Creative History
An Engagement Toolkit

April 2017 release

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Introduction

Purpose of the toolkit

This is a 'toolkit' that outlines some principles, motivations and methods for identifying, approaching and using audio-visual (AV) archives in creative, effective and memorable public history projects. It is aimed at educators, community groups, local history societies and individuals interested in working with archives in order to explore and make available our shared pasts.

The toolkit is derived from a funded research project, *Generations of Commemoration*, a partnership between Secret City Arts (SCA) represented by Mandy Ross and Pyn Stockman, and researchers from the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research (BCMCR), supported as part of the *Voices of War and Peace First World War Engagement Centre* funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council and in partnership with the Heritage Lottery Fund (details in the appendix).

> **Pyn Stockman:** *We're part of a network of organisations and projects that seek to explore World War I. And to engage communities with their history and with the history of World War I. We see it as a community of interest and that 'Voices of War' has brought together a number of different organisations and groups in order to explore that.*

> **Mandy Ross:** *We came into the process having done a World War I project, and we were encouraged to look at ways that we could deepen and further our project and extend its value. Build on the work that we'd done, and that's been a great opportunity, which we feel is continuing, and we can see the potential for further links and bonds and explorations via 'Voices of War'.*

Approach of the toolkit

Generations of Commemoration focused specifically on creative responses to the subject of the Great War as a means of exploring themes of commemoration and working with groups of young people, focussed in particular on the use of archive film material.

As part of *Voices of War and Peace*, this toolkit is illustrated with rich detail from *Generations of Commemoration*, yet the approach also suggests how lessons from this project can be transferred imaginatively to history topics concerning other eras, as well as aspects of working with other age groups and communities of interest.

Our approach in this toolkit is to set out a number of questions and ideas about historical work, outlining practical steps towards productive development and engagement with archives.

Each section deals with an aspect of public history and the archive. It gives a simple checklist of prompts and illustrates these with reference to the operations of *Generations of Commemoration* and the practical methods of SCA. The work of SCA is further elaborated in the 'Background to the toolkit – project and partners' section of this toolkit (p 22), in our further resources (Sharing Project Insights, p 19), and on their website.

This toolkit emerges from the collaboration of academics and artists eager to pass on lessons gained from that collaboration. We hope that this will be of use for those of you already advanced in the development of projects and currently seeking financial support, as well as those who might just be getting started and who might be aiming to produce history whatever it takes.

Doing Public History

Principles

- Anyone can produce history
- Public history work can go beyond familiar stories
- Historical work can be accessible and creative

What is Public History?

Everyone has a history that connects them directly or indirectly with stories from the past about the wider community – locally, nationally and globally. Alongside the work of professional or academic historians, there is a wide array of other ways of representing this connection with the past, as well as many ways of engaging non-professional communities.

This array is often called 'public history': it is produced by individuals and communities, who need not be professionals, as a public 'event' which attempts to engage as wide a constituency as possible. Whether concerned with the Great War or some other aspect of the past, anything can be the subject of history and can be conveyed in a range of interesting and meaningful ways. The work of public history includes historical re-enactment societies, blue plaques, musical tribute bands, drama and so on.

Seen in this way, then, public history offers a space for everyday, ordinary and often overlooked stories to be told in creative ways.

> *Pyn Stockman: As a subject, World War I is not necessarily studied or explored in primary school at all. So, I think what we wanted to do with our project wasn't to focus too much on the war aspect, but to focus on the home front and what would have been going on.*
>
> *Mandy Ross: Initially, a head teacher had said, "Oh, no. We don't do World War I in primary." So, that was useful to learn, and certainly, I think you can offer it as, "These are different ways of getting kids fired up about history." That's a more general thing that you're offering, with some CPD for teachers, than simply, "Here's a bit of poppies and bloodshed about World War I."*

The centenary of the Great War provides the backdrop to this toolkit explored in the supporting case study of Secret City Arts activity on *Generations of Commemoration*. Although many people would be able to trace personal connections to men who fought on the Western Front, the history of the First World War is about much more than the mud and trenches: it is about other theatres of war, about the wider impact of mobilization on countries like the UK, about the families supporting men at war, about women and children working in factories or learning in schools, all amidst this traumatic event. Then, of course, we can imagine the legacies of the war: for those who came back; for the families waiting for them; for the families who lost sons and husbands. Seen in this light, the idea of the veteran encompasses all those impacted by the war, and its meanings are not confined to

1914-18 but endure in memorials and around a century of annual commemoration. This process and practice of remembering might, itself, be a form of public history.

While academics are core to work on *Voices of War and Peace*, the projects it supports (exemplified here by *Generations of Commemoration*), and SCA's practice in particular, suggest a range of activities that we can count as 'public history' and demonstrate the variety of ways in which history can be produced. SCA, for instance, outline the differences between 'academic' history and the nature of their own public engagement work:

> **Mandy Ross**: *What we look for are tiny nuggets of history: tiny bits that we can then weave a story or invite the participants to imagine a story around. So, I think that's a very different approach from an academic history. So, it's very much a starting point, a historic document or an archive resource. It's one tiny thing.*

Creative Public History

Public history approaches, like those demonstrated by SCA, allow for overtly creative interpretations in order to develop ideas about the past. Although they do not ignore the importance of facts or the 'correct order' of events, such approaches do not necessarily make a fetish on these aspects of history. Instead they seek to make connections between individuals and events, between the general and the particular, in highly personal ways.

SCA aid an understanding of the past through creative activity, a practice that is apparent in the educational aspects of their work with children. In the *Generations of Commemoration* project, their work has involved both pupils and their teachers, and has extended the knowledge of both beyond the limits of the national curriculum and how it deals with the Great War:

> *Mandy Ross: What we're trying to do is to bring the history to life and for the children or young people to inhabit a story, so that they have some empathy with the characters. And they can try to imagine what they might do if they were in that situation, imagine what it might have been like. [Pyn's] drama work [...] is all about experiencing some of the feelings that go with that kind of experience. So, making connections.*

Pyn identifies the combined use of physical materials and everyday objects (such as suitcases and documents) alongside creative writing or film-making as integral to telling a story about the past, of setting the personal within a wider context of understanding:

> *Pyn Stockman: We tell it as a story. We create that bit of excitement of, "This case. It contains a story. A real story," and from that moment, the kids are kind of, "What? What?"*
>
> *Then, they wait for the reveal, and then gradually the objects are taken out and the objects, the artefacts… They help bring that story in some way to life. The children get to interact with those, not just in a, "Oh, we're looking at an old letter," but, "This tells us something about what we're going to work with."*
>
> *Then, the drama work goes on to ask them to become those characters: "What is it like to be that character? What do they do? How do they do it?" So, you begin to gradually build up a picture, and I think maybe that's slightly unusual.*

Working with Archives

Principles

- Archives collect historical material and take many forms
- Many official archives are open to the public and are resources available to all
- Archives are interpretations of the past and what 'counts'
- Archive holdings do not have a 'perfect' fit for project ideas
- Archives are creative resources

What are archives (and how can we use them)?

An archive is a collection of materials that offer a resource through which we are able to describe, interpret and understand the past. Archives *may* resemble the materials presented by museums, or may be akin to the collections many of us keep of family photographs, or to the records that we have from the formal and informal organisations to which we belong: our school achievement record; a weekend netball or football team roster; notes from a book club.

Historians tend to work with archives that are maintained by national and local government and so have a formal, legal status. These archives contain the documentary evidence of how things were organised and managed in the past, and their material is properly catalogued and searchable. The National Archive, for example, contains the material that often informs official histories of the nation and of the great and good. Nonetheless, such archives also preserve material that tells other stories.

But no matter how 'formal' and well organised they are, archives are not exhaustive repositories of the material of the past. As such, any collection to which we might turn in order to produce history – academic or public – invites a number of questions that are key to archive literacy:

> *Who collected this material?*
> *How and why was this material chosen (what's missing)?*
> *How is it organised?*
> *Who pays for this collection?*

These questions underline the idea that archives are already an interpretation or 'mediation' of the past as by default they represent a *selection* of materials. Above all, the key question for public historians is: *(how) can we access and use this archive*? Public archives are, in theory, available to all, but there are limits on what can be done with the material they contain. The rarity or value of documents may mean that historians are not allowed to borrow them, for example, or to photograph or otherwise copy them.

Audio Visual Archives

Alongside those archives that contain papers and official documents are a range of collections that offer access to visual and audio records of the past. In the UK, these include some of the holdings of the British Library, the British Film Institute and the regional film archives.

One of these is the Media Archive for Central England – MACE – an accessible organisation which connects people with the moving image heritage of the English midlands. MACE does this by:

- selecting and acquiring, researching and developing moving images and related materials which inform our understanding of the history and culture of the midlands.

- ensuring this collection is accessible through the application of preservation and curatorial skills.

- providing public repository services, professional advice on the care and preservation of moving image heritage, and support for community-based events and collection-related research.

But we should also now recognise accessible resources such as YouTube and Vimeo as a form of archive, as well as social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and others connect which themselves connect with and collecting individual and community materials like photographs, video and sound.

One great benefit of the holdings of archives like MACE is the way they draw attention to the look and sound of the past: how the past looks and often sounds different!

Audio Visual Archives are interpretations

As suggested, archives are always interpretations: archivists generally collect only a fraction of the materials and accounts of the past, and cannot preserve *everything*. However, this means archives offer a perspective on what matters simply by virtue of the choices that they make. Furthermore, the documents held in archives are themselves interpretations: letters, diaries, reports and so on, alongside the 'facts' of ledgers and the like.

This idea of interpretation is useful in thinking about audio-visual archives like MACE in two ways.

Firstly, while the digital age appears to involve recording and sharing everything, the AV record of the past – in film, television and radio for instance – is limited. As historical material was stored on perishable media such as film or videotape, unless it has been digitised much of it is in danger of being lost, if it has not been lost already.

Secondly, whether with or without sound, or colour, the direct or 'liveness' of film, TV and audio recordings has the appearance of 'reality'. It can be inviting to approach such material as if it is 'unmediated'; but just with writing preserved in the archive, one also needs a form of literacy with which to view and hear film, TV and sound recordings.

Extending those expressed above therefore, basic questions to ask of AV archive material include:

- *Who made this record?*
- *What kind of techniques were used in production (what can we see of it)?*
- *Who is in this film/audio?*
- *Who saw or heard this material (who was it for)? What did they make of it?*

In the case of MACE, as with a variety of official archives, the archive catalogue is available online for users to search. A range of material has been digitised already, and can be viewed online; but the majority of holdings are not yet available in this way.

The general and particular in the AV archive

Many people encounter archives in everyday life when they embark on personal projects such as researching their family tree. There are plenty of highly individual and personalised records available to the amateur genealogist, of who lived where and in what street thanks to voting records, as well as birth, marriage and death certificates. Similarly, in a previous project, SCA worked with primary school children, drawing upon a specific school record book and memorial information regarding specific individuals.

Audio-visual archives are generally not so precise or democratic, and their material does not tend to identify individuals and specific places in the same depth as written archives might. While MACE, for instance, does have some (surprising) material of this nature as a result of holding local TV news archives, film and television coverage of ordinary people has historically been limited.

	Title	Date	Summary	Duration
	[Midland Montage: 13.07.1961: Here and There]	1961	Five recent Midlands News stories re-edited for Midland Montage.	00:03:00
	[Horizon Midlands Holiday Promo, East Midlands Airport]	1969	Unused material from Horizon Midlands promotional film. Features footage of passengers and staff at East Midlands Airport. Also, some footage of Birmingham Airport and what appears to be an alternative ending to film.	00:05:30
	First Bosnians	2005	Oral history conducted by Bosnian Cultural Centre - Midlands including interviews with Bosnians who came to the UK in the 1940s and 50s .	00:37:29
	[ATV Today: 01.09.1969: Midlands News Film Unit Retrospective]	1969	Compilation of items to mark the tenth anniversary of the Midlands News Film Unit.	00:20:00
	[Midlands News: 16.07.1969:	1969	Display by pupils about the history of an unidentified Birmingham school	00:00:30

Holdings of the AV archive will, therefore, need to be used as general representations of the past, rather than as the kind of personalised evidence people used to produce family trees or to deliver SCA's previous work. Don't expect an audio-visual archive to hold a perfect film for your needs – of a very particular event or place. Instead, expect it to have a large number of films that you can approach with a sense of creativity and flexibility, and be open to letting the collection guide your selection. The act of interpreting what an archival film contains and what meanings can be extracted is a significant part of the process.

> *Mandy Ross: The MACE archive was something […] We were aware of it, but didn't really have a sense of what there was in it, and also how we might build on our previous projects to develop further work.*

> *Pyn Stockman: Ultimately, where film might sit when we do a bigger project and how we might use film, existing archive film, within the films or the live performances that we make would perhaps be one of the outcomes.*

An added challenge for the work demonstrated by SCA lies in consideration of how archives may not be a reflection of who we are now. What if your personal lineage and community is not readily mirrored in the historical record?

> *Mandy Ross: In our project, originally, we were working with a school community where the families would not have had personal links with World War I. They would have come to this country much later and not have had personal involvement. We wanted to find a way to work out how to bring the history and the commemoration alive for people who wouldn't automatically have a personal link.*

In such instances, it is creative approaches that make historical engagement and understanding possible.

Working with AV archives

Principles

- Archive retrieval is time-consuming, but rewarding
- An archivist or research assistant will have skills and experience to help
- Take time to plan your search of the archive: start with an expansive list of keywords
- Be prepared to think creatively about how to use the available material
- Allow lead time: archive staff field many requests and will take time to respond

How do you find something in an archive?

If you are able to work with a research assistant (RA), they will have skills and experience to lead this part of the process. If you don't have access to (or funding for) research help, you can do archival work on your own. Archives such as MACE make their search functions public, and do not require special access. Some archives are, however, closed to the public; but you may still be able to contact an archivist and work with them to retrieve relevant material.

This section will use more detail from *Generations of Commemoration* and MACE as an example of how to access an AV archive.

There are (broadly) two stages to working with an archive: finding out what material is available, followed by selecting which items to request for closer study. On *Generations of Commemoration*, this process happened a few times. Guided by the project brief and discussions with SCA, our RA used MACE's search functions to create a master list of all the clips which might be useful, and made recommendations to SCA about what holdings should be requested for use. The RA then contacted MACE directly to learn which films could be used for this kind of workshop (i.e. were licensed to be used in this manner). Seven films were then made available to SCA, who screened them all and selected one short film to use in the workshops. This film showed the <u>1927 dedication of the Alfreton War memorial</u>.

Step by Step: Finding the Film

Finding something in an archive is not difficult, but it is time-consuming.

What follows is a description of the process followed on *Generations of Commemoration* in search of Great War material. This is of particular relevance to those using MACE, but many of the steps apply to any kind of archival retrieval.

1. Comb through archive search results, collecting all possible references to your topic (here WW1)

   - Start with list of provided keywords, which were drawn up as guidelines
   - Modify search (narrow/broaden) based on what terminology is used by the archive ("home front" giving results for "national front"; "Great War", "old soldiers" for interwar material)
   - Descriptions of material can be as old as the material itself: be prepared for out-dated language
   - If the archive uses tags, as MACE does, browsing these will connect you to parallel material or new sets of keywords, such as "Old Contemptibles" as a synonym for WW1 veterans
   - In addition to WW1 searches, our keywords also included the neighbourhoods of the schools themselves, fitting SCA's established practice of working with hyper-local history based in the built environment.

2. Contact the archive via email before you get too much further

- Offer a quick introduction to your project, explaining what its goals are
- Find out what provision the archive has for making films available for education or research, and what their typical timescales are for releasing copies
- Communicating in the early stages of research also helps the archive plan their workflow, and makes it less of a surprise when you bombard them with requests
- For our project, physically visiting MACE wasn't necessary as all business could be conducted online.

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Media Archive for Central England

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? How do I access the material held at MACE?

THIS WEBSITE
MACE has catalogued over 51,000 titles on the website. 4200 of these titles have video and this number grows weekly. We also hold a number of, as yet, un-catalogued collections. **Contact Us** if you have a specific query or to find out more.

ARRANGE A VIEWING APPOINTMENT
If you have a research interest you can visit the archive to view titles from the collections free of charge. **Contact us** if you would like to make an appointment

VIEWING COPY FROM MACE
Subject to copyright permission, are able to produce one-off viewing copies of titles on DVD for you to watch at home. We call this our **Bespoke DVD Service**. This specialist service is dependent on the condition of the material, the format it is held on as well as obtaining permission from the copyright holders to copy it.

MACE SCREENINGS
MACE conducts screenings across the East and West Midlands of titles taken from its collections and partner archives. These screenings offer opportunities to see programmes of material often not seen in decades and have made a real stir in the communities that they have touched.

3. Keep your list in a separate file, pulling in as much detail as possible

- Note every relevant record with its identifying number as you go
- This gives you a document to refer to, meaning you don't have to continually return to the search page
- We noted data such as title, duration, brief description, and stable URL for each film's record
- Our longlist of results was more extensive than just those films which had a direct mention of WW1, since the scope of the project was to evaluate the changing remembrances of that conflict. Accordingly, the list also included news magazine programme discussions of how commemoration has changed, interviews with veterans, and a selection of later 20th-century remembrance activities which are likely to mention both WW1 and WW2
- Keep the list as expansive as is reasonable at this stage
- Don't get discouraged because the kind of film you hoped to find hasn't turned up in the search results. It may never do, but you have to be open to seeing *what is in the archive*, rather than *what you would like to be there*.

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	Title	Date	Summary	Duration
ma)ce	[ATV Today: 05.08.1974: First World War veteran visits barracks]	1974	80 year old Arthur Allwood, First World War veteran visits the Shrewsbury barracks as a VIP guest.	00:00:29
ma)ce	[ATV Today: 24.12.1975: 1919 Christmas card still being sent to two war veterans]	1975	1919 Christmas card still being sent to two war veterans, Herbert Higgins and Herbert Clarridge.	00:00:25
ma)ce	[ATV Today: 09.12.1976: War veteran John Ring sleeping rough - Nottingham]	1976	War veteran John Ring sleeping rough in the Forest Recreation Ground, Nottingham, after the local council evicted him from a Nottingham Council house, where he was residing as an illegal sub-tenant. David Mannion talks to Mr. Ring in his tent re his	00:02:06
ma)ce	[ATV Today: 13.12.1976: Veteran motorcycles]	1976	Veteran motorcycles - Tony Maycock visits disused airfield at Desborough to see the various antique wartime vehicles restored to working order by members of the 1939/45 Military Vehicle Group from Kettering. Interviews with some of the members re their	00:05:02

4. Analyse results, evaluating relevance

- It can be useful to sort the records. We did this by year and by theme
- What kinds of films are available (home movies, newsreels, factual broadcasts, human interest stories)? What patterns emerge?
- A lot of information is available in each film's record: decisions at this stage are not based in viewing the films themselves
- With an AV archive, recording duration is important - MACE collects home movies, news magazine reports, discussion programmes, amateur films, etc. It may be more expedient to simply note the existence of a 15-second clip that is listed in the index (e.g. women window washing, 1915) but to request a longer film for viewing, as it may give you more to work with

5. Draw up preliminary list of highlights

- Note items of exceptional interest
- Meet with project partners, discuss what is available, and what different film selections might mean for the direction of the project (do the films have sound? What decade are they from? Will that matter?)
- Narrow selection further!
- On *Generations Of Commemoration*, at this point we had a list of 15 possible films

6. Forward list to archive to find out what is available

- Build on the connection you made back in step 2.
- The archivist will let you know if the films have been digitised. If not, you can discuss how long will it take to convert them, and *whether or not this would incur extra costs*.
- Are there alternative films that have already been digitised, and are therefore more readily accessible?
- Are the films subject to licensing fees? Who owns the rights?
- The archivist may suggest further options that you hadn't come across, or that you'd dismissed in your earlier selection. If these can be viewed without further expense, say yes to these too!

7. Evaluate new, shortest list

- On *Generations Of Commemoration*, our goal was to generate sufficient useful material for a schools project, and to demonstrate what kind of material archives may have readily available
- We didn't follow up the availability of every film, due to time/budget pressures, as there was a healthy selection
- On a different kind of project with a different budget, there would be potential for more active pursuit of a specific film. On our project, there was more scope to look for something indicative or evocative
- Deviance from the original brief is fine, if the film looks promising: the Alfreton film chosen proved to be a much richer text than the ones shot in Birmingham

8. Almost there!

- Sign and return clearance paperwork provided by the archive
- Obtain correctly encoded (for us, mpeg4) copies of the shortest shortlist of films, shared with partners so they can make final decisions
- If receiving files through a digital locker service, be sure to save a copy locally: these sites will delete the files after a short interval (WeTransfer has a 7-day window to access shared files)

Partnerships, engagement and sharing insights

Principles

- Why work with academic partners?
- Who is your work with and for?
- Who is likely to be interested in it?
- What do you want to say about your project?
- What should people know about it?
- How can you tell what people made of your project (and why)?

What is it like for a community group to work with academics?

> **Pyn Stockman**: *Some of the academic language took a little bit of getting used to, unpicking that and going, "Oh, right. Oh, okay," and then working with it.*

> **Mandy Ross**: *It's a different world. [...] and that flows into how you explain things.*

Many university academics are looking to build partnerships for their work in the wider community beyond the campus and an academic audience. They can learn a lot from everyday practices and community groups as opposed to assuming that they lend them legitimacy. In fact, there is significant mutual benefit in collaboration.

> **Mandy Ross:** *It was great to have an outside eye, and it helped us to capture what was going on in the session. When we're delivering, it's hard to do the delivery and to capture what's going on.*
>
> *… we had more of a close focus, and we had the opportunity, working with […] a researcher, to plan and to observe and to reflect on our practice in more close focus and greater depth than we usually have. The chance to repeat a small project was useful for us, I think.*

> **Pyn Stockman:** *I think it was also different in that we weren't working towards the children producing a film or a book. It was about exploration and about understanding, which is always part of our projects, but that was its main focus.*

How do you find a researcher?

Your best option is to attend a networking event where academics will be present. Everyone will be interested in discussing previous research and future projects. If the person you're speaking to isn't able to help, chances are they'll be able to help connect you to the right people. (If you are active on Twitter, ask there and tag appropriately!)

Failing that, directly approach an academic. Every university website will provide profiles of its staff, and these profiles will include research interests. There is no standard template for university

websites, and most will have a focus on recruiting undergraduate students, but you will typically be able to find staff pages. This is best if you have a specific institution you want to partner with.

Alternatively, use Google search tools; using "site:ac.uk [search term]" will let you search UK university websites to see if anyone has mentioned your topic of interest in their own research profile. This will require a touch of perseverance, but means you won't miss someone working in an unexpected place (for example, finding historians in a media school, not a traditional history department!). As a last resort, university marketing offices are often approached by the media, who ask for experts to quote or interview. Community groups are also free to use this approach, though directly contacting a person whose work interests you will likely have better results. Throughout, bear in mind that academics **want and need** to work with community groups, you will not be imposing or wasting anyone's time.

Sharing project insights

Most history projects that involve working with others will be oriented to sharing their insights with a wider constituency simply by virtue of the fact of having discovered something worth knowing about or doing as a form of public history.

Sharing the outcomes of history work has the benefit of generating feedback and more information to add to the project, as well as prompting more people to engage with it. On a previous project (see below) SCA publicised how their work made use of the life and death of George Grimmett. This activity drew attention from his grandson, who shared family letters and photos, making *Generations Of Commemoration* both an extension of the Handsworth project, and a deepening of a family's story.

Of course, if you are designing a project with a view to gaining financial support from local government or an organisation like Heritage Lottery Fund, sharing and showing what you've been doing via some form of output is integral to the conditions of funding. For the benefit of funders, or to share more widely what you have been doing, plan to work towards creating something that explains your project and what you have learned from it.

Generation of Commemoration has produced the following as part of its process of history-making and in its design for outcomes:

- Workshops (good for inspiring others and finding out if your project and ideas are clear enough for further audiences)
- This toolkit! (again, useful for inspiring others, and for sharing the general lessons that emerge from your projects, alongside the specific histories you produce)
- A podcast interview (hosted on Soundcloud – free and easily accessible)
- An interview transcript (hosted on this website).
- Academic outputs (published in journals and presented at events)

How do you know what difference you've made?

Funding agencies require a final report, detailing the activities undertaken and what impact your work has had. If you are working with an academic partner, they will also need to gather evidence here.

Even if there are no demands made of your project, it is helpful to document its various stages: take photos at events, keep notes as you go, and look for ways to make or write about what you've been doing during the process.

In their work, SCA took photographs, recorded an interview about their work, produced artefacts and asked children to write sentences from speeches they imagined would be given at a commemorative event. As an activity alone, this encouraged the children to engage with the material. Thinking ahead to the end of the project, this sort of activity produces tangible material to reflect upon as you draw up a final report for a funding agency, and to show others.

Mandy and Pyn also reflected on the processes of simply asking how the project worked for its participants:

> *Mandy Ross: Each time we asked the participants - the classes of children or the young people from the youth group - what it was that most engaged them and that did the best job of helping them to understand what we were exploring. So, we asked, "Was it the suitcase of artefacts or was it the film, or was it the artefacts with the films?"*
>
> *In each case, it was the combination that, by a long way, was the most effective way of engaging and helping them to understand.*
>
> *Pyn Stockman: that's about the importance of building your evaluation into the session that you're delivering, and capturing it there and then in the simplest possible way. I think it highlighted for me one of the most effective ways is the circle where you step in if you agree with the statement. You step out if you disagree with the statement. You immediately have a visual way of capturing that evaluation, and then you can ask the question of, "Well, why have you chosen to make that response?"*

What do you think?

If you make use of this toolkit, we would very much like to hear from you. How has it helped you and what did you do with it? What changed because of it? Do we need to add anything, and if so, what? Would it be useful for us to do things differently – if so, how can we address your needs?

All comments and suggestions are most welcome; please drop us a line. Email: info@bcmcr.org
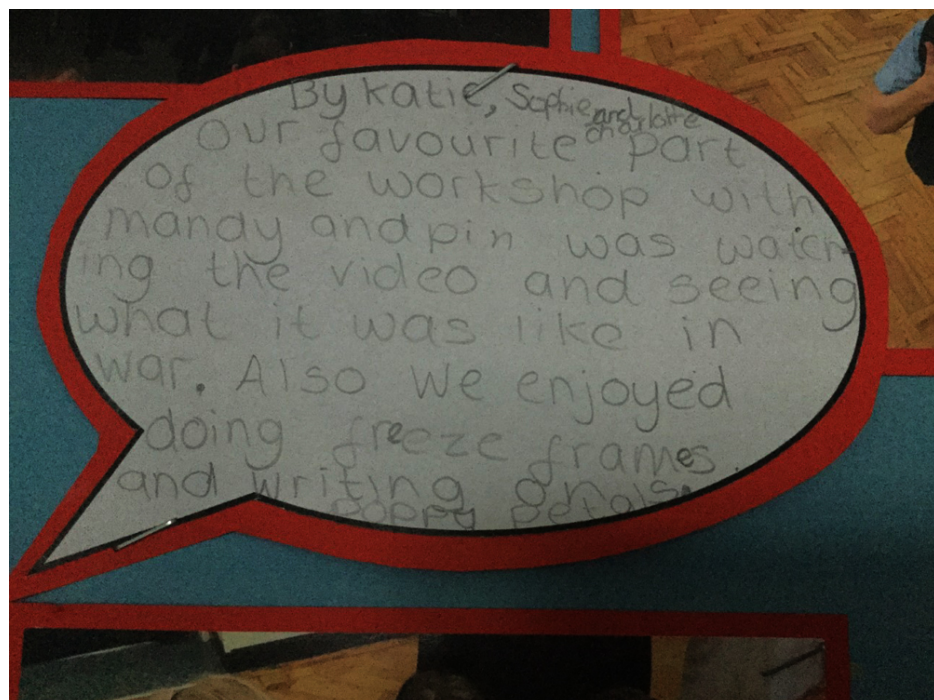
Background to the toolkit – project and partners

What is Generations of Commemoration?

Generations of Commemoration: Re-Presenting the Legacy of the Great War was funded through the Voices of War and Peace AHRC First World War Engagement Centre. It enabled the Birmingham-based community arts organisation Secret City Arts (SCA) to develop their work in helping schoolchildren to understand this long-ago conflict in places where spaces and peoples had undergone considerable transformations in the last hundred years. These transformations posed a challenge for assumptions about the nature of a collective history presented by the centenary commemorations of the Great War and how contemporary communities might engage with it.

In 2015, SCA used Rookery School's war memorial and the discovery of a 1914-1918 log book as the starting point to work with children to develop their questions about and creative responses to the First World War, in a project titled 'From Handsworth to Flanders Field'. SCA used print and photo archives to lead the Rookery children in devising and starring in a series of dramatic short films inspired by their discoveries.

Generations of Commemoration builds on this work, and expands it in three key directions. Firstly, it developed the idea of original creative production in film to make use of original archival sources concerned with WW1 and its commemoration. It made use of the resources of the Media Archive for Central England (MACE), which holds over a century of film and video records of life in the Midlands. Secondly, SCA expanded its engagement beyond the specific history of an individual place and worked with several new groups: Old Hill (Oldbury/Sandwell) and St Anne's (Digbeth), as well as the extracurricular group Action 4 Bullying (A4B) in a series of paired workshops in Sept/Oct 2016. Thirdly, by working with research partners to reflect on and frame SCA creative work, a broader set of questions about memory and history could be addressed.

The project partners

Secret City Arts
SCA is a small arts organisation developing community projects in consultation with adults, children and local community groups. We seek to build awareness, a sense of ownership and a creative response to the secret history, living stories and wild green spaces hidden in the urban environment. Our specialism is to work inclusively, sharing creative skills development to facilitate people and communities to discover, explore and make a creative response to their own locality. We work closely with the local Archive service to bring historical materials out into the community, and create exciting project outcomes in the form of live performance, film, audio work and publications.

Secret City's practitioners are local history writer Mandy Ross and Pyn Stockman, performance storyteller, oral/living history and drama specialist.

Pyn Stockman: Secret City Arts […] was founded in 2008. Mandy and I met via a CBSO project and decided we wanted to do something. Our first project was 'Tracing the River Rea', which I think lies at the heart of some of Secret City's work, because it was about exploring wild, open green spaces and making a creative response to them.

Mandy Ross: So, we are very much located in the city and making a response to the urban environment and to the hidden stories, the hidden histories that we can discover and make a response to. Working with community groups, adults and children, with schools, with youth groups, with all kinds of different groups and settings.

Pyn Stockman: We have a range of outcomes to our projects. Some of it is about making audio pieces, some of it is about making visual work, and some of it's about making live performance, creative writing and film.

Mandy Ross: And drawing all those different art forms together, so they're integrated and firing off from each other.

Pyn Stockman: one of the key things about Secret City is the interplay between the different art forms and how we create projects that explore our own interests, so that we're very excited about what we do.
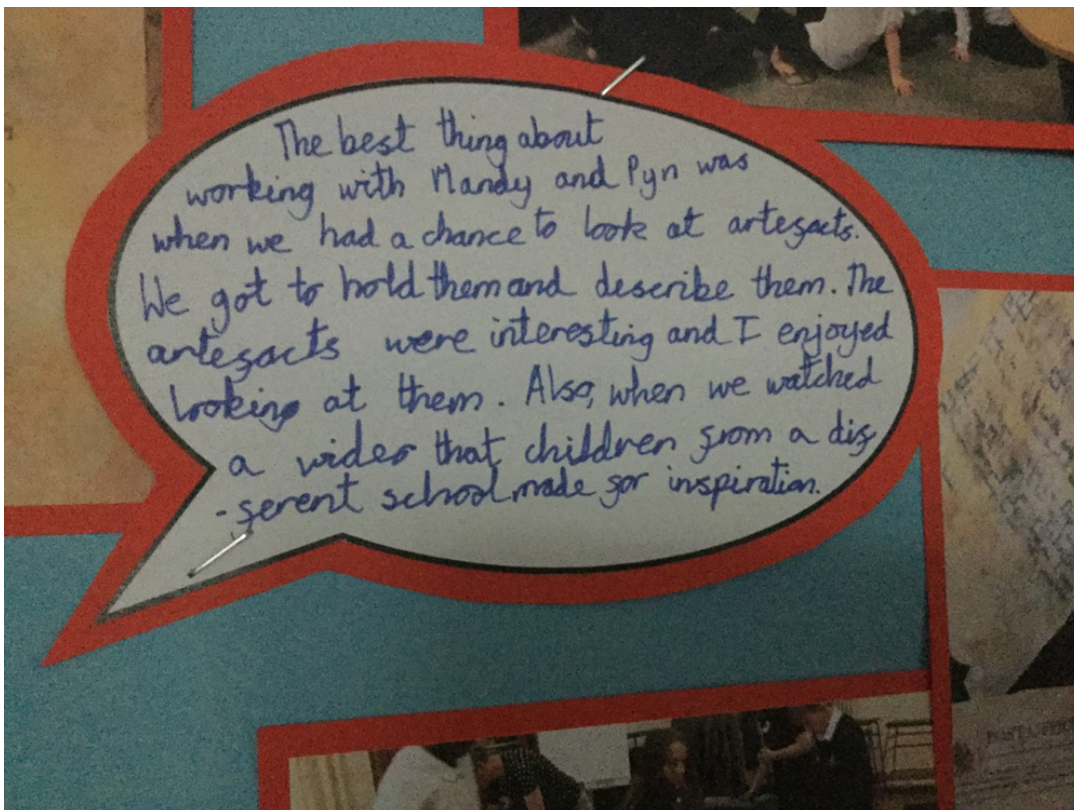
Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research (BCMCR)

Paul Long is Professor of Media and Cultural History and Director of Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research (BCMCR). Dr Nick Webber is Associate Director of BCMCR. Both are trained historians and lead the BCMCR research cluster 'History, Heritage and Archives'. Dr Charlotte Stevens is a Research Assistant at BCMCR, with a background in screen studies and experience in archival retrieval.

In this context the team has worked as media and cultural historians, archive experts and media producers, and collaborated with a variety of public institutions and communities of interest, to draw attention to neglected histories, to respond to the opportunities afforded by new digital technologies, to disseminate archived material, and to interpret it for wide audiences. Through our work we have contributed to an improvement in the understanding and practice of media history, in particular the exploration and archiving of, and engagement with, the popular cultural artefacts which index its lived experience. Most noteworthy have been our contributions to the development of online and offline communities of interest by integrating processes of knowledge exchange into our research, in order to promote co-curation, and discussion about cultural value, memory and collecting.

Voices of War and Peace: the Great War and its Legacy is a First World War Engagement Centre funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council and in partnership with the Heritage Lottery Fund. The University of Birmingham Centre is a joint initiative across the Midlands with Birmingham City University, University of Wolverhampton and University of Worcester, and further afield with Cardiff University, University of Durham, Manchester Metropolitan University and Newcastle University.

The Engagement Centre is based in the Library of Birmingham and supports a wide range of community engagement activities, connecting academic and public histories of the First World War as part of the commemoration of the War's centenary.

The Centre covers a broad range of relevant research knowledge that enables it to respond to diverse community interests. This research knowledge ranges from the history of Birmingham, the Black Country and urban and rural Worcestershire to the impact of air power, from the experiences of Belgian refugees to trench warfare, from Quakers and humanitarian relief to battlefield archaeology, and from caring for the casualties of war to the involvement of colonial troops and labour.

Project Background: From Handsworth of Flanders Field

> *Pyn Stockman*: *The original World War I project for which we received HLF funding was called 'From Handsworth to Flanders Field' and was based around a war memorial that is in Rookery Primary School. That's where we began with it.*

Generations of Commemoration grew out of one of SCA's previous projects, *From Handsworth To Flanders Field*. One of the family histories uncovered during *Handsworth*, that of George Grimmett, provided the basis for the new project: his war service, the war's effect on his family, and creative responses to the Grimmett story were the narrative basis for historical explorations in *Generations of Commemoration*.

Documenting SCA's public history practice as enacted through the Handsworth project is important to understanding the successes of *Generations of Commemoration*.

Working with Year 6 children at Rookery Primary School, the *Handsworth* project used local histories to engage schoolchildren in the immediate context of WW1. SCA has an ongoing relationship with this particular school, having worked with classes on projects in the past. Additionally, class teacher and history specialist Annette Whyley is a member of SCA's board. The WW1 project was inspired (and enabled) by the discovery of the school's logbooks, which cover the war years, and include names of former students that also appear on the school's war memorial.

Starting with these names, SCA was guided through archives held by the Library of Birmingham to gain more information about the names identified from the memorial. They identified two individuals, one who was killed in action and one who survived, used civil records (birth/marriage/death records, census data, regimental material) to piece together an idea of these individuals' lives. Ideally, these men would have lived locally to the school building itself, in order to have an immediate local relevance for the schoolchildren involved in the project. By identifying two men with contrasting experiences, SCA could show different possibilities for wartime outcomes; by limiting the focus to two, SCA could also have a manageable representative sample of WW1 servicemen.

Once the two men were identified, SCA undertook further research at local and national archives (Library of Birmingham; Imperial War Museum).

> *Pyn Stockman*: *We began by asking questions with the children, with two Year 6 classes, and uncovering two stories from two of the names on the memorial.*

Over six 1.5/2hr sessions, SCA worked with the children to develop creative responses to:

- history clues in the present day environment
- both men's family life before they joined up
- correspondence about the decision to join up
- correspondence while they were serving
- life on the home front
- school life during the war
- correspondence about the death of George Grimmett
- celebrations for the armistice
- after the war - homecoming, remembrance, at school and at home

The project was initially presented to the children via work with the logbook and school memorial board, with further historical information introduced over the course of the project, as appropriate. Taking time with presenting these historical documents gives children time to develop their own questions about the material and the lives of these historical figures. They were asked to reflect on what they knew (the facts) and what they could imagine or infer based on what they knew from other sources. Out of this came the creative responses, based on information and imagination.

Toolkit by Paul Long, Charlotte Stevens and Nick Webber
In collaboration with Pyn Stockman and Mandy Ross, Secret City Arts

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