

CASE STUDY REPORT

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Fieldwork date:

Organisation: Bottesford Community Heritage Project

Project: 'Bottesford Parish 1st World War Centenary: People, Community and Memory'

Funding Stream: Our Heritage

Funding Amount: £34,100 (97%)

Location: East Midlands

Summary

Bottesford Community Heritage Project (BCHP) is a community group who research the history of the parish of Bottesford, including Muston, Easthorpe and Normanton in north Leicestershire. BCHP marked the Centenary of 1st World War over the course of the grants term (2014-2017) by delivering an impressive number of activities and events in the Parish that were informed by their original research into Bottesford at the time of 1st World War.

- The project leadership was exemplary for the way in which it went about establishing working partnerships with other organisations to realise outcomes that far outstripped what would be expected of a voluntary group of its size
- The 16-25 core volunteers at the heart of BHCP were hugely committed and invested many hours in the uncovering of the heritage of 1st World War and Bottesford local history.
- There was also an impressive level of time and energy given over by many other volunteers to hold community events and activities that effectively disseminated 1st World War research.
- The events and activities held by the BHCP and its partners succeeded in engaging the interest of the residents of Bottesford throughout the period of grant. This interest also spread to beyond the locality to further afield, and was intergenerational in composition.
- BHCP made effective use of social media, including Facebook and Twitter; the active engagement in these tools and in the project website by the public is exceptional.
- One of the impressive aspects of the projects approach has been the way in which it has adapted and used the evaluation element of HLF and actively incorporated it into its engagement with its audiences over the course of the project.

Background

This case study report is based on a review of project documentation (including HLF application, case paper, and progress reports). It also consisted of 6 interviews with:

- The Project Lead

- Volunteer and participant 1 (helped with 1st World War survivor biographies; exhibitions and displays; web site & archive)
- Volunteer and participant 2 (helped with evaluation; biographies; exhibitions and displays)
- Volunteer and participant 3 (helped with Family 1st World War service; exhibitions and displays)
- Volunteer and participant 4 (helped with the book - social history of the village in the Great War; exhibitions and displays; web site & archive)
- Stakeholder - Methodist Chapel (Roll of Honour conservation and rededication)

The interviews took place within the home of the project lead who had kindly spent time setting up a display of much of the projects exhibition material and resources for the purposes of the evaluation.

Motivations

‘People, Community and Memory’ originated in the research of a previously funded HLF project; ‘Bottesford a Living history’ (2007). The volunteers who worked on this project had unearthed a rich seam of archival data relating to 1st World War and the Parish; *‘it was a great untapped resource that we could only place in one chapter of the book’* (project lead). The HLF grant programme for centenary commemorations was an opportune moment to revisit these materials.

BCHP marked the Centenary of 1st World War over the course of the grants term by delivering an impressive number of activities and events that were informed by their own research into Bottesford at the time of 1st World War. This research involved the study of a range of resources including community memories and artefacts, historical archives and local newspaper materials. It has resulted in

- The production of 250 plus 1st World War biographies, including those named on war memorials, and those who served and survived
- The collection of 25 recorded oral histories and the online archiving of memorabilia including over 600 images
- The publication of a 300-page book, ‘Lest we forget’, charting the impact of the war on the communities of Bottesford and Muston.

In addition, BCHP provided an impressive breadth and depth of 1st World War heritage activities and events across the Parish (below)

Activities

The events have been so enjoyable, the launch event in the village hall (was typical) ... the guy playing the last post, the choir singing, the talks and the exhibition; it was a terrific village event but one out of the ordinary, and everyone was putting in... and then there was the flower show, the horse show ...
 (volunteer 3)

In all, the project engaged its publics through the provision of over 30 activities and events including 8 exhibitions. Highlights were

- A project launch event (300 people attended)
- A Bottesford Primary School 1st World War activities day (Recruitment, Training, Trench life and First aid, Life at home, and exhibits from the war including tanks, uniforms and equipment)
- A concert held at St Mary's church with choirs from the U3A and the local primary school, and readings from school pupils and community volunteers
- A 'Bottesford in the Great War exhibition' at St Marys church (400 attended)
- The restoration and service for the rededicating of the Roll of Honour of the Chapel
- Muston 1st World War Flower festival and Great War exhibition display (400 attended)
- Bottesford 1st World War Commemorative Lions Gala and exhibition (1200 passed through)
- Bottesford participative bell ringing in the Great War
- 'Forgotten Heroes: Horses in the Great War'; a display of equestrian art, and books (200 attended)
- A Battle of the Somme Centenary with half muffled bell ringing, community and secondary school screening of 1916 documentary film (180 attended)
- Bottesford and Muston 1st World War Heritage walks – illustrated maps with guided walks
- 1st World War Embroidered Memorial Banner created by Bottesford Primary school; given an unveiling ceremony and on permanent display at the school.
- Two 1st World War project newsletters were produced by year 9 students
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- Twelve bi-monthly project bulletins published in the Bottesford Village Voice magazine distributed to 1800 households

Support received

The project found the process of the HLF application very supportive and used the advice of a development officer who gave them 'sound guidance' regarding realistic project costings;

We were going to go for a small amount of money... but there is always the same amount of work to do... so we talked to HLF and they said 'do it, and get it costed, don't lard it but cost it, if it is costed properly it is funded' ... the HLF have been brilliant, and we have been lucky with the project officer, very good. We had one of the East Midland committee members coming to the launch too, very enthusiastic and supportive and another came to the Commemorative Banner dedication at the Primary School. Both gave good feedback and they have said interesting things. (Project Lead)

BCHP also had a volunteer who was experienced in community development, and in making grant applications, who was 'quite brilliant at sorting out the wheat from the chaff' in the application process.

Engagement

Partnership working

The project worked in partnership and formed working relationships with over 20 bodies ranging from the Leicester and Rutland Western Front Association, Belvoir Care and Fox Medics, the U3A, British Red Cross, Leicester County Council, the Museum of the Horse, The Imperial War museum, The Royal British Legion, the local secondary and primary schools, churches and scout and guide groups. As the events and activities held evidenced, this partnership working has been a stand-out feature of the BCHP; there '*has been real cross pollination across the stakeholders, people have got engaged with each other*' to *realise more than the sum of their parts* (project lead).

The project lead (below) provides an example of this partnership working for one of the many events held;

...we asked if the Belvoir Lions would like their biannual gala in Bottesford themed around 1st World War and they said yes. We worked with them for over a year, we set up re-enactments, and the Female Nursing Yeomanry (History Re-Visited Group) came with their horses. We had a load of equipment that came in from a farmer who phoned out of the blue – loads of 1st World War equipment; a field ambulance, 2 1st World War lorries, an immense collection all brought in to the field for nothing. So, we ran the Gala and that brought in the Muston brass quintet, the hall was buzzing where the exhibition was displayed and there were loads of events across the field bringing in people from all over the vale, 1200 came through the exhibition

Volunteering and participation

The project was big enough to place people by their strengths, but you haven't just got a small group; there is a bigger pool, all sorts of people, people who can't give huge amounts of time but they will pitch in (volunteer 2)

BCHP involved 25 core volunteers who were recruited through established social networks and through identifying people within Bottesford and approaching them ('sandbagging'). The project also advertised at each event, on their project website and on the well-used village local history noticeboard.

A far larger number of volunteers (400 plus) also contributed through their help in organising and facilitating activities on the days of the events held. These included those drawn from partner organisations such as schools, guides, The U3A, church congregations and so on. Amongst these volunteers there was a high number of younger participants, making its activities wholly inter-generational.

In terms of the balance of the core group, most volunteers were of retirement age. The project lead made the following observations on the composition of the core group of volunteers:

it is always difficult, we have an equal split of men and women but this is not a diverse ethnic community and I can't answer about socio and economic disadvantage. I would imagine there is a big range of economic capacity in the

village but it is not something that is of issue. It would be wrong to say we had sought out those with mental or physical health issues, but there are people who have differences who are part of the village and they come along to the exhibitions and so on... we have not done systematic outreach, we just welcome them when they come along

Dissemination

The level of volunteer engagement with the project was reflected in the attendances for the events, which were exceptional. The project was well branded, with careful attention to detail and a clearly identifiable identity ran through all its promotional material. This material was of high quality, using good materials and photographic prints of Bottesford and its residents living in the 1st World War period. It made effective use of social media including Facebook and an active twitter account of 1600 followers. Its website www.bottesfordhistory.org.uk includes 300 plus pages dedicated to the 1st World War research project and has an impressive 1500+ active Twitter users per month. The project attracted the interest of those outside the Parish with an interest in heritage, as well as those who lived in Bottesford

Making a difference

How the project achieved outcomes for heritage

Heritage is in a better condition

The professional restoration of the deteriorating Bottesford Methodist Chapels Roll of Honour has insured that *local heritage is in a better condition*. The project held a rededication service for the document which prior to the project 'had been forgotten, a unique document that is significant and rare has (now) been recovered and restored'.

I came here in 1948 and I looked at this roll of honour and well a lot of them were still alive, one of them was a baker who worked for my father, another was the postman ... the church wasn't going to pay for its restoration, it would have just gently faded away ... it will certainly last another 100 years now (Stakeholder)

Heritage is better identified and recorded.

The project has captured an enormous amount of information which would otherwise have drifted off into the ether, been lost (Volunteer 4)

BCHP has helped Bottesford residents, and those from further afield, *explore, conserve and share its 1st World War heritage*. There had been no prior co-ordinated effort to document and record the areas role in the 1st World War and BHCP has ensured that *heritage that was previously hidden, not well known, nor accessible will now be available to the public*.

Volunteer research has resulted in the production of 250 plus 1st World War biographies, including those named on war memorials, and those who served and survived. The project has uploaded much of this original research onto a website together with the online archiving of 1st World War memorabilia and over 600 images. The collection of oral records has also helped preserve the dwindling number of living memories of those relatives who had parents and other family members who served in the war.

The production of the book 'Lest we forget: Bottesford and Muston in the Great War' forms an important part of the projects legacy and was realised through volunteers researching photographs, memorabilia, family memories, newspaper reports, and historical archives.

Heritage is better interpreted and explained

BCHP has brought existing and new information to the attention of its audiences at events and exhibitions, through the publication of a book, and the archiving of its work on its website.

The book was supposed to be 100 pages, but it ended up as 300 with extensive biographies of everyone involved from Bottesford who were killed (and many who had served) ... We said we would do 50 biographies, but I think it will end up as 250 (project lead)

Volunteers have also taken up the challenge to collate the projects research and create a physical community heritage resource in the library. An exhibition display that includes a large map of the Bottesford area with pictures of the soldiers who served in 1st World War will be left there to form part of this permanent heritage resource. During the project this display was taken around various venues and served to 'tell a story, their memories, your memories, of people and places, of community ... people spent hours going through the boards' (project lead).

BCHP captured the interest of the residents by organizing a plethora of different and imaginative activities and events that people could identify with and find engaging. In doing so, the project focussed on heritage that had relevance to a particular community and made information about this heritage accessible;

... it has made everyone realise what it was like in this village to be involved in war, preparing clothing, raising money, mothers losing sons. 234 served from the Rutland estate alone; it has brought a realisation back to what it was like – the special bell ringing for each of those who died, it echoed around the village, people stood there counting, the realisation of how terrible it was (stakeholder)

Project volunteers have also provided talks to outside organisations, locally and further afield;

I have been asked to give talks to a National Trust group in Grantham and another church group in Bingham, that has been quite enjoyable and it seems to be an obvious thing to follow on from the work. We are in a position where we can talk in a quantitative way, what the population of Bottesford was, how did it break down and who were the people who served, and what the fatality rate was and how this compares to national averages, the spread of regiments and so on and so forth (Volunteer 1)

How the project achieved outcomes for people

People developed skills

The volunteers spoken to emphasised that formal training opportunities were not a priority for them because they were of retirement age. The core volunteers, however, also spoke of how they had gained 'on the job' experience and skills that included: researching archives, interpretation of photographs and memorabilia, record management, collecting oral histories, making presentations and talks, organising events and producing and displaying exhibitions, publishing and writing skills.

Monthly planning and training meetings for these core volunteers provided a successful and informal supportive environment for learning;

Training narrows it to something very formal, but I think what you get is learning which is quite a different thing. It was about learning about village history, but also the specific learning involved in how to do the research, getting familiar with resources, starting with ancestry, but then broadening scope to other archives, looking and pursuing different records (Volunteer 2)

Core volunteers, whilst recognising these 'gains' were also aware that they came to the project with their own established resources, in terms of skills and knowledge. Many of them were at retirement age, and wanted to contribute their time and experience to realise the projects goals whilst also benefiting from the projects offer of sociability and sense of purpose:

I've just retired so for me it was a way of getting back into the village and use some of the skills and knowledge that I have but also do something different, something new. (Volunteer 2)

People will have learnt about heritage

The core volunteers, who were already interested in heritage and history before the HLF project, all spoke of their deepened understanding of 1st World War and emphasised that the energy and commitment they had shown during the life of the project would be *sustained in further heritage activity*;

People have got such a head of steam that we will just keep on doing it, carry on. There is a vast amount of learning, and you learn by doing it, no telling. It is about having the bravery to go digging, and the sense of triumph of discovery. Those stories that emerge, bit by bit, are the result of becoming obsessive, of sensitising yourself to irregularities in the records; it's the thrill of the chase (volunteer 1)

Volunteers have used their knowledge and understanding of Bottesford 1st World War heritage beyond the life term of the grant and are now engaged in providing talks to outside organisations, and in collating a physical heritage resource at the library. Others are continuing their research on individual biographies;

We now have an archive of local heritage which needs assembling in the community library, and to get catalogued; a big catch up exercise. I am starting a local history group in the library who will give help with this. That will be quite an achievement, it would be nice to have a living museum on a small scale inside the village (Volunteer 1)

For other volunteers the project had been an opportunity to learn about 1st World War heritage for the first time;

It was a closed door to me, a black void ... in the first meeting I wandered along with some of my grandfather's medals and memorabilia and an expert was able to point me to the resources and books which kick started me... I have learnt a lot and I'm sure many people have as well (volunteer 4)

Other volunteers emphasised that their work had closely affected the families of those they had researched '*we have told families about things that they have never been able to piece together at all, it is one of the most satisfying things to give those biographies back to them'*

(Volunteer 1) Such occasions provided opportunity for *learning and sharing knowledge about heritage*.

... it is the sheer number of families we have engaged through the research, and it has stimulated them to go back into the past and look at family trees, the reach has been quite wide, one of the most fascinating parts has been watching and listening to people as they were pulling trunks out of closets and them telling us we have this, we have that... (volunteer 2)

The projects extensive and varied events have meant that there would have been ample opportunities for its differing audiences and participants to *learn about 1st World War heritage*;

What (the project) did was strike chords with people. It raised people's consciousness of 1st World War. At points I thought is this village worn down, have they had enough? But each event has resonated with different groups of people. So, for example the event on the horses of 1st World War found a new audience and generated an interest in all the different animals involved, the ways they were cared for ... it is learning all the way, different people have gone to different events and we have attracted a range of people; not just locally (volunteer 3)

Schools activities day and commemorative banner

BCHP organised an activities day for the primary school, an event that was characterised by enjoyment, learning new skills and learning about 1st World War heritage.

the local school had a fantastic activities day that went brilliantly, with 150 children ... re-enactors came in, there was a tank, trench lines, first aid where the Belvoir Care and Fox medics gave their time for nothing, everyone was dressed up, they did life on the Homefront, 1st World War schools meals, we prepared a whole set of resources for the school...

I was in the Field station and the children learnt how to do a head bandage, an ankle bandage, splints and a sling; none had done it before but we also put pressure in there, they had to do it quickly and they got a sense of how hard it was, how continuous it was. The children got a lot out of it, it came through in their comments, one of them said it was the best day ever at school (volunteer 3)

BCHP worked in partnership with the secondary school to complete 2 projects with year 9 students. The first studied the source materials of the Grantham Journal to examine the effects of 1st World War on Bottesford and from there the students produced a newsletter. The second project produced a further newsletter on the history and impact of the battle of the Somme. The entire school went on to watch the 1916 documentary on the Somme in the hall.

Changing attitudes and/or behaviours and thinking differently about heritage

The BCHP 1st World War events, such as the school's activity day, 'created memories for the future through engagement and through enjoyment' and *they affected and changed people's attitudes and perceptions of 1st World War heritage*. Another example is provided by the making of the commemorative banner which was inspired by the children's activity

day. The embroidery, silk printing and textile skills used to create it were also the medium through which the children's understanding and perception of 1st World War was deepened; '*the children said they felt a real connection (with the soldier who they were threading through onto the banner), a lot of children said that...*' (project lead). The secondary school screening of the Somme film also had an impact; it was on 'a massive screen, and the hall was totally blacked out, stunning, it had all the pupils sat there in silence' (project lead)

Adults, too, were affected by their engagement in the project. As mentioned previously, some volunteers went on to engage in further heritage activity through the provision of talks and the establishment of a heritage resource at the library whilst for one volunteer (below) their involvement had entailed a personal journey;

(the project) has made me think more about 1st World War, going through the war diaries and seeing the day to day suffering and casualties – (as a result) I went out to the Somme to retrace my grandfather's steps, and we went to the village where he was posted ...you go to the cemetery and the Leicester regiment were just part of it, you walk through hundreds of graves to reach the back wall and then there are 100-150 from the people who served with him... very moving; and then you think this is terrible, awful and how lucky my grandfather was just to survive that first year let alone the next four and the Somme. You stand back and that cemetery stretches before you, it became real (volunteer 4)

Providing an enjoyable experience

The project lead and the volunteers were all confident that those participating and attending events had enjoyed themselves. The ongoing evaluations carried out by project across all of its activities confirm this;

What we got was a breadth of feedback, bucket loads of compliments and praise, people valued it; and this was surprising because there was almost no negative feedback, you normally get someone whining. The events caused people to reflect, to think about their own families. For others, it opened eyes, and we can show that across the age spectrum (volunteer 3)

People will have volunteered time

A core group of 25 and a wider pool of over 400 volunteers gave their time to realising the project and through these commitments the BHCP realised three years of genuine community participation and engagement in 1st World War heritage. Whilst not wanting to highlight one person at the expense of this collective effort it is important to recognise the importance of leadership.

Throughout this case study evaluation attention was drawn to the skills of the project lead and the amount of time and energy he has invested in its activities. His ability to communicate, enthuse and enjoin Bottesford residents and organisations in 'People, Community and Memory' was central;

'we are so lucky to have a good leader who drove everything through; he has been a key to its success' (volunteer 4)

'he knows his people, he is the key to it all really' (volunteer 5)

'I can't imagine anyone else has put so much into it, or done such a fantastic job anywhere else. Absolutely fantastic and tireless' (volunteer 3)

How the project achieved outcomes for communities

The application did not claim to provide outcomes for Community other than the activities undertaken would make the BCHP more resilient. This shows an admirable reticence at claims making. It is unlikely, however, that there are many residents in Bottesford who were not touched in one form or another by BCHP activities. What was apparent in the case study interviews was that the depth of attachment and engagement in the project by the core volunteers had ensured that the wider community had all been positively affected by its activities:

It has been enjoyable, stimulating, educational. I've realised how important it is, it is not just an educational exercise; it goes on to all sorts of areas ... the project has penetrated the collective consciousness of the village... (volunteer 1)

When you look around the village, it has impinged on just about everyone...it certainly has been a vibrant and collective part of community life ... (stakeholder)

The publication of the book provides the BCHP with hope of a small stream of seed money through which it can contribute to future projects, but the projects main contribution towards *increased resilience* has been that HLF activities have 'created a new network of people' committed to further heritage and Parish activity.

Additional outcomes

Volunteers all identified positive impacts upon their, and others, health and wellbeing and spoke of the emotional enrichment of being part of the project and the sense of community cohesion its activities had helped to strengthen;

Wellbeing is partly about friendships and networking and integration; by nature, myself and my wife are not outgoing, so to be part of this and to be included has certainly contributed to our wellbeing (volunteer)

... yes, it is like Penny, she is 90 something, and she still walks to meetings; her local knowledge and her ability to make connections has been invaluable but it has also kept her interested, kept her going. So, on all levels it works for people (volunteer)

The project lead identified the importance of the 'make up' of Bottesford for the successful realisation of the project. HLF funding had gone to an area *with an already established sense of identity, one with well-resourced and established social networks*;

It is closely knit, defined for a long time by its parallel organisations: churches, choirs, societies, community library, schools. It is not too big and not too small and it is very resilient community, a boundary community where self-help has always been necessary. Each organisation has its own life and network but (at the same time) this allows you to tap into them and into their different knowledge bases and capacities; there is overlap but it is not total.

HLF funding has no doubt helped strengthen these existing networks and helped to consolidate further the identity of Bottesford through enabling it to (re) construct its resident's memory and connections to 1st World War.

Lessons learnt

Advice on project planning and organisation

It's challenging dealing with other organisations, schools are so trammelled by existing constraints of funding and curriculum ... it is hard work and it takes up a lot of time, it is quite a challenge (but) nobody has said no to anything... don't be shy at asking people to get involved, you will be surprised at people's generosity. [And] don't underestimate the time it takes to produce your printed materials and media! (Project Lead)

Advice on HLF Evaluation requirements

The HLF have got a big thing on evaluation and it is so complicated and involved you could spend your whole time on it. It looks onerous, but you must find a way through it. I think we have learnt that if you create the right stimulus you get quality information back. So, what I would say is do not be intimidated by the evaluation process.

The project leads observations (above) may give the HLF pause for thought. If the language and procedure entailed for something as important as evaluation is such that it puts off volunteers with backgrounds of working in higher education, as is the case here – what does it do for less ‘capitalised’ projects elsewhere. Indeed, would it discourage applicants, and make still others see evaluation as something to be done at the end as a form of box ticking?

The volunteer responsible for co-ordinating the projects evaluation exercises offers the following advice to others:

In terms of the evaluation we do it because we must – paperwork crunching; it is par for the course. But (the process) has generated stuff that was unexpected, very thoughtful comments. As time went by, it has become less structured and less formal; and this has allowed us to get more informative responses. As we have gone on through the various events we were more direct 'well what did you think of this?'. We provided labels for people to stick comments on, evaluation was loose and open.

BCHP were exceptional in the way they went about evaluating their activities as a process of continual self-assessment and through seeking feedback from participants throughout the project.

Concerns over issues of Legacy and Learning

There were questions posed to the HLF from volunteers concerned with issues of legacy and with learning. The partnership with the Imperial War Museum was recommended to BCHP as a way of ensuring the projects research could be linked in and uploaded to a larger archival resource but it proved to be inflexible and unwieldy. In addition, and re-iterating what other projects have said within case study evaluation, volunteers questioned whether the HLF might not think more strategically about how projects could learn from each other, pool resources, share knowledge and avoid duplication; '*I don't know whether this is something the HLF have missed, but having some sort of overall networking project ...*'(volunteer)