

Volunteer Evaluation Summary Report

Introduction

Responses were received from 17 of the regular members of the project and all had taken the trouble to think through their responses and give honest feedback, which is much appreciated. 88% were involved from the launch and it is a credit to the project that there has been such good retention, continuity and engagement of core volunteers.

Involvement in the Project

There were only 2 members of the project group who did not feel they were as involved as they wanted to be- and for both individuals this was because of external factors. One was because of other (personal) commitments and the other because of their geographical distance from the village (30 miles away). This individual was however able to support the project through technical research and email/ telephone support to other volunteers.

The majority of project members felt they were as involved as they wanted to be. 7 gave reasons relating to personal enrichment and use of skills. 4 valued the flexibility the project offered both in terms of the range of activities and when volunteers contributed. 3 particularly commented on how welcoming the project was.

Hindsight

Most volunteers seemed happy with the project and recognised it achieved far more than might have been expected. 3 comments related to volunteer contributions and discussion in meetings. Given how much information had to be shared in meetings and the need for meetings to be of a reasonable length this is understandable. The volunteers recognised and appreciated that David Middleton, the project leader and Sue Middleton, his wife put in an extraordinary amount into the project and one comment specifically recognised the burden they carried and perhaps might have shared to make their lives easier.

Best Part of the Project

The range and breadth of activities in the project meant that the volunteers were kept engaged year on year and it was clear from the feedback that certain elements were very meaningful. Almost half the team enjoyed the historical research. Though this took many forms volunteers were able to work individually on sources that were of a personal as well as project interest. Given that over 240 casualty and survivor/ veteran biographies have been completed against the target of XXX it shows the level of commitment and skills within the team.

Project events were highlights for 64% of the volunteers and reflected their involvement in specific events. Almost 1/3rd of the volunteers specifically mentioned the WW1 activities day in the primary school as the best part of the project. It was a memorable day.

Interestingly many project volunteers particularly appreciated working with people and the engagement with their local community was the best bit of the project for them. This included a sense of feeling welcome into the group by those who were new to the village as well as contributing their expertise to events (such as the knitting project).

Involvement in Future Activities

The majority of the volunteers wanted to get involved with future projects. Some were simply prepared to pitch in with anything. Others specifically mentioned the heritage group and local research. About a third wanted to continue with local & / or family history research.

2 people specifically mentioned a permanent project archive & maintenance of the website to ensure a permanent record of the projects outcomes. 1 person suggested an event to mark the 100 year celebration of the end of the war in 2018.

Skills

The project drew on a wide range of skills and experience in the volunteers ranging from authentic WW1 skills like knitting on 4 pins to modern day skills like IT, graphic design, and historical research. The volunteers brought facets of project management skills and experience like coordination, planning, writing, research & evaluation to the WW1 project.

A few of the volunteers had been involved in previous village history projects but the majority had not. It is not surprising therefore that over half the volunteers recognised that they had developed their historical research skills and given the outcomes of their efforts – the biographies, the book etc. it is clear that a high degree of competency was achieved. This included using online research websites like Ancestry, Find My Past, the National Archives, The imperial War Museum, the newspaper archive as well as source material like the old maps and information in the Village and Leicestershire Archive.

The development of social media skills was particularly valuable in publicising events which were always well attended.

With the breadth and depth of life experience in the volunteers it is inevitable that some of their skills were underused by virtue of need and timing. Comments related to statistical evaluation, soldier research, public speaking and presentations.

Overall the majority of the volunteers felt their skills had been made best use of – wholly or in part, which is a credit to the project lead.

Legacy event suggestions

An ongoing heritage group was suggested to research aspects of local history.

Several individuals suggested an informed visit to the Western Front, France and Belgium.

Other suggestions included the Bell tower at the old school, the upkeep of the website, a permanent exhibition and a place to display store artefacts donated to the project. An event to mark the 100 year celebration of the end of the war was also suggested.

Other Feedback and comments

All were complementary and appreciative of the project leadership and coordination and felt it was run well with enthusiasm and expertise. Volunteers felt it was enjoyable, worthwhile, first class and a privilege to be part of it.

It was felt that the project brought the community together, with much community involvement and that it made one individual feel part of the village again. The friendliness within the project group, bringing people to work together on the different events, was recognised and valued.

It was summed up by one individual in that “we owe it to the 1914 – 1918 generation to reconstruct their story”.

We have told the stories of those who did not survive the conflict – those listed on the memorials and those who, for some reason, had been omitted.

We have told the stories of those who served and returned and to date there are over 200 of them. In the book and on the website, at events and exhibitions we have told their story and we have gained far from the experience more than we could ever have imagined.