interests and priorities that created them'.[46] The formal and informal structures of power, which often privilege those with professional training in the creation of a shared sense of the past, could often be interrogated and destabilised in these community-led projects. As one academic participant in many of these projects reflected: 'A member of a community group . . . said to me . . . "we all have expertise". He said, "nobody's an expert, we all have expertise" . . . we all had something to contribute and it was all different'.[47]

In her work on the ways that societies and communities make use of the past, Laurajane Smith has argued that heritage can be understood as 'a cultural and social process, which engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present'.[48] It is this understanding of heritage as practice, which holds in common with cultural memory its essentially fluid and 'unfixed' nature, that is central to our understanding of community heritage projects, and indeed to our approach to the centenary as a whole.

For diverse publics across the United Kingdom, the centenary of the First World War had meaning not only because of the national framework of remembrance and commemoration, but because of its multiple legacies in families and in communities. The centenary may have been shaped by events that took place on a national and international level, but the impetus for involvement in many commemorative events and projects came from 'below', and was driven by an understanding of the war as an event that not only shaped the twentieth century in geopolitical terms, but also shaped communities, families and individual lives in its aftermath. The war's 'long shadow' was often understood within the projects we examine here in terms of feeling, as an event that had an unprecedented impact on the lives, and the emotions, of those who experienced the war, and of their descendants.[49] The next section examines some of the many community commemorative projects that placed the local war memorial, a 'site of memory' that embodies the emotional practice of remembering the First World War in Britain, at their heart.[50]

'I Just Wondered Who These Boys Were': Community Commemoration and War Memorials

As we argued in the Introduction to this volume,[51] the cultural memory of the First World War that was circulating at its centenary had a widely shared emotional appeal, and it was this emotional appeal that often acted as a spur to individuals to become involved in community centenary projects. In particular, local war memorials, the site of remembrance for the war's dead, often sat at the heart of community projects, the NLHF estimating in 2018 that 60 per cent of the projects that they funded through the *First World War: Then and Now* scheme had looked at war memorials.[52] War memorials are at the heart of remembrance in Britain, the site where communal rituals of commemoration and remembrance are performed. They are also ubiquitous: the War Memorials Trust, the charity that records and attempts to preserve memorials, has over sixty thousand listed on its website, whereas only fifty-six 'thankful villages' – villages where all of those who served in

the First World War returned – have been identified.[53] While, as Rodney Harrison argues, 'walking down any major street in just about any city in the world will reveal dozens of memorials, monuments, listed buildings . . . and the heterogeneous piling up of the traces of the past in the present', war memorials have a particular emotional resonance, and a powerful emotional pull in modern Britain.[54]

The emotional power of these memorials stems from their centrality to remembrance and grief, both individual and collective, in the postwar years. Most memorials were created by local communities, with committees in villages, towns and cities raising funds, and overseeing the planning and design of memorials to the locally dead and missing. As the historian Jay Winter has argued, the drive to create these local sites of remembrance came from the bereaved. While they could undoubtedly have political significance, their primary purpose was to serve as 'places where people could mourn. And could be seen to mourn'.[55] As sites where the names of the dead from a community were listed, often placed in the civic and geographical heart of that community, in a city square, a town centre or on a village green, they served as a reminder to the community of their loss, of households that might need support in the years following the war, as a place where the bereaved could mourn their dead, usually buried in one of the Imperial War Graves Commission cemeteries overseas, or named on a memorial to 'the missing', and they bound the local community into national and imperial rituals of remembrance. The ceremonies of Armistice Day, which was moved to the Sunday closest to 11 November each year and renamed Remembrance Sunday following the Second World War, continue to be performed at local memorials as well as at the Cenotaph in central London, and still bring communities together to honour the local dead of the First World War and all subsequent wars.[56] In these ceremonies the bonds of loss and remembrance that developed following the First World War are re-enacted, acting to strengthen both a sense of shared cultural memory amongst those present, and the centrality of these rituals, and the figure of the sacrificial soldier, to the dominant national memory of the conflict.

Historic England, the non-departmental government body charged with protecting the historic environment of England, added over 2,500 war memorials to their list of protected sites during the centenary. Working with a range of other organisations, including the War Memorials Trust and the Imperial War Museum, and drawing on the work and expertise of numerous volunteers, Historic England listed 2,645 war memorials, providing them with recognition and planning protection that they did not have previously.[57] In all four nations of Great Britain, government heritage agencies worked with the War Memorials Trust to identify and – if necessary – conserve,

repair and list war memorials. For example, in Scotland alone, £1 million was made available to local communities for the preservation and conservation of war memorials by Historic Environment Scotland.[58] Not all of these were 'traditional' stone memorials to the military dead. On Twyn Y Garth, a Welsh hilltop overlooking the Wye Valley, a German Garth Gun, one of many 'trophy prizes' erected as memorials around the country in the immediate aftermath of war, was added to the record of listed memorials by CADW, the Welsh government's historic environment service.[59] Among the more unusual memorials listed in England were a memorial to the eighteen children killed when Upper North Street School, Poplar, was bombed in 1917, and the Conscientious Objectors' Stone in Cumbria, a rocky outcrop carrying inscriptions by conscientious objectors who were hiding from the recruiting authorities in the area and campaigning against the war. Both memorials acted as a reminder that the story of the war was not simply that of the Western Front, and that support for the conflict was far from universal.[60] War memorials could serve to remind communities and visitors alike that the war was composed of multiple experiences, and fought on multiple fronts.

War memorials, and the names inscribed on them, were central to many community commemorative projects, serving as the focus for a diverse range of activities. At times, these were focused on the tangible, physical form of the memorial and its surroundings as heritage, but this was underpinned by a recognition of their role in linking the personal with the collective, and the communities of the past with today. In Wales, CADW and the War Memorials Trust published a booklet in 2014 that argued: 'Not only do they hold personal ties, but they also continue to play an important role in the identity of our communities. Caring for and maintaining them is a way of honouring their enduring relevance'.[61]

The individual and collective importance of war memorials today drove a project in Stratherrick in the Scottish Highlands, where a complaint from a local resident who was no longer able to access the memorial, situated in an imposing position high on a hill above a road, led the South Loch Ness Heritage Group to organise volunteers to remove undergrowth, level ground and improve access. The project attracted the attention of local people 'from every age – from seventeen upwards' who came to help, and by Remembrance Sunday 2018 access had been improved and an information board, replicating the names on the memorial, had been placed by the roadside for those who could not climb to view the memorial itself.[62]

Some projects, like that in Pudsey, West Yorkshire, focused on the names listed on the memorial, and their meanings to the community from which they came. Researchers discovered that some names were missing from the local memorial and worked to rectify this, erecting a plinth next

to the memorial in 2018 that listed the names of men born in the town who had been omitted from the original memorial. During the centenary they researched the impact of the war on the town through its military losses, discovering the burial places of those named on the memorial and 'using the last map produced before the war to show the impact on the town, each dwelling where somebody died coloured in red'.[63] A website, *Pudsey Cenotaph Virtual Remembrance*, describes the history of the memorial and provides information about the dead, giving visitors a sense of the individual lives listed there, and their role in the local community, which is absent from the traditional list of names engraved on memorials. Arthur Beaumont, for example, is described as 'a man of meagre means. . . previously employed as a warp dresser and lived in a slum cottage'. Dying in 1920 of heart disease, but named on the memorial as a casualty of war, his wife was refused a widow's pension. Samuel and Bramwell Baxter, brothers, were both members of the Conservative Club, while Reuben Hustler, who was killed in 1917, had his application for exemption from military service refused at the local tribunal.[64] Thus the named dead become recognisable individuals, members of a past community remembered by contemporary members of that same, local community. Similarly, a project in Brighton on England's South Coast set out to discover the stories behind 'the boys on the plaque', a war memorial found in a decommissioned church, now an art gallery in the city centre. The main aims of The Boys on the Plaque project were 'connecting with the community. . . and . . . with locals through learning something new about our community'. The emotional resonance of war memorials was clear in the responses to the project: over 140 volunteers came forward to help to research the names, with young volunteers attending graffiti workshops that took the names on the plaque to create 'a new updated version of a cenotaph. . . in keeping with a newer generation and yet still memorialising the names of the soldiers', while older volunteers attended 'conversation cafes' and historical walks.[65] A book, *The Boys on the Plaque*, was produced towards the end of the project, listing the names held there with further details about their lives: for example, Frank Port, killed in 1917, who had been in trouble with the police in 1908 for throwing stones at a telegraph pole; and Howard Pullinger, killed in 1918, whose father was a Congregational minister, and whose mother ran a bookshop.[66]

Linking together the personal, familial histories of some of those who had served with the history of their wider community, the project enabled volunteers to bring together the lives of those they researched with their own family histories, strengthening the ties between past and present, family and community.[67]

The ability of war memorials, and the names inscribed there, to bring communities together for the centenary could not, however, always be

Figure 1.1. The Orange Lilies and Shalom Sussex project. Image courtesy of *Strike a Light – Arts and Heritage* and Nicola Benge. Many of those who had worked on 'The Boys on the Plaque' project also contributed to this project. Reproduced with permission.

taken for granted. In the majority Catholic and nationalist city of Derry/Londonderry in Northern Ireland, the Diamond war memorial, erected in 1927 in the city centre, had long been a point of contestation and division.[68] The First World War, particularly the losses of the 36th (Ulster) Division, is central to the memory culture of the loyalist communities of Northern Ireland. Combined with the role of Remembrance Sunday as a key date in the calendar of the British state, the Diamond war memorial had been understood in Derry/Londonderry as a distinctly British commemorative space, symbolically dedicated to the British Army, and had been the site of 'ongoing, low-level nationalist and republican attacks'.[69] As such it had been the subject of attempts to reposition it within heritage and memory since the 1998 Belfast Agreement, and turn it from a site of 'contested heritage' to a shared heritage site in the 'post-conflict' society of Northern Ireland.[70] The centenary commemorative period appeared to offer an opportunity to extend and embed this work more deeply within the communities of the city.

The Derry/Londonderry peace-building organisation, the Holywell Trust, was awarded a grant by the NLHF in 2006 to research the lives of the 756 named war dead listed on the memorial. They found that 48 per cent of those whose names were recorded there were from the nationalist community.[71] There was an attempt to draw on this research as a way of

incorporating the Diamond war memorial into the peace process; to re-interpret it not as a symbol of loyalist suffering and pride but instead as a symbol of a shared history, heritage and identity that had been lost in the creation of Northern Ireland in the aftermath of war. But as Hocking has shown, although members of the nationalist community, who had previously understood the memorial and its environs as a loyalist space, were more likely to attend ceremonies of remembrance, narratives of the war years, and its impact and legacies, still differed profoundly between the two communities in Derry/Londonderry.[72] As both Evershed and Pennell have argued, attempts to reinterpret contested heritage like the Diamond war memorial as a symbol of reconciliation are not straightforward, and to do so 'risks obscuring much of the unsettling complexity of the period'.[73]

The place of war memorials, symbolically and physically at the centre of practices of remembrance in Britain, where they act as both a site where the losses of war are remembered collectively, and as a reminder of these losses and their impact, meant that they were often the focus of community commemorative projects. Their centrality to local communities' remembrance of war in the years that followed the armistice was echoed in their centrality to these same communities at the centenary. The names on the memorials, which would have been known to many of those attending remembrance events in the years and decades immediately following the war were, by 2014, often just that – names. The impetus to research and share the lives of these men, expressed by one community volunteer as the realisation that 'you're not looking. . . at thirty names, you're looking at thirty stories, and they're all different', was at the heart of projects like those in Pudsey and Brighton.[74] The physical restoration of memorials, as seen in Stratherrick, was also important, reflecting the widely shared sense that those named there, and the communal desire to commemorate them, should not be forgotten. Both of these heritage practices show, as we discuss in Chapter 5, the powerful desire to ensure that future generations understand, and thus continue to commemorate and remember, the First World War as a pivotal event for societies and for individuals. However, as the Diamond war memorial in Derry/Londonderry reminds us, even war memorials, so widely understood as a shared heritage in Britain, can be contested, their ability to unite communities in the war's aftermath, and today, shaped by political structures. The next section of this chapter considers community commemoration as local heritage practice, examining some centenary projects to explore how 'heritage as practice' worked, and how communities engaged with, and helped to shape, the wider cultural memory of the war.

'It Does Make It Feel So Real': Local Commemorative Projects

For many of those who participated in community projects commemorating the war,[75] family history, and the legacies of the First World War for their families in its aftermath, was important. As James Wallis noted in 2015, 'family history is transforming both public understanding and continued commemoration of the war'.[76] The war was a moment in history when the state recorded the lives, and sometimes the deaths, of large numbers of people, records that have been preserved, and are now made available to the genealogist through the digitisation of local, national and international archives. By the start of the centenary, researching family history had become a widespread and popular leisure pursuit in Britain. Women were especially likely to mention family history as a reason for becoming involved in a commemorative project. In an online survey held in 2017–18, family history was the third most cited factor for participation, following 'remembrance' and 'research'. One respondent went on to describe how she had written a novel based on her grandfather's experiences, and that 'using my family archive material has changed 2D history into 3D reality for me. The names of the battles are real places to me now, where real people my grandfather cared about died'.[77] The emotional power of family histories, the sense of tangible links to real people, helped to drive individual engagement with centenary projects, as people both sought to learn more about the conflict's impact in their own community, and to make their own family stories part of this wider history.

Geographical immediacy, combined with family histories, could be a powerful driver of participation in centenary heritage projects, which could themselves help to develop or strengthen a sense of local community. *Six Streets Derby*, a community-led project in a neighbourhood of the English Midlands city of Derby, drew on past research into local history to create a resource that enabled people living in the area today to see the wartime history of past inhabitants. A pop-up exhibition, *Lest We Forget*, posted information panels outside local houses, detailing the experiences of their wartime inhabitants. As volunteers on the project explained: 'the panels we put outside people's houses engaged people in a way that they hadn't fully realised. They felt a real sense of ownership to people – a connection to people who lived – because most of the people in the area don't come from the area. . . Most are people who have moved in'.[78] This connection was felt profoundly by some of the residents. One resident, writing on the project's website, reflected that 'it is so good to see the people near the actual house where someone lived, to think of them stepping out of the door to go to war. . . it does make it feel so real'.[79] This sense of an emotional connection with the past, seen so widely across a range of centenary projects, while

it risked collapsing historically specific experiences into a more general and perhaps an ahistorical belief about the universality of human suffering, nonetheless worked effectively to strengthen a sense of historical continuity that helped to bind communities together today.

As seen in some of the projects that focused on war memorials, the enduring power of family and communal loss as a legacy of the war could be a powerful driver of commemorative projects undertaken by communities. The isles of Lewis and Harris in the Western Isles, Scotland, suffered their worst losses of the conflict when *HMY Iolaire* hit rocks just outside Stornoway harbour on the night of 1 January 1919. The ship was bringing men from the islands home from the war, and over 200 of those on board lost their lives, including 184 men from Lewis, most of whom had served in the Royal Naval Reserve.[80] There is a clear 'fit' between the disaster that befell the *Iolaire* and the dominant cultural memory of the First World War in Britain: there is a horrible irony to these men's deaths, after the war had ended and so close to home, and the Admiralty showed great insensitivity following the loss, attempting to put the wreck up for sale within fifteen days, and downgrading their investigation from a court martial to a private inquiry. While the findings of this inquiry were only released to the Admiralty, a public inquiry held in Stornoway in February 1919 found not only that insufficient care had been taken when approaching the harbour, but that the *Iolaire* had had insufficient lifeboats and lifebelts for those on board.[81] The loss of the *Iolaire* remains the worst peacetime disaster at sea for the United Kingdom since the sinking of the *Titanic*.

The sinking of the *Iolaire* has a continued resonance in the Western Isles. The loss of so many men from the islands has been deeply felt, first through the immediate shock of grief and bereavement, and then through the poverty occasioned by the absence of so many young men. In the small and close-knit crofting and fishing communities of the Western Isles, there were very few who had no direct connection with the loss of the *Iolaire*. The wartime Roll of Honour for Lewis, published in 1920, includes this description of the aftermath of the tragedy published in the *Stornoway Gazette* in 1919: 'One thinks of the wide circle of blood relations affected by the loss of even one of these gallant lads, and imagination sees these circles multiplied by the number of dead, overlapping and overlapping each other until the whole island – every hearth and home in it – is shrouded in deepest gloom'.[82] The loss of the *Iolaire* cast a long shadow over the islands after the war. As one participant in a 2019 focus group held in Stornoway reflected, 'there was no peace here. There was no celebration. And for at least a generation, people went into mourning, and stayed in mourning'.[83] Trauma and poverty were effective drivers of emigration from the islands between the wars, with some eight hundred leaving for Canada in 1923 alone, further

contributing to the sense of loss and displacement, and a silence around the *Iolaire* was commented on again and again by participants in meetings and focus groups held in the islands during the centenary.[84]

This remembered silence around the *Iolaire* in the years following its loss makes the focus on the tragedy during the centenary all the more striking. A range of different projects worked to remember and commemorate the event: Stornoway Museum held an exhibition, while the Island Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) collected material objects left behind by some of the men who died, using these to trace the legacies of the disaster in the bereaved and their descendants. Margaret Ferguson, a local artist and family doctor whose great uncle had died in the shipwreck, painted one hundred oil portraits of some of those who drowned.[85] *Sheòl an Iolaire* (*The Iolaire Sailed*), consisting of 280 illuminated columns outlining the ship's hull that are covered by high tide, was installed in Stornoway harbour in 1919, and a new Harris tweed was created to mark the disaster. These and other projects commemorating both the loss of the *Iolaire* and other legacies of the war, such as migration, demonstrated the importance of the war to the contemporary island community, understood as an event that had shaped postwar life, and the memory of which had to be understood and passed on to subsequent generations. One focus group participant, commenting on the ways that the centenary had opened up opportunities to explore family and community history, summed up its importance thus: 'It's not just the legacy for the young people, it's even the generation above that, that are finding out their own heritage'.[86] The centenary of the First World War, shaped as it was by narratives of tragedy and loss, had a particular resonance in the Western Isles. Here a local inheritance of loss was understood as continuing to shape life on the islands, both through an increased awareness of the trauma suffered by the wartime and postwar generations, and by the opportunities this offered to develop knowledge of the island's wider wartime histories and shared heritage.

This powerful memory of wartime loss as sitting at the heart of the local community may have been specific to the Western Isles, but other communities around the country also had their own, deeply embedded, cultural memories of the war years to draw upon and mobilise during the centenary. In Belfast where, as we have seen, the memory of the war had acted as one of the symbols of community division, attempts to organise a parade commemorating the departure of soldiers for the war front in 1914 raised some difficult questions for heritage practitioners. In 2013, thousands had marched to commemorate the founding of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) a hundred years earlier. While the paramilitary group of the same name had been banned in the 1960s, the parade was allowed on the basis that it was marking not 'the 1968 Ulster Volunteer Force. . . but a patriotic

organisation that fought bravely' in the First World War.[87] Nevertheless, the parade was a controversial event, with hundreds of UVF flags being erected along the route.[88] Organisers of the 2014 parade applied to Ulster Museums for use of archive film that showed the UVF marching through the centre of Belfast in 1914, which they planned to show on a large screen outside City Hall, Belfast, the centre of civic identity in the city, and a site shared by both loyalist and nationalist communities. The request was declined because of the difficulties inherent in identifying this shared space with the heritage of one community, and the validation the screening might be seen to bestow on the banned paramilitary organisation.

Other community projects in Northern Ireland attempted to discover new histories and emphasise different narratives of the war in the drive to build a shared sense of national identity from the 'decade of centenaries'. At times, the heritage and memory of the First World War were put into practice in ways that clearly foregrounded a shared past, and perhaps hoped to use this as a means of reconciliation in the present. For example, in Killyleagh, protestant and catholic families shared their stories of the impact of war on their ancestors and the wider community. A key aim of the project was to educate 'all generations and religious backgrounds' with objectives including 'the promotion of positive relations characterised by respect'.[89] This use of heritage to build local communities was also seen in *Lest We Forget*, a project run by the Scottish Refugee Council that explored the history of the nineteen thousand Belgian refuges who had found wartime sanctuary in Scotland. The overarching aim of the project was to help to integrate current refugees from Eritrea, Sudan, Syria and Iran into their new Scottish homes, and to build new collective identities based on a shared understanding of the past.[90] In common with many other centenary projects, these showed how, in a divided country, the history and heritage of the First World War was put to use in order to 'construct, reconstruct and negotiate a range of identities and social and cultural values and meanings in the present'.[91]

However, while the focus on local heritage and history was widely seen during the centenary, not all community projects, and indeed not all communities, were geographically situated. Heritage can be a key to many identity formations below the level of the nation state: regional, local, religious, ethnic, political and other identities often have a sense of shared heritage and history. As Harrison has argued, from the late twentieth century onwards, heritage has, at least partially, shifted 'the focus away from practical issues of conservation to those of identity politics and representation'.[92] The final section of this chapter examines some instances of heritage and 'communities of identity' in the First World War centenary.

'I Didn't Know Anything about this War':
Community, Identity and Commemoration

Writing about the relationship between heritage and identity,[93] Laurajane Smith has argued that 'the idea of "identity" tends to be unproblematically linked with concepts of "heritage"'.[94] While widely recognised, usually tangible, sites of heritage such as historic buildings, may act to disguise the ways that heritage and identity exist in a dynamic relationship where the links between them 'need to be actively forged, or continually remade and created', community heritage projects, such as those examined in this chapter, can provide us with a clearer picture of this relationship.[95] Projects like this, which tend to be shaped by the interests, needs and concerns of local and other communities, rather than the priorities of elites or heritage professionals (though of course these are not mutually exclusive) can demonstrate how heritage is far from being fixed but, in fact, is continually being remade and negotiated. Although the dominant cultural memory of the First World War as a time of loss and tragedy informed numerous community commemoration projects, as evidenced by the numbers that focused on war memorials, the centenary also offered an opportunity for differing interest groups and communities to undertake research that told 'their' story, or that enabled them to communicate and validate identities and communal values that they held dear.

As discussed in the Introduction to this volume, family histories were often central to people's participation in the centenary, sometimes providing participants with a 'usable past' that they could utilise in both the ongoing process of identity formation, and in the creation of communities with shared beliefs and understandings of the past, that could be put to work in the present. *Meeting in No Man's Land*, a project funded by the NLHF and created by the reminiscence organisation Age Exchange, is an example of the ways that family history research can provide its practitioners with 'social, emotional and cultural capital, transforming their understandings of themselves and the world in which they live'.[96] *Meeting in No Man's Land* brought together the descendants of British and German veterans in order to 'explore how the war affected those families from the interwar (period) through to participants' experience of remembrance and commemoration today'.[97] Participants were asked to share a family artefact and its meaning with one another, an activity that led one (German) participant to comment that he hoped this activity would create 'an enduring love and friendship' across national borders 'through a deep understanding of the stories of others'.[98] The emotional power of these artefacts, and the family stories, histories and meanings that were attached to them for each participant, lay at the heart of

the project, and show how family histories were woven into the fabric of the centenary.

The timing of *Meeting in No Man's Land* was also important, and contributed to a sense of the project's importance among its members. Participants met in Germany, shortly before the June 2016 referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, and in the midst of a refugee crisis that had seen Germany open its borders to thousands of refugees from the Syrian civil war, while British borders remained resolutely closed. A desire to mobilise the cultural memory and the shared experiences of ancestors in the First World War in order to oppose nationalism and support victims of war, informed the motivations and reflections of many of the participants. A British man, describing his grandfather's experiences in terms that sat comfortably within the dominant cultural memory of the war as tragedy, explained that he wanted the project to be the starting point for a new peace movement, ending his meeting with a German participant with the joint pledge 'never again'.[99] A German man broke into English at the end of his interview to pledge "Peace in Europe and the world", while others made an explicit connection between their ancestors' suffering during and after the First World War, and the dangers of a divided Europe today.[100] For the participants in this project, the emotive power of both family histories and the wider cultural memory of the First World War acted as a means of identity formation that crossed national borders and emphasised ties of belief rooted in shared family legacies.

Community commemorative projects could also provide an effective mechanism for the communication of histories and experiences that had been absent from, or marginal to, the British cultural memory of the war. As one focus group participant put it: 'There were a lot of black people involved. . . they should be integrated as part of British history. . . Britain is not just white. It's not just about the war. It's about our society'.[101] Research by the think-tank 'British Future' before the centenary demonstrates the truth of this comment. Surveying public knowledge of the First World War in 2013, the think-tank found that while 59 per cent of respondents had visited their local war memorial, 52 per cent did not know that Indian troops came to Britain to fight, and 60 per cent had no knowledge of the participation of Kenyan troops.[102] For some communities, bound together by identity rather than locality, the centenary provided an opportunity to research and communicate these histories, and to increase public understanding of the role of their ancestors, often from the colonies and Dominions of the British Empire, during the war.

One such project was led by two British officers of Asian heritage in the British armed forces. Alarmed by the lack of knowledge of South Asian combatants in the war, they worked with a range of partners to 'broaden

understanding' of the presence and participation of the Indian army during the First World War, 'not just within the diaspora, but at large across the British community'.[103] The project drew effectively on intangible heritage to extend knowledge, providing a reception at a local school on the south coast of England that replicated the kinds of foods that soldiers in the Indian Army would have eaten during the First World War. The reception followed a remembrance service for Hindu and Sikh soldiers who had died of their wounds in a nearby town, and who were commemorated by a shrine at the spot where their bodies had been cremated.[104] The shared foodstuffs 'provided a tangible connection between the people – the fifty-three Hindus and Sikhs that we have just been talking about and commemorating, and what they would have been eating'.[105] Developing an understanding not just of the presence of South Asian soldiers, but of their experiences and 'the emotions of the soldier', was central to the aims of the two military officers who led the project.[106] Young people who participated in it were taken to sites on the Western Front where the Indian Army had fought, and to archival sites in Britain, with their subsequent artworks incorporated into an exhibition about the soldiers' experiences. Looking back on the project, one of its organisers reflected that it was the experiential nature of many of the activities that made it so powerful, drawing in young people with no direct family history of the Indian Army, and enabling them to develop an 'emotional understanding' of the experiences of South Asian soldiers:

> To my mind, taking them over to the Western Front on a day like today, when it is absolutely pouring down, and they were drenched – soaked to the bone – actually just served to highlight to them how, what, it must have been like to be a soldier, living in fatigues, having come over from the subcontinent. It really brought it home.[107]

While heritage projects can never fully 'determine the scope or meaning' of remembrance or commemoration, the sensory, experiential and ultimately emotional nature of acts like eating, and visiting a battlefield or a memorial, can be far more long-lasting than 'just reading . . . one of the panels on an exhibition board'.[108]

These Dangerous Women likewise drew on an emotional connection to a little-remembered aspect of the First World War. The aim of the project was to embed knowledge of the International Congress of Women in 1915, and to draw on this to inspire activism today. The International Congress of Women was a meeting of 1,300 women from warring and neutral countries, who came together in The Hague, the Netherlands, to state their opposition to war.[109] The Congress led to the establishment of the Women's

International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and several members of the WILPF participated in the project. One woman saw a clear link between the aims and experiences of women in 1915, and her own activities and beliefs today:

> Women tried to prevent (war), having demonstrations and so on, just as we do now. . . . And that brought home to me what life was like for the women involved. . . because, you know, it's very easy to identify. . . ever since I have been an adult, demonstrating against wars. So straightaway it sort of rang all those bells.[110]

Participants in *These Dangerous Women* re-enacted the journey of a group of British peace activists to The Hague, and the subsequent film of the project intercut these re-enactments with a history of the wartime activists.[111] Each of the participants 'played' the part of one of the original activists, researching their history, communicating and embodying their experiences in the final film. As with the previous project, the sensory and experiential elements of participation were paramount, demonstrating 'the importance of (bodily) experience to an understanding of history' that is largely absent from both academic histories, and from traditional 'glass case' museum exhibitions.[112] The little-known history of female peace activists in 1915, two of whom were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931, was a powerful example for peace activists today, and the project concluded with the female participants handing in a letter to Prime Minister David Cameron that replicated the message of women to politicians in the First World War: 'negotiation not war'.[113]

Laurajane Smith has argued that 'the real sense of heritage, the real moment when our emotions and sense of self are truly engaged is. . . in the act of passing on and receiving memories and knowledge'.[114] The three commemorative projects discussed here demonstrate the veracity of this maxim, showing how an understanding of the past, and the act of communicating this understanding to others, can act to engage individuals in an act of individual and communal identity formation. Each of these drew upon narratives of the war that made lesser-known histories visible, integrating them into the wider understanding of the war years by emphasising the horrors of war, and the desire of many for peace. They also emphasised their emotional resonance for participants and audiences today, inviting them to identify with those who experienced the war in a way that accentuated shared feelings and downplayed the differences between life today and a century ago. These projects, bringing together people with shared values or histories, show how heritage can be 'an act of communication and meaning making' by individuals and communities – a powerful means of identity creation in the present.[115]

Conclusion

A sense of shared heritage can be an effective means for strengthening a sense of community at all levels. National communities, geographic communities and communities of shared interest, beliefs and identity all rely in part upon the widely held perception of a common past, symbolised by particular events, rituals or material objects that inform beliefs and identities held in common in the present. When the event is on the scale of the First World War, with the consequent opportunities for individuals to link family histories to the wider narrative, and the emotional force of this narrative strengthened through recognition, repetition and identification, the power of heritage to support and strengthen community identification is even greater.

This power, however, can potentially come at the cost of historical precision, one historian bemoaning the government's failure to 'look at the First World War objectively' rather than 'starting from a sort of modified Blackadder point of view'.[116] While the community heritage projects explored here all worked carefully with archival and historical records, often uncovering new histories and experiences of the war years, the dominant cultural memory of the First World War, which understands the conflict first and foremost as a tragedy, nonetheless informed much of what was produced. The focus on war memorials seen in so many NLHF projects reflected the power of this cultural memory, and the centrality of loss to British understandings of the war. When the aim of projects was to build community cohesion or recognition, or, as in the case of Northern Ireland, to make use of the past in order to overcome conflict in the present, heritage could come into conflict with history. The use of the past 'as a way of dealing with the instability of the present and future' can come with its own set of risks.[117]

Community heritage projects, with their combination of often crowd-sourced research and their aim of contributing to the life of the community in some way, perhaps sit somewhere between the commemorative events and artworks explored in Chapter 2 and the museum exhibitions and work of heritage professionals explored in Chapter 3. Artworks and commemorative events are shaped by and respond to cultural memory, shared traditions, and the emotional power of these, far more than by historical research, which can uncover events and stories that refuse to sit within the widely shared narrative. Museum exhibitions, and the work of heritage professionals, on the other hand, are more closely related to historical and archaeological research, driven by professional practice that values accuracy and veracity above memory and narrative. The following chapter examines the work of museum and heritage professionals during the centenary, as they worked to respond to an event with a powerful, and widely shared, cultural memory.

Notes

1. Cameron, 'Speech at Imperial War Museum'.
2. BBC, 'Scotland Decides', https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/events/scotland-decides /results; BBC, 'EU Referendum Results', https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics /eu_referendum/results. Both last accessed 22 June 2025.
3. BBC, 'Scotland Decides'.
4. BBC, 'EU Referendum Results'.
5. In Boston, which had the highest percentage of Leave voters in the referendum, 75.6 per cent voted to leave the EU, while in more affluent Brighton and Hove on the South Coast of England, home to two universities, 68.6 per cent voted to remain. 'Brexit EU Referendum Results', *Financial Times*, 24 June 2016, https://ig .ft.com/sites/elections/2016/uk/eu-referendum/, last accessed 22 June 2025.
6. YouGov, 'How Britain Voted at the EU Referendum', https://yougov.co.uk/topics /politics/articles-reports/2016/06/27/how-britain-voted, last accessed 22 June 2025.
7. Fetzer, 'Austerity and Brexit'. It should be noted however that this pattern was largely seen in England and Wales, and was less evident in Scotland, which had been spared the worst of austerity by its government, and in Northern Ireland, where the complexities of post-Brexit trade barriers threatened to destabilise the Belfast Agreement (often referred to as the Good Friday Agreement) of 1996, which had been a central part of the peace process.
8. Samuel, 'British Dimensions', ix.
9. Pocock, 'British History', 610; Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*.
10. Henderson and Wyn Jones, *Englishness*, 38.
11. It should be noted here, however, that the Ulster Unionist identity is strongly allied with Britain and Britishness, and that Englishness is a far weaker identity than the others listed here, with England being the only one of the four nations not to have its own devolved government.
12. Kumar, 'Nation and Empire', 589.
13. Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge, *Pluralising Pasts*, 1.
14. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6–7.
15. DCMS, 'First World War Centenary Programme', ii.
16. Ibid.
17. These separate centenary programmes did not include all the activities and projects that took place within the four nations.
18. Poppyscotland, 'WW100 Project', https://web.archive.org/web/20200710144854 /http://learning.poppyscotland.org.uk/ww100/, last accessed 23 June 2025.
19. The Lady Haig Poppy Factory employs military veterans to produce poppies of remembrance for the Royal British Legion in Scotland. It was established in 1926.
20. Ditchburn and Macdonald, 'Bannockburn'.
21. Poppyscotland, 'The Far, Far From Ypres Project', https://web.archive.org/web /20200430021921/http://learning.poppyscotland.org.uk/resources/far-far-from -ypres/; 'WW100 4 Banners Map of Scottish Memorials in Europe', https:// web.archive.org/web/20200430022242/http://learning.poppyscotland.org.uk /ww100-the-map-of-scottish-memorials-in-europe/, last accessed 23 June 2025.

22. DCMS, 'First World War Centenary Programme', 37.
23. 'Cymru'n Cofio', 6.
24. Merfyn Jones, 'Beyond Identity?', 332.
25. Ugolini, 'The Band of Brothers', 828.
26. 'Cymru'n Cofio', 9.
27. Ibid., 36, 77.
28. Ibid., 44, 67–71.
29. Harries, Byrne and Lymperopoulou, *Who Identifies as Welsh?*, 1.
30. Pennell, 'Choreographed by the Angels?', 259.
31. Quoted in Crooke and Maguire, *Heritage After Conflict*, 1.
32. Community Relations Council of Northern Ireland. 'Decade of Centenaries', https://www.community-relations.org.uk/decade-centenaries, last accessed 23 June 2025.
33. Cited in Madigan, 'Centenary (Ireland)'.
34. On disruptive heritage, see Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage*.
35. Madigan, 'Centenary (Ireland)'.
36. Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, 5.
37. Williams, *Keywords*, 76.
38. Berger, Dicks and Fontaine, "Community", 327.
39. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*; Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity*; UK Parliament, *The Problems of British Society*.
40. Lawrence, *Me Me Me*, 1.
41. For a discussion of the phrase 'ordinary people' in modern Britain, see Langhamer, 'Who the Hell are Ordinary People Anyway?'
42. Heritage Fund, *First World War Centenary Activity Evaluation*, https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/publications/evaluation-first-world-war-centenary-activity, last accessed, 23 June 2025. The Office for National Statistics estimated the population of Britain to be 66,436,000 in 2018; Office for National Statistics, https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2018, last accessed 23 June 2025.
43. Brookfield, 'The People's Centenary', 121.
44. Smith, *Emotional Heritage*, 7; Sheffield Hallam, 'Evaluation of Heritage Lottery Fund', 2.
45. Hobsbawn and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*; Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, 14.
46. Lloyd and Moore, 'Sedimented Histories'.
47. Reflections on the Centenary focus group, 2017, Kent.
48. Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 2.
49. Reynolds, *The Long Shadow*. Reynolds uses the term 'the long shadow' to explore the war's multiple political legacies. We borrow it here to describe the emotional, social and cultural legacies of the war.
50. Nora, 'Between Memory and History'.
51. Reflections on the Centenary focus group, 2019, Leeds.
52. Brookfield, 'The People's Centenary', 122. Many of these projects did not focus solely on war memorials. The NLHF estimates that one-third looked at food and

agriculture, one-third at medicine and healthcare, and 61 per cent at women's experiences of war.

53. War Memorials Trust, https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/, last accessed 22 June 2025. Morris, Hugh, 'Britain's 56 'Thankful Villages'', *Telegraph*, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/united-kingdom/articles/thankful-villages-war-dead/, last accessed 19 June 2025. The researchers had not identified any such villages in Scotland or Ireland at the time of publication.

54. Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, 1.

55. Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 93.

56. For a history of Armistice Day up until 1945, see Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*; Noakes, 'A Broken Silence?'.

57. Historic England, 'War Memorials Listed During Four Year Project to Commemorate First World War Centenary', https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/war-memorials-listed-during-four-year-commemoration-project/, last accessed 19 June 2025.

58. War Memorials Trust. 'Scotland – Historic Environment Scotland', http://www.warmemorials.org/grants-scotland/, last accessed 22 June 2025.

59. CADW press release, 'CADW Lists Rare War Memorials as Wales Remembers the End of the First World War', https://gov.wales/cadw-lists-rare-war-memorials-wales-remembers-end-first-world-war, last accessed 23 June 2025.

60. Historic England, 'War Memorials Listed During Four Year Project to Commemorate First World War Centenary', https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/war-memorials-listed-during-four-year-commemoration-project/, last accessed 22 June 2025.

61. CADW, *War Memorials in Wales*, 4.

62. Reflections on the Centenary focus group, 2018, Inverness; The South Loch Ness Heritage Group, 2017 'Stratherrick War Memorial', https://southlochnessheritage.co.uk/stratherrick-war-memorial/, last accessed 23 June 2025.

63. Reflections on the Centenary focus group, 2019, Leeds.

64. Pudsey Cenotaph Virtual Remembrance, https://web.archive.org/web/20200810043407/http://www.pudseycenotaph.co.uk/, last accessed 23 June 2025.

65. Fabrica Gallery, Strike A Light and Brighton and Hove Libraries Service. 'The Boys on the Plaque: Unearthing Hidden Histories of WW1 Soldiers from Brighton and Hove', https://boysontheplaque.wordpress.com/about/, last accessed 22 June 2025.

66. 'The Boys on the Plaque'. See https://shop.fabrica.org.uk/products/boys-on-the-plaque, last accessed 23 June 2025.

67. See, for example, the blogpost discussing an event focused on family memories of the First World War. 'Boys on the Plaque', https://boysontheplaque.wordpress.com/2016/01/17/family-history-from-wwi/, last accessed 22 June 2025.

68. Derry/Londonderry is the official name of the city.

69. Hocking, 'Great Transformations', 231.

70. Mullan, P., 2018. 'The Decade of Centenaries and a Methodology for Engaging with "Difficult Heritage"', in E. Crooke and T. Maguire (eds), *Heritage After Conflict*. London: Routledge, 53–70.

71. National Lottery Heritage Fund, 'Diamond War Memorial', https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/news/diamond-war-memorial, last accessed 22 June 2025.

72. Hocking, 'Great Transformations'.

73. Pennell, 'Choreographed by the Angels?', 274; Evershed, *Ghosts of the Somme*.

74. Reflections on the Centenary focus group, 2019, Leeds.

75. 'Six Streets Derby, Arts and History Trail', https://www.sixstreetsderby.org/local-history/hlf-project, last accessed 22 June 2025.

76. Wallis, J. 2015. '"Great Grandfather, What Did *You* Do in the Great War?"', 21.

77. Reflections on the Centenary Online Survey, 2017–18.

78. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 2019, Derby.

79. 'Six Streets Derby, Arts and History Trail', https://www.sixstreetsderby.org/local-history/hlf-project, last accessed 22 June 2025.

80. The Iolaire Centre, 'The Iolaire Disaster', https://iolaire.org/the-iolaire-disaster/?v=7885444af42e, last accessed 22 June 2025.

81. 'Iolaire Disaster. Jury's Verdict', *The Scotsman*, 12 February 1919.

82. *'Loyal Lewis' Roll of Honour (1914 and After)*, 311.

83. Reflections on the Centenary focus group, 2019, Stornoway.

84. *Iolaire*, National Library of Scotland, https://digital.nls.uk/learning/iolaire/index-en.html, last accessed 22 June 2025.

85. 'Margaret Ferguson Fine Art', https://www.margaretfergusonart.com/collections/90674, last accessed 22 June 2025.

86. Reflections on the Centenary focus group, 2019, Stornoway.

87. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 2017, Belfast.

88. Kilpatrick, C. 2013. '18,000 Loyalists expected for "Ulster Day" march to commemorate UVF formation', *Belfast Telegraph*, 24 September, https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/18000-loyalists-expected-for-ulster-day-march-to-commemorate-uvf-formation-29603764.html, last accessed 22 June 2025.

89. 'Killyleagh Remembers the Great War', *Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Website*, https://www.newrymournedown.org/killyleagh-remembers-the-great-war, last accessed 22 June 2025.

90. Scottish Refugee Council, 'Lest We Forget', YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_ZgFSzf2Fg, last accessed 22 June 2025.

91. Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 3.

92. Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, 117.

93. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 2018, Birmingham.

94. Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 316.

95. Ibid.

96. Evans, 'Emotions of Family History', 310–13.

97. Age Exchange (2015), cited in Duffett and Roper, 'Making Histories', 18.

98. Age Exchange, 'Meeting in No Man's Land', YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtOvjVihEfA, last accessed 22 June 2025.

99. Duffett and Roper, 'Family Legacies', 85.

100. Ibid., 86.

101. Reflections on the Centenary focus group, 2019, Leeds.

102. British Future, 'Do Mention the War', 32–33.

103. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 2019, Surrey.

104. On this, see the Chattri Memorial Group website, https://www.chattri.org/, last accessed 22 June 2025.
105. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 2019, Surrey.
106. Ibid.
107. Ibid.
108. Smith, *Emotional Heritage*, 241; Reflections on the Centenary interview, 2019, Surrey.
109. Liddington, *The Long Road to Greenham*. The majority of the British delegates were prevented by the wartime government from travelling to The Hague.
110. Reflections on the Centenary focus group, 2019, Glasgow.
111. The film can be viewed on the Clapham Film Unit website, https://www.claphamfilmunit.com/projects/these-dangerous-women/, last accessed 22 June 2025.
112. De Groot, *Consuming History*, 106.
113. Film *These Dangerous Women*, https://www.claphamfilmunit.com/projects/these-dangerous-women/, last accessed 23 June 2025.
114. Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 2.
115. Ibid.
116. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 2019, Birmingham.
117. Pennell, 'Choreographed by the Angels?', 273.

CHAPTER 2

National and Transnational Commemoration

At the start of the centenary, some members of the military history establishment commented that artistic outputs would be seen by millions more people than the number who would be reading their own published work.[1] It was an entirely accurate prediction. During the centenary, performative artistic works like those organized and funded by the arts organisation 14–18 NOW had a marked impact on the British public, reframing the ways in which the wider public commemorates the loss and trauma of past conflicts. Broadcast media, particularly the BBC in its coverage of remembrance events and ceremonies, attracted considerable audience numbers around significant anniversaries, such as the battles of the Somme and Passchendaele, and the signing of the Armistice. However, social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Instagram, played an even greater role in the dissemination and sharing of public commemorative activity.

This chapter examines the organisations who worked to plan, create and promulgate public commemorative activities at both national and transnational levels. It will explain how the British government, under the guise of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), sought to play a central role in coordinating the ways in which the centenary was commemorated in Great Britain and on the Continent. It will show how key organisations such as the Royal British Legion (RBL), the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) worked to produce their own programmes of remembrance in line with the national timeline of events. The chapter will then consider a selection of artistic outputs by 14–18 NOW, such as Paul Cummins and Tom Piper's *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* (2014), Jeremy Deller's

We're Here Because We're Here (2016) and Danny Boyle's *Pages of the Sea* (2018).

We will consider how politics and the concept of transculturalism informed the scale and scope of commemorative activities during the centenary period. The artistic scale, impact and perceived emotional clout of the works commissioned by 14–18 NOW demonstrate what happens when aesthetic and/or artistic value judgements collide with the responsibility of the historian to construct narratives out of the evidence of the past. David Olusoga highlighted that the dominance of literature in Britain's modern memory of the First World War acted to obscure other aspects of the conflict, 'those upon which the poets were silent, and to which the war artists were not drawn'.[2] While 70 million men were mobilised, 4 million were non-white non-Europeans. Most of these were subjects of European empires, and they 'fought, laboured and died in Europe and various theatres of war across the globe'. Yet Olusoga underlined that 'more books and plays have been written, and more movies and documentaries produced, about the few dozen war poets than [about] the campaigns fought in the colonies and the colonial troops who fought on the Western Front'.[3] Yet it could be argued that some commemorative events such as Akram Khan's *XENOS* attempted to highlight previously unheard voices, as a whole they did not change the British public's views about 1914–18, which are rooted in feelings of loss and futility.[4]

As Ashplant, Dawson and Roper have noted, contemporary war commemorations have become media events that stimulate cultural productions of all kinds.[5] The modernity of public commemorative artistic performance was heightened by the multiple uses of social media platforms. Real-time digital documentation via applications such as Twitter/X and Instagram enabled different levels of engagement, resistance and re-mediation with the artworks, and in the many layers of reception in various public spheres.[6] If history is 'a contested discourse, an embattled terrain' where individuals and groups construct interpretations of the past 'to please themselves', temporary consensus is only reached 'when dominant voices can silence others either by overt power or covert incorporation'.[7] Where art is seen to be the dominant voice, the critic-historian chooses silence and turns away.[8] Many of the funded centenary artworks emphasised the act of remembrance, although the strategies used throughout the commissions resisted traditional memorial aesthetics, absorbing and building upon counter-memorial discourse and post-digital thinking. The importance of storytelling, of using commemorative art as both counter-monument and anti-monument produced works that were often participatory, ephemeral and mutable.

The chapter ends with an examination of how public participation and voluntarism were key to the delivery of many national initiatives,

particularly grassroots and public activities in local communities such as 'yarn-bombing'.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Since its formation by the Blair administration in July 1997, the British government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has been a ministerial department that is responsible for supporting the cultural life of the nation, covering the arts, media, sport, tourism and civil society. Its primary policy areas cover a very wide range of activities including broadcasting, heritage, gambling and the National Lottery, and the creative industries. The department is supported by forty-two agencies and public bodies ranging from the BBC and Channel 4, the National Archives, national museums and libraries, and Arts Council England. As the principal organiser of the annual Remembrance Day ceremony at the Cenotaph, it was logical that the DCMS should play a central role in the commemorations of the centenary of the First World War. Indeed, it was the first time a 'Prime Minister's Special Representative' role was created to support the coordination and delivery of commemorative events. The Rt. Hon. Dr Andrew Murrison MP was appointed to serve in this position throughout the period of the First World War centenary anniversaries. He represented the government in galvanising activity and securing political support across the four nations of the United Kingdom.[9] This included the Somme 100 programme of events in Manchester in July 2016, and the centenary of the Battle of Passchendaele in August 2017. The DCMS coordinated the ballot for four thousand tickets to attend the centenary commemorations at Passchendaele on 31 July, which was open to descendants of those who had fought in the area. A commemoration ceremony was held at the CWGC Tyne Cot cemetery and followed by a series of live performances, open to thousands in Ypres' rebuilt market square, telling the story of the battle. The DCMS appointed the organisation 14–18 NOW to deliver the UK's art programme for the centenary. Jenny Waldman, who was appointed as director of 14–18 NOW in 2013, praised the way that the DCMS acted more as a moderator rather a director of the commemorations. This 'hands-off' approach enabled the commemorations to explore different interpretations and narratives of the war, and to build trust with artists.[10]

In July 2019, the DCMS stated that the centenary commemorations had been 'hugely successful' in that they had engaged a 'significant proportion of the population across all parts of the UK'. Their inquiry found that the experience had 'changed approaches to commemorations for many of the organisations involved' and that the success of the projects at national and

local levels 'was far greater than expected'. The report underlined that the arts are 'a core part of our national life'.[11] As the lead government department, the DCMS acted as a convening body for the commemorations. Lord Ashton, the DCMS parliamentary under-secretary of state, described how the department had put together a skeleton of national events, and supported others, with questions and discussions taking place in the advisory group. It was underlined that the DCMS had not been there to direct a national commemorative programme, as Lord Ashton said it is 'not a good thing for ministers to direct the arts'. However, the committee and its work did face criticism from some of those who gave evidence. The historian Sir Anthony Seldon described 14–18 NOW as a 'come and go' organisation that had not aimed to leave a 'physical legacy'. The recommendations from the report found that the DCMS must 'now take the opportunity to evaluate, record and disseminate key learnings around the role of the arts, engaging with children and young people, reaching diverse audiences, nurturing the community connections that have been made, and preserving the digital assets of the commemorations'.[12]

The Royal British Legion

Describing their organisation as the 'national champions of remembrance', the Royal British Legion (RBL), the UK's largest armed forces charity, undertook a number of activities to commemorate the First World War centenary. Known for its prominent roles in the annual Armistice Day services and the Festival of Remembrance, and most notably the sale of red poppies, the legion saw the centenary period as an 'opportunity . . . to engage with new supporters in new ways'.[13] In 2014 the legion took a different approach to the launch of its annual Poppy Appeal, for which it recreated the watch kept over the body of the Unknown Warrior in 1920 by inviting eighty-three people to stand at the Cenotaph in Central London, 'keeping watch' over the memories of their loved ones for periods of thirty minutes. They also hosted the 'Every Man Remembered' statue in Trafalgar Square, which commemorated all the members of the British and Commonwealth forces who died in the First World War. On 4 August 2014, the legion organised *Lights Out* events across the country to mark Britain's entry into the First World War. Legion branches coordinated 51 per cent of all the registered events, with the aim of bringing together people 'of all ages, backgrounds and faiths to hold a moment of shared recollection and remembrance'. The National Grid estimated that across the nation over 3 million people turned off their electric lights. The legion were also one of the beneficiary charities of the *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* installation at the Tower of London

in August 2014, an art installation of 888,246 ceramic poppies planted in the moat of the Tower of London to remember the British and colonial forces who died during the war. An estimated 4 million people visited the Tower to see the poppies, and the legion were among the voices that expressed pleasure at seeing those visitors 'taking time to remember those who fell 100 years ago and bringing Remembrance to a modern audience'.[14]

On 10 March 2015, the RBL hosted a Service of Remembrance at the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) to mark the centenary of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle. Around 4,500 of the casualties sustained during that action had come from the Indian Corps, making it the most significant loss of Indian armed forces during the conflict. The legion underlined that the service provided an opportunity for their British descendants, and Sikhs serving in the British Army today, to pay their respects to the war dead.

The Somme 100 programme of commemorations in 2016 were extensive. The legion delivered the first integrated Remembrance experience across the whole of the organisation, moving into digital activities including the creation of a Somme app featuring television historian Dan Snow. The app included audio recordings of those who had taken part in the battle, battlefield film sequences, maps, and historical information. It was free to the public and had about 41,000 downloads. In its desire to encourage local community commemoration events, the legion developed 'community toolkits'. Taking their inspiration from the 'Pals Battalions', the community toolkits were ordered by five thousand communities who took part in events, and an additional five thousand were downloaded online for communities to use in their own local commemorations. The legion also provided a specific programme of Somme 100 remembrance events at the NMA, from trench experiences to daily remembrance services. The events attracted 48,220 visitors. To mark the suspension of professional sport in 1915, and to commemorate the service and sacrifice of sporting battalions during the Somme, the legion created the Sport Remembers programme, which encouraged sports clubs to remember their own contribution. Sport Remembers was supported by nearly every main sports association and governing body in the UK, as well as by sporting clubs and high-profile athletes.

The RBL continued to play a central role in all public remembrance ceremonies. On 1 July 2016, at an event at the Thiepval Memorial on the Somme, the RBL were centre stage at the service of remembrance, attended by ten thousand people, including members of the royal family, the then prime minister David Cameron, and the archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. In 2017, to commemorate the centenary of the Battle of Passchendaele (also known as the Third Battle of Ypres), the RBL once again partnered with its ambassador, Dan Snow, in creating a series of immersive virtual reality (VR) videos about the First World War, from the experiences of front-line

soldiers through to nurses treating the wounded. Pensioners from the Royal Hospital Chelsea participated in the launch of the videos, with footage being shown in the market square in Ypres and at the special exhibition in the build-up to the Passchendaele 100 national commemorative events. The legion also distributed more than a thousand cardboard VR headsets to schools and community groups across England, Scotland and Wales, reporting that their *Passchendaele 100* videos had been watched more than 800,000 times by 2019. In July 2017, the legion returned to the National Memorial Arboretum to host the Women at War 100 event. This brought together more than a thousand serving and veteran women to celebrate one hundred years of women's contributions to the British Armed Forces since 1917, the year when the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) became their first all-female unit. The RBL recorded that the event was reported across national media and reached seventy regional TV stations and sixty-eight regional radio stations.[15]

In 2018, the RBL marked the centenary of the armistices with its 'Thank You' movement. Taking place throughout the year, the movement 'focused on bringing people together locally and nationally to say Thank You to the First World War generation, and all who served, sacrificed, and changed our world'. Launched on 3 August 2018, the 'Thank You' programme was based around an installation on London's South Bank. Members of the public were invited to write their messages of thanks to the First World War generation directly onto an original piece of art by Sarah Arnett depicting the six themes of Thank You through historical images. This was followed by a tour of five British cities – Birmingham, Dundee, Belfast, Liverpool and Swansea. Approximately ten thousand messages were written over the duration of the tour, and the artwork was subsequently exhibited at Longleat House and at the NMA. A centenary 'Thank You' field was also planted at the NMA using Thank You messages submitted from 45,000 legion supporters.[16]

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) was established in May 1917 by a Royal Charter. It continues to work on behalf of the governments of Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom. It maintains 23,000 sites in 150 countries, including 2,000 'constructed' war cemeteries. The CWGC is not one of the forty-two organisations who work with the DCMS. It is funded by the member governments of the Commonwealth nations who share the cost of the commission's work according to the proportion of each country's war graves. In 2019/20, for

example, the UK government contributed most of the CWGC's funding (78.43%), followed by Canada (10.07%), Australia (6.05%), New Zealand (2.14%), South Africa (2.11%) and India (1.20%).[17] While Clare Horton, the director general of the CWGC has said that the commission 'should not define itself solely on anniversaries', it has already published its strategy for its plans relating to the centenary of the Second World War – *Strategy Towards 2039*.[18]

The centenary period saw the CWGC become much more public facing. Ahead of the Passchendaele commemorative programme the commission opened its Ieper Information Centre in May 2017. Situated in close proximity to the Menin Gate, it provided further details for visitors to the battlefield areas. It also provided opportunities for visitors to purchase souvenirs and wreaths to place at memorials.[19] In June 2019 the commission opened the CWGC Experience – a visitors' centre at Beaurains, near Arras, France, which allowed people to see behind the scenes of the commission's work. As well as the history of the commission, visitors can learn about the process of finding, recovering and burying the dead as well as the methods of identification, and watch the commission's craftsmen at work. Entry to the CWGC Experience is free, and visitors can access a free audio guide that walks them through every aspect of the work undertaken by the commission.[20] While these facilities were closed during the Covid pandemic that started in March 2020, by April the CWGC had recommenced its outreach work by producing its own podcast series.[21]

The centenary period gave the commission greater opportunities to engage in conversations with the general public about its work. For example, the commission's use of social media and more traditional forms of interaction, such as providing talks and tours to groups, also sought to emphasise its work in the UK. In 2014, the commission began to erect green signs to signpost the public towards local war graves found in churches and civilian cemeteries. After the centenary, volunteers were recruited by the CWGC, with an online portal for voluntary roles released in October 2020. This formed part of the 'Eyes On, Hands On' project for war graves based in the United Kingdom. Volunteers are asked to photograph and lightly clean headstones, providing some upkeep of the graves in between formal visits by commission staff.[22]

Behind the scenes, work was being done to review historical inequalities in commemoration. In December 2019, the commissioners of the CWGC elected to appoint a committee of independent experts and community representatives to 'analyse the historical actions of the CWGC within a global context to identify and, wherever possible, correct any gaps in commemoration', and to produce recommendations that could help to shape the future work of the CWGC. The committee was asked to be impartial,

and to report the facts objectively, however uncomfortable they might be. Sir Tim Hitchens, a CWGC commissioner, was appointed as the special committee's chair.[23] The Non-Commemoration Project started in 2021 – a five-year plan of work and research to address historical inequalities after the world wars. The commission continues to work with architects and heritage professionals to ensure that all those from the Commonwealth who lost their lives in either of the world wars are remembered equally. The creative advisor is the award-winning architect Sir David Adjaye, and the advisory panel comprises twelve experienced academics, historians, writers and military personnel.[24] Annual reports and regular updates on the Non-Commemoration project are published on the CWGC website.[25]

The British Broadcasting Corporation

The BBC, as the national broadcaster, had a leading role in Britain's centenary commemorations. In October 2013, the corporation announced an unprecedented broadcasting project in its commemoration of the First World War: 2,500 hours of programming across all platforms, to be transmitted throughout 2014–18. One historian asserted that

> this self-billed "4-year-season" is far more than the BBC's fulfilment of its Public Service Broadcasting charter in the Reithian sense of informing, educating and entertaining. Coming as it did after a tumultuous period of crisis when trust in the BBC had been quantified as declining, and when the corporation remained under extended assault from the competing media that have proliferated in the digital era, the commemorative season was seen as the BBC's attempt to bolster and secure its own place as a repository for public history and public memory.[26]

It is indeed pertinent to consider how the commemoration of events key to national identity are 'filtered through broadcaster's preconceptions of audience preferences and their own institutional identities'.[27]

Before the centenary it was suggested that the BBC's four-year-long project was excessive, and that the commemoration would be longer than the war itself. It was also suggested that the BBC would be comfortable doing what it does best because 'war [is] its safe zone'.[28] Nevertheless, television is still the site where the two Western fronts – one of literature and popular culture, and the other of history – continue to clash.[29] While new programmes are made it remains that televisual output about the First World War still refers back to images and ideas which resonate with the accepted stories of the conflict. Since the 1960s British television programmes about 1914–18 have largely been produced, broadcast and received as memorials,

small screen alternatives to stone and bronze.[30] From the landmark epic series *The Great War* (BBC, 1964), British television programmes have continued to be made and broadcast to mark various anniversaries of the war, and the act of making and watching a programme about the conflict is an act of remembrance in its own right. This commemorative impulse – the visceral need to remember the war at significant points in time – means that small-screen representations of the conflict are expressions of grief and consolation that continue to utilise established tropes of remembrance in their visual, aural and historiographical design. The scale of the BBC's commemorative season represented the creation of a new archive of programmes. There were documentaries, debates, dramas, children's programmes, radio series, special editions, commemorative ceremonies, and regional content.

The flagship series of the BBC's commemorative programme was *Britain's Great War*, a four-part series presented by Jeremy Paxman, broadcast in a prime-time slot in January 2014. A BBC press release in October 2013 underlined that the aim of the series was to explore 'how Britain and the lives of British people were transformed by the Great War'. It was designed to attract attention in its content and telling: the emphasis on Britain, *our* story, a story for all our ancestors. Most notably this series showed how television continues to be consumed as a form of public history.[31] The use of Paxman in presenter-mode delivers a 'knowledge brand' – where persona and authority converge to create a particular style of delivery and sense of authorship.[32] The occasional pronouncement from the cantankerous former *Newsnight* anchor, such as his assertion that conscientious objectors were 'cranks', gained for the series additional and predictable attention in the press; one reviewer said that Paxman 'goes over the top more than the infantry' and described the series as 'a theatrical documentary'.[33] However, the series received largely positive reviews. The reviewer for the *Spectator* went further, underlining that

> a retrospective of the First World War is not about these people a century ago, but about us. . . . I can't speak for everyone who'll watch this documentary, so I can only say how I felt – a complicated mixture of horror, sadness and. . . , yes, some excitement. There was something galvanising in the air. Might this have been what at first stirred so many people to answer the call to arms? Surely this early exhilaration cannot be a total mystery to us, even from our comfortable twenty-first-century perches?[34]

In its title, *Britain's Great War* references the BBC's 1964 landmark series *The Great War*, and it is unsurprising that the BBC is once again showing the established national televisual memorial. As a precursor to this, the BBC released extended versions of the veterans' interviews filmed for the original series, titled *The Great War Interviews*. This asserts the veterans' testimonies

as *the* oral history of the conflict, especially given that the last surviving veteran of the war, Harry Patch, died in 2009. This also places the BBC in the role of custodian for this valuable firsthand material: television has preserved the veterans for posterity, and the authority of the voices of what one historian called 'the nation's grandparents' is still a powerful force weighted with the authority of men who actually witnessed the war.[35] British history documentaries are different to those shown on the Continent, which are more likely to feature a small group of historians discussing a subject round a table in a studio. This historian-focused format was attempted in *The Pity of War* (BBC, 2014), presented by Professor Niall Ferguson. Ferguson argued that Britain's decision to enter the war was a tragic error, and during the final thirty minutes of the programme he debates these views with some leading First World War historians. Viewers then had the opportunity to interact with the debate via a live blog which ran before, during and after the broadcast, and the audience could join the conversation and voice their opinions on Twitter in real time. This demonstrated how television as public history has, with the help of contemporary social media, started to move towards a less demotic and more democratic model.

A significant number of television dramas and adaptations were broadcast in the run up to the centenary. Various dramatic series such as *The Village* (ITV, 2012), *Downton Abbey* (ITV, 2011–2015) and *Peaky Blinders* (BBC, 2013) featured wartime storylines that resonated with the established themes of loss, futility and trauma. There have also been series that have focused on the war itself. The BBC's *37 Days* (BBC, 2014) was reviewed as 'a political thriller that grippingly uncovers the countdown to war'[36] and *The Wipers Times* (BBC, 2013) was described as 'funny, sad and peculiarly British'.[37] Literature continued to take a leading role in televisual representations of the First World War. Dramatic adaptations of novels such as *Birdsong* (BBC, 2011) and *Parade's End* (BBC, 2012) have been well received, and *The Crimson Field* (ITV, 2014), a drama about nursing staff at a field hospital in Belgium during 1915, foregrounded a more female perspective. However, with their emphasis on grief and trauma, these programmes continue to feed Britain's long-held modern memory of the First World War in terms of loss and futility.

According to the First World War Tracker findings in 2016, people wanted to hear more about the First World War centenary publicly, and felt they had heard less than in 2014. The report by British Future found that, in 2016, people tended to hear about the centenary predominantly from TV and radio. By the end of the commemorations, expectations were better met and the public felt they had heard about the right amount, particularly in the broadcast media. A majority of people in 2018 (56%) agreed that TV and radio coverage of the centenary had the right amount of publicity – an

indicator of the vast public appetite to learn more, given that the First World War centenary was the biggest 'season' of thematic coverage in the BBC's history.[38] By the end of 2018, most people had encountered it on their television (38%), with the BBC the most commonly cited (67%). Audiences reported that the tone of TV coverage was considered 'better' by the end of the centenary period, and the average score given in 2018 was 7.3, compared to 6.9 in 2016.[39]

The BBC 'wanted to bring the nation together' as part of the national commemorations to 'help create a national and international conversation about the First World War'. BBC Audiences tracked the viewers' and listeners' experiences over the centenary period, recording how many people 'consumed' BBC content, asking what they thought about the coverage overall, and 'looking at what effect it had had on their knowledge and views' about the 1914–18 war. They used media industry measurements, as well as carrying out nineteen individual surveys on a BBC audience panel between 2013 and 2019. They reported a 'very high awareness' of the BBC's output, and there was wide consumption of the content across the centenary years, with engagement spiking in 2014 and 2018. BBC coverage in 2014 established a high base of consumption, with over 80 per cent of consumers reporting they had come across some aspect of it. It was reported that the vast majority of those who had consumed some of their First World War coverage felt it had met or exceeded their expectations, and that it had 'captured the mood of the occasion'. The BBC found that awareness and engagement decreased in 2015, but coverage around key events in the following three years – such as the Easter Rising, the battles of Jutland, the Somme and Passchendaele, the Russian Revolution and the Armistice – saw figures increase for TV programmes and news coverage, particularly around the 'real world' commemorations and events covered on all BBC news outlets. There were also some strong listening figures from radio (national and local) and people visiting BBC facilities online.[40]

When audiences were asked in 2018 which BBC content they remember consuming from all the events covered during the centenary, the coverage of the Battle of the Somme and the annual Remembrance Day ceremonies were most regularly mentioned. The BBC believed that the 'wide range of formats, genres and platforms involved in our coverage also helped in reaching a broader demographic base beyond just existing history fans'. The corporation's research concluded that there was no 'fatigue' over the centenary, and that interest was maintained over the four years. The BBC coverage had 'had a real impact on the audience – imparting knowledge, changing perceptions, and encouraging people to explore further'. Many said they had learnt things that they had not known before across a range of subjects, and claimed that their understanding of the war and its causes

had increased over the four years from only 23 per cent in 2014 to 48 per cent in 2018. Programming that featured the lives of 'everyday people' was particularly popular with audiences, and the season felt 'personally relevant to them, and made them appreciate the sacrifices that had been made by previous generations'. Overall, the BBC stated that 'the most encouraging aspect of the audience response was that it showed the continued ability of the BBC, in an increasingly fragmented media environment, to bring together a wide cross-section of the UK around a shared sense of a national event of this type'. The BBC continued to feel 'uniquely placed to do this, with our wide range of platforms and services and our broad audience footprint', and that their apparently successful engagement with audiences through 2014–18 'bodes well for future events of this type', such as future commemorations of the Second World War.[41]

14–18 NOW

After television, the second most popular way people heard about the centenary was through word of mouth (19%), not newspapers or radio. More people also encountered the centenary at public events than they had in previous years. The public responded positively to the tone of these events, rating them eight out of ten. For organisations that sought to engage the public with the centenary, this story of participation and engagement is encouraging. There was also a subtle shift away from traditional media sources, such as newspapers, from 2014 to 2018, as more people were learning about the centenary online. Online sources such as Facebook and other social media were mentioned more in 2018, when 23 per cent of those who heard about the centenary online said they did so through Facebook – higher than the 16 per cent who said they had encountered the centenary on news websites. Across different platforms most people rated the tone of information they received about the centenary more highly in 2018 than in 2016 or 2014.[42]

Many of Britain's national commemorative activities for the centenary of the First World War were performance-based artworks designed with public mass participation as their defining characteristic. Despite earlier anxieties about 'triumphalism' and militaristic overtones in the pre-centenary planning period, it was evident that the most impactful public commemorative events were not the state-led official ceremonies, nor works informed by leading historians, but those that reframed commemorative practice by producing artistic works to create new forms of performative public remembrance rituals. The principal organiser of these events was '14–18 NOW'. Launched in 2013, it was established as an independent organisation with

a brief to create a cultural programme as a complement to the more formal centenary commemorations. With £10 million funding from the National Lottery, its programme focused on three main 'seasons' in 2014, 2016 and 2018, with the Poppies tour and occasional commissions in between.[43] Further financial support was provided by Arts Council England, together with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and supported by a myriad of individuals, businesses and trusts. Artists were given access to the archives and historians of the Imperial War Museum 'to open new avenues of enquiry and [add] depth to their research'. According to Jenny Waldman, the director of 14–18 NOW, the name 14–18 NOW was chosen to reflect how the impact of the First World War continues to be felt in the twenty-first century.[44] Waldman underlined that they wanted to generate large-scale, ambitious ideas that would 'engage hearts as well as minds'. She wrote that 'art packs an emotional punch, and has proved to be a power-ful tool to connect us with our shared history and heritage'. The aim was to reach young audiences as Waldman believed that they 'feel distant from formal centenary commemorations and from the war itself'.[45] 14–18 NOW originally aimed to reach 10 million people but far exceeded that audience. The organisation's own data on impact states that it engaged over 35 million people with the centenary of the First World War, including 8 million young people. It worked with 420 artists from forty countries to produce artworks of all kinds – including visual arts, theatre, literature, dance, music, film, digital, and outdoor arts – in 220 locations, connecting with 600 arts, heri-tage and community organisations across the United Kingdom.[46]

The dominance of the arts, particularly poetry, was evident throughout the centenary and in the work of 14–18 NOW. Many of those involved in the commemorations felt that this was entirely appropriate for the British commemorations of a war that 'is known more through the poetry and the art that it generated than through the writing of historians'.[47] In the opening of her introduction to the book produced by the organisation, Waldman refers to the poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, and to work of the artist Paul Nash. In her introduction, Professor Margaret MacMillan stated that as British artists 'were deeply involved in the First World War' as combatants, supporters and critics, it was 'both inspired and right' that contemporary artists were called upon to help audiences understand the war today.[48] The film director Danny Boyle, the artistic director of the UK-wide commemoration of the armistice *Pages of the Sea*, was inspired by Rudyard Kipling's poem 'My Boy Jack', written in 1917 in response to the losses at the Battle of Jutland: 'Have you news of my boy Jack? / Not this tide'. Boyle felt that the poem 'has come to represent . . . our own feelings about the millions of unknown soldiers lost to history'.[49] Boyle was partic-ularly taken with the idea that Wilfred Owen swam at Folkestone beach the

Figure 2.1. Pages of the Sea. Image courtesy of Helen E.M. Brooks, reproduced with permission.

day before he left for France for the last time in 1918. He felt that Owen and the other war poets 'brought the war home in a way that the newspapers and newsreels could not'. Boyle and 14–18 NOW asked the poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy to write a new poem to mark the event. The closing line of Duffy's poem – 'Your faces drowning in the pages of the sea' – gave the title of the project. Boyle stated that he liked to think that Wilfred Owen would have been pleased with the simplicity and beauty of what she wrote.[50]

However, 14–18 NOW stated that they aimed to remind people of the past 'without trying to recreate it or impose a false nostalgia'.[51] MacMillan conceded that marking the 100th anniversary of the First World War was always going to be difficult as we 'still cannot agree on how it started or why it went on for so long, and we still debate its meaning and its legacy a century later'.[52] She highlighted the difficulties of marking the anniversaries of great events as '[t]he greater the consequences or the horror, the more difficult it becomes'.[53] MacMillan underlined the dilemmas involved in deciding to bring contemporary 'concerns and preoccupations as we try to grasp the meaning of past events? And, after all, who are "we"?'[54] She stated that governments may want to 'tidy up the past and impose a single unified version of what happened back then . . . But there can be no one view. Women, men, diverse ethnic groups, religions [and] social classes start from different viewpoints, and what they see in the past may be guided

by that'.[55] MacMillan believed that 14–18 NOW reminded audiences of 'the complexity of the war's impact without imposing a single narrative. . . . it's many and varied projects opened up the possibility of many stories and many ways of reacting to the past. It was left to each of us how we wanted to think and feel about the war'. MacMillan acknowledged that 'contemporary concerns and issues . . . were very much part of the enterprise'.[56]

Politics and Transculturalism

In March 2019, Dr Andrew Murrison MP, the prime minister's special representative for the Commemoration of the Centenary of the First World War, reported to the DCMS Select Committee inquiry into the Centenary of the Great War. His evidence highlighted the work of the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government in 'exploring the part played by soldiers and workers from around the world'. Referring to the reports published by the think tank British Future, the evidence suggested that the centenary had 'improved the British public's appreciation of the contribution to the war effort of people from outside the UK'. Murrison stated that substantial pieces of work such as MHCLG's 'The Unremembered' and 'No Barriers', together with the promotion of figures like Lieutenant Walter Tull, 'have helped people who might previously have thought that they and their antecedents had little or no equity in the Great War and their neighbours to think again'. Murrison credited funding from the National Lottery, which 'enabled alternative views to be expressed', and stated that the structure of UK lottery funding was 'a significant strength in securing the reach and scope of this centenary'.[57]

Margaret MacMillan highlighted that 14–18 NOW did much to remind the British that the First World War as a truly global event.[58] She cited works such as The Indian Garden painted in Bradford by Imran Qureshi, performances by the Orchestra of Syrian Musicians, the installation *Dr Blighty* featuring Indian soldiers convalescing in Brighton, and the play *SS Mendi: Dancing the Death Drill* by Fred Khumalo and Isango Ensemble from South Africa, who told of their compatriots who died at sea on their way to the battlefields. Other works included William Kentridge's multimedia *The Head & the Load*, a tribute to the millions of African men and women who carried supplies for the fighting between Britain, France and Germany in Africa. Akram Khan's *XENOS* was a reimagination of the Prometheus story where an Indian dancer-turned-soldier takes the audience on 'a dream-like journey into the mind of a man scarred by his experiences of combat, in which physical and psychological punishment is meted out on him as an individual for mankind's collective decision to create such a war'.[59]

Sabine Sörgel has noted that 'transcultural memories' evoked by the poppy, the rope or the shadow of an African carrier are suggestive of the way remembrance leans on 'multidirectional historical awareness and knowledge', and these tropes of memory were mobilized as political performance in the context of national centenary celebrations of the First World War.[60] Olusoga described 14–18 NOW's 'desire to paint a fuller, more inclusive and more honest picture of the conflict' was working towards 'historical recovery' where 'the struggle to salvage lost experiences and find missing voices found greater energy and urgency during the centenary'. Artists, he argued, have played a key role in the reframing of the war, and in the efforts to recover lost voices. While much of the work was done by historians and those working in the heritage sector, artists working in different mediums and new artistic forms began to fill in the gaps in the cultural memory of the conflict, 're-globalising our understanding of the first global war'.[61]

Akram Khan's *XENOS* was one of many dance pieces commissioned by 14–18 NOW. Featured in the 2018 season, the main run was presented at Sadler's Wells theatre, London. Adding weight to the production was the fact that *XENOS* was billed as Khan's final solo work before his retirement as a principal dancer. In discussion with 14–18 NOW, Khan and his collaborators spoke about how often similarities are drawn between the First World War and Greek mythology. Khan was taken by the Prometheus story – the idea of men and gods making the same mistakes, trapped in eternal torment after Prometheus formed man from clay and was punished by the Gods for stealing fire. The work developed with the title as *XENOS*, a Greek word meaning stranger or foreigner, to explore the experiences of 1.3 million Indian soldiers, whom Khan felt had been neglected by history as their experiences 'had not been taught in school'. He recalled that the fact that these men had been 'plucked from their homes in India to take part in a war on foreign soil for a country that they knew nothing about really struck us. How strange the experience, the countryside and the treatment of them must have been. But also the way that these men were viewed as strangers, and treated differently to the other British men taking part in the conflict'. Khan, as a man of Bangladeshi origin, felt that the subject matter was 'extremely close' to him and his heritage. The work throughout is a dialogue between classical Indian and modern representations as Khan felt 'a strong desire to meld the historical with the contemporary'. Although Khan and his company started this piece of work as 'an examination of the past, it became obvious that the themes we were exploring remained hugely relevant . . . Whether we're white, black or brown, we all know what it means to be a stranger because we're all, to a certain extent, powerless as citizens because of the actions of the government of the time'.[62]

XENOS opens with Khan showing his life as a court dancer before he is drawn into service as a soldier on the Western Front. The choreography references the traditional Kathak, a form of dance that is associated with the sacred and spiritual, and also with storytelling.[63] A large crackling gramophone intones the names of Indian soldiers, stating their civilian occupations before the war – 'Teacher. Engineer. Dancer' – and of what they endured during it: 'I put down telephone cables in the mud,' says one man. 'Voices in the mud. Half of them already dead, sir.' The phrase 'already dead' repeats, a juddering stuck record. A steep slope ran the length of the stage, spattered with mud and earth, representing the bottom of a dugout or shell crater.

Chairs were attached to ropes, cluttering the stage in the opening scene, and were gradually pulled over the top to an imagined No Man's Land beyond. Khan's soldier heaved desperately on the cords to keep them back, keep them safe. At one point, he stands on the slope's ridge exposing himself to enemy gunfire. The very low lighting suggested night-blindness, and as a tangle of hanging light bulbs fused, the gramophone turned into a searchlight. The sound effects included shouts and echoes of war, from a parade-ground drill to a sergeant major's whistle. The drumming and use of *konnakol* – a type of vocal percussion associated with South Indian Carnatic music – conjured artillery fire and rain on duckboards. One reviewer described the stage scene as 'a slice of a Paul Nash landscape', and said that Khan communicated 'a quiet respect for the soldiers whose bodies were maimed and made less than whole by the war'.[64]

For dance scholars, *XENOS* addressed the question posed by Susan Manning, Janice Ross and Rebecca Schneider as to how archives constructed by spectators from dominant cultures might reveal the embodiment of dancers from subordinated cultures.[65] Royona Mitra argued that in utilising state-sponsored commemorative art to rewrite the received histories of the First World War, *XENOS* evaded the conventions of historical fiction and re-enactments in order to give life to the voices of Indian colonial soldiers. Mitra argues *XENOS* performs historiography itself by using the embodied medium of dance to foreground the 'bodily archives' of Indian colonial soldiers from the First World War. Mitra asks 'if such transtemporal unearthing of these people from the depths of histories is a rewriting of archives themselves? And if so, how might we reframe the intangibility of their repertoires in this process?' *XENOS*, she argues, becomes a 'fracture between generations and their shared trauma, between erasure and agency, between fact and fiction, between pre-war and post-war, and between life and death'.[66] Historians, however, remained silent on many of the works such as *XENOS*. Indeed, few historians provided any commentary or analysis on most commissioned pieces from 14–18 NOW, apart from those who work regularly with the media and are active on social media.

Storytelling: Art as Counter-Monument and Anti-Monument

Re-creating wartime narratives through storytelling was a theme of the 14–18 NOW programme. Kate Pullinger and Neil Bartlett's *Letter to an Unknown Soldier* (2014), for example, responded to The Great Western Railway War Memorial at Paddington Station, London, where a soldier is depicted reading a letter. Participants were invited to submit letters written for a fallen soldier – as embodied in the memorial – which were then published online. Peter Jackson's *They Shall Not Grow Old* (2018), a colourised and digitally enhanced documentary film based on footage sourced from the Imperial War Museum archives, is another example of retelling wartime stories. Jackson 'employed modern technology to rework footage from the Great War, removing all the jerky movements and graininess that so distances us from the people depicted there'. Waldman stated that the director wanted to 'bring the First World War alive for fifteen year olds'.[67]

Director Peter Jackson was commissioned by 14–18 NOW, in association with the BBC, to produce a film to mark the centenary of the Great War. Jackson was keen to be involved in the project as his paternal grandfather had fought in the conflict. The director developed the stories of those who there from the archives of the Imperial War Museum, concentrating on the everyday experiences of those men – how they ate, rested, and managed their time between fighting and other duties – and creating his own narratives about their attitudes to the war. Jackson's New Zealand-based production team used new post-production techniques to transform audio and moving image footage of troops filmed during the war. Taken from the archives of the Imperial War Museum, the footage was 3D-digitised, each frame hand-colourised and digitally restored to give the men voices and a representation appearing more lifelike for viewers. An important element of this was Jackson's alteration of the film's pace. The original film footage would have been shot at 10–18 frames per second, which when projected at the modern speed of 24 frames per second makes the movement of the figures on screen fast and jerky. The technicians behind *They Shall Not Grow Old* built and inserted interstitial frames to give the moving images a smoother, more natural movement. This is the updated, smoother equivalent of the 'step-printing' process the BBC used for many of these scenes in *The Great War* series, first broadcast in 1964.[68] The unfettered and enhanced access to the hyper-realistic sights and sounds of the Western Front was the defining feature of the reception of *They Shall Not Grow Old*. Mark Kermode, *The Guardian* film critic, for example, described the film's 'revivification' of archive footage as 'breathtaking', and the ways in which the film used the words of the men as 'arresting'. He saw the absence of historians, narrators, and political commentators as an entirely good thing.[69] The film

critic of *The New Yorker* concurred that the 'vocal witnessing' of the soldiers was 'strikingly beautiful' and that it was 'blessedly free' of the 'sapient sounds' of contemporary talking heads.[70]

The film was premiered at the British Film Institute on 16 October 2018, and shown the following month on Armistice Day at 9pm on BBC2. It was distributed in America not on general release but on a limited release, being shown at a series of single screenings from mid-December and on theatrical release by Warner Bros. from February 2019. Jackson did not receive a fee for his work on the project, despite his technical team working on approximately 100 hours of archive film to help to improve the Imperial War Museum's holdings.[71] However, many historians are unhappy with *They Shall Not Grow Old*. In a blogpost for the International Association for Media and History, expert film historian Lawrence Napper wrote that the 'publicity hype' around the film, and 'so sacred is the cow of the Great War in its centenary moment' that few people have noticed or commented on 'how horribly distorted and ludicrous Jackson's tarted-up images look'.[72] Napper was not alone. Jonathan Romney described the technical effects as creating 'hologram ghosts' who have been 'summoned from the past . . . in an usually unsettling, somehow improper-seeming way'. It is the sound that he found most affecting, the film becoming 'a séance, a conjuring of the speaking dead'.[73] With reference to Jackson's earlier work on the film series *Lord of the Rings*, Pamela Hutchinson referred to the soldiers of *They Shall Not Grow Old* as 'an army of Gollums' who were 'not wearied by age . . . but certainly condemned by technology'.[74]

Owing to its success at the box office, *They Shall Not Grow Old* was distributed on DVD on 10 December 2018, and it is now available on various streaming services globally.[75] The film has been a commercial success generating more than $20 million in revenue. Following the success of the film, 14–18 NOW and the Imperial War Museum agreed that a £2.5 million share of the film's royalties would be used to establish the 14–18 Now IWM Legacy Fund, a scheme to support a new programme of twenty-two artist commissions to be shown from 2022.[76] The centenary of the First World War, and perhaps the commercial success of Jackson's *They Shall Not Grow Old* may well have encouraged the production of more films about the conflict. In June 2018, British director Sam Mendes announced he was making the feature film *1917*. The storyline was said to be partially based on the wartime stories of Mendes' paternal grandfather, a Trinidadian who had served as a messenger for the British Army on the Western Front.[77] Released in December 2019, the resulting film went on to be a critical and commercial success, winning three Oscars and two Gloden Globe awards. Similarly successful was the third adaptation of Eric Maria Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Released in October 2022, the

German-language production had been in discussions among writers and producers since 2006, sometime before the centenary. Production started in 2021, and it could be argued that the cinema successes of *They Shall Not Grow Old* and *1917* meant that audiences had been primed for large-scale war films, particularly in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Participation and Voluntarism

Many of the artworks commissioned by 14–18 NOW used participatory methods, and networked technologies were utilised to create experiential memorials. They resisted the monumental tendencies of early and mid-twentieth century war memorials, and in doing so assert a contemporary and inclusive tone. A key property of this counter-memorial aesthetic is that of negation, or negative space: monolithic stone structures replaced by open spaces, light projections and performances; the specificity of inscribed names and heroic statues replaced by open-ended, co-creative frameworks; permanence and substance replaced by the ephemeral and embodied.[78] In partnership with the Royal British Legion, *Lights Out* (2014) encouraged around 16 million people in the UK to switch off their lights between 10 and 11 p.m., leaving a single candle burning, to mark the outbreak of the First World War. Artists Ryoji Ikeda, Nalini Malani, Bob and Roberta Smith and Bedwyr Williams created light sculptures across the country for the event, and Jeremy Deller designed a free app, which featured four short films that self-erased at 11 p.m. on 4 August 2014.

Another 14–18 NOW commissioned work, which has been described as an 'anti-memorial', is Chloe Dewes Matthews' photographic series *Shot at Dawn* (2014). Co-commissioned by the Ruskin School of Art at the University of Oxford, and exhibited as part of Tate Modern's *Conflict, Time, Photography* exhibition in 2014, the series features twenty-three photographs taken at dawn at the location of a military execution for cowardice or desertion suffered by British, Irish, Belgian, French, French-African and Commonwealth soldiers. Approximately one thousand men from European armies were executed by firing squad between 1914 and 1918, and the selection of subjects from diverse backgrounds has been designed to draw attention to the inequities of court-martial sentencing. Dewe Mathews worked to re-establish the connection between the place and the people who died there. The labels that accompany the photographs name the men shot and state the date and location of their execution. 'Shot at Dawn' demonstrates the extent to which these forgotten landscapes have changed since the war years. The locations of military executions are not heritage

sites. As Dewe Mathews herself remarks, they have become slag-heaps, schools and abattoirs. Conversely, the named battlefields upon which soldiers fought and were killed in the First World War remain protected spaces. The images feature wheelie bins, plastic buckets and graffitied walls, as well as modern architecture. These are images of the present rather than the past, and 'they attest, as all testimony does, to the crisis of history and its failure to account for traumatic and politically contested events'.[79]

In his evidence reported to the DCMS Select Committee inquiry into the Centenary of the Great War in March 2019, Andrew Murrison believed most people in the UK had experienced the centenary commemorations via the broadcast media, however this was not the case. As the statistics from 14–18 NOW have shown, 35 million people witnessed the commemorative artworks during the centenary.[80] No television or radio broadcast could hope to achieve a fraction of that audience number.[81] It was what Murrison described as 'coming together moments' – the mass participation centenary events at little or no cost to the participants, such as the RBL's *Lights Out* (August 2014), the Somme 100 events at Heaton Park Manchester (July 2016) that drew people's attention, along with 'creations' like *We're Here Because We're Here* and *Pages of the Sea*.[82] Murrison identified that the production and reception of these events was unique to the United Kingdom. Of the centenary's enduring impact, Murrison added that 'the habit of volunteering' that the commemorations have imbued was notable 'in hard-to-reach areas and those where culture and the arts in a traditional sense have not permeated particularly well in the past'.[83] Evidence provided by the NLHF to the DCMS Select Committee inquiry stated that volunteers were involved in 90 per cent of projects. Their data showed that over twenty-six thousand volunteers provided an estimated 241,000 days of their time.[84]

Many artworks commissioned for the centenary period give insight into the ways in which amateurism is conceived in contemporary cultural practice, and how amateurs contribute to the broad landscape of theatre-making. Many performances illustrated the resurgence of interest in the amateur and amateurism, and harnessed their affective power for Britain's centenary commemorations.[85] Some events required very little effort on the part of the participants. At 10 p.m. on 4 August 2014, 16 million British people turned off their lights for an hour to mark the 100th anniversary of Britain's declaration of war on Germany as part of the 14–18 NOW commemoration *Lights Out*. This simple act of commemoration was, in Margaret MacMillan's opinion, 'a moment to wonder what we would do if our world was suddenly turned upside down'.[86] There were several notable performance pieces that placed volunteers at the heart of the work. For the Somme 100 commemorations at Heaton Park in Manchester, the artistic director Alan Lane and

choreographers Lucy Hind and Dan Watson called for volunteers to form a new dance troupe, *The Somme 100 Pals*. With a clear wartime reference to the volunteers who served in units formed from their existing communities, men and women aged over eighteen were invited to apply to appear in the performance via an online form. No previous dance experience was required, and YouTube videos were posted on Facebook to enable people to learn the choreography ahead of rehearsals. The performance was coordinated by the Slung Low Theatre Company, who specialise in site-specific productions involving volunteers from a wide range of communities.[87] For the open-air performance on the evening of 1 July, approximately 350 volunteers danced in the form of a 'flash mob', having been seated among the nineteen thousand members of the audience before following the lead of their dance captains when it was time for them to appear.[88] Lane said that the concert brought with it 'a huge sense of responsibility to both honour and respect what has gone before and the price paid by so many at that time, whilst also looking beyond the past to the future, and our hopes about what this might bring'.[89]

On the same day, a more secret performance piece was presented at railways stations across the UK. *We're Here Because We're Here* was commissioned by 14–18 NOW and created by the artist Jeremy Deller in collaboration with Rufus Norris, the artistic director of the National Theatre.[90] Professionally conceived, it involved fourteen hundred men between the ages of sixteen and fifty-two who volunteered to perform in this living memorial to the dead. All participants had been required to keep the artwork secret and to commit to extensive rehearsals with the National Theatre. The power of the performance was intended to be in its unexpected intervention into everyday contemporary life, with every uniformed man representing a 'real' soldier and invoking his 'real' death. Historian Margaret MacMillan noted that the impact of *We're Here Because We're Here* lay in the young men being 'among us but not part of our world . . . it was both moving and jolted all of us out of our daily preoccupations'.[91]

Spectacle and Social Media

Data analysis of Twitter activity across specific dates in the centenary shows that the social media platform, now known as X, was particularly effective in enabling the dissemination of images and ideas of commemorative activities. 14–18 NOW actively used Twitter to promote their artworks, particularly the visual public performances such as *We're Here Because We're Here* in July 2016, and *Pages of the Sea* in November 2018. Both events produced a spike in activity and engagement across all social

media platforms. The 14–18 NOW Twitter account tweeted forty-three times on Jeremy Deller's *We're Here Because We're Here*, sending 152 on the day after the piece had taken place. For Danny Boyle's *Pages of the Sea*, 14–18 NOW's account tweeted ninety-five posts, sending 1,881 tweets in the period immediately before and after the artworks had been created and viewed. With over 16,200 followers, the 14–18 NOW account was able to reach a considerable audience in a swift and accessible way.[92]

The visual power of many of the pieces commissioned and staged by 14–18 NOW and their partners lent themselves to extensive documentation on social media. The striking images of Paul Cummins' *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* at the Tower of London in August 2014 marked the beginning of the centenary, with 888,246 ceramic poppies filling the moat. Over 5 million people visited the poppies at the Tower before 14–18 NOW took the structural elements of the work on a tour of nineteen locations across the UK.[93] The images of First World War soldiers in full kit sitting among commuters on the London Underground, and in various other locations, were widely shared. The large-scale portraits crafted in the sand of thirty-two British beaches for *Pages of the Sea* also saturated social media feeds during and after the anniversary of the signing of the armistice. The *Pages of the Sea* Twitter feed was also filled with images taken by members of the public, where the hashtag #PagesOfTheSea was trending for some time over the Remembrance week period. On Armistice Day itself, the project's Twitter account urged people to 'join Danny Boyle and thousands of others to say thank you and goodbye to the millions who had left their shores. Be part of this unique moment, as communities gather on beaches to mark 100 years since Armistice and the end of the First World War'.[94] This 'unique moment' was seen by the majority to be 'breathtaking' and 'beautiful'.

Pages of the Sea was conceived by the film director Danny Boyle as an 'informal nationwide gesture of remembrance'. A large-scale portrait of a casualty from the war was drawn into the sand at low tide at each location, and washed away as the tide came in. Members of the public joined in by creating silhouettes of people in the sand, and in doing so it was intended that they would be remembering the millions of lives lost or affected by the conflict. Boyle underlined that the shoreline 'is a democratic space, where only the sea rules; at once a personal and public landscape'. He was keen that the artworks would encourage people to come together to commemorate 'without too much formal ceremony'.[95] Boyle wanted to encourage audiences to be able 'to imagine standing beside those young expectant folk who could not imagine what awaited them, and to say a final goodbye and an endless thank you'.[96] The legacy of the project is now a digital archive of photographs and time-lapse footage, mostly shot by remote-control

drones, which are housed on the 14–18 NOW website. The organisation has also created an online learning resource for children in primary schools.[97]

Boyle contacted the company Sand in Your Eye just seven weeks before Armistice Day. The lead artist Jamie Wardley said that he knew that *Pages of the Sea* was going to be 'one of the most complicated and ambitious projects we have ever embarked upon'. With six weeks to go, Wardley 'met the whole team in Folkstone for a test run and got Danny raking in the sand'. He highlighted that while 'Folkstone is a lovely seaside town' he found that 'its history is chilling. Hundreds of thousands of people departed for the front from here. There is a railway-like pier that they call the canteen, and this is where soldiers would get their last cup of tea before departing and, for many, never to return'. Wardley recalled that it quickly became evident that

> there was a mountain of challenges facing us. Firstly, we obviously could not be in twenty-eight locations all at once to draw in the sand. This meant that we would have to train teams who had never made sand drawings or worked on a beach before to be able to make a 30-metre drawing to a professional standard. Furthermore, the tide times across the UK are totally different, which meant that some of these teams would have to start in the dark. In November the days are short and cold, the beaches do not drain so well, and on top of that each beach is unique and has its own challenges and logistics.[98]

Wardley and his team trained forty individuals how to draw in the sand, and then taught a further team to create twenty-eight teams with over 160 people to draw in the sand on 11 November. They then designed the images for each location. Wardley underlined that the portraits 'were chosen by Danny and the 14–18 NOW team as a representation of the people of the UK as well as local connections'. He found that 'it was haunting how some of the faces we drew looked just like young boys, and [we were] learning about each person's life and history. Young lives cut short before their time'. They also made eight hundred stencils that were to be distributed to each site 'for the public to use to make life-sized silhouettes of service people on the beach so that they could connect with people of the past and be part of the artwork'. By 10 November the teams had their equipment, and they had practised on their beaches.[99] The plans for *Pages of the Sea* were kept secret until just before Armistice Day. This gave members of the public enough notice to locate their nearest event and to contemplate taking part in creating their own commemorative portraits in the sand.[100]

Those who attended the *Pages of the Sea* event were also quick to contextualise the act of commemoration with reference to other cultural outputs that were released at the same time. One was Peter Jackson's film *They Shall Not Grow Old*, which was screened on 11 November and was later described by someone who saw *Pages of the Sea* as 'one of the most remarkable things

I have seen on TV – what really works in that film is that the young men look and behave exactly like we do now'. Overall, he had 'no great interest in military memorials and parades but I thought the whole 14–18 cultural project worked extremely well in finding a human connection across the century. I would say the same about the *We're Here Because We're Here* event that Jeremy Deller directed, again presenting "ordinary lads" in uniform'. The wider context of emotion around the centenary of Armistice Day was well summed up by Jamie Wardley after his experiences of working on the project:

> This was not the war to end all wars as it was unfortunately followed by others. . . . I am in my late 30s and cannot conceive of Britain going to war with another European county. It seems evident that if we engage with other nations politically and socially in relationships then the conditions for war are much lessened. . . . What concerns me is that we are now in an age of emerging nationalism where countries are seeking to become more isolated. With isolation there is room for jealousy, misunderstandings, relentless greed and ultimately hostility. The conditions for war become more fertile. Let's hope that we can learn from the Pages of the Sea.[101]

It was intended that *Pages of the Sea* would leave no physical trace at each of the beach locations. The lead sand artists commented that their drawings 'only last for the time of the tides. The beach is a beautiful place and we cannot improve it. Our drawings only visit it as we do this earth. We try and live the best lives we can until it is our time. Life is precious, and for some so short'.[102] Laura Bissell argues that while shorelines provide sites for large- and small-scale acts of public remembering through the media of 'tidal choreographies', they are simultaneously acts of forgetting as the twice-daily tides cause inevitable erasure.[103]

In Britain, a number of communities witnessed the appearance of longer-lasting memorials. These came in the form of knitted or crochet poppies produced as alternative memorials in a practice that has become known as Yarn Bombing. This phenomenon has been defined as 'To cover or decorate a public object or monument with colourful knitted or crochet items and motifs, as a form of street art'. A 'Yarn Bomber' is also known as a 'graffiti knitter'.[104] Some academic work has been done on the wider subject of yarn bombing, linking it to a Do-It-Yourself culture which relies on digital communities of like-minded people in drawing attention to socially important issues, and Third-Wave Feminism.[105] The whimsical nature of yarn bombing has been seen to 'increase attentiveness to habitual worlds in a series of micro-political gestures'.[106] Sometimes referred to as 'yarn storming', the uses of traditionally feminine materials and craftwork has been understood as an antithesis to traditionally masculine forms of street art to wrap

hand-knitted forms of street art onto features of the urban landscape such as lamp-posts, railings and letterboxes.[107]

Knitted poppies appeared in various locations. In Folkestone, craft shop owner Di Burns led the town's crafters to make and install three thousand knitted poppies to decorate the railings along the Road of Remembrance.[108] With the local branch of the Royal British Legion, the Romney Marsh District Scouts ran a campaign to knit a curtain of knitted poppies to be displayed in local churches and at other venues for the Armistice 100 commemorations in November 2018. Under the tagline 'Remember, Respect, Reflect', the group used the social media platform Facebook to invite people to participate in creating at least five thousand poppies, to be knitted or crocheted, measuring 4–5 inches in diameter. A wreath of knitted poppies was laid at the Cenotaph on 11 November 2018 by the founder of the charity Woundcare4Heroes, using the sale of knitted poppies to raise funds for the care of wounded ex-service personnel.[109] The knitting of poppies as alternative memorials continued after the centenary period. For example, in Northamptonshire during the Covid-19 lockdown, a team of villagers knitted two thousand and seven hundred poppies to add to their war memorial at Gretton.[110]

Conclusion

The centenary of the First World War was marked by various organisations in both personal and universal terms. From an organisational perspective, surveys showed a lack of public awareness of the role that government departments had played within the wider remembrance commemorations nationally. In 2018, four in ten of those surveyed (38%) did not know who had led the centenary commemorations, with 26 per cent incorrectly believing it was the Royal British Legion, and only 6 per cent identifying the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.[111] For the Royal British Legion and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the centenary period gave them opportunities to highlight the long-standing record of work they continue to do, and to encourage them to consider how they can utilise new forms of social media to communicate to new generations about their permanent activities. It is to be expected that the BBC, as the national broadcaster, would capture a greater amount of public visibility. The centenary is the longest instance of the BBC's relationship with war and commemoration. It was intended from the outset to 'reach and engage as many people as possible, remembering those who died, broadening understanding of the war, offering fresh perspectives and original stories, and supporting artistic and cultural responses'.[112] However, despite

its attempts to present fresh perspectives on the war, recent studies have shown that the BBC's centenary programming continued to recycle old tropes and revisionist interpretations of the Great War. While the BBC did feature historians on some of their output, their comparatively diminutive involvement in the flagship programmes shows that any opportunities to challenge, change or inform the audience's perceptions of the conflict were missed. This resulted in the centenary coverage staying within the realms of social histories, reminiscent of the historiography of the 1960s and 1970s.[113]

The success of artistic commemorative works, such as Peter Jackson's *They Shall Not Grow Old*, shows the popularity of forms of remembrance created by the 'melding of art and heritage'.[114] In 2019, 14–18 NOW reported that their commemorative activities had complemented the ceremonies of the church, state and military. The organisation had done this by issuing 107 commissions, which produced 269 new artworks in 220 locations across the British Isles. These artworks were produced by 420 artists from forty countries, and with the help of 580 arts, heritage and community partners the organisation believed it had reached 35 million members of the public. *We're Here Because We're Here*, for example, was seen by 63 per cent of the population. The director of 14–18 NOW, Jenny Waldman, stated that they had created 'bold and revealing' artworks that had generated 'fresh perspectives' on the First World War.[115] However, the most successful acts of commemoration were by those who created public works of art that spoke to the emotional lives and experiences of individuals, and of loss. That the Battle of the Somme still holds as the ultimate British touchstone for the memory of 1914–18 is telling, as is the continued primacy of the poetry of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. This was exemplified by the image of Owen being etched on the sands of Folkestone on the centenary of the Armistice. Indeed, it was the experience of watching the poet's face being washed away by the sea that Damian Collins MP, chair of the DCMS Committee, cited as his most unforgettable moment of the commemorations.[116]

Many organisations such as the CWGC are already planning their programmes for the centenary of the Second World War in 2039–2045. They are taking lessons from the experiences of 2014–2018, taking forward what was learnt from the national commemorations of the First World War. Indeed, 14–18 NOW stated that for the next events of this kind, there should be more time given to planning a programme, incorporating sufficient space for the commissioning process, and for building relationships with artists and partners. The challenges and opportunities of the developing social media spaces should also be considered, particularly for the promotions of smaller, local projects.[117] Overall, the period of 2014–18 shows that while formal remembrance rituals and ceremonies will always play a part

in the commemorative calendar, and that historians will be called upon to comment on events, the most impactful commemorative activities were artistic, performative and spectacularly visual events that were both accessible and emotionally engaging. The centenary of the First World War has reframed the ways in which Britain will remember its past.

Notes

1. Sheffield, 'The Centenary of the First World War'.
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Museums and Heritage

Introduction

Museums and heritage organisations sat at the centre of the nation's commemoration of the First World War centenary, with many institutions – from large national museums to the smallest local group – curating displays related to the history and legacies of the conflict. As Damousi, Tout-Smith and Ziino have argued, museums acted as a key site 'from which to inscribe new meanings and narratives about the war, and ways that war and its long impacts can be imagined and understood'.[1] Whilst there were clearly dominant narratives that emerged from advance government planning for the centenary, the implementation of those plans and they ways in which the public interacted with them could often be diffuse. Nowhere is this clearer than in the ways that museums and heritage organisations at various levels attempted to interact with and illuminate national and local aspects of the war's legacy.

This chapter considers these interactions via a number of different case studies: the Imperial War Museum, local and regional museums, virtual exhibitions, and exhibitions focusing on the Indian Army in the First World War. Beginning at the level of the nation state, the chapter examines the ways in which large organisations such as the Imperial War Museum came to hold a key role within the centenary period, sometimes understood as central commemorative spaces that could help to set the national 'tone' for the centenary. However, as this volume and others have shown, the centenary had a large number of different stakeholders and audiences, often with varying interests and concerns, and thus these large, national institutions

did not completely dominate. The centenary was experienced by many in local and regional spaces, such as town and county museums, and in the virtual world via web-based projects and exhibitions.[2] As this chapter goes on to discuss, virtual sites of commemoration played a large role in the centenary, providing accessible spaces through which exhibitions could be curated and made visible online. Museums both large and small often held virtual exhibitions or used the internet for crowd-sourced history, as in the Imperial War Museum's 'Lives of the First World War' project, which provided a visitor-friendly home for family history and community research into the impact of the war on individual lives.[3] But while the online world has sometimes been seen to collapse and undermine local identity, visitors to many online exhibitions, in common with visitors to local and regional museums, were likely to encounter representations of the First World War that were overtly shaped by the experiences of those in a particular locale, even as these were placed within the wider history of the war. This history often extended beyond national borders, expanding and widening 'British' experience to include the war's multiple imperial legacies, detailed here through a comparative study of local and national representation of the Indian Army at war. Such narratives were incorporated, if imperfectly, within a variety of museum and heritage settings. To fully understand and appreciate the different ways that organisations looked to explore the conflict, it is necessary to begin with the institution that played perhaps the largest part in setting a national commemorative agenda.

The Imperial War Museums, London

The Imperial War Museums' (IWM) flagship site in Lambeth, London sat at the heart of the centenary in the United Kingdom from its inception, serving as the site for then prime minister David Cameron's speech announcing government support for commemorative events in October 2012. The museum sought to set the tone for the upcoming centenary, delivering new First World War galleries that were to open in July 2014.[4] This timing instigated the not insignificant challenge of having to pre-empt, or feasibly to fix, some core commemorative themes that could emerge over the course of the broader centenary period. It invited an accompanying risk that a cautious approach would not only date quickly, but any shortcomings would quickly attract negative publicity or public backlash. The establishment of an Academic Advisory Board became a key element in the galleries' planning, setting out how best to mine and integrate the latest historiography directly into the exhibition content. Likewise, the creation of text panels and object captions were helped by the involvement of a dedicated Youth Panel.

This curatorial anticipation, selecting which core topics and subjects from a multifaceted and global historical narrative might just bubble to the surface over a long-term anniversary period was, perhaps, one of the galleries' most impressive achievements. By the same token though, one cannot overlook that it also made certain omissions feel heightened. A braver stance on addressing contested narratives, such as the conflict's complex imperial dimensions, might have enhanced the result – but this is easy to posit retrospectively nearly a decade later.

A major strength of the galleries was the curatorial ability to draw upon a vast and rich in-house collection of contemporary objects, ranging across large pieces of hardware (including a tank and an aeroplane), weaponry, documents, medical equipment and uniforms. The overall number of items eventually displayed totalled around thirteen hundred. By integrating the accompanying text and historical narrative as an equal partner to these items, the displays sought to recontextualise and retell the causes, courses and consequences of the First World War. This objective was set out for an audience now beyond living memory of the conflict. The various sections were themed by events on the fighting fronts alongside the home front, with the latter showcasing the impact of the war on the British people. Prominence was given to lesser-explored themes, such as food and agriculture, the role of women in war, and industrial production. Other sections of the galleries utilised digital technologies for impact: one of the first displays encountered by visitors was a slow-motion audiovisual depiction of the brutal impact of artillery fire upon soldiers advancing across open ground. The design was intended to do more than simply illustrate the changing nature of open warfare and show visitors how the Western Front quickly became a war of attrition, with men living in a trench system designed, not always effectively, to protect them from the conflict's shells and machine guns. Rather, it drew on many visitors' understanding of the war as an emotionally engaging historical event dominated by the needless death of combatants, and it acted as a means for visually explaining how the network of underground trenches – now one of the most recognisable and iconic symbols of the First World War – first developed in 1914.[5]

A 2017 book chapter, co-authored by a 'Reflections on the Centenary' team member and an IWM curator-historian, explored the creative processes behind these galleries in greater detail than is possible here.[6] The authors argued that '[p]roducing galleries is an act of negotiating – in terms of simultaneously suppressing and empowering – a constrained, finite space made readable for public consumption'.[7] But the remit of this exhibition space went beyond a core museological purpose of purely conserving objects from the past. The IWM was originally established in 1917 as a site through which to record and memorialise the national and imperial

experience of war, and to act as 'a memorial which speaks to the heart and to the imagination'.[8] Being on display in this space meant that these objects bore a particular emotional and historical weight. They functioned as an element of the wider period of commemoration; one that, given the museum's history and status as a national site for representation, understanding and memorialisation of the war, had a particular power and status. Progressing through this emotional and sensory space sought to shape and enhance visitor understanding of the First World War, its impact and legacies, ahead of visitors engaging with other commemorative activities.

The principal strategy for visitor engagement was the use of individual testimony as authentic witness. Whilst not entirely novel or pioneering, the deploying of individual experience to encourage empathy among gallery visitors saw firsthand narratives grounded in the material of war, acting as a tangible and relatable means for visitors to situate themselves amidst the historical subject matter. Ingraining a more human-interest focused approach, alongside efforts to broaden its audience base, was a confident approach for an institution aware of the need to capitalise on the public interest that the centenary period generated. These learnings were incorporated into subsequent temporary exhibition series, including the 2018–19 'Making A New World' season of five exhibitions, and the accompanying programme of immersive installations.

The total cost of revamping the First World War galleries came via grant funding awarded from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).[9] This financial support enabled IWM to develop further activities outside of the new, centrepiece gallery during the course of the centenary period. One of these, and arguably one of the museum's lasting legacies, was the work orchestrated by the First World War Centenary Partnership, part funded by Arts Council England and the charity Culture 24. A network of over four thousand members, from sixty countries, it functioned to bring together national, regional and local organisations across different sectors, connecting community research projects with local history societies, museums, governments, galleries and schools. The First World War Centenary Report produced by the DCMS describes the partnership's impressive scale of activities across the United Kingdom over a six-year period.[10] Similarly, a second large-scale online initiative led by IWM in partnership with the genealogy company Findmypast was 'Lives of the First World War', a free-to-access online family history database. This innovative crowd-sourced public history repository received contributions from 160,000 people, making visible over 7 million individual 'Life Stories' of those from across the Commonwealth who had experienced the conflict directly.[11] The museum thus acted to shape understandings of the conflict not only through the traditional curated galleries, but through community

organisation and the visibility of previously unseen individual stories of the war.

However, whilst the Imperial War Museum clearly played a key role in shaping and communicating widely shared understandings of the First World War at its centenary, they were not the only interested party. Beyond the IWM and commemoration at the national level, a huge number of local museums and heritage partners also took part in the centenary, holding exhibitions and organising events that often focused on local experiences of the war.

Local Museums and Heritage in the Centenary

The best-funded, and most visited, First World War centenary exhibitions and projects may have been situated in major organisations such as the Imperial War Museum and other national institutions, but for many their primary and most important engagement with the war and its multiple legacies was mediated through local museums and heritage organisations. In these, the war on the home front, and the way that it impacted the lives of those who lived in the region during the conflict, was a recurring focus and subject. Unsurprisingly, they often focused on the local heritage, history and experience of the First World War – as was explored in more detail in Chapter 1, in our discussion of community-based commemorative projects.

Like the 'Lives of the First World War' project run by the IWM, which drew on the popularity of family history to build new stories about the war, some regional exhibitions and heritage projects explored ways of working with local communities. Projects and exhibitions like these were imagined as a means of developing new content, and as a way to encourage people to engage with local heritage.[12]

For example, Doncaster Heritage Services in South Yorkshire received NLHF funding to 'encourage the people of Doncaster and anyone with a connection to the area... to uncover and share their First World War stories'. Recognising that 'many residents will have either a family or local history connection with the war', the city's heritage services set out to draw upon the popularity of family history research as a leisure activity in the creation of new content.[13] Others were designed to explicitly explore the impact of the First World War on particular local histories: the Heritage and History Society in Pershore, Worcestershire worked with the local Women's Institute to develop an exhibition focused on food production during the war in the Vale of Evesham, a fruit-growing area, while in Devon 'Dartmoor Life in World War One', an NLHF-funded local history project and exhibition examined the ways in which the war affected Dartmoor.

As the project co-ordinator explained, the exhibition 'was not about the war itself. It was about how the war affected life on Dartmoor'.[14] These, and multiple other exhibitions and heritage projects that ran around the country during the centenary worked to reposition the audience gaze away from the Western Front and towards the experience of war on the home front.

While often focusing on the civilian war and life on the home front, many of these exhibitions and projects nonetheless drew on the established emotional power of the First World War in British culture, where it is associated with the figure of the combatant on the Western Front, and widely remembered as a time of tragic loss and sacrifice – an understanding of the war that framed representation and remembrance from the beginning of the centenary period when the installation *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* at the Tower of London set the scene for the next four years.[15] In regional museums and heritage organisations, the potent feelings that were often evoked by national centenary commissions such as *Blood Swept Lands* or Jeremy Deller's 2016 *We're Here Because We're Here* – complex responses that included feelings of sadness, of anger and of gratitude – were given an even greater resonance by their application to local, community and sometimes family histories.

One powerful example of the relationship between the local and the national can be seen in the commemoration of the loss of *HMY Iolaire* just outside the harbour of Stornoway in 1919, discussed in more detail in Chapter 1. A local artist and doctor, who had spent years painting the portraits of one hundred of the men who died when the *Iolaire* sank, explained that it was not the facts but the people and the stories that had motivated her to undertake this act of remembrance and commemoration.[16] It was exactly this, the people and the stories, that were the focus of so many of the exhibitions and projects held around the country during the centenary.

Brighton Royal Pavilion and Museum, on England's south coast, launched their centenary programme with a major exhibition, *War Stories: Voices from the First World War*, which ran from July 2014 until March 2015. This exhibition drew on the ephemera of war: the letters, stories, family heirlooms and photographs passed down through generations to trace the history of the war through the stories of thirteen individuals who either came from Brighton or had links with the city during the war years. Visitors were invited to 'see the war through the eyes of a young girl born in 1914, an Indian soldier wounded on the Western Front and taken to hospital in the Royal Pavilion, soldiers from the city, including a Brighton and Hove Albion footballer, nurses, and a gardener who was imprisoned for his pacifist beliefs'.[17]

This approach to the history of the conflict, emphasising the personal, the subjective and the local, was worlds away from the more 'traditional' war museum, where pristine weaponry and military uniforms in glass cases often exist uneasily within sites that also have a memorial function.[18] Museums, both local and national, are repositories of knowledge and authority, sites where the past is made knowable and where, by their very inclusion, objects, or in this case stories, can have a particular affective relationship with the visitor, described by Steven Greenblatt as one of resonance and power. Greenblatt argues:

> By resonance I mean the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged . . . by wonder I mean the power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention.[19]

The power of the *War Stories* exhibition lay both in its site in the city's main museum, and in its emotional appeal, in the investment that visitors were asked to make in the lives and stories on display. Visitors explored these stories in quiet rooms with subdued lighting. Pachelbel's *Canon in D Major* played softly in the background. As visitors reached the exit, they were invited to leave a note describing their feelings, with a box of paper handkerchiefs carefully placed next to the cards and pens. Tears, it seemed, were an expected response.

The exhibition successfully linked the global war with the local through its affective appeal to the visitors. The home front, the impact of the war on the city, was at its heart, but by including individual stories like those of the local footballer killed on the Western Front, and the Indian soldier cared for in the wartime hospital of the Royal Pavilion, *War Stories* was able to draw on the emotional resonance of the First World War in contemporary Britain to widen understandings of the conflict and draw attention to dissenting voices and global experiences. One visitor, who responded to a Mass Observation Directive of 2014 asking for feelings about the First World War at its centenary, described her own and her adult son's response to the exhibition: 'I found it quite fascinating and spent ages going round it, but my eldest son (forty-seven) said he had been underwhelmed, which disappointed me'. She put this difference down to their age gap, to her son's immersion in modern media with a 'wow' factor, and to her own memories of the impact of the war on her parents and older relatives. Keeping memory of the war is important today, she argued, as 'we have to bear witness to the dreadful things that happened in the past, even if it was a totally different age, and to tell our children what happened'.[20] The exhibition addressed this visitor, if not her son, on an emotional level, using stories of individual

lives shaped by war to engage with the wider conflict, and through its focus on loss, grief and the disruption of everyday, local lives, strengthened her sense that the main reason to revisit the war years was to bear witness, to ensure that through learning the lessons of the conflict, 'never again' would future generations have to experience such traumatic events. Like the *World War One: Love and Sorrow* exhibition held on the far side of the world in Melbourne, Australia throughout the centenary period, this local museum told the story of the war through 'personal lives, intimate experiences and emotional responses', the intent being 'to maximise emotional engagement' among its visitors.[21]

In the north of England, an online exhibition drawing on material held in Ormesby Hall, a National Trust property in Middlesborough, digitised 120 of the letters sent by widows and bereaved mothers to a Mrs Perryman, the secretary to the King's Own Scottish Borderers Widows and Orphans Fund.[22] This moving collection served to illuminate not only the impact of wartime loss on families at home, but also the gap, often so difficult for historians and researchers to access, between public discourse and individual feeling and action. The women ostensibly wrote to Mrs Pennyman to ask for financial support, but their letters describe not only the economic hardship often faced by women and children who had lost a breadwinner, but also the struggle to maintain an emotional equilibrium, experiencing a loss that they were expected to meet stoically, keeping their distress private lest it impact on wartime morale. For example, Eileen Walker of Kirkconnell wrote in 1917:

> One need not complain as there are thousands the same, it is a terrible war. I was left with five children and the six one was born two months after he was killed but I lost my dear weak darling when she was ten months old with pneumonia . . . it was a terrible blow. I was sick with grief. I thought I would never get over it.[23]

The collection personalised the abstract and the historical, showing the intimate impact of the war on the women and children of north-east England and the Scottish borders. The stories recorded there were no doubt played out all over the country and across much of the world, highlighting not only the local and individual experiences of war, but its wider, shared impact. Both Brighton Museum and the *Dear Mrs Pennyman* project produced representations of the war that could be understood as both highly local and individual but also international and widely shared; while being grounded in the local and the individual stories they told, they drew attention to common wartime experiences encountered and negotiated by individuals, families and communities across national borders.[24]

Across the country local museums and heritage organisations developed projects and exhibitions that demonstrated the transformative nature of the

war. In Invergordon, a harbour town in the Scottish Highlands, a community history project funded by the NLHF and co-ordinated by Invergordon Museum and Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands (ARCH) showed how the town's population swelled from around 1,100 before the war to over 20,000, as dockyard workers, Russian migrants and American servicemen joined the soldiers based in a large army camp on the outskirts of the town.[25] The Ulster Museum in Belfast directly addressed the very different and often divisive memories of the war in Northern Ireland by creating a new modern history gallery that traced these memories – of the Battle of the Somme for loyalist communities and of the Easter Rising for republican ones – through the exhibition of two objects made by republican and loyalist prisoners during the period of the Troubles. One was a plaque made by republican prisoners in the 1970s, showing James Connolly, the socialist and republican executed after the Easter Rising, and the other was an artwork made by an Ulster Volunteer Force leader, paying tribute to the 9th Battalion West Belfast Volunteers, part of the 36th Ulster Division decimated at the Battle of the Somme in 1916.[26] By placing these objects within the wider history of the war and the region, the museum worked to demonstrate the conflict's enduring legacy for Northern Ireland, providing a space for productive 'agonistic memory', in which 'political adversaries. . . share the same symbolic space' and thus begin the process of recognising a shared process of politicising past conflicts.[27]

Many people's primary engagement with the centenary of the First World War was through their local community, often mediated by a local museum or heritage organisation. However, while these usually focused on the local and regional impact of the war, they were not provincial in their gaze. The exhibitions discussed here invited their audiences to look outwards, to make empathetic connections between their own lives and the lives of those who experienced the war, and to consider how these experiences might have been shared across not only the homes and streets of a village, town or city, but across the country and across international borders. They showed how the war had intensified processes of migration and globalisation, with Indian soldiers being cared for in Brighton, and Russian emigres arriving in the Scottish Highlands. The enduring, and often problematic, legacy of the conflict was made visible in the Ulster Museum in a way that suggested the potential for a more unified future. Perhaps most importantly, they acted to remind their audiences that the war was not only fought by soldiers, and not only by soldiers on the Western Front, but was instead transformative of societies and of lives on the home front as well as the battlefield. Through their stories of individual lives and local communities, recounted in physical museums and in digital spaces, they showed the transfigurative, modernising and enduring impact of the war for the contemporary world.

Digital Heritage and the Centenary

Throughout the First World War centenary, heritage organisations – broadly defined as galleries, libraries, museums and archives – produced a significant amount of digital content in various forms.[28] These digital initiatives spanned diverse forms such as collections, educational resources, exhibitions, and public engagement activities, leveraging the potential of digital delivery to support the preservation, protection, study and promotion of cultural heritage.[29] They helped heritage organisations to extend their reach and engagement, fostering co-produced projects with the public and academic researchers, and engaging with other organisations nationally and internationally. This section considers some of these initiatives, setting them within the wider international context of digital projects and resources at the centenary as a means of reflecting their intended accessibility. However, as we will show, such accessibility was dependent upon long-term capacity and funding for sustainability, often regrettably lacking particularly in the case of smaller, and less well-funded, but nonetheless valuable, projects and resources.

Digital centenary heritage initiatives were frequently supported by investment and funding from government agencies, charitable and private funding, and research grants. The structures and drivers for these activities were therefore sometimes external, as required by funders and government organisations with little consideration of the digital legacy of these outputs. In some cases, activities developed for the centenary were pragmatic and responsive, rather than strategically aligned with the mission or long-term plans of heritage organisations. This section explores the ways in which heritage organisations utilised digital technologies for centenary activities, and also introduces a framework for assessing activities as enabling mechanisms for delivering their remit.

Heritage organisations have utilised new technologies to deliver their institutional missions and to deliver collections-based services to the public throughout history. Archives, libraries and museums have adopted the use of photography, photostats and microfilm to reach and engage with distant audiences, and to enable and enrich access to collections for research.[30] The uptake of digital technologies by heritage organisations is in many respects a continuum of technical and collections innovation in these organisations, and the potential of digital technologies to enable vastly enhanced and augmented collections access has led heritage organisations to utilise proportions of their budgets and resources to digital delivery or services.[31] Often this is in the context of a wider digital transformation of an organisation, a process documented by Andrew Green, the former librarian of the National Library of Wales.[32] Other heritage organisations, however, still

face challenges to greater adoption of digital heritage, including funding, staffing and expertise, awareness and training.[33]

Throughout the centenary period many heritage organisations were well placed to deliver commemorative content and services in digital forms, so many turned to digital delivery as a default means of delivering centenary-based content and activities. Meanwhile others approached the centenary as an opportunity to explore and engage with digital technologies to deliver content and activities. The digital heritage created during the centenary falls into key heritage service categories: collections delivery (digitisation, crowdsourcing), education and outreach (online exhibitions, educational resources), and public engagement (blogs, social media).

Collections delivery projects generally extended digital delivery strategies at heritage organisations, and largely focused on digitisation of analogue collections. In Germany, the *Bundesarchiv* digitised large numbers of documents (700,000 pages are now available online), as well as releasing many thousands of photographs and moving images.[34] In the UK, the National Archives added to their existing digital collection of wartime records at a significant rate during the centenary, including the digitisation of the First World War Cabinet Office papers.[35] Digitised collections also fulfilled strategic and transnational objectives: the Australian Government invested heavily in the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) Centenary commemoration, with both a national programme and activities organised by state, territory and local governments, as well as business and community organisations.[36] The investment generated a wealth of digital archives, also building on an existing collaboration between National Archives Australia and Archives New Zealand to expand the *Discovering Anzacs* project that digitised First World War service records. However, the website is no longer active, making this another example of a high-profile First World War digital collection that is no longer supported.[37] In the UK, the Jisc issued a funding call for mass digitisation projects in 2012: an application by the National Library of Wales (NLW) was funded to develop *Rhyfel Byd 1914–1918 a'r profiad Cymreig / Welsh Experience of World War One 1914–1918*, a digital archive of over 250,000 items related to the history and experience of the First World War in Wales. It was operational from 2013 to 2020, when it was shut down by NLW due to a lack of technical capacity to sustain its interface.[38]

Digital approaches were also used to enhance collections and metadata, through the use of crowdsourced or community generated content. Crowdsourcing was deployed to transcribe and classify digital content. Notably, the UK National Archives digitised 1.5 million pages of unit war diaries from the WO95 series, collaborating with the Imperial War Museum and the Oxford University-based crowdsourcing platform, Zooniverse,

on *Operation War Diary* to annotate transcriptions.[39] This method adds considerable value to existing collections; upon being able to access the transcripts the historian Richard Grayson utilised them to develop a fuller understanding of the British Army's day-to-day life on the Western Front, focusing on the first seven divisions (six infantry and one cavalry) to arrive on the Western Front, subsequently noting the significant impact of the additional accessible data.[40]

Community-generated digital content took the crowdsourcing model further, enabling members of the public to contribute digital copies of personal collection items to add to official collections. The best known of these projects is *Europeana 1914–18*, which was organised by Europeana, a pan-national digital heritage initiative based in the Netherlands that aggregates content from over two thousand heritage organisations internationally. *Europeana 1914–18* gathered digitised memorabilia and personal stories from individuals, notably via a series of public workshops where material could be scanned or photographed.[41] Elsewhere, digital activities were consolidated thematically, via portals that brought together content across different organisations, such as the UK National Archives, the Library of Congress and the Welsh Government Programme Board for the Centenary.[42] Other digital content portals included *History Pin* and *Mapping the Centenary*, the latter repository being maintained by IWM.[43]

Heritage organisations also created digital resources for education and outreach. These are generally secondary outputs, generated from existing digital collections and packaged into teaching materials that tell particular stories: for example, the US National Archives made an edited collection of teaching materials available based on primary source materials they had already digitised.[44] A more formal approach was taken in Wales, where the Welsh Government Education Department commissioned material drawn from digital collections at the National Museum of Wales and the National Library of Wales, including *Welsh Newspapers Online*, to populate bespoke teaching materials about the First World War to be delivered via its e-learning platform for schools, *Hwb*.[45]

Heritage organisations of all sizes organised exhibitions and engagement programmes around the events and anniversaries of the First World War, often with accompanying websites and apps to provide augmented experiences for visitors. In New Zealand, Te Papa produced *All that Remains*, an online exhibition of 225 objects from the war with their stories.[46] The Library of Congress in the United States held an online exhibition of artistic responses to the war, based on items in their collections.[47] However, smaller organisations also adopted the use of digital heritage to tell stories related to their collections, such as the Fusilier Museum London, which has a permanent online exhibition and memorial.[48]

Digital public engagement was also a valuable tool for outreach by heritage organisations, with blogs, social media, outreach initiatives and large-scale digital engagement utilised to include large groups of stakeholders in commemoration activities. Heritage organisations carried out significant campaigns on major social media platforms to highlight their involvement in centenary activities.[49] The First World War Centenary Partnership, discussed above and based at IWM, carried out a number of digital engagement activities throughout the centenary. One coincided with the centenary of *The Representation of the People Act* in 2018, a programme called *Women's Work 100*, an international programme of activity that explored the working lives of women during the First World War, with a digital campaign #WomensWork100 that reached over ninety thousand users.[50] Ironically, the use of hashtags and social media activity has proved more robust in terms of its longevity than some other digital content.

Globally, the heritage sector carried out an enormous amount of digital activity throughout the centenary, but there are several challenges in carrying out an assessment of the impact and value of digital heritage initiatives. The remit of heritage organisations varies according to the type of heritage they are responsible for delivering, their location, and the audiences they serve, and therefore there cannot be a single framework for assessment. However, key considerations include determining the goals of funding agencies in shaping activities, the extent of utilising existing digital infrastructure or the requirement of additional technical investment, and the delivery of partnerships that could ensure a result of meaningful exchange or co-creation.

Heritage organisations are reliant on processes to measure all activities, so it is instructive to understand how and if these processes were put in place for digital initiatives: were clear objectives and goals around organisational remits, including preservation, accessibility, education and engagement established at the outset? Were key performance indicators set for these activities: website traffic, user engagement, content downloads, visitor demographics; and if so, what methods were used to gather this data: website analytics, user surveys, social media metrics, and/or archival records? Some heritage organisations also carry out audience and user engagement analysis, analysing pageviews, time spent on site, bounce rates, and the number of interactions with the content (e.g. likes, shares, comments). Qualitative studies are also often carried out, using surveys generating feedback to assess user satisfaction in order to understand how materials were received by target audiences. These approaches help to measure the educational, cultural and social impact of digital heritage materials and activities.

What is striking is how many First World War digital heritage resources no longer exist. Even projects that were developed by large, national

institutions, like the ANZAC project mentioned above, and the National Library of Wales's *Welsh Experience of the First World War*, are no longer operational; the future of the community content within the enormous *Europeana 1914–1918* project is uncertain, whilst the multiple digital resources created by projects funded by the NLHF's *First World War: Then and Now* programme are also inaccessible.[51] This raises concerns about the nature of digital heritage and questions about its appropriateness for delivering on institutional goals. These include:

- Whether it fully meets the needs of target audiences
- How it contributes to increased knowledge, understanding or appreciation of content
- Its role in cultural preservation and awareness of identities, nationally, globally and within specific communities
- How it can foster engagement with the past among individuals or groups
- Its cost-effectiveness (resources invested not just in creation but in long-term sustainability), in proportion to achieved outcomes and impact
- How digital activities can be incorporated into the long-term objectives of an organisation.

The large number of digital resources that are no longer accessible is of course a function of funding: if funding for long-term sustainability is not available after the end of a grant-funded period, then the resources may not have a future. Interestingly, many valuable digital resources that brought together community groups and reunified content from disparate collections have the highest relative overhead for digital curation.

Another consideration is that a good deal of centenary activity was initiated through top-down directives, and in response to funding opportunities. In the UK, from April 2010 to March 2018, the NLHF awarded over £94 million to more than 1,900 First World War projects, many with some sort of digital output. Many of these activities were small-scale and driven by local volunteers. Heritage organisations funded centrally were often directed to develop centenary activities – those who had the capacity to deliver these requirements digitally chose to do so for internal reasons. In the UK, the First World War Centenary Programme was driven by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with responsibility for funding heritage. While Wales followed a different path to the UK plan for the centenary, through the Welsh Government Programme Board for the Centenary, *Wales Remembers*, heritage organisations in Wales were still directed to deliver centenary activities in line with the Programme's themes and priorities.[52] This is clear in the remit letters to the National Library of Wales and National Museum of Wales during this period.[53] This may also indicate that some centenary activities were *sui generis* rather than indicative

of fulfilling a specific organisational goal. Another factor was 'centenary fatigue'. Although the official report on the UK Centenary Programme found that the public did not experience centenary fatigue, there is evidence in analysis of individual organisations plans that some scaled back their digital activities as the centenary went on.[54] Additionally, the fact that many organisations did not sustain their digital outputs can be seen as evidence that these activities were no longer a priority, as newer initiatives emerged; also, as austerity impacted the heritage sector, there was little additional capacity for sustaining activities associated with the complete centenary programme.

There is often a perception that the centenary left a somewhat fragmented legacy of digital heritage (this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4). But many heritage organisations utilised the centenary as a means of enriching existing digital collections, delivering deeper engagement with communities, and building important partnerships and alliances with related organisations. We can see this in the extraordinarily rich range of digital initiatives in heritage organisations, offering a valuable source of evidence for critical analysis that can shape and inform the development of future commemorative activities that have potential to help heritage organisations deliver their remit. While digital projects did not always outlast the lifespan of the centenary, lessons learned from this can go on to inform planning for sustainability of future digital projects. And like the war itself, digital heritage projects had profound impacts across national borders.

Imperial Pasts and Heritage

In the past two decades, historians have mounted an increasingly powerful counterargument to the previously dominant Anglocentric view of the war, summarised by the old adage of 'blood, mud, and futility'.[55] A significant element of this 'revisionism' has been the acknowledgement and exploration of the variety of experiences within and beyond the British army, including colonial soldiers; amongst soldiers of different regiments, ranks, and social classes; between different sectors of the Western Front (and other theatres of war); and between different phases of the war. This has given rise to a more complex and nuanced understanding of the First World War.[56] Put simply, there was no single, fixed experience of the war.

Most of the countries involved in the First World War were empires. Britain – or more accurately in 1914, the United Kingdom of Britain and Ireland – possessed enormous territories both near and far from home with a global reach that stretched across every populated continent. The

implications of this 'age of empire', in the context of the global expansion of the conflict, were significant; a little over 40 per cent of the world's population was living in combatant states at this time. When the imperial 'metropole' declared war, this automatically brought in the 'peripheral' dominions and colonies, including the British Raj.[57] The British war effort alone was reliant on a large contribution from soldiers from across the globe, including over 1.5 million soldiers from India and thousands of troops from Australia, Canada, Kenya, and other British-controlled territories.[58]

How did this translate into the centenary of the First World War? According to the independent non-partisan think tank, British Future, in 2013, before the start of the centenary, knowledge of the role of Commonwealth soldiers was confined to a minority of the British public. However, by 2014, most of the public were aware of their contribution, with around two-thirds able to identify that more than a thousand troops came to fight from Australia (65%), Canada (65%) and India (68%). Three-quarters (77%) of the people were aware that 'the British war effort had included Empire and Commonwealth soldiers from countries including India, the West Indies, Australia and Canada. It is important for integration today that all of our children are taught about this shared multiethnic history'.[59] By the end of the centenary, the British prime minister's special representative for the commemoration of the centenary of the First World War, the Rt. Hon. Dr Andrew Murrison MP, believed that this attitude had cemented amongst the British public:

> Evidence suggests inter alia that the centenary has improved the British public's appreciation of the contribution to the war effort of people from outside the UK . . . substantial pieces of work such as MHCLG's 'The Unremembered' and 'No Barriers', together with the promotion of figures like Lieutenant Walter Tull, have helped both people who might previously have thought that they and their antecedents had little or no equity in the Great War and their neighbours to think again.[60]

However, the same review found government-funded programming around the centenary lacked planning for legacy, including a failure to place 'diversity' as an explicit criterion in the commemorations. For many stakeholders representing non-white communities in Britain, 'diverse representation remained the exception during the centenary'.[61] In late 2014, the Imperial War Museum, London had faced criticism at the opening of its new First World War galleries for its lack of non-British representation. Following complaints from former Australian deputy prime minister, Tim Fischer, that significant leaders amongst Canadian and Australian forces had been overlooked, the museum adjusted its galleries to include Australian General Sir John Monash and Canadian General Sir Arthur Currie.[62] The irony that

adjustments were made to curatorial presentation for two male white elites is not lost here.

This section will explore two examples where the diversity of colonial experience across the British Empire made its way into local and regional museum and heritage projects during the centenary of the First World War. Both were successful projects, in the sense that they achieved high footfall and garnered the attention of local and national media outlets. Both concern elements of the Indian Army, and neatly bookend the centenary – taking place, respectively, at the start and latter stages of the centenary process.

By 1914, the Indian Army had been recruited for several decades according to the problematic theory of the so-called 'martial races'. This theory contended that only some Indian communities were naturally 'warlike' and hence suitable for military recruitment. In addition to those Indians from the northern and north-western parts of India (particularly Punjab), Sikhs were considered one of the most important 'martial races', partly because of the long-standing warrior traditions of Sikhism. At the outbreak of the war, Sikhs made up about 20 per cent of the Indian Army – a far higher proportion than that of the Sikhs in the Indian population as a whole (less than 2 per cent).[63]

At the start of the centenary their contribution to Britain's war effort was widely overlooked in British understandings of the war, and a major project by the UK Punjabi Heritage Association (UKPHA) was launched to remedy this. Supported by funding from the NLHF, a nationwide team of researchers combed through regimental histories, official dispatches, correspondence, and war grave records for information on the Sikh soldiers of the First World War. Titled 'Empire, Faith, and War: The Sikhs and World War One', one of the project's first outcomes was a major exhibition of the same name in the Brunei Gallery at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in central London between July and September 2014.[64] According to information archiving the exhibition,

> it commemorated the largely forgotten contribution and experiences of Sikh soldiers and the families they left behind. The Sikh experience was described using remarkable written accounts of their experiences and achievements, rarely seen imagery, and extraordinary archive film and sound recordings.[65]

Amerdeep Singh Panesar, brought up in Halifax in a Sikh family, was in the second year of his history and politics degree at the University of Huddersfield when he became involved in the project. In April 2014 he explained: 'What drew me to the project was that soldiers of World War One who were Sikhs, and from other backgrounds in India, do not get the recognition they deserve'.[66] While acknowledging the complexity of their

service – for the British Empire and not India, a fact that was not always well understood by families back home – he attested to their bravery using the example of a British war hero, Lieutenant John Smyth of the 15th Ludhiana Sikhs. On 18 May 1915, Smyth led a near-suicidal mission on the Western Front with a group of ten Sikhs, carrying bombs to a position just yards away from the enemy. All ten Sikhs who took part in the raid were killed and posthumously awarded the Indian Distinguished Service Medal. Smyth survived and got the Victoria Cross, although he believed his men never received the recognition they deserved.[67] The exhibition itself was the centrepiece of SOAS's own centenary commemorations, and was de-signed to serve as a 'recruiting sergeant' for UKPHA's community-driven effort to create new history, with public attendees encouraged to sign up as 'citizen historians' to help to populate the digital repository connected to the exhibition.[68]

It is estimated that of the 1.5 million Indian soldiers who fought for Britain in the First World War, around 430,000 were Muslim. The exhi-bition, 'Connected Histories: Muslims in the First World War', sought to tell their story at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery between October 2016 and March 2017. Funded by the NLHF and the Library of Birmingham, it linked historical research with personal testimony from people in Birmingham whose Muslim relatives had served in the First World War.[69] It was overseen by Xtra Mile West Midlands (XMWM) – a col-laboration of arts and education professionals who delivered cultural and creative programmes to connect people, heritage and culture to improve integration and social cohesion.[70] As well as exploring local archives and collections, the project worked with descendants of those soldiers who had settled in Birmingham post-war, to collect memories, photos, medals and letters and build a bank of knowledge about this aspect of the war. The exhibition was part of a portfolio of activities, including a digital gallery, workshops, and educational resources, to bring the project alive for people of all backgrounds and give the First World War centenary added meaning for Birmingham's Muslim residents. Particular attention was paid to young people to highlight the role that their ancestors, and their peers' ancestors, played in the war, and explore how it helped to shape today's diverse community. At the start of the project, in November 2014, Haroon Ravat, director of XMWM, said: 'Britain's wartime past is a legacy that belongs to everyone [who] contributes to our multicultural society. This important landmark project will help to archive stories that celebrate this shared endeavour and sacrifice for the benefit of future generations'.[71] The project was therefore about giving voice to and recording lesser-known experiences of Muslim participation in Britain's First World War, creat-ing a sense of connection across generations, integrating Muslim heritage

within a wider context of British national experience, and developing a sense of pride in the way Muslims have contributed to the protection of Britain:

> Because it's not a little effort, it was a massive effort. People in their hundreds of thousands joined the army to fight for the British effort. Not only in my family, greater family . . . Our people did well for this country, which we're very proud of.[72]

There are several similarities between these two chosen examples. Both exhibitions came from the 'ground up', instigated, developed, and delivered (including through a competitive process of grant capture) by members of significant ethno-religious minority groups within Britain.[73] While it is only right that community members, respected and trusted by their communities, should be at the helm of telling these stories, it does raise the question that such stories were unlikely to have been told if community members had not agitated and lobbied on their behalf. Both exhibitions were free to enter, ensuring economic barriers to engagement were removed. Citizen historians were at the forefront of both exhibitions, with an emphasis on subject matter resonating with members of the public who would want to get involved in helping to tell stories about family members and community descendants as part of a process of recovering 'lost' history. Both exhibitions contained elements of intergenerational exchange as the process of telling lesser-known stories about Muslim and Sikh communities in Britain was as important for younger members within those plural-identity communities as people on the outside.

More significantly, both exhibitions were trying to engage audiences – whether younger members of the community or outsiders – in developing a sense of pride in and gratitude to 'forgotten' heroes. On this reading, we can see how these stories of First World War colonial participation fitted neatly into a wider UK government objective of promoting integration and community cohesion. In November 2014, the then secretary of state for communities and local government, Eric Pickles, outlined how 'Bring an Object' events to commemorate the First World War could act as a means of bringing communities together around a shared history to give thanks for past sacrifices and present-day freedoms:

> A hundred years ago men from across the globe fought side-by-side in defence of Britain, and the liberty of the world. Their sacrifice not only defeated tyranny and oppression, it also built the foundations for modern Britain, where people from all backgrounds can live together in peace. These 'Bring an Object' events enable communities across the country to honour and take pride in the achievements of the past. But they also ensure we can celebrate what makes Britain a

great place to live today, and remember that the mutual tolerance and respect we value was bought at a price.[74]

Set within a political context about the perceived 'failures of multiculturalism', terrorism, and the controversial Prevent strategy (which has served to stigmatise and marginalise Muslim communities), it becomes clear that exhibitions that told a story of heroic participation of Muslims and Sikhs in protecting Britain at war were doing a good deal of political work on behalf of the establishment.[75] Both exhibitions focused on British colonial participation in the First World War through the prism of the Indian Army, at the expense of other colonial combatant and non-combatant experience across the British Empire during the war. The exhibitions feed into wider concerns, raised by Santanu Das and others, of the imperial undertones of the centenary commemorations. A core concern is the selective, sanitised and celebratory nature in which non-white experiences have been engaged with focusing on the 'martial races' and the empire 'coming together', all whilst ignoring the exploitative and hierarchical nature of British colonial rule at the time of the war.[76]

Conclusion

The First World War centenary represented both an opportunity and also a significant challenge for those in the museums and heritage industries. As discussed elsewhere in this volume, public interest across 2014–2018 gave museums the chance to interact with a highly engaged aspect of the population. However, there were also notable pressures regarding not just what should be displayed or exhibited, but what the benefits of doing so at all would be. It was unclear at the outset, and in some ways remains so, to what extent the general public wanted to have their views of the war either enhanced or challenged. The question of 'giving the people what they wanted' has been one that has confronted public historians for some time, but this was especially true during the centenary.

However, as this chapter has shown, many attempts were made, often with a degree of inventiveness, to reframe the conflict to provide something to those who would be interacting with it during the centenary. Museums and heritage organisations often sought out the 'new' – be it new angles, perspectives, or context – through which to portray the war to a newly engaged audience. Some of this may have been down to simple pragmatism. To varying extents, museums ended up being in competition with each other for (sometimes the same) audiences, with those who could provide the best experience gathering up most visitors. As is often the way, funding

considerations proved a dictating factor in determining the relative longevity of individual project outputs. But despite these concerns, this chapter ends on a more optimistic note by recognising how our colleagues in the museums and heritage sectors were similarly highly invested and motivated in wanting to engage with the past. There is sometimes a tendency to see historians and heritage professionals as existing across a divide, but the centenary proved that this need not be the case and, in fact, all can benefit through wider and closer collaboration.

Notes

1. Damousi, Tout-Smith and Ziino, *Museums, History and the Intimate Experience*, 3.
2. For a study of two local museums and their audiences for centenary exhibitions, see Cubitt and Moody, 'Centenaries, Museum Audiences and Discourses'.
3. Imperial War Museum, 'Lives of the First World War'.
4. For commentary around the respective centenary activities of various international museums of the First World War, see Cornish and Saunders, *Curating the Great War*; Damousi, Tout-Smith and Ziino, *Museums, History and the Intimate Experience.*
5. See McCartney, 'The First World War Soldier'.
6. Wallis and Taylor, 'The Art of War Display', 101–14.
7. Ibid., 104.
8. King George V, Opening of Imperial War Museum, 1920, cited in Cundy, 'Thresholds of Memory', 247.
9. This grant formed part of a £35 million refurbishment of IWM London.
10. See DCMS, 'Lessons from the First World War Centenary', 65–68.
11. For detail on the ambitions and scope of this project, see Foster and Wallis, 'The Memorial Afterlives', 30. See also DCMS, 'Lessons from the First World War Centenary', 69–70.
12. Imperial War Museum, 'Lives of the First World War'.
13. Response to Reflections on the Centenary Online Survey. The survey was hosted on the project website and was live between November 2017 and summer 2018, receiving 126 detailed responses. 'Reflections on the Centenary of the First World War: Learning and Legacies for the Future' Project Report, 17. For reflections on the role of family history in the First World War centenary, see Wallis, '"Great-Grandfather, What Did *You* Do in the Great War?", 21–38.
14. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 'World War One in the Vale', March 2019; Reflections interview, 'Dartmoor Life in World War One', October 2018.
15. McCartney, 'The First World War Soldier'.
16. 'Reflections on the Centenary focus group', Kinloch Historical Society, September 2018.
17. Brighton and Hove Museums, *War Stories*.
18. On the wider relationship between wars and museums displaying war artefacts, see Muchitsch, *Does War Belong in Museums?*
19. Greenblatt, 'Resonance and Wonder', 42.

20. Mass Observation Project, *First World War Directive*, November 2014, Respondent L4071.
21. Tout-Smith, 'After One Hundred Years. Exhibiting World War I', 153.
22. The *Dear Mrs Pennyman* project was led by Dr Roisin Higgins of Teesside University, funded by the NLHF and supported by the AHRC Living Legacies Public Engagement Centre. Although the website of digitised letters is no longer available, the collection is held at Teesside Archives.
23. Letter from the *Dear Mrs Pennyman* project website. Resource no longer available.
24. The idea of memories that travel across borders and cultures is developed by Levy and Sznaider, 'Memory Unbound'.
25. Invergordon Museum. 'Invergordon in WW1', https://www.invergordonmuseum.co.uk/index.asp?pageid=654036, last accessed 2 June 2025.
26. Blair, 'Remembering 1916 at the Ulster Museum'.
27. Bull and Hansen, 'On Agonistic Memory', 393.
28. Hughes and Anderson, 'Centenary (Internet)'.
29. For the ICOM definition of a museum, see https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/, last accessed 14 June 2025.
30. Hughes, 'Live and Kicking'.
31. European Commission, 'The New Renaissance'.
32. Green, 'The Future of National Libraries and Archives', https://web.archive.org/web/20130511024739/www.llgc.org.uk/fileadmin/documents/pdf/future_national_libraries_archives.pdf, last accessed 17 June 2025.
33. Münster et al., 'International Stakeholder Survey'.
34. See https://ersterweltkrieg.bundesarchiv.de/, last accessed 17 June 2025; and Mombauer, 'The German Centenary of the First World War', 276–82.
35. For a list of digitised First World War records see https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/first-world-war/centenary-digitised-records/, last accessed 20 January 2025.
36. See https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/commemoration/days/national-program/anzac-centenary, last accessed 20 January 2025.
37. See https://www.naa.gov.au/help-your-research/discovering-anzacs, last accessed 20 January 2025.
38. Jisc is the Joint Information Systems Committee, a not-for-profit organisation that supports digital and IT resources and services in British further and higher education.
39. See https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/first-world-war/centenary-unit-war-diaries/, last accessed 20 January 2025; and https://www.operationwardiary.org/#/, last accessed 20 January 2025.
40. Grayson, 'A Life in the Trenches?'
41. The resource is currently available at http://www.europeana-collections-1914-1918.eu/, last accessed 20 January 2025, however as Europeana does not host content, the future of the community-generated material is uncertain, and the current iteration of the collections does not distinguish between community-generated material provided by the public and the content aggregated from heritage organisations.

42. See Library of Congress at https://guides.loc.gov/wwi/digital-collections, last accessed 20 January 2025; and *Wales Remembers* at https://walesremembers.org/, last accessed 20 January 2025.

43. See *History Pin* at https://www.historypin.org/en/, last accessed 20 January 2025; and *Mapping the Centenary* at https://www.iwm.org.uk/partnerships/mapping-the-centenary, last accessed 20 January 2025.

44. 'Primary Sources and Teaching Activities for World War I' at https://education.blogs.archives.gov/2020/11/09/wwi-resources/, last accessed 20 January 2025.

45. See Hwb, at https://hwb.gov.wales/repository/resource/78bcda33-6249-4027-bee6-da09f7dd9b04/en/overview, last accessed 20 January 2025. The National Library of Wales maintains links to educational resources on its own pages, see https://www.library.wales/discover-learn/education/learning-resources/the-first-world-war, last accessed 20 January 2025.

46. For a description of the project see https://web.archive.org/web/20220709025750/https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/sites/default/files/all_that_remains_info_for_participants_oct_2014.pdf, last accessed 17 June 2025. However, the resource itself is no longer available.

47. See https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/american-artists-view-the-great-war/online-exhibition.html, last accessed 17 June 2025.

48. See https://www.fusiliermuseumlondon.org/art19426, last accessed 20 January 2025.

49. Clavert, Majerus and Beaupré, '#ww1. Twitter'.

50. Written Evidence Submitted by Liz Robertson, Head of Partnerships, on Behalf of IWM (Imperial War Museums), https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/100355/html/, last accessed 20 January 2025. Also at DCMS, 'Lessons from the First World War Centenary'.

51. Konstantelos and Hughes, 'Digital Sustainability Review'.

52. *Wales Remembers* was a response to the UK Government's Centenary Education Programme, announced by UK PM David Cameron, which emphasised visits to First World War battlefields as a key venue for remembrance. In many respects the NLHF *First World War: Then and Now* programme, and initiatives in heritage organisations, were also a reaction to that approach to commemoration, and a wish to carry out more inclusive, community focused activities.

53. See Welsh Government remit letters requesting First World War content, https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-04/national-library-of-wales-remit-letter-2018-to-2019.pdf, last accessed 20 January 2025.

54. See Malan, Lale-Demoz and Brady, 'First World War Centenary Programme'. A number of planned activities itemised in a 2014 post about the National Library of Wales Centenary activities did not take place as originally planned.

55. Parker, *The Last Veteran*, 19. See also Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front*.

56. For an excellent historiographical overview of First World War Studies on the eve of the centenary, see Jones, 'As the Centenary Approaches'.

57. Darwin, *The Empire Project*.

58. For more on the contribution of colonial manpower during the First World War, including labourers, see Koller, 'The Recruitment of Colonial Troops'.

59. Hough, Ballinger and Katwala, *A Centenary Shared*.
60. Supplementary written evidence submitted to the DCMS Select Committee Inquiry into the centenary of the Great War, March 2019. See, Appendix to the Thirteenth Report – Lessons from the First World War Centenary, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcumeds/2001/200116.htm, last accessed 16 June 2025. In January 2018, as part of a Cabinet reshuffle, it was announced that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) would be renamed the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).
61. DCMS, 'Lessons from the First World War Centenary'.
62. O'Connor, 'London's Imperial War Museum Backs down over Forgotten "Colonial" Generals'. See also Pearlman, 'Imperial War Museum backs down over Australia "mere colonials" row'.
63. Omissi, 'Sikh Soldiers in Europe During the First World War, 1914–18', 36–50.
64. http://www.empirefaithwar.com/, last accessed 16 June 2025.
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74. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/online-guide-to-help-communities-learn
    -about-their-shared-ww1-history, last accessed 14 June 2025.
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76. Das, 'The First World War and the Colour of Memory'.

❦ CHAPTER 4

The Digital Centenary

Introduction

In 2013, the first minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, gave a speech to launch *Wales Remembers*, the Welsh Government's First World War centenary programme. In his remarks, he noted that the centenary would foster a 'digital big bang': so many projects with digital outputs relating to the First World War were in development that the period 1914–18 would have greater digital coverage than any other historical period. He stated: 'We must ensure that the stories of our grandparents and great grandparents are made available through digital resources for future generations to better understand and learn lessons from such a transformational event in our history. There are so many tales to be captured'.[1]

His remarks underscore the expectation that the centenary would offer unprecedented opportunities for creating, sharing and using digital content and using digital approaches for engagement, especially through widespread and inclusive public-facing and community-led activities. This was one of the first major commemorations of the digital age, and expectations were high that it would result in digital content of a scope and quality that would enable new histories and narratives of the war to be uncovered. In many respects this expectation was fulfilled. The centenary generated a significant number of projects with some form of digital output, so much so that the UK government's Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Committee report on the impact of the centenary commemorations in the UK noted that 'the First World War is now the most digitally documented period in history'.[2]

Globally, commemoration activities resulted in an unprecedented amount of digital cultural production, which ranged from ambitious large-scale projects created by universities and memory institutions, to projects to digitise the heritage of community groups and local archives and museums, and projects based around digital communication of historical artefacts from personal collections shared by individuals and families.[3] However, the long-term sustainability of these collections was not always secured, and a key theme of this chapter is the fragility of the digital outputs created as part of the centenary. The issue is reflected in the fact that a number of items referenced in the chapter are no longer accessible at the time of writing – a problem that will become more acute over time.

This chapter primarily draws on research from three funded projects that assessed the scope, impact and effectiveness of centenary digital outputs and their relevance to critical digital heritage that were led or co-led by the author of this chapter. In the context of the first project, the author was responsible for the practice-based research and evaluation of the mass digital archive, *Rhyfel Byd 1914–1918 a'r profiad Cymreig / Welsh Experience of the First World War 1914–1918*. This was funded as a mass digitisation project by the UK's Joint Information Systems Committee (Jisc) e-content programme and the Welsh Government, and its development and hosting was based at the National Library of Wales.[4] It was an integrated collection of open digital materials relating to the impact of the First World War on all aspects of Welsh life, from the archives and special collections of Wales, developed with an aim of creating greater access to previously hard-to-access archives and special collections. The author's role in the second project was as co-investigator on the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded *Living Legacies WW1 Engagement Centre*, which served as the basis for extensive research on digital sustainability of UK-based First World War centenary projects with digital outputs, and on the development of community-generated digital content. Finally, the third role as was serving as a co-investigator on the *AHRC Reflections on the Centenary* project, which researched the overall digital legacy of the centenary.[5]

A Digital Centenary

In many important aspects, heritage and history is now digital by default. Since the early 1990s, there has been a digital transformation in the accessibility and use of primary sources, and the research, teaching and engagement they enable, through the affordances of a range of technologies, methods and tools. Digitisation allows increased, enhanced and enriched access to primary sources; it protects rare and fragile materials from handling, thus

supporting preservation; and it is an opportunity for the enhancement and reunification of collections, bringing together material from disparate archives.[6] Digital access to heritage offers new modalities of interpretation and representation, and new ways of working with primary and secondary archives that allow mobility and interactivity.[7] Access to a greater volume and range of content for discovery, and the ability to link collections, also empowers those who use, consume and manage the past. Digital archives and special collections make available collections that are often inaccessible in analogue forms, and the 'desktop museum' offers access to hybrid collections of heritage content outside the artistic and cultural mainstream.[8]

Digital approaches can also transform research and scholarship, making sources accessible for new types of analysis and interpretation, and transform people's relationship with the past, allowing a deeper and richer engagement with primary source materials through activities like transcription and annotation. Since the 1980s, there has been an increasing recognition and promotion of a 'digital turn' in humanities research. This is largely in response to the availability of digital source materials, and the benefits of synthesising this content with tools and methods to carry out traditional research more effectively, and to formulate and address completely new research questions.[9]

The development of Web 2.0 technologies, and the consequent development of social media as a dominant form of online communication and interaction, underpinned the creation of digital services and infrastructures that support the generation and exchange of user-generated content. Therefore, throughout the centenaries of the significant events of the First World War, digital technologies, platforms and content were familiar and ubiquitous, and readily accessible to support the creation of a significant volume of digital content, adding digital archives, collections and resources to our cultural heritage landscape. These digital outputs were created both in response to the need to fill gaps in the available digital historical record, and as a result of commemorative activities at local, national and transnational levels.[10]

The utilization of digital approaches for centenary-based activities can be seen to have followed an existing pattern. As Jay Winter has noted, the first 'memory boom' of the twentieth century immediately followed the First World War, with the establishment of remembrance focused on rituals such as the two-minute silence, and war memorial construction.[11] At this time, a need was also identified to record the recent conflict: on Friday 7 June 1918, a report in the *Llangollen Advertiser*, the Welsh weekly newspaper, described the half-yearly meeting of the governors of the National Library of Wales, at Aberystwyth. In this, the librarian referred to a collection the library was developing of 'all records connected with the war so far as Wales

was concerned', and appealed 'to the people of Wales to send all printed documents dealing with local efforts of any kind, as they would be invaluable when the history of the war came to be written'. The same report also reported the purchase of 'new photography equipment, which would allow photographs to be taken of all manuscripts, and thus enable the schools in Wales to receive copies', which established the photostat and photographic section at the library.[12] In this report, we therefore see the adoption of new technologies for documenting heritage as part of a 'memory boom'.[13] It has been argued that the digital age has generated another memory boom around the war, and 'more and more data about the past is uploaded and recorded, and remembrance accelerates', with stone memorials not replaced, but transferred to digital media, in a period of 'hyperconnected commemoration', through engagement with online remembrance.[14]

Centenary projects with a substantial digital focus fall into five key categories: digital archives; crowdsourcing (also known as citizen science) initiatives; community-generated digital content (CGDC); community-led projects that created digital outputs; and research projects. These are all reasonably well-established approaches in digital humanities/digital heritage. At their core, there is either a process of digitisation – of converting analogue source materials to digital – or of generating born digital material, such as community-generated ('crowdsourced') content. The type of digital content created under these headings encompasses the full range of primary sources: text in all its substrates, images, moving image and audio, as well as 3D objects.[15] In some cases, digital content was created as secondary output of research or scholarship carried out using more traditional methods, such as using a database or blog to document archival research.

Digital Archives

Digital archives leverage a range of technologies to deliver digitised source materials, often at a large scale. Their primary purpose is access to original materials in an enhanced form for searching or browsing, and they frequently reunify disparate and fragmented collections. There is now a critical mass of highly digital multimedia source materials for arts and humanities scholarship, representing the varied and complex information formats of primary sources.

As the benefits of mass digital archives were well established by the start of the First World War centenary, it was logical that efforts would be made to develop large-scale digital archives for academic and public use. As the 100th anniversary of the beginning of World War One approached, and the focus on commemoration, teaching and research that the centenary would attract was identified, the significant potential for digital collections

to make previously inaccessible primary sources for research into the Great War widely available for broadest use became manifest.[16] An early example is the First World War Poetry Archive, at the University of Oxford, which was launched in 2008. This is an online repository of over seven thousand items of text, images, audio and video for teaching, learning and research, consolidating a series of earlier projects.[17] Similarly, the Library of Congress[18] and the National Archives in the UK[19] launched First World War archives in time for the commemoration. The resources were often the basis for further activities: Helen McCartney has noted that commemorative projects have frequently reused digital archival material, and exploited opportunities presented by social media, to engage a broader range of participants in commemoration:[20] an example of this can be seen in the reuse of material created for *Rhyfel Byd 1914–1918 a'r profiad Cymreig / Welsh Experience of the First World War 1914–1918*.[21] A primary aim of this project was to enable use and reuse of the digital collections it created: throughout the centenary, content from the digital archive was used in other centenary projects; for example, Paul O'Leary at Aberystwyth University used the content to develop a digital exhibition *The Great War and the Valleys*,[22] exploring the impact on civilians of 'Total War'. Bedwyr Williams's public artwork *Traw*, commissioned by 14–18 NOW,[23] used digitised images of unknown recruits and conscripts from Llandeilo and Ammanford from the D.C. Harries Collection of glass-plate negatives held by the National Library of Wales.[24] Data in the archive was also used to visualise newspaper references to Belgian refugees in Wales from 1914 to 1918.[25] Digital multimedia archives also used advanced imaging technologies, such as 3D-scanning methods, to represent objects in a greater degree of detail; for example, a team at Queen's University Belfast digitised six First World War uniforms and other objects.[26] In a similar vein, the University of Oxford's *Remembering the First World War in 10 Objects* project included a collection of six 3D objects gathered during the *Europeana 1914–1918* roadshows.[27] *EFG1418*, the European Film Gateway, is an example of a moving image collection of digitised films and related documents from, and related to, the First World War.[28]

Crowdsourcing Projects

Accessible computing, image capture technologies and web 2.0 technologies accelerated the use of crowdsourcing, using digital methods for social engagement to achieve large and focused goals that would not be achievable without a collective approach. Projects created by initiatives such as *Galaxy Zoo* involved asking a disparate, connected community to carry out specific tasks in pursuit of a larger goal: examples include correction of digital text

created through Optical Character Recognition (OCR); contextualisation by providing further information about the resource; classification of data; and adding to a collection through co-curation.[29]

During the centenary, crowdsourcing methods were used to 'personalise' and memorialise in greater depth individual stories of the First World War. A high-profile example of this is the project to crowdsource transcriptions of the names of thirty-five thousand servicemen and women, as well as members of Welsh Regiments, who lost their lives in the war and are documented in the *Welsh National Book of Remembrance for the First World War*. The book was dedicated in 1928, and is held at the Temple of Peace in Cardiff. A NLHF grant was used to digitise the book, and launch a transcription project based at the National Library of Wales.[30]

Community-Generated Digital Content (CGDC)

Crowdsourcing methods also underpin the creation of community-generated digital content (CGDC). This is community-facing digitisation in which members of the public make personal collections accessible digitally, contributing to a larger or thematic project. It is often supported by physical workshops led by experts in digital data collection, at which scanning or image-capture equipment is available, and the public have the opportunity to upload content to a thematic or geographically relevant website. The use of CGDC in First World War projects was pioneered by the Oxford-based *Great War Archive* project from 2008 to 2014,[31] and the methods and approaches developed by Oxford were adopted at scale across Europe by *Europeana 1914–1918*.[32] A Welsh project funded by Jisc, *Welsh Voices of the Great War Online*, ran from the summer of 2010 to early 2011, gathering material from the Welsh public relating to the First World War. Content gathered from this project was extremely diverse, and included contemporary letters and diaries, visual material such as photographs and sketches, and physical memorabilia, from decorated items brought home from places such as Mesopotamia to German weapons picked up on the field of battle. This material was catalogued and made available via People's Collection Wales, an initiative funded by the Welsh government to build an online 'People's Museum of Wales' from community-generated content, and to promote digitisation skills and information literacy around the country.[33]

Local and Community History Projects with Digital Outputs

One of the most interesting aspects of the digital landscape of resources related to the First World War is the proliferation of community-based projects, often addressing local histories and exploring evidence for the impact

of the war on a specific area, frequently utilising collaborative methods for public engagement. These projects frequently addressed histories that were previously unknown or under-researched.

In the UK, much of this activity was funded by the NLHF. From April 2010 to March 2018, this organisation awarded over £94 million to more than 1,900 projects, including 1,400 projects funded through the *First World War: Then and Now* programme, which supported community-led heritage.[34] The data made available by NLHF about the outputs of the projects they funded is not detailed in terms of outputs and approaches, so it is not possible to calculate exactly how many of these projects utilised digital approaches, however, a significant number produced some type of digital output. An example of digital gathering and publishing methods is the Tynemouth Commemoration Project,[35] which digitally recorded the employment, military service and burial details of local casualties; also, projects that focused on local war memorials to explore the detailed stories of the names on these monuments by bringing together evidence from a range of sources, such as the Flintshire War Memorials project, which carried out community engagement and research working with the County Record Office and the Local Voluntary Council. These projects were often very small scale: the Flintshire project had a budget of only £10,000.[36]

The development of such open, co-produced digital projects was a hallmark of the centenary. While large-scale transnational digital initiatives such as *Lives of the First World War* and *Europeana 1914–1918* had a high profile, much of the digital activity that was developed was local and small scale, evidencing an enthusiastic embrace of a range of tools and methods to create projects with digital outputs, created in response to gaps in the historical record. Collectively, these projects generated a significant volume of digital content, and digital outputs that have been archived in a variety of ways, but usually as standalone websites that were not integrated with related resources.

Research and Education Projects

Drawing on the digital turn in humanities research, academic projects in a variety of disciplines used advanced technology for researching the material heritage of the First World War, with implications for future study in conflict heritage. Advanced imaging and data representation methods enabled research into contested and under-represented narratives at heritage sites,[37] such as those explored by the *VAST* project,[38] which created 3D models of sites, monuments and artefacts associated in Trentino region of Northern Italy, a key battleground between Italian and Austro-Hungarian forces.

Digital access also allowed exploration of hard-to reach sites, as evidenced by the UNESCO Underwater heritage of the First World War project.[39]

Digital approaches were also foundational to initiatives that synthesised collections, research and pedagogy. A UK example was the *World War I Centenary: Continuations and Beginnings* project, funded by the Jisc WW1 Open Educational Resources (OER) programme,[40] which brought together academic and non-academic experts in different disciplines to collect and share multimedia content and make it accessible in thematic collections that could be used for innovative teaching approaches and studies, and for the verification of hypotheses and theories about the war and its social, cultural, historical and political context – for example, a project that used digital techniques to virtually simulate underground warfare.[41]

Drivers for the Digital Centenary: Why Did We See So Much Digital Stuff?

The affordances of digital technologies such as social media, web 2.0, internet access and digital capture technologies unquestionably fuelled interest in creating grassroots centenary activities with some sort of digital output. However, a great deal of digital development was created in response to the 'top-down' drivers of the centenary – the need to fill national and local commemorative schedules with activities, especially for government-funded and mandated programmes such as *Wales Remembers* in Wales, the ANZAC Centenary national programme in Australia and New Zealand, and the UK's DCMS programme of First World War commemoration.

These official and national contexts are also important. The centenary was an opportunity to develop digital surrogates to showcase 'national treasures', exemplified by the 3D scan of the Eisteddford chair posthumously won by the Welsh poet Hedd Wyn (Ellis Humphrey Evans, 1887–1917) at the Birkenhead National Eisteddfod following his death in 1917.[42] This raises the question of the political and cultural aspects of digital heritage: digital representations can be used to show national stories and to a wider audience, but this can also reinforce canonicities and cultural stereotypes. However, numerous digital projects have attempted to transcend this narrow approach, recognising that there is a risk that digital representation can simply use a new media to reinforce old tropes, and seeing digital instead as an opportunity to explore richer and more nuanced political and cultural aspects of heritage.[43] In Wales, the contributions of the National Library of Wales and the National Museum of Wales should be seen against the background of a devolved government, which has since 1999 actively sought to support the development of digital and other technologies in

order to promote specific government policies intended to improve links between the geographically and linguistically disparate parts of Wales,[44] and to connect communities with heritage. The National Library of Wales embedded this perspective in its digitisation strategy, and embarked on digitisation of its archive of Welsh printed materials in 1999, through a programme it called, appropriately, *The Theatre of Memory*. Many centenary projects developed in Wales were a conscious contribution to the cultural heritage, and the shifting memorial landscape, of the First World War as part of a promotion of a particular contemporary view of the conflict in Wales. The view of the war as a hegemonic 'British' endeavour evidencing a 'national' sacrifice has been problematised within contemporary identity politics, demonstrated by the construction in 1987 of a specifically 'Welsh Memorial', a Welsh dragon tearing at barbed wire near Mametz Wood in commemoration of the 38th (Welsh) division, the Welsh Army Corps.[45] The Wales Remembers Programme Board centenary activities emphasised messages of the cultural, social and economic impacts of 'the Great War' in a small country with a distinct cultural and linguistic identity that was overshadowed by the English language and culture, also highlighted by the Welsh activities departing significantly from the 'official narrative' of the centenary in England, with its emphasis on battlefield tours and trench warfare.

Some initiatives were unquestionably responsive: the grants offered by sources such as the NLHF's *First World War: Then and Now* programme opened up funding opportunities to small heritage and community organisations during a time of particular austerity in the UK culture sector. However, a great deal of activity was also driven by a wish to tell new stories, or to explore existing and received histories in new ways. At some levels, this digital 'storification', while using the tools and approaches developed by digital heritage and digital humanities initiatives, was at odds with the existing trend for 'datafication' – for creating large-scale resources for longitudinal analysis over space and time. When user analysis was carried out on the *Welsh Experience of the First World War*, this revealed that most searches were for places – people were most interested in their local places and local histories, even in a large national collection. The identification with place and local issues tells us a great deal about people's priorities when they engage with the past digitally, and how digital collections can create an understanding of history that sits within personal and contemporary frames of refence, allowing the meaning of the past to be continuously negotiated in the context of the needs of the present.[46]

Critical Digital Heritage in the Context of the Centenary

Analyses of digital cultural heritage frequently embrace a straightforward positivist narrative: that access to digital surrogates have a democratising effect through opening up access, and allowing new voices to be heard.[47] However, a deeper analysis of the digital lifecycle of creating, managing and using digital collections shows how aspects of digital materiality itself enable a deeper and more transformative engagement with primary source materials.

Throughout the digital lifecycle of *selection and capture, metadata and description, interface, sustainability, and use,* decision-making processes are invoked that require a deep understanding of primary sources and the materiality of the past, their uses and users, and intended audiences, as well as contemporary infrastructures and ecosystems that fuse digital methods, content and tools to create digital surrogates.[48] These processes within the digital lifecycle are dynamic, socially constructed, and influenced by power relations, politics and cultural dynamics; it is, therefore, a critical framework that provides a media lens for understanding how the past can be used in the present. It incorporates key ideas within critical digital heritage, which explores how digital technologies impact the creation, preservation, interpretation and dissemination of cultural heritage. It can be shown as a framing device in the context of a number of centenary digital activities that anchor these ideas in theory and practice, and a unifying perspective for digital projects that have been created with wildly varying aims, tools and methods; it is applicable to community-held and minority collections as to the digitisation of 'treasures' in mainstream and national collections.

The conceptualisation of the digital life cycle is grounded in key digital humanities research and practitioner collaborations around the creation, use and impact of digital collections and collaborative building and making of digital heritage that bridges the interdisciplinarity and experimentation of digital humanities and the creation, management and use of information in cultural heritage, enabling a theoretical and practice-led critical framework for the production and consumption of knowledge in a digital age, drawing on interdisciplinary digitisation and infrastructure research.[49] It can be used as cultural critique of the ways that digital interventions alter the production, analysis and dissemination of knowledge.[50]

In questioning the broader cultural implications of each stage of this defined digital life cycle, this critical framework is an opportunity for discourse around the wider considerations that surround digital heritage, a heuristic for critical and self-reflexive engagement with the nature of digital heritage, its mediation, and the materiality of its creation, curation and

durability. It is also a valuable heuristic to evaluate, and consider the legacy of, centenary digital projects.

Selection and Digital Capture

Historically, memory organizations have developed their collections through evolving selection processes that encompass several key criteria: the content of the materials in scope; whether they are at risk or in need of long-term preservation of conservation; and how they can be used by the organization's audiences. Similar considerations inform decisions taken about what should be included in the development of a digital archive. Just as with analogue collections, decisions about content selection should be clearly articulated to ensure transparency about what was considered worthy of inclusion in a digital project. Most importantly, it should be possible for users of digital collections to be able to understand who made the decisions to include or exclude certain materials, and why the decisions were taken, in order to understand 'which classifications, cultural values or aesthetic attributes are given preeminence'.[51]

Digital archives such as *The Welsh Experience of the First World War* were developed with a conscious aim of revealing previously hidden aspects of the war, such as the histories of refugees and displaced people, as well as challenging and expanding existing viewpoints.

Sometimes material is included or excluded due to funding constraints, or to the condition or accessibility of original materials; when this is the case, it should be made clear. For example, the war-era newspapers digitised for the *Welsh Newspapers Online* project[52] were not a full representation of all newspapers of the period. Many were excluded due to copyright issues and incomplete newspaper runs held by the National Library of Wales; this incompleteness is shown by a visualization of the collections on the home page that shows the actual range of newspapers digitised.

Similarly, making decisions about how to digitise, and what technologies are appropriate for digital capture, is also an iterative process that requires analysis. This relates especially to data-rich artefacts, such as manuscripts or archival pages, which can now be captured by hyperspectral, ultraviolet, or RTI imaging methods. Even highly sophisticated digital imaging is still a process of deciding what can be captured, and how, leaving a valuable media archaeology of technologies and file formats.[53]

Metadata and Description

Metadata (or description) is a core component of the digital life cycle that makes digital collections discoverable and useable.[54] The way that objects

are described and catalogued can be highly political, and associated with structures of power and governance,[55] as descriptive processes dictate what is catalogued and how an object is found. In the digital sense, metadata does not just describe objects, but makes clear their use and relationship to other objects. Digital projects can be an opportunity to add rich descriptive metadata for previously uncatalogued material, and to add data that facilitates discovery, study and sharing of previously hidden materials, and to add important provenance information.[56] For *The Welsh Experience of the First World War*, a significant part of the project was creating detailed descriptive metadata that enabled discovery of collections about refugees and other marginalised figures.[57] Metadata that incorporates standardised terminologies and authority data can also enable linking of material across collections: there are references to a Belgian refugee, Rene Demoulin, in a record in the People's Collection Wales (PCW) First World War archive, and the *Tracing the Belgian Refugees* project at Leeds University: there is a photograph of Renee in the PCW record, and there was a textual description in the Leeds project.[58]

Sustainability

Another critical component of the digital life cycle is digital preservation/ sustainability: building in planning for the durability of the data. Sustaining access to not just digital data but to their functionality and context is a not merely a technical process but an ongoing process of human care and attention. Digital resources that are used and reused are more likely to be sustained, so it is important to create digital collections and resources that can be reimagined for future use and repurposing.[59] There are two elements to sustaining digital content that must be addressed throughout the digital life cycle: *technical* sustainability, by which content is preserved, managed and migrated; and *intellectual (or academic)* sustainability, which allows enriching, using, and adding to digital content. Both processes require awareness of, and responses to, the underlying data structures, technological frameworks and software that mediate humanities and heritage data, and also access and interface mechanism: the digital life cycle is always an ecosystem of dependencies.[60]

Interface

Interface is the public facing aspect of a collection. Once content is selected, how it is presented and how some information is privileged and linked to other content is important: interface design is critical to enhancing the functionality and uses of digital collections.[61] Digital interface, and

the functionalities it supports, should be co-designed with potential users to incorporate and support the variety of routes that digital technologies allow through complex, hybrid source materials, whether that is the ability to upload community content, to search across hybrid collections, or to download collections and data for further analysis offline. Building in tools for visualisation and repurposing of content can also make the material more valuable for research and teaching. The interface design of digital heritage is therefore an opportunity to take stock of the ways that content can be remediated and interpreted. Approaches that increase useability will also increase familiarity with the original content: an example of this is *Europeana 1914–1918*, with an appealing and easy to use user interface that invited and encouraged participation.

Use and Reuse

A key part of the critical digital heritage framework is the need to set in place digitisation structures and processes that anticipate the use and reuse of digital content, which is key to ensuring the afterlife of data and projects created.[62] Adopting open approaches allows the creation of data that can be used for unforeseen purposes: not just searched, but recontextualised on new digital platforms and contexts, and by new users.[63] An example of this is reuse of data from the *Welsh Newspapers Online* collection to visualise references to Belgian refugees over the period 1914–19.[64]

The above examples show how the processes in creating digital heritage provide a 'wrapper' that enables and inhibits understanding of the complexity and intellectual content of the original materials. All phases of the life cycle discussed above require critical interventions and decisions about the affordances of digital approaches and practice.

CGDC as a Case Study in Critical Digital Heritage

As discussed above, community-generated digital content (CGDC) proliferated during the centenary; in the UK, it was mostly in projects funded by the NLHF's *First World War: Then and Now* programme. These initiatives emphasised the value of personal and family history, and the contribution of the public in 'remembering' and 'understanding' the First World War, reaffirming 'the role of the public as "witnesses" to the past' but in a highly active way.[65] This approach is not new: collecting historical material in this way builds on long-standing approaches to integrating community and previously unheard voices into the historical narrative, such as history from

below, oral history, the History Workshop, and other inclusive archival and historical practices.[66]

As part of research carried out for *Living Legacies* and *Reflections on the Centenary*, the digital outputs of over fifty NLHF-funded First World War projects with CGDC were reviewed to assess their content, tools and methods, and their usefulness.[67] Interviews were also carried out with a range of stakeholders involved in projects collecting CGDC, looking at the methodologies employed for digitisation: design, organization, structure, format, collection methods, communities involved, challenges, obstacles and lessons learnt. We also asked about curation, reuse and sustainability, and the data preservation and management guidelines used. This informed analysis of the ways that CGDC was collected, curated, exposed and used during the centenary, as well as the relationship between the development of community-generated content (including incentives and motivations to contribute) and the value of such activities for engagement with cultural heritage, primary sources and history. The study found many parallels between CGDC and the earlier establishment of community archives and 'people's history'; one historian interviewed stated:

> A high point is really how it has . . . unearthed quite a lot of grassroots material from families. And sort of the photographs that have . . . finally been digitised and had them made available. So, I think that in a way – that money that went into this – and in a way [it] has made quite a lot . . . of, I think, grassroots perspective accessible.[68]

Two large-scale projects that were analysed as part of this research were *Europeana 1914–1918*, and the First World War Collections of the People's Collection Wales (PCW).

The aim of *Europeana 1914–1918* was to create a pan-European digital First World War archive, and to provide unique new resources for research, education, exhibitions and events by exploring untold stories that complement official histories. Members of the public brought family letters, photographs and keepsakes from the War to digitisation events, or uploaded their material directly to the website. Working with partners across Europe, the project led 142 workshops, and generated 192,000 items from individuals. This content is now hosted in Europeana Collections 1914–1918, alongside 135,000 items of First World War content aggregated from Europeana partner libraries, archives and museums; the combined collection has had over 575,000 visits. The success of the project in generating enthusiasm relied very much on the use of Europeana as a trusted environment, the use of standardised and easy-to-follow processes, and also the aesthetics and ease of use of the interface. In terms of *selection*, projects of this nature are mostly very open, with no guiding selection policies;

digitisation workshops run by *Europeana 1914–1918* were completely open to all content and participation, as long as the material in scope related to the First World War. The model was utilised by PCW in a Welsh context, in a series of workshops organised through *The Welsh Experience of The First World War*. PCW also ran open digitisation workshops, held at local records offices around Wales. At these events, one of the most significant finds was a body of material from MI7b, a military propaganda outfit, which was brought to the workshop in Brecon by its owner and has attracted great attention in the media.[69] Materials were also brought by the family of the first doctor who graduated from Cardiff University, Mary Eppynt Phillips, who ran field hospitals throughout the war. She was involved in running the Typhoid Hospital at Calais before joining the 2nd Serbian Unit as a senior physician at the Scottish Women's Hospital at Valjevo, Serbia, in April 1914, and undertook a lecture tour in Britain to raise funds for this hospital. Returning to the Continent in April 1916, she travelled to Corsica where she was the chief medical officer at the hospital in Ajacci on the island until 1917. Dr Phillips is mentioned in literature about the involvement of women in the First World War, but the collection of additional items (including photographs and telegrams), until now hidden in a family collection, contribute significantly to this knowledge.[70]

Description and metadata was generated in situ; at the *Europeana 1914–1918* and PCW workshops, people who brought the collections filled in data about their materials at the workshops, using standard metadata forms based on conventional archival metadata. The challenge was that metadata had to be gathered in the short space of time the owners of the content were available, although in many cases the owners of the materials stayed in touch, and continued to update the collections information.

The *interfaces* for CGDC projects are generally 'generous' – open and welcoming. *Europeana 1914–1918* and the Oxford Great War project allowed people to upload content, and to add metadata. Europeana also developed a spin off project, *Transcribathon*, with a carefully designed crowdsourcing interface that was created in response to a study that showed that the educational aspects of the project could be enhanced by allowing people to transcribe the handwritten source material. This has significantly increased engagement with the sources and allowed even greater enrichment of the content for further analysis and reuse.

In terms of *sustainability*, the use of, and investment in creating, PCW and Europeana have ensured that they are (currently) too big to fail, and they are still available, unlike smaller and less prominent initiatives that have not been sustained. But this raises the question of what the content is being sustained for: 'if a community has gathered all the data that it needs to gather to develop a piece of research, or to tell a particular story,

a project can be seen as "complete"', and as having delivered its objectives. However, the *use and reuse* of this material is usually viewed as a valuable objective by those who create it, and who wish see their stories represented. This sort of material is mostly used for story-based research, and for highlighting the hidden stories of the war, rather than creating a significant corpora of linked and connected data. Several historians interviewed for our research noted that CGDC is not valued for research for a number of structural reasons – for example, it may not be stored in a trusted technical framework where provenance is clear, or rights are transparent, or reliable citation of permanent sources is supported. The ad hoc nature of the creation of this content can make it less useful as a historical source: a digital archive based on voluntary contributions cannot be fully representative,[71] and there has been a critical view that relying on personal or community content as a means of association with the past can be seen as a 'domestication' of the past, or enlisting it for present purposes, such as making it 'relatable'.[72]

This raises a key point, which is the 'value' of CGDC. While these initiatives present personal collections and content alongside 'official' archives, collections and narratives, they can also present an opportunity to explore the potential of community histories and content to challenge notions of professionalism and the authority of the 'expert' voice. This potential was highlighted in the review of *Europeana 1914–1918*, 'Workers Underground: An Impact Assessment Case Study – Europeana 1914–1918', published in 2016,[73] which highlighted the most valuable aspects of participating in the project. A key aspect was the value of knowing that the resource existed, expressed in several quotes in the assessment: 'Let it be preserved for generations to come, one after the other. My family will rejoice that somebody remembers them'. Another aspect was legacy: the evaluation captured moving testimonies about how publishing photos online was leaving a trace and preserving materials for future generations. Long-term use and reuse of the content was a priority for many users (61%).

Perhaps the key 'value' of these projects is less the digital outputs themselves, and more their role as facilitator of the experience economy, a concept and model developed for economics by Pine and Gilmore,[74] which – adapted and applied in this context – highlights the value, opportunities and benefits deriving from CGDC when perceived as an *experience*. The value of the experience can be seen in many ways: as info-tainment, generational and object-based learning; as critical skills for developing information management and content evaluation; and as active participation through content contribution, development and collaboration among community members. The process of gathering, publishing and transcribing historical documents as a shared experience among communities can recast

the experience of using digital cultural heritage from passive consumption to active participation.

Sustainability of Digital Centenary Outputs

Reflecting on the digital centenary after the period of commemoration has ended is a valuable opportunity to assess the legacy of the huge investment in digital projects. The centenary created an unprecedented chance for community groups and memory organisations to share and document sources and projects related to experiences of the war. It was arguably the longest and most diverse programme of cultural activities around a specific theme, and a significant by-product of these activities, and in some cases their stated purpose, was the creation of newly accessible digital information. In line with the expectation of a 'digital big bang' at the start of the centenary, if one were to objectively generate a definitive list of what was funded, we would see an expansive digital collection of rich and varied projects, a latent asset to scholarship and a form of memorialisation in its own right. But as the programme of centenary anniversaries, and the programmes that funded the centenary, came to an end, so did the processes and networks that sustained these digital outputs, leading them to face significant threat of digital loss.[75]

As part of the above-mentioned research carried out for the *Living Legacies* and *Reflections on the Centenary* projects, an analysis of digital sustainability of UK-based First World War centenary projects with digital was carried out, including a qualitative and quantitative assessment to understand key issues in digital fragility, with case studies explored at a workshop attended by key stakeholders.[76] This study resulted in several key outputs, including a framework[77] for assessing the likelihood of sustainability of community-based digital outputs, and a set of guidelines[78] for digital preservation of this data, both of which are publicly available.

An indicative snapshot of the rate of digital decay can be seen by evidence collected about the digital outputs of co-created projects developed through the AHRC-funded First World War Engagement Centres, which were active from 2014 to 2021. This data was first collected in 2021, and reported in the 'Reflections on the Centenary of the First World War: Learning and Legacies for the Future' report, and revisited and updated in 2023, in the context of this wider review of the digital legacy of the centenary.

The results in Table 4.1 indicate the scale of the problem: of the 200 projects developed or co-created by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's First World War engagement centres, 102 produced some kind of digital output. For this analysis, this is defined as a website with digital/digitised

Table 4.1. Current status of digital outputs from co-created AHRC-funded First World War Engagement Centres, as of November 2023. © Lorna Hughes.

Centre	Total Projects Listed on Website	Projects with a Digital Output	Total Digital Projects Still Accessible	Total Digital Projects No Longer Accessible
The Centre for Hidden Histories	47	20	17	3
Gateways to the First World War	58	24	17	7
Everyday Lives in War	15	4	4	0
Voices of War and Peace	44	18	11	7
Living Legacies	36	36	23	13
Total	200	102	72	30

content, or a description of the project: a blog, an interactive website, a database, CGDC, geographic/mapping projects, apps, or other outputs in digital form (film, publication, e-book/booklet, learning resources).

The percentage of digital projects no longer accessible varies per AHRC Engagement Centre, with the Centre for Hidden Histories at 15.00% (n = 3/17), Gateways to the First World War at 29.17% (n = 7/24), Everyday Lives in War at 0%, Voices of War and Peace at 38.89% (n = 7/18), Living Legacies at 36.11% (n = 13/36), and a Total of 29.41% (n = 30/102). This constitutes a small decrease from the 33% of projects reported as inaccessible in the original *Reflections* report. *Reflections* accounted for a total of 129 listed projects, while this data collection consulted 200 items. Therefore, a consistent level of digital unsustainability has persisted since the conclusion of the funded period, even with new projects going live and being listed through the Engagement Centres. Various inaccessible projects contained external site dependencies, with hosting infrastructure no longer functioning.

Included in this data are several projects that were specifically co-created by the Engagement Centres with a digital heritage focus, such as Campbell College's, Men Behind the Glass,[79] Visualising the Iolaire,[80] Welsh Memorials to the Great War,[81] Dear Mrs Pennyman,[82] Defence Heritage Project,[83] and Battlebags and Blimps.[84] Of these, Dear Mrs Pennyman and Battlebugs and Blimps are no longer available.

Figure 4.1. *Visualising the Iolaire.* Image courtesy of the AHRC 1914–18 Living Legacies project run by Queen's University Belfast, reproduced with permission.

There are a number of reasons why digital sustainability was not prioritised. Institutionally, an assessment of potential sustainability solutions showed that no one organisation provided a comprehensive digital archive (let alone a Trusted Digital Repository) for community digital heritage projects: throughout the centenary, there was little clarity about what digital sustainability solutions were available for co-produced projects, nationally or internationally. The limitations and restrictions of existing solutions were not clear, leading to ambiguity around what is considered permanent and open. Throughout the centenary, community groups were encouraged to think about the opportunities of digital, but not to engage with the responsibility and overheads of creating sustainable digital content. Funders were not focused on resource requirements for planning, developing and implementing sustainability solutions for centenary projects, and there was little consensus around expectations, requirements, responsibilities, solutions or gaps.[85] At the outset of the centenary, there was no agreed digital legacy plan. In many cases, organisations were creating digital content and utilising social media for the first time, and had little or no history of archiving this sort of content.[86]

This concern was recognised at a policy level: in their report on lessons from the First World War commemorations,[87] the House of Commons' Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee noted that 'it is unfortunate

Table 4.2. An analysis of remaining accessible projects, as of November 2023. © Lorna Hughes.

	Total Projects Considered	Projects with a Digital Output	Total Digital Projects Still Accessible	Total Digital Projects No Longer Accessible
IWM Mapping the Centenary	441	171	80	91

that the need for this was not foreseen at the start of the commemorations. Given that the DCMS leads on digital policy, a strategic approach to preserving digital assets should form part of initial planning of any future government-funded arts or heritage programmes'. In the same report, the NLHF 'expressed concern that the investment in digital legacy was not made at the outset of the centenary programme'. DCMS noted that it would be working with the Imperial War Museum 'to preserve the wealth of digital material generated by the commemorations. . . (including) support for small organisations that do not have previous experience of preserving digital work'. What was actually funded was a portal that provided links to projects – however, as the projects were closed, these links also died, as the resource did not provide long-term digital access to the data. In November 2023, I carried out an analysis of the projects linked via this portal to see how many were still accessible: the results appear in Table 4.2.[88]

This IWM data, which takes into account a much broader range of WW1 centenary projects than those AHRC-funded, saw a greater percentage of no-longer-accessible digital outputs (53.22%, n = 91/171). One notable discovery was the number of domains now for sale (n = 5). The domain for Oldham Remembers had clearly been sold, as in November 2023 the domain name was being used by an architectural firm.[89] Wider issues of financial sustainability within cultural heritage can also be seen in this data: one listed project was no longer accessible as the institution itself had closed in 2022 due to spiralling costs.

In addition to the technical and institutional reasons for projects not being sustained, there are intangible reasons. Many local and community projects set out to achieve a specific goal – to document a certain number of items, or to digitise a particular collection. As noted in the Europeana review cited above, for a number of projects the value was in the digital engagement rather than sustaining a resource, and as such, the 'storification' emphasis outweighed the need to sustain a data collection for future researchers.

Sustaining CGDC

The *Living Legacies* research included interview and observational research on the methodologies of creation and sustainability of GCDC, and highlighted the particular vulnerability of this content to loss. The development of CGDC projects, and participation by the public, was usually driven by a desire to memorialize local histories, to preserve the memory of family members, or to highlight a 'neglected' aspect of the conflict, such as a specific theme. Representatives of memory organisations interviewed also indicated that as key stimuli for centenary-related digital initiatives supporting connectedness, sharing and generosity.[90] As highlighted in the *Europeana 1914–1918* review, user expectations of 'permanence' and 'leaving a legacy' were seen as valuable aspects of community-generated heritage projects. As an organisation, Europeana maintains a recognition of the importance of the *Europeana 1914–1918* collections, evidenced by their continued existence, but creating durable, reuseable and sustainable digital resources can be challenging even for major organisations, and the long-term preservation prognosis of community-generated digital content is generally poor, especially for smaller, community-based digital archives facing technical or financial issues. Some interviewees reported that they simply had not intended to archive the material over the long term, with one respondent noting:

> We didn't think we were storing anything. And again, we're not an archive, we're not storing any data, really. We're just holding bits of information, and 2,000 pieces of digital objects–material for our participants. But we're not an archive, as such.[91]

The study showed that, in many respects, CGDC is 'orphan' content, and sustaining it over the longer term is particularly challenging. This is because the way that CGDC in many respects pushes the boundaries of heritage – deploying methods of open data collection, community-generated metadata, and an emphasis on stories rather than collections – makes it fresh and exciting, but it can also make it vulnerable to loss.[92] Often, these projects are not developed in partnership with an 'official collections organisation', largely because these organisations can be wary of such content: it can contain personal data; and the descriptive information accompanying the data may not be comprehensive enough to identify rights holders. This can necessitate restrictive confidentiality and copyright conditions that prohibit reuse. Data is frequently stored on temporary community-based websites, or commercial media platforms (it is important to note that community-generated content is often a reaction to official, custodial archival structures that do not work for community archives, hence the popularity of Facebook and

other commercial platforms[93] for organisations like London Metropolitan Archives).[94] Interfaces that provide access to the content are frequently not discoverable: small local digital projects are developed with cost-efficient ease-of-use in mind, and users and creators are not encouraged to consider the materiality of the technologies that uphold this content and make it durable. Complex factors such as trust, standard processes, and aesthetics are often sacrificed to cost and expediency. Sustainability is seldom built into long-term planning, and there is a lack of awareness of best practice in digital curation and preservation. The use of these projects is also limited by their fragility – their citation as historical sources is compromised when the underlying data is at such a significant risk of disappearing, or is enshrined in a local heritage website structure that means the content is neither discoverable nor useable.

Sustaining community archives is a not a new challenge in heritage, and in many respects CGDC has replicated the sustainability issues facing analogue community archives (for example, oral histories on cassette and video tapes; grey literature on deteriorating paper). Digital community archives are even more fragile, and CGDC have been listed as 'Critically Endangered' on the Digital Preservation Coalition's 'Bit List' of 'Digitally Endangered Species' facing 'material technical challenges to preservation: there are no agencies responsible for them, or those agencies are unwilling or unable to meet preservation needs'.[95]

Reflecting on Oxford University's Great War Archive project in a piece written in 2009, Stuart Lee noted that 'community collection requires resourcing beyond supporting the public during the submission stage and making the material available – it also, we would argue, requires sustaining the community into the future by answering questions, providing further information, and assisting teachers and researchers'.[96] The fragility of CGDC, and the sustainability challenges it raises, were identified long before the start of the centenary, yet there was little reflection on this by projects engaging with community digitisation.

Conclusion

An analysis of the digital legacy of the centenary shows that there was an enormous amount of data generated, in response to both top-down and grassroots, local drivers. Globally, academics, heritage organisations and local communities embraced the affordances of the digital with enthusiasm, seeing it as an enabling mechanism for access to primary sources, and extending the experience of heritage. Reviewing key digital outputs enables understanding and reflection on how 'the centenary' was understood and

valorised by different groups as an insight into how the past is used and engaged with in the present: from the 'storification' valued by both communities and researchers, to the 'datafication' of key collections that enabled a different sort of interpretation and analysis.

Within the creation, management and use of digital content, we also see a life cycle of processes – selection, capture, description, interface, sustainability and use. The life cycle offers a media lens for critical digital heritage that enables an exploration of the affordances of technologies, and the systems and infrastructures that deliver and conserve them over the longer term, to be appraised and understood in relation to the materiality of the sources they represent. They also raise the question of whether we can 'know' a digital object if we are unable to filter through the layers of interpretation that surround it. This perspective amplifies the value and impact of digital heritage. Unfortunately, the longer-term impact of much of this material is compromised due to its siloization and digital fragility, but lessons have clearly been learnt about how future centenaries can adopt, and preserve, digital heritage.

Notes

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80. 'Researchers from Abertay University and the University of the Highlands and Islands have developed an online application that provides a virtual map of the disaster. It details those who died, and identifies the communities directly and indirectly impacted, while also documenting how people have been memorialised on the island'. https://iolaire.itch.io/the-iolaire, last accessed 29 June 2025.
81. 'The core output of the project will be a database of WW1 memorials in Wales, to be shared via the Wales at War portal and the People's Collection Wales website'. The project was available at http://war-memorials.swan.ac.uk, but as of June 2025, it is no longer available.
82. The project was funded by the NLHF and AHRC. It digitised over a hundred letters sent to Mary Pennyman in her capacity as secretary of the King's Own Scottish Borderers Widows and Orphans Fund, which were held by and copyright of Teesside Archives. The digital letters were available to explore on a website, http://www.dearmrspennyman.com/, but as of June 2025, this is no longer available.
83. https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/get-involved-heritage-projects, last accessed 29 June 2025.
84. The original project description was: 'As a small but important link in a chain of naval and aviation bases all around the coast of Ireland, Royal Naval Air Service airships operating from Bentra played a vital role in surveillance and deterrence of enemy submarines in the Atlantic approaches of Ireland and Great Britain. The Battlebags and Blimps project has surveyed, mapped and commemorated this long-neglected WW1 aerodrome site'. The website https://www.midandeastantrim.gov.uk/things-to-do/museums-arts/carrickfergus-museum-and-civic-centre/battlebags-and-blimps is no longer available as of June 2025, however the data is still accessible on a Queen's University Belfast site: https://queensub.maps.arcgis

.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=226739b69b7a4f3cae47d98064862900, last accessed 29 June 2025.

85. Konstantelos, Hughes and Kilbride, 'The Bits Liveth Forever?'.

86. Quote from a participant, 'The Bits Liveth Forever?' Workshop, IWM War and Conflict Subject Network. Workshop report is available at http://eprints.gla.ac.uk /191301/, last accessed 29 June 2025.

87. DCMS, 'Lessons from the First World War Centenary'.

88. Due to the project database's scale, IWM filters were used to narrow the data collected: these included 'online database', 'art/creative response', 'course/class/ group activity', 'publication or pamphlet'. While not exact, this process ensured that a degree of relevance to community-generated digital content (CGDC).

89. The URL for this was https://oldhamremembers.org.uk/, as of June 2025, this is no longer available.

90. Oomen and Aroyo, 'Crowdsourcing'.

91. Living Legacies project, CGDC creator interview, November 2018.

92. This research was presented in 'Europe 1918 in 2018: Creating, Using and Sustaining Digital History', a keynote presentation at European Science Open Forum (ESOF) 2018, Toulouse, France.

93. Popple, Mutibwa and Prescott, 'Community Archives and the Creation of Living Knowledge', in Popple, Prescott and Mutibwa, *Communities, Archives and New Collaborative Practices*, 1–18.

94. https://www.facebook.com/pages/London%20Metropolitan%20Archives /132408150128712/, last accessed 29 June 2025.

95. Community-generated content in arts and heritage, Digital Preservation Coalition, available at https://www.dpconline.org/digipres/champion-digital-preservation /bit-list/critically-endangered/bitlist-community-generated-content, last accessed 29 June 2025.

96. Lee, 'If You Build It, They Will Scan: Oxford University's Exploration of Community Collections', https://er.educause.edu/en/Articles/2009/7/If-You-Build-It-They -Will-Scan-Oxford-Universitys-Exploration-of-Community-Collections, last accessed 29 June 2025.

Youth

Introduction: The 'Perfect Choice'

> Aged just thirteen years and three months, Cadet Harry Hayes looked as far removed as is possible from the horrors of war as he planted the 888,246th and final poppy in the Tower of London's moat. Yet this little boy in beret and fatigues is already older than some of the volunteers who joined up at the beginning of the First World War a century ago. Look at his picture and think on this: Cadet Hayes shares his age with the youngest British soldier at the Battle of the Somme. It made him the perfect choice to complete this most powerful act of remembrance of those who died in the Great War, as Britain fell silent for two minutes on Armistice Day.[1]

Memory is a subject that has excited considerable academic interest in the past four decades.[2] A process used 'to connect the past with the present and the future',[3] it provides 'security, authority, legitimacy and . . .identity in the present'.[4] Often bearing tangential relation to the historical detail of the event,[5] commemoration arises from a need to 'keep the memory of a person or a thing alive'.[6] National and local stakeholders involved in the commemoration of wars are particularly concerned about the continuation of the processes of remembrance by next generations: how can a postwar generation without a direct connection to war, relate to its commemoration?

War remembrance has intensified in recent years building on the 'memory boom' of the last twenty years, notable for its focus on war, mass death and atrocity.[7] Increasingly, young people are placed at the centre of these practices and processes of memorialisation; the 'perfect choice', as journalist Gordon Rayner described above, to bridge that unreachable,

mythical space between the past and the present. During the centenary an-niversaries of the First World War (2014–18) in Britain, young people like Harry Hayes played a prominent role in practices of remembrance; crucial participants, 'for it is they who have to bear the burden of memory in order to pass it on to subsequent generations', exacerbated by the increasing absence of living veterans of that war.[8] Youth involvement in the cente-nary was perceived as central to the UK government's plans, unveiled by then prime minister David Cameron at the Imperial War Museum, London in October 2012. He underscored how it was an opportunity to 'provide the foundations upon which to build an enduring cultural and educational legacy', putting 'young people front and centre in our commemoration' in order 'to ensure that the sacrifice and service of a hundred years ago is still remembered in a hundred years' [*sic*] time'.[9] The types of activity they par-ticipated in included formal commemorative rituals, educational battlefield tours, musical and theatrical performances, artistic outputs, and expert-led debates, amongst many others.

Teaching the First World War, 1918–2014

The centenary of the First World War was, of course, not the first time that young people in Britain had been exposed to the history of the First World War, nor integrated into its rituals of commemoration. During the centenary, however, the ways in which young people learnt about the war became more participatory in contrast to the 'regular' – and often didactic – teaching of the war in classrooms up to this point. This next section will offer a summary of how the First World War has been taught since the war ended, focusing primarily on the English and Welsh systems owing to the distinction in delivery across the four nations of the United Kingdom.[10]

In Britain and the Commonwealth, remembrance of the war – since its inception in autumn 1919 – has been understood primarily as a pedagogical exercise for children.[11] As Rosie Kennedy has evidenced, British children were organised, deployed and educated in the war effort as the conflict un-folded. Between 1914 and 1918, the war was taught as a means of engaging pupils with their lessons, as well as educating them in British imperial duty and international responsibility.[12] There is limited literature on the place of the war in British History classrooms in the first half of the twentieth century. We must rely on Cannadine et al.'s *The History Education Project*, which sought to create a 'history of school history' by interviewing teachers and pupils who had been part of the British education system since 1900.[13] Some interviewees who had attended school during the Second World War remembered the First World War being excluded from the History class,

because 'the war very much restricted the teaching of current history' or the discussion of world conflict 'must still have been raw to our teachers'.[14] Yet other interviewees recalled how their teachers had been willing to discuss the connections between the first war and its contemporary successor.[15]

Significant shifts emerged within the History curriculum in the UK in the 1970s. The climate of curriculum development – as part of the 'New History' movement (which instructed children to learn about historians' approaches as well as facts and dates) – placed emphasis on the importance of modern and contemporary history so that pupils could gain an under-standing of how the world around them had developed.[16] The First World War became part of an increasing focus on twentieth-century history, which led some teachers who had worked between 1962 and 1999 to comment on the 'rise of over-dominance of 20C World Affairs', in which 'there has been too much concentration on the two world wars'.[17] These statements suggest that there was a distinct surge in learning about the conflict during this period where it was repeated several times throughout a pupil's educa-tion – both inside and outside the classroom.

This period not only saw a 'revolution in curriculum thinking' in terms of *what* was deemed best for pupils to learn, but also regarding *how* they learnt best and *when* it was deemed most appropriate for certain subjects to be covered.[18] Approaches to teaching History moved away from 'chalk and talk' to more diverse learning methods that included skills development such as interpretation of sources and empathy through a variety of activities and formats that went beyond the rote-learning of key facts and dates. These developments were incorporated into the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and National Curriculum rolled out nationally in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[19] However, this move to standardisation in British schooling also squeezed out room for creative and diverse teaching methods. As exam performance was linked to a school's position in national league tables, the focus shifted to being exam-orientated at the expense of what was deemed 'added extras' such as field trips and creative activities. In addition, the implementation of the National Curriculum in 1991 came with an order that History would only be compulsory up until the age of fourteen (Key Stage 3),[20] meaning that teachers had less time to cover key historical periods and topics compared with when they taught History to pupils for two years longer, until sixteen.[21]

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the First World War re-mained an integral – but optional – part of secondary school education for pupils at Key Stage 3 or above. While there remains the possibility that stu-dents will encounter the First World War via a small selection of its poetry in their English Literature classrooms, accusations by media figures like Jeremy Paxman that 'the war is "only ever taught as poetry now"' do not

stand up to the evidence.[22] Whether or not students study First World War poetry is down to decisions made by individual schools and English departments, and is only likely to appear at Key Stage 4 if the school picks a GCSE or A-Level English Literature unit that includes war writing.[23] Similarly, in the 2014 revised National Curriculum for History, the war was positioned as a non-statutory subject. It was, however, still mandatory for all pupils to learn about twentieth-century history, suggesting the war was expected to be covered.[24] The war also remained a key feature of GCSE History exam papers.[25] The 2014 AHRC-funded project, 'The First World War in the Classroom: Teaching and the Construction of Cultural Memory' (FWWC) – an exploratory project aimed at gaining initial insights into the contribution made by teaching the history and literature of the First World War in English classrooms to the way the war is remembered – found that 76 per cent of surveyed History teachers taught the war during Key Stage 3 to ensure that pupils studied it before History became an optional subject at Key Stage 4, indicating the importance teachers placed on the First World War as a seminal event in British twentieth-century history.[26] Even within the context of curriculum reform, the First World War remains an 'expected' topic across all History exam boards. According to one exam board product manager, interviewed in April 2014:

> There is no core or compulsory content that awarding organisations have to include in their specifications for either GCSE or A-level, though the content they offer has to meet certain criteria – for example, requirements for chronological and geographical breadth within a student's course, and for a minimum percentage of British history. It seems highly likely that most, if not all, awarding organisations will continue to offer the First World War in some way in their new specifications, whether as a discrete topic or as part of a broader topic area. Teachers and other stakeholders would expect it to be available amongst the options – and would be shocked were it to be completely absent. It also continues to be popular with students.[27]

Whilst the First World War is seen as a central part of Key Stage 3 learning in the twenty-first century, consensus does not exist on what or how it should be taught. In 2014 a media furore was caused by then secretary of state for education and Conservative Party politician, Michael Gove, for publicly stating that pupils were being incorrectly taught the conflict through a 'fictional prism of dramas such as *Oh! What a Lovely War*, *The Monocled Mutineer* and *Blackadder*'. Gove claimed these misrepresented the conflict as 'a series of catastrophic mistakes perpetrated by an out-of-touch elite'.[28] Such arguments were not new in 2014; similar criticisms were voiced in 2002 by historian Brian Bond, who claimed trends in modern teaching of the war were 'perturbing'. He highlighted a school where pupils

read and wrote poetry about trench warfare as part of their history education. For Bond such artistic activities could not be classed as 'true' history but revealed the 'negative side' of teaching methods that only 'reinforce the assumption of the pointless waste of young lives'.[29]

Gove's public comments did not go unchallenged. Tony Robinson, a cast member of *Blackadder Goes Forth*, reportedly said that Gove's criticisms had amounted to a 'slagging off' of teachers for their choice of supposedly 'left-wing propaganda' teaching materials.[30] Theatre director Philip Hedley, involved with the original stage production of *Oh! What a Lovely War*, stated that 'Mr Gove now wishes to appoint himself the censor of theatre at the heart of the education system'.[31] For Robinson and Hedley, removing such cultural representations of the conflict from the classroom would mislead and distort teaching of the war in favour of some jingoistic alternative. Some teachers were also frustrated with Gove's criticisms. History teacher Louise Birch publicly argued that many criticisms were made without observing or interacting with 'the very people who are in the classroom'. Birch claimed that in many classrooms cultural works were used to 'teach pupils how to conduct an inquiry'. Programmes such as *Blackadder Goes Forth* were used to explore different interpretations of the First World War by 'testing the view that the British generals were "Lions led by Donkeys"' against different types of evidence.[32]

The results of the FWWC research painted a highly diverse picture of teaching the history and literature of the First World War on the eve of the centenary that rendered generalisations – like Gove's – problematic. That said, 82 per cent of History teachers who responded to the FWWC survey 'felt that it was either important or very important as an objective to "educate pupils about the cost of war"', whilst 70 per cent 'wished to use their teaching of the war as an opportunity to "demonstrate the futility of war"'.[33] It is important to note that any continued dominance of narratives of the war based on futility, loss or tragedy communicated in English secondary-level classrooms is linked to several key structural issues rather than any sense of resistance, unprofessionalism or malevolence on the part of teaching staff.[34] All sorts of practical variables affect the teaching of the First World War as a topic in both History and English Literature, including (but not limited to): time allocation in the timetable, type of school, age group/key stage, exam board specification, and the teacher's enthusiasm for, and dedication to, the topic. History teachers have to cover a wide range of subject matter at Key Stage 3, and generalists cannot be experts in everything. Other structural issues include budget constraints, region/locality (e.g. naval/military towns), and the seniority of the teacher – younger, less experienced teachers have less freedom to choose texts and topics than more experienced colleagues with

budget control, like heads of department.[35] Criticism is easy without any sense of context.

This section has outlined how the First World War has been present in British classrooms since the war ended. However, this statement is made in the knowledge that it is a generalisation, and there exists great variation over time and place, particularly before and after the introduction of the National Curriculum and across the four nations of the UK. Of course, young people do not exist in a hermetically sealed space, and the First World War could form part of their historical landscape alongside and outside of their formal education. A distinctive example of this is in Northern Ireland, where the First World War – especially the involvement of the 36th Ulster Division at the Battle of the Somme in July 1916 – forms the basis of many of the murals used to promote Ulster loyalist paramilitary groups in working-class unionist communities.[36] More generally, young people might encounter the First World War via films (like Steven Spielberg's *War Horse*), TV shows (like BBC's *Horrible Histories*), novels (like Michael Morpurgo's *Private Peaceful*), and regular memorial services around Remembrance Sunday (observed as standard in their school assembly as well as within their locality via groups like the Cadets, Scouts and Guides).

One area in which the First World War centenary and popular culture intersected to provide a new access point for children was the emergence and popularity of computer games released between 2014 and 2018, and set within the conflict. Computer games about the war allowed players to participate in its events in ways that other more traditional forms of media did not. Released in 2016, the first-person shooter Battlefield 1[37] (rated age seventeen years and above) sold a combined total of 4.91 million copies on the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One consoles in Europe in the first ten months alone.[38] Many of those sales would have been within the United Kingdom. Worldwide, the game would sell over 25 million copies. Whether those playing them would have considered their actions to be participating in the learning of history is unclear, though there is ample evidence to show that both the developers and enough of the player base considered the games to be a transmitter of historical truths.[39] Regardless, these games and their popularity amongst the young meant that, perhaps for the first time, schoolchildren were experiencing the First World War before they had been fully exposed to it in the classroom.[40]

Centenary Projects

It is against this educational backdrop that centenary projects aimed at young people in Britain (defined broadly as anyone up to the age of eighteen)

took place. According to the UK government's official inquiry into the centenary, 'young people under sixteen' were particularly well represented in funded First World War projects.[41] This overview cannot hope to capture all that took place between 2014 and 2018, but instead offers a flavour of the type of top-down (state-led) and bottom-up (grassroots, community) activity that emerged during this period. It seeks to provide a flavour of the different types of projects and programmes through the prism of their major objectives: to educate (about the history of the war); remember (the dead); create (artistic, musical and dramatic outputs); and connect (young people with the war, with one another, and with older generations). It will examine different formats and patterns of delivery, who was involved, and the methods of funding from a range of local and national examples.

National Level

The two major national-level educational activities aimed at creating a new sense of connection between British young people and the First World War were framed around the well-established practice in history education of 'a carefully crafted enquiry question' – an intriguing and worthwhile key question that governs a sequence of lessons or activities, and that students are ultimately required to answer.[42] The Great War Debate was funded jointly by the Department for Education and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and delivered by a private education consultancy firm, Hopscotch Consulting. Aimed at A-Level students (aged sixteen to eighteen), these interactive panel debates were held at local venues around the UK with a historical attachment to the war, such as former military hospitals and recruiting offices. Between June 2016 and March 2018, eighteen debates took place, covering topics such as the origins of the war, soldiers' resilience, the war at sea, the Eastern Front, the experience of women, and state-controlled propaganda. The debates reached over 2,100 students.[43]

The cornerstone of the British government's youth-focused commemorative activity was the First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours Programme (FWWCBTP), which cost £5.3 million. It was provided by the Department for Education and the Department for Communities and Local Government,[44] in cooperation with the Ministry of Defence. Delivered in partnership between UCL Institute of Education and Equity, a specialist provider of group tours for educational institutions, it was designed to give the opportunity to at least two students, aged predominately eleven to fourteen, and one teacher from every state-funded secondary school in England to visit the battlefields in a four-day tour of the major battlefields and memorial sites on the Western Front.[45] Just over 4,500 students from 1,811 schools participated between September 2014 and March 2019.[46] Each coach on

the tour was led by an accredited member of the International Guild of Battlefield Guides, accompanied by a serving soldier from the British Army and a member of Equity staff. The tour content was framed around three aspects of the conflict: social (the impact on ordinary people), military (the Battle of the Somme 1916), and cultural (remembrance and commemoration). Like many of the national-led commemoration programmes, emphasis was placed on *participation in* rather than *opposition to* the war. With the added presence of soldier-chaperones, the space for critical reflection and query was largely shut down; the overwhelming response from the young participants was sombre and reverential. Young people attested to a need to give respect and meaning to the 'noble sacrifice' of First World War soldiers.[47] Laying a wreath at Menin Gate was, for one Year 10 pupil, part of his unquestionable duty to atone for a past debt: 'Hundreds of thousands of people died for us so we could live our way of life. We've got to remember, because if we forget then it's like we don't care. We owe them everything'.[48]

While these larger national education schemes attempted to expose young people to a broad range of topics and issues relating to the history of the First World War, two other programmes of activity zoomed in on particular 'hooks' to engage school-age children: football and creative outputs. In the approach to the first year of the centenary (2014), there was a lot of interest in the so-called Christmas Truce at its 100th anniversary. The British Council, with the support of the Premier League (the top level of the English football league system), the Football League (the next tier down), and the Football Association (the governing body of association football in England), produced an education pack, 'Football Remembers', as a resource for schools. It was described by one teacher as an excellent set of resources, 'particularly useful for football-mad kids who might not otherwise engage well with history'.[49] The education pack was distributed alongside a competition for children aged eight to fourteen to design a memorial to the Truce at the National Arboretum in Staffordshire. The winning design was created by ten-year-old Spencer Turner from Farne Primary in Newcastle; it represents the hands of an English and German soldier clasped in friendship inside a steel symbol of a football. As he unveiled the memorial on 12 December 2014, Prince William, then Duke of Cambridge, said: 'For future generations this memorial will help ensure that not just football, but also a nation, remembers'.[50]

Never Such Innocence – named after Philip Larkin's famous poem MCMXIV, written in response to the First World War – began in 2014 as a poetry and art competition open to young people aged nine to sixteen in England, encouraging them to engage in the history of the First World War and respond creatively to their learning. The competition expanded over the course of the centenary from around six hundred entries (in 2014)

to over seven thousand entries in the final competition of the centenary (2017–18). By the centenary's end, more than eleven thousand young people from forty-seven different countries, territories and dependencies had created poetry, artwork and songs. The competition continues with a wider focus on conflict in all forms and throughout history, up to and including the present day.[51] The driving force behind the competition is Lady Lucy French, great-granddaughter of Field Marshal Sir John French, who commanded the British Expeditionary Force from 1914 to 1915. Her mission was to ensure that young people were integrated into the centenary period, so that they understood 'the complexities of war and the vital importance of the sacrifices our forces made 100 years ago and today'. In her mind, it was 'vital that we pass on this shared history and the spirit of commemoration to the next generation'.[52]

Overall, the main national-led youth-centred centenary commemoration activities shared an agenda of imparting something to the young participants: knowledge about the war (of a particular kind relating to loss and sacrifice, especially on the Western Front) and a commitment to carrying remembrance of it into the future. In the case of the FWWCBTP, the topics of focus were primarily on the Western Front and male combat service, as well as developing a sense of reverence, respect and gratitude towards British armed forces, past and present. 'Football Remembers' was based within a somewhat romanticised fairy-tale version of the First World War, where the everyday reality of killing or being killed was largely overlooked in favour of a brief twenty-four-hours of mythologised humanity. 'Never Such Innocence' largely saw young people producing conformist and conservative pieces of art and creative writing that drew on existing national tropes of poppies, sadness, sacrifice, reverence and gratitude. The space for nuance within these examples was limited; instead, young participants were encouraged – implicitly or explicitly – to see the First World War as a vehicle for thinking about national identity and commitment to the national cause.

The Great Debate stands out as a slightly different example. While the programme was certainly about imparting knowledge about the First World War, it was based on a much wider topic base. Between June 2016 and March 2018, eighteen different debates took place across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland on topics both traditional (origins of the war, soldiers' resilience, propaganda) and less familiar (women's experiences, the Eastern Front, the war in the Middle East). Significantly, the panels were made up of established historians from a range of backgrounds, and they participated in highly interactive sessions with young people who were free to ask whatever questions they wanted. This indicated a greater degree of authentic participation than in the other national-led projects,

which tended to operate within the existing structure of status quo and passive acceptance. Below this level – in local, community-led projects – there were even more opportunities for young people to actively participate in their encounters with First World War history and to take ownership of the direction of travel of their enquiries.

Community Level

By October 2018, the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) had awarded £96.5 million in grants to 2,155 community heritage projects across the UK, many of which were aimed at or included the participation of young people.[53] Many of these projects were supported by one of the five Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded First World War Centenary Engagement Centres, which also sought to engage young people through centre-led activities during the centenary.[54] The types of activities varied immensely: from working on theatre productions, producing films, creating exhibitions, and working in archives; to examining sources and artefact boxes in class, going on field trips to memorials, writing blog posts, and conducting oral history interviews. There are many crossovers between these projects. All shared the same two primary educational objectives of (1) broadening young people's understanding of the First World War; and (2) engaging young people in the centenary through creative means. Many also aimed to expose young people to lesser-known aspects of the war's history (e.g. conscientious objectors, women, ethnic minorities, peace), in contrast with the national picture discussed above. Many used locality and/or issues related to the present day (e.g. the refugee crisis) as hooks to draw young people into the relevance of the project. The projects were also bigger than the sum of their parts, in the sense that they all contained transferable skills (e.g. creative writing, organisation, team management, research, confidence building, public speaking, developing empathy). All of them were concerned with legacy; particularly how the outputs produced (e.g. film, booklet, exhibition) would go beyond the original lifespan of the project itself. Some projects included interesting intergenerational elements, where younger people were tasked with collaborating with older members of their community. The following section outlines seven examples of these types of activities, supported either by the NLHF or the AHRC Engagement Centres (or both) from across the UK.

'Dusty's First World War', Cardiff, 2016 (Funded by the AHRC Centre Voices of War and Peace)

This project[55] stemmed out of existing community heritage work initiated by CAER Heritage:[56] a collaboration between the community development organisation, Action in Caerau and Ely (ACE), Cardiff University, local schools, residents, and community groups from the West Cardiff suburbs of Caerau and Ely. These are parts of the city that suffer from high levels of socioeconomic deprivation and unemployment. 'Dusty's First World War' sought to uncover the origins of the Ely housing estate – a garden village designed in the 1920s which established itself as a model for 'homes for heroes' in the aftermath of the First World War. Around thirty local Year 8 school pupils worked with twenty elderly residents who had grown up on the estate (and whose parents had been some of the first inhabitants in the postwar period) to produce an exhibition to explore some of the social legacies of the conflict in this locality. The young people worked with archivists from the Glamorgan Archive (which housed some of the original architect's drawings, maps and plans for the estate) and drew out case studies of families housed on the estate in the aftermath of the war, including a war widow with children, Belgian refugees, and war veterans.

The young people were also trained in oral history techniques to interview older members of the community. What emerged was a 'really quite magical and amazing' conversation between disconnected generations about the different problems and issues faced living on the estate now and then. In addition to expanding the young people's understanding of the conflict and the co-produced exhibition, several non-quantifiable results emerged, including the development of understanding and empathy between generations. As a result of collaborating on this project, older residents of Ely could see that these 'young people are lovely, and not to be feared'.[57] The intergenerational aspect of this project is worth reflecting upon: the older members of the community almost certainly would not have been alive during the First World War. At best, they would have been babies in the postwar period. Yet the concept of generational transfer of memory remains very strong, making this a logical activity that completely overlooks the fact that these older community members had the past (about the First World War) transferred to them as well.[58] In Britain, there is a surprisingly resilient authority about the two world wars that is attached to age. Perhaps this says more about a culture of reverence and respect for older people (and a latent fear that this is ever decreasing with moral panics about 'hoodies' and deviant youth) than any authentic accuracy of firsthand witnesses.[59]

'The Men Behind the Glass', Belfast, 2017 (Funded by the NLHF and supported by the AHRC Centre Living Legacies 1914–1918)

The project[60] began as a preservation exercise, started by the Old Campbellian Society, which represents the alumni of Campbell College – a private day and boarding school for boys located in East Belfast, founded in 1894. The society had begun to raise money to reframe the 105 surviving photographs of the 126 Campbell pupils who died during service in the First World War, which are displayed in the main hall of the school. Partnering with the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), the images were digitised and restored so that replicas could return to be displayed at the school, with the originals stored in a specialist facility at PRONI. The project employed part-time archivists to uncover the stories of the 126 pupil-soldiers using records in the school archives and beyond, such as headmaster's logbooks, to bring them to life and ensure 'they're more than dead men on a wall'.[61] This research then became the basis for more creative projects, building links with other schools and community stakeholders, to explore and understand the stories behind the photographs. This included a drama outreach programme in local schools, a website containing free-to-use educational resources, and an exhibition. Campbell pupils also made films and animations based on the archival research. The school partnered with two local all-girls grammar schools in Belfast to support German language A-level students in creative writing in German.

A project that was essentially about uncovering the forgotten stories of pupil-soldiers at a particular school, quickly became a community outreach activity where 'the heritage that we have at the school' was used 'to integrate. . .and build. . .within the wider community'.[62] In the Northern Ireland context, this has particular significance when considering the contested and provocative nature of First World War commemoration amongst different communities on the island of Ireland.[63] The project was not only about providing more information about the First World War but thinking about different war experiences in Belfast, based on different school backgrounds, taking the relevance beyond Campbell while at the same time encouraging those who engaged in the project to maybe reconsider their traditional stereotypes of the type of pupils who attend Campbell, past and present. It worked to challenge the assumption that everyone who attended the school

> was a card-carrying Unionist, patriot. . . We've got one you know, Eric Robson-Dobbs, who became a conscientious objector and was expelled from Campbell for writing a letter to the headmaster, and trying to tell these other stories. Another one of the brothers from the 'Men Behind the Glass' stood as a Nationalist candidate in Donegal against his uncle.[64]

Overall, the project contributed to broader efforts to make the history of the First World War relevant to both Unionists and Nationalists on the island of Ireland, 'beyond just. . .the first of July. . .and the sixteen rising'.[65]

'Visualising the *Iolaire*', Western Isles/Outer Hebrides, 2017–18 (Funded by the AHRC Centre Living Legacies 1914–1918)

The First World War[66] had a tremendous impact on the population of the Western Isles (also known as the Outer Hebrides), despite their remoteness from the theatres of battle. A final, bitter blow was struck on 1 January 1919 when, with the sinking of HMY *Iolaire*, two hundred returning sailors were lost, some within sight of their homes. As mentioned in previous chapters, the project was not about the disaster itself, but rather its legacy. In part it was a sociocultural oral history project that explored how a community 're-covers from collective trauma . . . trying to ascertain from stories of how the memory of the disaster was passed on from generation to generation, and trying to ascertain how they coped'.[67] But it was also about how memory and commemoration can resonate with younger generations who are dig-itally literate. The project output was an online application that virtually maps the disaster by detailing those that died, and the communities that were directly and indirectly impacted, and shows how people have been memorialised on the island since.

The project enabled a previously 'silenced' memory of the war to be brought back into public discussion. Because the disaster happened on New Year's Eve – a traditional evening of celebration in Scotland, more signifi-cant than Christmas – 'there was no peace here. There was no celebration. And, for at least a generation, people went into mourning, and stayed in mourning'.[68] The research aspect of the project located where those who died on the *Iolaire* were from on the Western Isles. It then linked the young-est living person in that area to the person who had died. Over half of the youngsters had never been told about the disaster.

Focus group participant: It had never been discussed in the family. It had never been mentioned. So, we had to sort of – when we went to these families, we had to tell them. And, they then went to their mother and father – and they then, for the first time, had to tell them.

Facilitator: That seems extraordinary. Because, I think now, if there's one thing that people know about the islands and the Great War, it would be the *Iolaire*. That's a huge change in four or five years since the centenary.[69]

The project was part of a wider portfolio of activity in the Western Isles that sought to bring First World War history back onto the radars of younger generations. It was often the first time that local history, specific to the islands, was taught in their schools. Up to this point, the history curriculum had followed a national standard. As one focus group participant described, 'for the first time across the islands, [young people] were actually told about their own history. And it came alive for them'.[70] But its ramifications went beyond education; it also contributed to community healing. Despite (or because of) the very small and isolated nature of the communities on the Western Isles, there is sometimes a good degree of competition and lack of collaboration. The project broke down some of these barriers and encouraged people to come out of their community silos. 'For the first time, there was an overarching vision of heritage, and how [your community] fitted into the bigger picture. And, the involvement of the children meant that that was accepted'.[71] The older generation – who may have been resistant to the project owing to its emotional and sombre connotations – were galvanised into participation by the curiosity of young islanders asking questions.

'Francophones in London during the First World War', London, 2016 (Funded by the AHRC Centre Gateways to the First World War)

This project[72] worked with around sixteen secondary school pupils from two contrasting London schools – the Lycée Français Charles de Gaulle in South Kensington (a private school) and Newham Sixth Form College in East London (a state school). Pupils, aged between eleven and eighteen, investigated the experiences of francophone refugees and members of the French and Belgium settled communities in London during the First World War, using francophone newspapers published in Britain at the time. The newspapers used were either created because of the war or were already in circulation because of the presence of French-speaking people in London since the nineteenth century. Over the course of six months, via a series of fortnightly after-school 'history clubs', pupils worked through articles related to the experience of migrants and refugees in Britain during the war. Employing both research and linguistic skills, they identified relevant articles, translated them, and then used them as a basis to write blogposts, populate a dedicated Twitter/X feed, and create a mobile exhibition. In a similar way to 'Dusty's First World War', this project brought together young people from different socioeconomic communities in London, establishing a sense of connection and common endeavour through their work.

The project was popular amongst young people because of its contemporary relevance. Two major political events were unfolding over the course of the project's lifespan (2015–16): the mass displacement of Syrians because of the ongoing civil war, and the UK's decision to leave the European Union. Students were able to reflect on how French and Belgian refugees had often been reported negatively in the press in 1914, despite being legitimate refugees fleeing violence and persecution, in similar ways to how Syrian refugees were being depicted in 2015. The project exhibition was formally launched six months after the Brexit referendum, and reminded those involved of the interconnected nature of Britain and France's national stories and the importance of making everyone feel welcome, regardless of where they come from.[73] For the principal of Newham Sixth Form College, the ability to draw parallels between the experience of migrants in the early twentieth century and the present day was particularly important:

> Because, of course, our students in East London have lots of personal experience of migration, we're an area of new arrivals . . . and it was interesting for our students to see the experience of xenophobia and racism in a way being experienced by [white] European migrants.[74]

'Journey from Home', Birmingham, 2018 (Funded by the NLHF and supported by the AHRC Centre Voices of War and Peace and the AHRC Centre for Hidden Histories)

A distinct effort was made during the centenary to expose the British public to a more diverse and 'global' history of the First World War, one that went beyond the experience of white British soldiers on the Western Front.[75] 'Journey from Home'[76] was one such project aimed at young people. Led by 'Believe in Me CIC', a community interest company that seeks to empower young people through education, in partnership with We Were There Too, young people of mainly South Asian heritage (including Bengalis and Pakistanis) from Birmingham researched and made accessible the stories and experiences of men from many faiths (Muslim, Sikh and Hindu) who had come from South Asia to fight as part of the British forces during the war. Young people were supported, via trips to memorials (e.g. the Chattri Memorial near Brighton), sites of historical relevance (e.g. Brighton Pavilion), museums and archives, to develop their knowledge about the past and to respond to it creatively through art workshops, creative writing, and an exhibition.[77] Like the projects described above, the development of transferable skills (such as research, presentation and

leadership) were central to the ethos of the project, as was making the past relevant to the present day – notably for the current South Asian community in Britain to recognise its links to the First World War centenary. Young people involved in the project were struck by how many different faiths had served and were being commemorated together. As a result, the topic of unity and comradeship came up in many of their creative responses. One of the overarching – and perhaps unexpected – outcomes of the project was the bringing together of traditionally estranged communities. For the project lead, the young participants had been on a personal journey seeking knowledge and insight that had cemented their interest in friendship and connection between groups, rather than conflict:

> And now communities are talking. If you look at the communities that they come from, the Pakistani community is sitting over there, Hindus are sitting over there, Sikhs are sitting over here. And, through this [project], we've been able to engage with the parents as well and teach them about history. And, it's funny – the parents who were once against the project, are now having conversations.[78]

'No Man's Land', Leeds, 2017 (Funded by the NLHF and supported by the AHRC Centre Gateways to the First World War)

No Man's Land: Young People Uncover Women's Viewpoints of the First World War[79] is the high-quality publication – designed by young people for young people – that resulted from a collaboration between New Focus (a young people's project group developed by Impressions Gallery in Bradford) and heritage partners including the Peace Museum, Bradford; the University of Leeds; and the Imperial War Museum, London. The eighty-six-page book was inspired by the major exhibition 'No Man's Land: Women's Photography and the First World War', which was on show at the Impressions Gallery in the autumn of 2017.[80] Around twenty young people, aged between sixteen and twenty-four, set out to investigate photographs taken by women in the First World War in order to rescue women's stories of the war, which had often been drowned out by the roles and experiences of male soldiers. The aim was 'to show alternative experiences and break the stereotype of war photography as being just pictures of soldiers on the battlefield'.[81] The book featured images never published before, including photographs taken by Mary 'Fluffy' Porter who had joined the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, and pictures from the album made by Sister 'Josie' Kane, who had travelled to Malta to work for the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service. Another key objective was to create a resource that young people

would find engaging. When Impressions Gallery consulted the New Focus team, the young people

> started thinking about the history books they had at school. . . and they were really boring with tiny black-and-white images, tiny text and really academic language. So the whole kind of rationale behind it was that they wanted to create a book that was going to inspire and engage other young people. So I guess other young people would realise that history can be fun. . . So they really wanted big images and text that was written by them in their voice.[82]

The book was distributed, for free, to all secondary schools and libraries in the Bradford district. Members of the New Focus team went into local schools to engage pupils with the themes in the book. They also led creative activities at Impressions Gallery to share their experiences of developing the book with other young people.[83] An important objective of the project, therefore, was about making the arts accessible to people of all ages and from all socioeconomic backgrounds:

> Essentially the target audience is fourteen to twenty-four year olds, [so] obviously we realised that cost would be a massive barrier to that audience. . . in terms of having access to these beautifully produced photographic books. . . [T]here was one comment from a teacher saying that a pupil didn't have a single book at home and this was the first book that had ever been given to them. . . One of the many things was that we wanted to go to schools, or get schools to come to the galleries.[84]

Sound Architect Creative Media films, Sussex, 2016 (Funded by the NLHF)

A media-based charitable project in Sussex[85] was also committed to empowering young people to bring the history of the First World War to life, while also ensuring that memories and research were recorded for posterity. Sound Architect Creative Media had been established in 2002, but used the opportunity provided by the First World War centenary (and the funding that came with it) to develop a series of films and booklets that brought young participants together through interaction, creativity and research to increase their awareness of First World War heritage and their community. Groups of pupils from schools across Sussex developed three films (with accompanying booklets and exhibition boards) that explored different aspects of First World War history related to their communities:

(a) 'The Day Sussex Died' (made by Year 8 pupils at St Catherine's College, Eastbourne);

(b) 'Twelve and Sixpence: Life on the Home Front during the First World War' (made by Year 5 pupils at Manor Primary School, Uckfield);

(c) 'The Right to Refuse' (made by Year 9 pupils at Newlands School, Seaford).

The project contained many of the features present in other regional youth-centred activities during the centenary, such as an emphasis on transferable skills and providing an opportunity to learn about the war. The idea of producing films, exhibition boards, and booklets (that were then deposited in local libraries, schools, museums and archives) was about preservation and legacy: 'making sure that we actually keep it [the history] alive for future generations'.[86] The organisers were also struck by the level of empathy and creativity displayed by the young participants, who were able to put themselves in the shoes of people from the past and develop imaginative responses to the material they uncovered:

> That was an important outcome for me, as [well as] them being interested in history, that they discover what they're interested in. . . [T]here was one girl who wrote a letter. She'd done an art thing, a little care package to send to the Front, and with all of the things that would be sent to the Front like trench cake, and she'd made the trench cake, and it was all packaged up as this care package to send to the Front. And she wrote this letter and she imagined that she was the wife of a man who had gone to war, and that she had three children and she was describing them in this letter, and I took it and went up to her and said, "where did you get this letter from?" "Oh no I made it up". And I was totally awestruck, because this was a nine-year-old. And I said "[do] you want to be a writer?" and she said "yes". And I thought wow, and I said, "I believe you".[87]

The project had not only expanded the student's understanding of a particular period of history but had identified their ability to embrace the freedom and scope of an activity not confined by the formal classroom curriculum.

These examples of AHRC- and/or NLHF-funded community-led centenary activities aimed at and involving young people display many similarities in their scope, objectives, delivery and outputs. All were creative, collaborative and community-based endeavours dedicated to empowering young people to research aspects of First World War history and heritage relevant to their area. All involved existing organisations that were interested in history and heritage within their communities, and that were run by (or employed) well-placed, committed and entrepreneurial individuals who were ready to seize the opportunity provided by the centenary to obtain funding to enable a project that was relevant to both their existing work and to the First World War. For some project coordinators, the centenary created an opportunity to draw on funding that would achieve

key outcomes, such as skills development or intergenerational relationship building, with the focus on content (i.e. the First World War) being less important. For others, it was the reverse; the centenary held a particular significance because of its importance for British cultural memory and national identity, or as a lesson in the pity of war; these projects focused more on developing young people's knowledge and understanding of the history of the conflict.

The attempts made to push young people's understanding of the war beyond the usual tropes of white, male combat experience on the Western Front were not always welcomed by the parents of the young people involved. The Sound Architect Creative Media project on conscientious objectors, 'The Right to Refuse', faced pushback from parents who were initially unsettled by the idea of exposing their young children to what they believed to be an anti-heroic and thus disrespectful aspect of the First World War. 'Some of the parents went mad, it was extraordinary . . . They thought it was wrong. "We don't want our child learning about this rubbish", because it was the antithesis to a patriotic and romanticised notion of the First World War being fuelled in the media'.[88] Conscientious objectors were seen as a problematic topic to cover because – from a traditional perspective – they were believed to be ungrateful, unpatriotic and unsupportive of the war effort. It is interesting that responses to conscientious objectors seen during the war itself, were still being reproduced a hundred years later by certain sections of the population.[89]

A more common obstacle, however, was working with schools. Projects like 'No Man's Land' and 'Dusty's First World War', which had existing links with young people in the community independent of a particular school, appeared to run more smoothly than those that needed to develop a relationship with a school first. This was not because school staff were resistant or uninterested in the projects, but it reflected the reality of the many pressures placed on teachers in British schools today: 'Teachers are so busy, and don't sit at computers, [so] you can't email them; but then they're in a classroom so you can't phone them either, so it's really difficult'.[90] The National Curriculum leaves little room for extracurricular or additional learning. Primary schools – with fewer exams – have more capacity in the timetable for alternative learning, but the younger age group can struggle to engage in an emotive and complex topic like the First World War. Exams and competing commitments made it very difficult to recruit pupils to the projects. Without a teacher integrated into the project, pupils found it hard to invest as they did not know the representatives of the organisations trying to get them involved in the project.[91]

The question of legacy remains ambiguous for all the projects discussed above. Young participants in these activities were self-selecting; they likely

had a pre-existing interest in the First World War that led them to volunteer in a heritage project that related to it. Effectively, pre-engaged students were being re-engaged, and a cycle repeated. The degree to which disengaged and uninterested young people were brought into these projects is hard to tell, but seems fairly limited. Furthermore, each project produced tangible outputs but it is unclear how far their impact extended beyond the life cycle of the actual project. Are the books, webpages, exhibitions and films produced during the centenary still being consulted, displayed and viewed? Is that the marker of long-lasting legacy? The opportunities presented by the projects – to learn new skills and to connect with new people – are certainly important, but they are harder to quantify in terms of a lasting impact. No doubt being brought into contact with community members from different ethno-religious backgrounds or older generations had an impact on the young people involved. But what that was and how long that impact lasted is far harder to gauge. A more significant issue – faced by all centenary projects involving young people – was the fact that the participants were all self-selecting. The young people who got involved in the projects did so because they wanted to; this was usually because of a predisposed interest in the First World War, a prior connection to a youth organisation or school that had been approached to collaborate on the project, and/or because they were the type of student that volunteered for extracurricular activities because they had the time and support from their teachers and families. Far more young people in the UK did *not* participate in a centenary-related project than did; yet understanding the reasons for their lack of participation is much harder. Was it a lack of interest, time, support, awareness, trust, or something else entirely?

Young People's Perspectives on the Centenary

People have like kind of forgotten about it [Battle of the Boar's Head, 1916] . . . Before the project I didn't know anything and I don't think really anyone else here did.

It's quite good that we are learning about it [the First World War] so that it doesn't happen again, 'cos it was such like a major event in our history. For that to happen again would be just horrendous.

It was nice to see loads of people just come together and respect all the graves from whether they were German, British, Jewish. . .Canadian.

You can just imagine their lives, 'cos they're still similar to us. They are who we are, and it's just scary to imagine that maybe one of our parents, our brothers, our uncles, our relatives could just go out to war just like that.[92]

It has been an amazing journey for us as a school to walk in the footsteps of those brave women, men and children in the home front during World War One. . . What they went through is as important today as it was at the time. We hope we have honoured their memories with our work.[93]

This small selection of feedback from Year 5 and Year 8 pupils involved in the Sound Architect Creative Media film projects gives an insight into how some young participants responded to their involvement in centenary activities. Compared with data collected from participants in other youth-centred centenary projects, these comments are broadly representative of the types of 'highlights' young people identified as a result of their involvement: learning something new both educationally and morally, developing a connection with people from the past, and honouring and showing respect to the dead.[94]

Existing research has highlighted how methodologically challenging it is to conceptualise how young participants in war remembrance activities – broadly defined – make sense of their involvement. Young people often have limited agency in how they participate in such activities; it is a passive dynamic where adults choreograph the activities *for* young participants to *do*. Young people also arrive at these projects socialised into an established set of protocols and behaviours, particularly when deemed to be 'representing' their school externally. As the comments above indicate, while the young people can offer reflections on the cost of war (the 'never again' mantra), they show nothing but reverence and gratitude to those who died fighting and participating in the war. There are rare, if any opportunities, to ask: why should we remember the First World War just because we always have done?[95] More simply, the young people are unlikely to say that they found the activities boring. As discussed above, the self-selected nature of participants means an existing interest in the First World War. Also, if the young participants are giving their feedback on the centenary project in the presence of authority figures (whether that is their teacher or an academic interviewing them, or both) they are unlikely to say anything critical or dismissive. Experiences of trying to garner feedback from young people during the centenary shows a definite sense of them trying to find a way to say what it was they thought they were supposed to say, and what we the researchers would want to hear.

In May 2019, just under a hundred pupils, aged fourteen to fifteen, from secondary schools in Kent were brought together in a series of focus groups, run under the umbrella of the AHRC-funded Centre Gateways to the First World War, to discuss their reflections on the centenary. Some of these young people had participated in activities related to the centenary but many had not. While the data produced in these focus groups cannot serve to reflect an

all-national picture of youth opinion, they do provide an interesting, albeit snapshot, insight into young people's responses to the centenary.

The focus groups began with a simple exercise: without thinking, the pupils were asked to write down three words or short phrases that they associated with the First World War. While far from being a scientific opinion poll, it does provide an interesting window into the dominant themes that English secondary school pupils associate with the First World War after four years of intensive activity over the course of the centenary. 'Trenches', 'death' and 'soldiers' were the top three most cited associations with the war. The pre-centenary cultural memory of the war – a largely male combat experience of death in the trenches – had remained remarkably resilient despite specific attempts during the commemorations to push understanding beyond that.[96]

What the pupils had studied in school naturally influenced their responses to this quick-fire exercise. Most pupils involved in the focus groups had covered the subject in their history lessons. The topics covered included the causes of the war, key battles (especially the Battle of the Somme), medical and technological developments, the contribution of women, trench experience, propaganda, and the war's aftermath and the outbreak of the Second World War. Some pupils had also covered the war in their English Literature classes, focusing on poets such as Wilfred Owen and John McCrae, and novels like Michael Morpurgo's *Private Peaceful* (2003). Pupils within some schools had also had the chance to participate in a school-led field trip to Belgium (relatively straightforward from England's east coast via the Channel Tunnel), where they visited preserved trenches and museums on the Western Front.

Any interest in the First World War nurtured beyond the formal classroom was entirely dependent on the individual pupil's home setting. Many pupils did not pursue any interest in the First World War outside of school. Those pupils with family members who shared an interest had pursued extracurricular activities related to the war, broadly defined. Activities included researching their family history, being taken to museums such as the Imperial War Museum, London, and watching documentaries or films about the war. Some pupils interacted with the First World War through computer games. Several participants had taken part in Remembrance Services, either through school (in assemblies) or with organisations like the Scouts, Girl Guides, or their local football club.

For many of the pupils, the centenary period stood out only because existing Remembrance Day activities that took place at school, such as assemblies, or in their communities, such as laying wreaths at the war memorial, were more elaborate and with more emphasis on the 100th anniversaries: 'It's a big number'.[97] Some participants were aware that there was

more activity going on in their local communities because of the centenary, but this did not mean they necessarily joined in. Lack of time or younger siblings getting bored meant that watching parades or memorial services, or visits to museums, were not feasible. Several pupils were simply unaware of the additional activity taking place because of the centenary.

Whether pupils had participated in centenary activities or not, they all agreed that remembering the First World War was important. Viewpoints varied from the size and scale of the conflict: 'it was a really big event and all those people died';[98] to a sense that remembrance provided the opportunity to learn from the past: 'if you were to forget about World War One. . .you'd make the exact same mistakes and it would lead onto another war'.[99] As one pupil summarised, the centenary was about

> [getting] future generations interested and [to] find out more about what happened, why and they [*sic*] make sure it doesn't happen again. And . . . the fact that just thinking about those who have died is . . . just good to understand why they died and the fact that they sacrificed their lives for ours and our future generations.[100]

Many participants shared this perspective that it would be disrespectful to not remember the First World War:

> the men who lost their lives . . . they're still important today. Because they helped. . . their country and they will always be known for doing that good for us. . . it shows how lucky we are today that we don't have to go through that.[101]

For some pupils, the centenary had demonstrated that not enough was done to commemorate the First World War outside of the centenary period. It had encouraged them to see the designated single day of remembrance – on 11 November each year – as insufficient. For these students, poppies should be worn more than once a year to 'really, really remember them [the dead] for more than two minutes, because to be honest, out of 365 days, only one day is there to remember them for two minutes'.[102]

However, given the opportunity to do so, the young people in these focus groups were able to engage critically with the processes of war re-membrance witnessed during the centenary. Some felt the centenary had been too London-centric and activities should have been spread around the country. Others discussed how the focus had been on Britain without thinking about how the war affected other nations, like Germany and the wider British Empire at the time: 'we should commemorate them as much as commemorating ourselves'.[103] For some, this distortion was part of the political climate of the time and Britain's withdrawal from the European Union, which was incongruent with the underlying sentiment of the

centenary: '[B]y Britain leaving the EU, it's kind of like a betrayal of their [Europe's] trust. Because, when we were in need, some European countries helped us, and now we're just leaving'.[104] Others queried the amount of money spent on the centenary: 'I would obviously spend some money on it. But. . . you've got like [the] NHS etc., who've got like budget struggles and what not. . . stuff like medical, people in need, charity, or something like that could do with it'.[105] For some, the centenary had over-commercialised the memory of the First World War, 'like the poppies and stuff. And, like supermarkets are earning money from it. . . we can't just keep like spending money on things that happened in the past because there's issues in the like present'.[106] As other studies have shown, young people are not as passive in the process of war remembrance as they might appear to be when participating in official rituals.[107]

When asked whether commemoration of the First World War would continue beyond the centenary, there was mixed opinion. Some felt that the two-minute silence would continue, but additional events, like parades and art installations at the Tower of London, would not happen: 'It will definitely slowly fade away but, because of the immensity – and it was the First World War – it will not disappear'.[108] There was always the possibility that more recent conflicts would overtake the First World War in significance. Over the next fifty to a hundred years, memory of the war

> would have started to fade away and then people won't care as much as they should. . . 'cos things like the Battle of Hastings, like back then, that was like the biggest like war and then that's been like forgotten over time, so I think it will be the same. It will be forgotten over time, just like the past as a part of history.[109]

Proof of Who We Are?

Collective remembering[110] of the courageous deeds and heroic sacrifices of the soldiers of a nation is one of the main components of national identity.[111] As formal and informal education have proved repeatedly to be key devices for the development and transmission of a sense of nationhood, it becomes clear that the way young people were exposed to the history and memory of the First World War during its 100th anniversaries through state-endorsed educational and commemorative programmes – however broadly defined – tells us something about the types of narratives a nation state wanted its 'future' to be fully conversant in.[112]

On the eve of centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, the British secretary of state for education, Michael Gove, was relieved of his duties. As discussed, he was a controversial figure, having taken an extremely

Whiggish historical perspective on the question of curriculum design by insisting on an 'island story' that located a common thread of British history from the Magna Carta to the present day in liberal constitutionalism and parliamentary democracy.[113] Only a month before his departure, he had unveiled plans to ensure British schools actively promoted and respected 'British values': democracy, the rule of law, liberty, respect and tolerance.[114] A number of commentators were therefore pleasantly surprised when the centenary programme, revealed in early 2014, appeared to embrace broad and inclusive activities based on a 'new patriotism' witnessed during the London 2012 Summer Olympics: support for a British identity that embraced diversity and was comfortable with an ethnic and cultural mix.[115] A number of youth-focused centenary activities were reflective of this broader trend, attempting to expose young people to lesser-known histories of the conflict, particularly from the perspective of colonial participation. These tended to be funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government, rather than the Department for Education, who viewed the milestone anniversaries as an opportunity to promote integration and community cohesion.[116]

Through such Department for Communities and Local Government-funded initiatives, like the FWWCBTP, young Britons were encouraged to consider the multicultural makeup of the British Army during the First World War and to 'remember that the mutual tolerance and respect we value was bought at a price'.[117] The Department for Communities and Local Government also partnered with Big Ideas – a company that develops and delivers projects for public participation – to deliver a number of commemorative initiatives focusing on 'forgotten histories' of imperial service in the war, such as 'The Unremembered', which commemorated the Labour Corps, focusing specifically on youth under the mission statement: 'towards a common future, while remembering the past'.[118] Local and community-level projects funded by the NLHF, particularly through its Young Roots scheme, followed suit, viewing the centenary as an opportunity to expose young people to the origins of Britain's multicultural society.[119] 'Empire, Faith & War' (2014–16), a project led by the UK Punjab Heritage Association and guided by a youth panel, aimed to commemorate 'the remarkable but largely forgotten contribution and experiences of the Sikhs during this epochal period in world history' through an exhibition, film, publications, and educational materials for schools.[120] British Future (an independent think tank that seeks to involve people in conversation about identity, integration, migration and opportunity) and New Horizons for British Islam (an organisation working for reform in Muslim thought and practice) collaborated on 'Unknown & Untold', raising awareness of the '400,000 Indian Muslims who gallantly fought during The Great War

as part of the British Army' in order to 'honour their bravery and ensure their remembrance but also to reveal the rich legacy of Muslim contribution towards the culture and identity Britain enjoys today'.[121] Through workshops and oral history interviews with descendants of First World War Indian soldiers, young people were encouraged to reflect upon their identity and place in contemporary British society.[122]

At the start of the centenary, Santanu Das issued a stark warning of the need to challenge the colour of memory and avoid the impulse of reducing the complexity and diversity of colonial experience into well-worn stereotypes that serve particular political and ideological purposes.[123] A focus on memorialising the feats of 'imperial heroes' risks whitewashing the brutality of British imperialism.[124] Such activities are susceptible to accusations of tokenism and 'imperial nostalgia', and demonstrate a failure to appreciate that debates about the war's legacies are deeply entangled with those of British colonialism.[125] Furthermore, it can be interpreted as part of a worrying trend in British politics – evident before the centenary but given renewed zeal since the vote to leave the European Union in June 2016 – to celebrate the period of empire and reveals a melancholic longing for a 'glorious past'.[126] As racism and xenophobia return to the centre of Western politics, it is concerning that particular narratives of the First World War – ones that overlook more complex and contentious issues of wartime racial hierarchy, exploitation and mistreatment – are given a privileged position in the school history curriculum in the UK while simultaneously a focus on the history of the realities of British imperialism and colonialism is entirely absent.[127]

Conclusion

Young people in the UK will generally encounter the First World War at some point during their journey through compulsory education. While variations occurred over time and space, this has been standard for much of the period since the end of the war. The point is, the centenary did not introduce the First World War to young people. Many had already been exposed to it via their formal and informal education. There does appear to be a particular period when young people are deemed to be at the most appropriate age to learn about the war (from secondary level upwards). But the type of knowledge they are given is something that generally 'happens' to them; it is information that they receive.

Did the centenary change any of this? While the focus remained on young people in secondary education, the centenary did open up more access points to the history of the First World War, and for it to be learnt about in different ways. But those different access points and methods tended to

work towards the same objective: to reconfirm existing tropes about the war that reinforced a sense of national identity and patriotic commitment to the nation. In many ways young people in the UK were conscripted into national commemorative activities during the centenary of the First World War that left very little room for deviation from the classic tropes of gratitude and reverence to the military dead, as outlined at the start of this chapter. This is, of course, owing to the inherent link between the formation of national identity and the nation's past conflicts. The commemoration of the memory of courageous deeds and heroic sacrifices of the soldiers of a nation is fundamental to this process. As Benedict Anderson argues, the tombs and cenotaphs of unknown soldiers are the most 'arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism'.[128]

This chapter has highlighted that greater opportunity for alternative perspectives of the war emerged in local and community-level centenary activities. Yet if there was too much deviance from the accepted narrative of the war (being tragic but necessary, and its participants heroic and brave), this led to pushback against what were perceived to be potentially 'radical' and disruptive narratives. This confirms the hierarchical power relationship between adult and child, where children are often restricted to the narratives deemed acceptable by their parents and guardians. Ultimately, these projects were delivered within a context of 'respect your elders', underscored by the way older community members were often the only ones deemed to have the authority to talk about the war. They are the custodians of national memory, and claim specific ownership over the memory of the two world wars.[129] Their advancing years means this memory must be passed on to younger generations for safekeeping, but as a narrative that is deemed acceptable and sufficiently respectful of the military dead.

Finally, the centenary might be best described as a 'bubble moment'. Overall, it only impacted those young people who were in secondary-level education at the time of the centenary. For those young people who were younger than eleven or older than sixteen between the years 2014 and 2018, the centenary could have passed by largely unnoticed. The centenary was therefore an experience frozen in time. For those young people that did encounter the centenary of the First World War during this period, it is difficult to tell what they will do with that experience. At the time of publication, it is still too early to tell. It may have impacted on some of them to the extent that they tell their children and grandchildren about the First World War, perhaps in ways that involve a more nuanced and global outlook. But that is going to be difficult to measure. It is likely that once the hype of the centenary died down, and the caravan of media and government attention moved on to the next topic, anniversary and crisis, so too did young people's attention.

It is more concrete to suggest, therefore, that one of the largest impacts of the centenary in terms of young people was on those adults who teach them. The centenary offered multiple opportunities for teaching staff to reflect on how and what they teach regarding First World War history and literature; it provided educationalists with a rich and varied portfolio of education packs and resources; and it exposed them to the potential benefits of working with external stakeholders on local heritage projects. The outcome of that will only be noticeable over time, but for some it made an immediate impression:

> Because we were successful I think we would be more keen to be involved in local history projects and get the students to work on areas which perhaps [aren't] to the front of our agenda . . . So it actually reminds us that anything can be made relevant and interesting if it's done well.[130]

Notes

1. Rayner, 'Cadet, 13, Lays Final Poppy in Memory of Boys His Age', 8.
2. Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*.
3. Evans and Lunn, *War and Memory*.
4. Thelen, 'Memory and American History', 1126. See also Whitmarsh, "We Will Remember Them".
5. Although it did happen in extreme cases, such as George Maher, it was not commonplace for boys as young as thirteen to successfully enlist in the British Army during the First World War, despite the suggestion in the opening quotation of this chapter. See Van Emden, *Boy Soldiers*.
6. Bomba, 'Memory and Commemoration', 7.
7. Beaumont, 'The Politics of Memory'; McCartney, 'The First World War Soldier'.
8. Pennell, 'Learning Lessons from War?', 38.
9. Cameron, 'Speech at Imperial War Museum'.
10. The National Curriculum for England was introduced by the Education Reform Act 1988. At the time of its introduction, the legislation applied to both England and Wales. However, education later became a devolved matter for the Welsh government. In 1992, the first Northern Ireland Curriculum was introduced, similar in structure to that in England and Wales but with a few points of distinction in relation to subjects and cross-curricular learning. Education in Scotland has always been run separately; the National Curriculum was never introduced in Scotland when it was introduced in England and Wales by Margaret Thatcher's government. Since devolution in 1999, the differences between Scottish and English school systems have only widened.
11. Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, 10.
12. Kennedy, *The Children's War*. See also Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, 63–64.
13. The work of Amanda Phipps on the use of performance in teaching the First World War explores this topic in greater detail. Whilst her PhD thesis remains embargoed, it is important to acknowledge her excellent scholarship here.

14. Cannadine, 'Pupils Born 1910s–40s Secondary School General Impressions', 1–33, here 7, http://www.history.ac.uk/history-in-education/browse/surveys .html, last accessed 9 July 2025.
15. Ibid., 1. RM/P20/HiE4.
16. Sylvester, 'Change and Continuity in History Teaching 1900–93'.
17. Cannadine et al., 'Teachers Born 1920s–30s History Curriculum and Practice in Schools', 1–14 (14 DG/T39/HiE9, 12 MA/T36/HiE119), http://www.history.ac .uk/history-in-education/browse/surveys.html, last accessed 6 June 2025.
18. Wilschut, 'History at the Mercy of Politicians and Ideologies', 699.
19. Ibid., 708; Culpin, 'Making Progress in History'.
20. The National Curriculum in England is split into four 'key stages' into which children are grouped, depending upon their age. Key Stage 3 denotes Years 7 to 9, when pupils are aged eleven to fourteen.
21. Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History*, 197, 200.
22. '"Poetry is no way to teach the Great War", *The Times*, 14 March 2014, 3.
23. Einhaus and Pennell, 'The First World War in the Classroom', 1–104.
24. Department for Education, 'National Curriculum in England: History Programmes', 4.
25. Einhaus and Pennell, 'The First World War in the Classroom'.
26. Pennell, 'On the Frontlines', 36.
27. Einhaus and Pennell, 'The First World War in the Classroom', 7.
28. Gove, 'Why Does the Left Insist on Belittling True British Heroes?'.
29. Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front*, 88–89.
30. Kennedy, 'Sir Tony Robinson Hits Back at Michael Gove's First World War Comments'.
31. Hedley, 'Letters: Michael Gove's Grand Illusion Over Oh What a Lovely War'.
32. Birch, 'History in the Classroom: A Teacher Speaks'.
33. Einhaus and Pennell, 'The First World War in the Classroom', 41.
34. Todman, *The Great War*.
35. Einhaus and Pennell, 'The First World War in the Classroom'.
36. Rolston, "Trying to Reach the Future through the Past".
37. Battlefield 1, Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Battlefield (EA DICE, 2016).
38. 'Battlefield 1 for PlayStation 4 – Sales, Wiki, Release Dates, Review, Cheats, Walkthrough', 1, https://www.vgchartz.com/game/110843/battlefield-1/?region =All, last accessed 6 June 2025; 'Battlefield 1 for Xbox One – Sales, Wiki, Release Dates, Review, Cheats, Walkthrough', 1, https://www.vgchartz.com/game/ 110844/battlefield-1/?region=All, last accessed 6 June 2025.
39. Chris Kempshall has written about this at length in 'War Collaborators'. Furthermore, Stefan Aguirre Quiroga's book *White Mythic Space* shows the ways in which these games have challenged some players' ahistorical views of the war.
40. For more details on this, see Chapman, *Digital Games as History*, 36, 203.
41. DCMS, 'Lessons from the First World War Centenary', 35.
42. Riley, 'Into the Key Stage 3 History Garden'.
43. The Great War debate, https://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/articles/the-great-war -debate/, last accessed 6 June 2025.

44. As explained in Chapter 3, the Department for Communities and Local Government was renamed the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in January 2018. See https://www.gov.uk/government/news /government-renews-focus-on-housing-with-ministry-of-housing-communities -and-local-government, last accessed 6 June 2025.
45. Pennell, 'Taught to Remember?'
46. Statistics provided by the Battlefield Tours Programme director, via email, 11 July 2019.
47. Pennell, 'Learning Lessons from War?'; Pennell, "Remembrance Isn't Working".
48. Cited in Pennell, "Remembrance Isn't Working", 90.
49. https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/football-remembers-education-pack -6427911, last accessed 6 June 2025.
50. BBC News, 'Prince William Hails "Lasting Memorial" to WW1 Christmas Truce'.
51. https://www.neversuchinnocence.com, last accessed 6 June 2025.
52. https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/communicate/press-media /wwi-centennial-news/3003-never-such-innocence-a-world-war-i-education -program-creative-competition.html, last accessed 6 June 2025.
53. Noakes, 'Centenary (United Kingdom)'.
54. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 9 January 2019, online.
55. https://caerheritageproject.com/2016/07/29/dustys-first-world-war/, last ac- cessed 6 June 2025.
56. https://www.caerheritage.org, last accessed 6 June 2025.
57. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 22 August 2018, online.
58. For more on 'generations of memory', see Summerfield, 'The Generation of Memory'; Roper, *Afterlives of War*.
59. Basham, 'Kids with Guns'.
60. https://menbehindtheglass.co.uk, last accessed 6 June 2025.
61. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 14 January 2019, online.
62. Ibid.
63. There is a vast literature on this topic, but a good starting point is Pennell, 'Choreographed by the Angels?'.
64. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 14 January 2019, online.
65. Ibid.
66. https://iolaire.itch.io/the-iolaire, last accessed 6 June 2025.
67. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 23 April 2018, Inverness.
68. Reflections on the Centenary focus group, 11 July 2019, Stornoway.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
72. https://ww1francophonesinlondon.wordpress.com/, last accessed 6 June 2025.
73. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 8 December 2017, online.
74. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 1 March 2018, online.
75. https://www.bimcic.com/journey-from-home-project, last accessed 6 June 2025.
76. Pennell and Todman, 'Introduction'.
77. During the First World War, injured Indian soldiers were hospitalised in the Royal Pavilion, Dome, and Corn Exchange. The Royal Pavilion was the first Indian

hospital to open in Brighton. The Hindus and Sikhs who died were cremated on the Downs and, in 1921, the Chattri Memorial was constructed on the cremation site. For more information, see https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/libraries-leisure-and-arts/parks-and-green-spaces/chattri-memorial, last accessed 6 June 2025.

78. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 22 January 2019, online.
79. https://www.impressions-gallery.com/event/no-mans-land-young-people-uncover-womens-viewpoints-of-the-first-world-war/, last accessed 6 June 2025.
80. https://www.impressions-gallery.com/event/no-mans-land/, last accessed 6 June 2025.
81. New Focus, *No Man's Land*, 8.
82. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 15 January 2018, online.
83. https://www.gatewaysfww.org.uk/projects/no-mans-land, last accessed 6 June 2025.
84. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 15 January 2018, online.
85. https://www.soundarchitectcreativemedia.co.uk, last accessed 6 June 2025.
86. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 23 April 2018, Brighton.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. For more on the ways in which conscientious objectors were viewed in England during the First World War, see Bibbings, *Telling Tales About Men*.
90. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 23 April 2018, Brighton. For more on the broader context of teaching the history of the First World War in English secondary schools, see Pennell, 'Learning Lessons from War?'
91. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 8 December 2017, online.
92. Quotations from pupils involved in 'The Day Sussex Died', https://youtu.be/nxbbD_6dPzA, last accessed 6 June 2025.
93. Quotation from pupils involved in 'Twelve and Sixpence', https://youtu.be/G2beFiKhvWQ, last accessed 6 June 2025.
94. Pennell, 'Taught to Remember?'; Pennell, "Remembrance Isn't Working"; Sheehan and Davison, "We Need to Remember They Died for Us"; Wheatley, 'Testament of Youth'.
95. Pennell and Sheehan, 'But What Do They Really Think?'
96. Noakes, 'Centenary (United Kingdom)'.
97. Reflections on the Centenary focus group (1), 15 May 2019, Kent.
98. Ibid.
99. Reflections on the Centenary focus group (7), 15 May 2019, Kent.
100. Reflections on the Centenary focus group (4), 15 May 2019, Kent.
101. Reflections on the Centenary focus group (6), 15 May 2019, Kent.
102. Ibid.
103. Reflections on the Centenary focus group (4), 15 May 2019, Kent.
104. Ibid.
105. Reflections on the Centenary focus group (3), 15 May 2019, Kent.
106. Ibid.
107. Pennell and Sheehan, 'But What Do They Really Think?'
108. Reflections on the Centenary focus group (1), 15 May 2019, Kent.
109. Ibid.

110. Please note, this section was first published as part of a wider article on youth programmes and pedagogy during the centenary. See Pennell, 'Centenary (Education, Pedagogy, Youth Programs)'.

111. Ben-Amos, 'War Commemoration'.

112. Lowe, 'Education and National Identity'.

113. Watson, 'Michael Gove's War'.

114. Wintour, 'Michael Gove Wants "British Values" on School Curriculums'.

115. Evans, 'Michael Gove Shows His Ignorance of History – Again'.

116. Integration update. House of Commons: Written Statement made by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles) on 18 December 2014, https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-vote -office/December%202014/18%20December/5.DCLG-Integration-update.pdf, last accessed 6 June 2025.

117. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government press release: 'Online guide to help communities learn about their shared WW1 history', 26 November 2014, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/online-guide-to -help-communities-learn-about-their-shared-ww1-history, last accessed 6 June 2025.

118. See https://www.big-ideas.org/towards-a-common-future-while-remembering -the-past/, last accessed 6 June 2025.

119. A scheme designed for organisations that wanted to involve and work with young people aged eleven to twenty-five, to encourage them to develop their own views about the culturally varied heritage of the UK. Funding of £10,000 to £50,000 was available for projects lasting up to two years.

120. See http://www.empirefaithwar.com, last accessed 6 June 2025.

121. See https://web.archive.org/web/20220926114057/http://ww1muslimsoldiers .org.uk/, last accessed 9 June 2025.

122. https://www.voicesofwarandpeace.org/2015/11/23/an-unknown-untold-story -the-muslim-contribution-to-the-first-world-war/, last accessed 6 June 2025.

123. Das, 'The First World War and the Colour of Memory'.

124. Mishra, 'How Colonial Violence Came Home: The Ugly Truth of the First World War'.

125. Mycock, 'The First World War Centenary in the UK'.

126. Brogan, 'It's Time to Celebrate the Empire, Says Brown'; Younge, 'Britain's Imperial Fantasies Have Given Us Brexit'.

127. Heath, 'British Empire is Still Being Whitewashed'.

128. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 9.

129. For more on authority, gender, generation and memory, see Duffett and Roper, 'Making Histories'; and Noakes, "My Husband is Interested in War Generally".

130. Reflections on the Centenary interview, 1 March 2018, online.

❧ Conclusion

Just as the years 1914–1918 have resulted in decade upon decade of analysis and scholarship, so too may the period 2014–2018. The centenary of the First World War, much like the conflict itself, can all too easily be viewed as a discrete event confined within its chronology. But, as this study has shown, the centenary commemorations began before 4 August 2014 and continued after the concluding events of November 2018.[1] Furthermore, the very tone of the activities was profoundly impacted and shaped by unfolding political events within the United Kingdom during those four years. Whatever the wider context that was expected of 2014–2018, the reality was clearly different. The commemoration and wider memory of public events, such as the First World War, are always shaped as much by the time in which they are being remembered as by the events themselves. As Daniel Todman and Jay Winter, amongst others, have previously shown, the ways in which the First World War has been commemorated since 1918 have always reflected the contemporary concerns and interests of societies at the time.[2] That continued to be the case for this centenary.

While not surprising, it is worth noting that an emotional relationship with the war remained strong in the United Kingdom in the lead up to 2014, and endured throughout the centenary. There remains a strong social and cultural connection to the events of the First World War, best evidenced by the continued centrality to the national calendar of remembrance of the national war dead, a ceremony that started in the aftermath of the war. The fact that the war still moves people is key to understanding the events of the centenary. Public participation in a variety of events spread across four years cannot be explained away entirely as simply a reflection of an unfolding and accepted narrative of national commemoration. People took part because they wanted to, and in ways that disproved concerns held by some members of the British government's World War I Centenary Advisory Board who feared, in January 2013, that the centenary was at risk of becoming 'sterile and boring'.[3] The decision to emotionally engage may have been

motivated by societal pressures and the expectation that the centenary was something people should participate in but, much like the volunteers of 1914, it was still an active decision by people to involve themselves in something unfolding around them. As Joanna Bourke has argued, it is individuals, not societies, that remember.[4]

This emotional motivation helps us to understand why the centenary produced such a variety of activities. It also risked inciting the ire of those historians who viewed the centenary as an opportunity to push public understanding beyond the well-trodden 'futility/lions led by donkeys' narrative of the war. In 2014, prominent First World War historian, Gary Sheffield, described his hopes for the centenary:

> The Great War centenary years offer a once-in-a-century opportunity for education, and to move serious debate beyond a narrow circle of historians. . . My hope is that at the end of the centenary period the people of Britain will have a more mature, reflective and less strident view of the Great War; one less encumbered by myths, half-truths [and] prejudice.[5]

The 'cultural turn' has seen the historiography of the First World War become far broader than it had been prior to the 1970s.[6] However, the very nature of First World War revisionism, particularly in relation to historical subjects like Sir Douglas Haig and British High Command, has laid bare the disconnect between academic understandings of the conflict and those more widely held by the general public.[7] Perhaps the centenary was unable to shift long-held popular assumptions about the war and its experience because the wider public simply did not want to revise them. There was, in fact, a comfort in holding on to narratives of the war that solidified the 'mud, blood and futility' of the war. Why not hold onto ideas about the war that have been commonplace for so long? If the centenary of the First World War opened up the possibility of a marketplace of ideas and interpretations, then it seems many of the public were not interested in buying the analysis that historians were selling. This not only has an impact on how the war continues to be remembered and placed within British society but, more importantly, has implications for how historians should attempt to engage with those outside of the academy.

However, it is worth remembering that historical remembrance is not necessarily what the state wishes its citizens to remember; and historians, as Jay Winter argues, play a small part in its construction. Instead, 'a whole range of actors – relatives and families, artistic producers, groups in civil society and political parties – also play a role in constructing historical remembrance'.[8] These varied actors, 'influenced by their own generational experience as well as by contemporary cultural, social, economic and

political concerns, help to construct and propagate narratives about the First World War'.[9] A 'collaborative turn' in academic research – where new spheres of collaborative knowledge generation and problem solving are redefining where knowledge comes from and who has expertise – means community partnerships are an increasingly common framework through which established narratives are being challenged.[10] The centenary of the First World War testified to the flattening of hierarchies in the production of history. A whole range of stakeholders and participants, ranging from teachers to curators, parish councillors to librarians, youth workers to NHS professionals and beyond, shaped how the First World War was remembered in its centenary moment. For most of these participants, there was no sense of 'owning' that space; it was simply about undertaking their own activities because it is what they wanted to do in that moment.

The widely felt and shared emotional connection to the war, as demonstrated again and again during the centenary, proves that interest in it had not dimmed by the start of proceedings in 2014, and it survived intact throughout the years of commemoration. This was an audience that whilst largely self-selecting, because of the 'voluntary' nature of many activities, wanted to engage with the topic. The various projects, initiatives, artistic performances, and national commemorations discussed throughout this study show the extent to which, in public engagement terms, the centenary was a resounding success. They could be found in all parts of the United Kingdom and in almost every form of space. It built something that certainly resembled a broadened sense of community. All four nations of the UK undertook activities during the commemorations, something that should not be underestimated in either significance or difficulty. Below the national level there were various activities that took place within regional and local spheres. The centenary was not something restricted to the upper echelons of the state. It existed within local towns and villages, and was both physical and digital. It was often used to help to examine and enhance concepts of identity. It was not an event that simply considered those of the past, but what they mean to us now. Attempts to broaden or diversify a wider understanding of those who 'participated' in the war were not universally successful, but the very fact that attempts were made should be considered important. As the likes of Santanu Das have argued, successful films such as *They Shall Not Grow Old* have done 'nothing to change the colour of memory about the first global conflict', and there remains a wide imbalance in how the imperial involvement in the war is perceived, with many approaches still tending to use tokenistic language.[11] However, we should acknowledge that even the attempts that failed were still attempts undertaken. Much work remains, but perhaps a more concerted effort to begin that work has emerged.

However, for all these clear benefits and positives of the centenary, it is equally true that the hope, as expressed in David Cameron's 2012 announcement speech, for the commemoration to serve as a way of building a cohesive national identity did not come to fruition. Perhaps this is unsurprising; any potentially 'unifying' event – whether commemorative (like the centenary), celebratory (like the Queen's Jubilee), or sporting (like the 2012 London Olympics) – has the potential to be hijacked by politicians for the purposes of aspirational political rhetoric, often with little undergirding substance. But in the case of the centenary – which, as this volume shows, did see an impressive array of grassroots community-driven activity – it does seem pronounced. This is because the centenary did not take place in a vacuum. The austerity programme of the coalition government, followed by the 2014 independence referendum in Scotland and the 2016 referendum to leave the European Union, all changed the state of the nation precisely as the centenary was in process, opening divisions rather than building unity. In some ways these changes could be incredibly stark. Whatever had initially been planned for the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme in July 2016, it was undeniably changed by the UK's decision to vote leave in the EU referendum barely a week beforehand. By the time of the Armistice anniversary in 2018, the French president Emmanuel Macron and the German chancellor Angela Merkel were meeting together at Compiègne on 11 November.[12] There was no British representative. Existing political discourse and realities encroached into the centenary in ways that could not have been easily predicted in 2013. The potential unifying possibilities of the commemorations were never able to take root as the United Kingdom's political landscape was marked by division, both internally and with its European neighbours. And, as Andrew Mycock established before the centenary officially began, there were existing divisions within the United Kingdom that, if not addressed head-on with openness and empathy, were only going to be exacerbated by the centenary commemorations themselves, particularly in terms of colonial legacies and racial inequalities.[13] Much like the case of the Decade of Centenaries in the Republic of Ireland, while the commemorative programme had the potential to create a sense of shared moment, it could never be expected to overcome the deep roots of historical conflict and injustice.[14]

This study has charted the ways in which both the hopes and realities of the First World War centenary existed – occasionally at the same time – and were then manifested across the country over its duration. What we have discovered through this process is that it is as impossible to claim there was a single centenary experience as it is to speak of singular 'soldiers experiences' during 1914–18. The opportunity to take part in different forms of event could differ noticeably across the four nations of the United

Kingdom, but the existence of some form of event did not. There were few places across the country where nothing happened to mark the centenary, and those events that did take place could be hugely varied in their nature and focus. As the preceding chapters have shown splits between national, regional and local commemorations produced so much material that its many digital traces and recordings either need to be reconsidered or, sadly, have failed to endure. A wealth of activities, material, evidence, and records of events and projects between 2014 and 2018 have effectively digitally self-destructed since the conclusion of the commemorative period, and that should cause significant concerns for historians, heritage professionals, and policymakers going forward.

The widespread failure to preserve the centenary in digital form is one of the many lessons the authors argue can be taken from the period of commemoration. Whilst anniversaries of significant historical moments have of course happened before, the First World War centenary is the first time there has been such a sustained and widely shared programme of commemoration. With the 100th anniversary of the Second World War now firmly on the horizon, there are going to be many lessons to be taken from 2014–2018 to help inform future events, as Jenny Macleod has argued.[15] This book will therefore be a foundational source for those who will, in 2039, attempt to undertake that which we have already done.

But despite the lessons and considerations outlined in this book, there also remain many questions that are implicitly tied to its contents. At the centre of them lies one clear query: what have been the consequences of the centenary? This book has surveyed and considered many of the different ways in which the centenary was manifested within the United Kingdom between 2014 and 2018. The outcome of these events, however, is both important and difficult to fully ascertain. This is not because of a lack of analysis, but rather because the very framing of the question assumes that the First World War centenary has finished, that it ceased to exist from 12 November 2018 onwards. But what if that is not true – if the outcome of the centenary was not constrained within the time allotted to it? What if the centenary is still happening now, today, tomorrow?

The students who visited battlefields still carry those experiences. The local projects that secured funding did not lose their knowledge once the money stopped, nor did they forget the experience of undertaking their activities. Whilst digital sources may have vanished, the memories of those who saw them has not. There are no more poppies in the moat of the Tower of London but they now exist across the United Kingdom in thousands of locations.[16] Films and television dramas can be rewatched. Games can be replayed. Stories can be retold. The historicity of the centenary may be contested but the experience of taking part in it is not open to the same

debates. There is no endpoint to this sort of legacy. It seems undeniable that historians and heritage experts will spend many more years to come attempting to unpick the benefits and drawbacks, the successes and failures, of the centenary period. Whilst their conclusions will undoubtedly be forthcoming, the very fact that they will be doing so helps to make the point that the centenary should be viewed as a starting point rather than an ending one. The aim of this study has not been to conclude discussions of the centenary but to prompt them. To paraphrase the famous recruitment poster, the question 'What did you do during the Great War centenary?' should now provoke answers that do not just look backwards but also consider the ongoing nature of historical remembrance and participation. The past rarely remains in the past: the centenary existed between 2014 and 2018, but it also continues today. This is not contradictory. It underpins the two aims of this research: firstly, to chart the many aspects of commemoration in Britain between 2014 and 2018; but secondly, to provide a starting point, a foundational primer, for scholars, educationalists, heritage professionals and others to continue examining the popular memory of the war. Commemoration can sometimes be hard to capture, reflections difficult to see. Hopefully this book is a beginning.

Finally, while much of the focus of this book has reflected on what was produced during the centenary, it is pertinent, as we bring our discussions to a close, to consider the question of what is being lost. As discussed, digital legacies are extremely short-lived. There is some irony in the fact that the website housing the digital map produced to trace the afterlives of the Tower of London poppies, 'Where Are the Poppies', no longer exists.[17] Little thought went into the maintenance, archiving, or future retrieval of the thousands of digital outputs created during the centenary. Furthermore, participatory research, by its very nature at least in visible terms, is transient. The work is in and of the moment; the outcomes are for the participants as they participate, and are thus harder to audit as tangible outputs. Some of the activities and events that characterised the centenary were fleeting, and deliberately so. Jeremy Deller's art installation, 'We're Here Because We're Here' was of the moment on 1 July 2016, with only 1,600 printed cards handed to members of the public as some kind of physical reminder, bearing the name, age and regiment of the person the actors represented. While the event inspired a documentary and book, and a mounted frame of twenty of the cards was purchased by the Tate, the artwork as a commemorative act was ephemeral.[18] Many of the activities were brief and grassroots in their nature, and there was never any intention that they would survive in the medium to longer term. So much effort was put into recording the centenary, yet it was never going to be possible to keep a full inventory of what unfolded in this period.

This leads to a broader question: how do we recall the traumatic events of the twentieth century when no one is alive to tell us about them? The year 2014 marked the beginning of a century of commemorations that will far outlast the authors of this book and the stakeholders it represents. British society is just at the beginning of a long journey of remembrance, reflecting on the catastrophes of the last hundred years while simultaneously dealing with the unpredictability of our own world beset by climate catastrophe, the rise of populism, genocide and conflict. How has the nature of remembrance adapted to meet the needs of the past and the present, as well as offering some sense of reassurance for the future? Is the turning inwards, harnessing the power of community and locality, a way of dealing with the uncertainties beyond our control? Are we therefore remembering past tragedy as a way of reminding ourselves what it is to be human, what it is to belong? The defiance that underscores remembrance, encapsulated by Laurence Binyon's phrase 'We will remember them', is therefore not just about the consequences of forgetting the past, but is instead driven by a desire to blinker our vision of what we are about to lose in our futures.[19]

Notes

1. For example, the First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours Programme continued until 2019. Never Such Innocence – a charity that began as a First World War commemoration project for children and young people – has, since 2019, expanded its focus to include conflict in all forms and throughout history, up to and including the present day.
2. Todman, *The Great War*; Winter, *Remembering War*.
3. Strachan, 'We Must Do More than Remember', 23.
4. Bourke, 'Introduction'.
5. Sheffield, 'A Once in a Century Opportunity?'
6. Jones, 'As the Centenary Approaches'.
7. For more on these debates, see Bond and Cave, *Haig*; Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*.
8. Winter, *Remembering War*, 10, 277.
9. McCartney, 'The First World War Soldier', 301.
10. Kempshall, Pennell and Tattersall, 'Waiting to Be Discovered?', 62. See also Saltmarsh, 'A Collaborative Turn', 3–15.
11. Das, 'Colors of the Past'; *They Shall Not Grow Old*, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2018.
12. 'Macron and Merkel Mark Armistice Centenary at Compiègne', *France 24*, https://www.france24.com/en/20181110-live-french-president-macron-german -chancellor-merkel-armistice-commemoration, last accessed 28 January 2025.
13. Mycock, 'The First World War Centenary in the UK'.
14. Pennell, 'Choreographed by the Angels?'
15. Macleod, 'Looking Forward'.
16. Each poppy was sold to private bidders to raise money for service charities, except for a few flowers that toured the country. The location of the poppies was digitally

mapped by a 14–18 NOW project, 'Where Are the Poppies Now?' See https://museumsandheritage.com/advisor/posts/poppies-now-project-launched-14-18-now/, last accessed 28 January 2025.

17. If you search https://www.wherearethepoppiesnow.org.uk, you will discover the domain is available to purchase, last accessed 28 January 2025.

18. See   https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/deller-were-here-because-were-here-p82019, last accessed 28 January 2025.

19. Binyon, 'For the Fallen', *The Times*. See https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57322/for-the-fallen, last accessed 28 January 2025.

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