

<b>Institution:</b> Manchester Metropolitan University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> D32 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Empathic Monument-Making: Re-shaping the Public Memorialisation of Conflict		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2014-2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Stephen Dixon Johnny Magee	Professor of Contemporary Crafts Principal Lecturer	1998 to present 1993 to present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>The creative, cultural and social impact of <u>Dixon</u> and <u>Magee</u>'s research derives from a new model of materialising and memorialising conflict, developed across a series of five participatory exhibition and installation projects, which reached a combined audience of 221,636 people and involved 1,542 active participants. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), Arts Council England (ACE) and The Royal British Legion, these projects have re-shaped conventional memorial-making practices, employing ceramics, narrative and an empathic response to emotive objects, to question both <i>why</i> and <i>how</i> we memorialise conflict. In generating innovative and immersive ways of responding to conflict, and engaging participants as co-researchers and co-producers of new multi-media commemorative artworks, these projects have transformed marginalised individuals, volunteers and community groups from passive audiences into active and emotionally-engaged participants.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>A sustained period of collaboration between ceramicist, Stephen <u>Dixon</u>, and film-maker, Johnny <u>Magee</u> (2014-2019), has resulted in multi-media artworks that have challenged the perception and memorialisation of twentieth-century conflict, and engaged volunteers and members of the public in the co-creation of ceramic artefacts, installation, sculpture and film. The underpinning research adopted an innovative and iterative public participation methodology, examining how to bring conflict 'home' and how to make memorialisation tangible, affecting, thought-provoking and socially-connecting. <u>Dixon</u>'s research has identified ceramics as a potent medium for commemoration, particularly in the culturally significant location of the Staffordshire potteries, while <u>Magee</u>'s documentary film practice has extended the reach and the legacy of their creative collaboration. Taking both medium and process out of the studio to engage with wider audiences, the research has identified and mobilised points of congruence between historic events and the contemporary experience of war, alienation and migration. The research found that employing the emotive materiality of objects was an effective strategy in evoking empathy, which in turn empowered audiences and participants to make an emotional connection with historic individuals' experiences of conflict through their personal possessions and objects of daily use. The collective research outcomes from all five projects are outlined in the journal article <i>Ceramics Narrative and Commemoration</i> (Dixon, 2019) [1].</p> <p>The touring exhibition <i>Resonance</i> (2015-2016) was the catalyst for this cluster of projects. The research responded to seven Staffordshire museum collections of First World War memorabilia, and as well as generating new and provocative commemorative works by <u>Dixon</u> and <u>Magee</u>, introduced a participatory methodology, inviting the public to take part in workshops to design digitally-printed ceramic artefacts to commemorate a relative who took</p>		

part in the First World War. These artefacts collectively formed *Column*, one of the central artworks in the exhibition, which included more of the participants' pieces as the tour progressed [2].

Building on the success of the public engagement strategy developed in *Resonance* (and particularly the participants' responses to making their own commemorative artworks for *Column*) a more all-embracing participatory rationale was developed for *Resonate* (2015). This took the form of a multi-media installation incorporating ceramics, sculpture and sound, commissioned for the British Ceramics Biennial 2015 in Stoke-on-Trent. Here, the entire audience was invited to participate in the making of a memorial, in commemoration of the 5,608 soldiers of the North Staffordshire Regiment killed during World War I. The project's outcomes were disseminated to a national audience in *Magee's* film, *Things Just Happen Anyway*, screened at the Crafts Council's *Real to Reel Film Festival* (2016) [3].

Funded by an AHRC *Voices of War and Peace* public engagement award, *The Lost Boys* project (2016) provided the opportunity to test a more focussed public participation strategy, working with young people aged 14-18 (the same age as the 'lost boys' of the First World War). The confluence of their ages allowed the young volunteers to empathise directly with these underage soldiers, and to draw attention to their stories, uncovered through the death notices held by Staffordshire County Archives. The young volunteers co-created an extensive body of commemorative ceramics, which were exhibited at the Wedgwood Museum and at Manchester Met's Special Collections [4].

*Passchendale: Mud and Memory* (2017/2019) re-visited and further refined the participatory workshop model developed in *Resonance*, using excavated artefacts and artworks, made using clay from the Wienerberger quarry and brickworks in Flanders, to compel museum visitors to engage emotionally with the brutal materiality of the First World War battlefield. Responding to these evocative battlefield artefacts, the workshop participants created drawings and prints on facsimile NACB (Navy and Army Canteen Board) plates, which were exhibited *en masse* as a central installation at the National Memorial Arboretum, the national centre of remembrance [5].

*Refugee Tales* (2017-2019) compared the experiences of First World War Belgian refugees with those of contemporary refugees in the UK. *Dixon* and *Magee* worked with refugees and asylum seekers in Stoke-on-Trent to co-create a collection of ceramic objects that examined narratives of identity, displacement and refuge. The asylum seekers were uniquely placed to give an insight into the contemporary experience of refugees, and to materialise this experience in ceramics. The project received an AHRC *Voices of War and Peace* (VWAP) public engagement award (2016) and culminated in *Magee's* film *Breakable* (2019), which was screened at the Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) Birmingham and Manchester Met [6].

### 3. References to the research

1. **Dixon, S.** 2019, 'Ceramics, narrative and commemoration', *Craft Research*, vol. 10, no.1, pp.121-131. [https://doi.org/10.1386/crre.10.1.121\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/crre.10.1.121_1)
2. **Dixon, S. and Magee, J.** *Resonance: Reflections on the Great War Through Artwork Inspired by Staffordshire Collections*, Touring Exhibition, 2015 <https://www.iwm.org.uk/partnerships/mapping-the-centenary/projects/resonance-reflections-on-the-great-war-through-artworks-inspired-by-staffordshire-collections>
3. **Dixon, S. and Magee, J.** *Resonate*, Installation, British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke-on-Trent, 2015 <https://www.britishceramicsbiennial.com/what-we-do/festival/past-festivals/2015-2/>
4. **Dixon, S. and Magee, J.** *The Lost Boys: Remembering the Boy Soldiers of WWI*, Exhibition, The Wedgwood Museum, 2016 <https://thelostboysww1.wordpress.com/>
5. **Dixon, S.** *Passchendale: Mud and Memory*, Exhibition, at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, 2017 and the Memorial Museum Passchendale 1917, Zonnebeke, Belgium, 2019 [https://www.passchendale.be/en/Museum/MMP1917\\_videos/Temporary\\_exhibitions](https://www.passchendale.be/en/Museum/MMP1917_videos/Temporary_exhibitions)

6. **Magee, J.** *Breakable*, Artist Film, Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham, 2019.  
<http://stephendixon.studio/films.html>

**Funding:**

- G1.** Resonance: Arts Council England, Grants for the Arts (G4A) 26573184 GBP20,000  
**G2.** The Lost Boys: Arts and Humanities Research Council/Heritage Lottery Fund, Voices of War & Peace public engagement award AH/L008149/1 (RRB017519) GBP14,951  
**G3.** Breakable: The Royal British Legion, Voices of War & Peace public engagement award AH/L008149/1 (RRB017519) GBP14,924

**4. Details of the impact**

Collectively, these five discrete but connected research projects have generated cultural impact on museum audiences, social impact on participant and community groups, and creative impact on public museums in the UK and in Belgium, during the Centenary of the First World War. Creative collaboration with public arts venues and organisations has been the central strategy in empowering co-researchers to engage in the re-imagining of public memorials and the co-creation of new commemorative artworks.

*Resonance* (2015) brought public attention to little-known social history collections of WWI memorabilia in the seven museums of the Staffordshire Museums Strategic Consortium and toured to each of the museums between March 2015 and April 2016, attracting 65,848 visitors. A total of 78 volunteers, recruited by the partner museums, participated in the co-creation of the ceramic artwork, *Column*, which was exhibited at every venue. As co-researchers, the participants gained new understandings of the contribution of their own relatives to the First World War, through individual research into their own family history. The creative application of this documentary information resulted in them becoming co-producers of a new artwork and gaining the satisfaction of seeing their work shown in the context of a commemorative public exhibition. Evaluation from the museums taking part in the touring exhibition indicated that the use of contemporary art as a strategy for reflection and interpretation increased visitor numbers and dwell time, unlocking archives and collections for new audiences **[A]**. Feedback from partner organisations highlighted the exhibition's innovative methodology and presentation of new narratives; "The whole project has been immensely rewarding ... completely different from the social or military historian developed exhibitions and displays which we would generally produce. The contrast in approaches is stimulating and imaginative and has made the museums look at their collections in a new and inspiring way, bringing fresh life to our core collections" **[B]**.

*Resonate* (2015) engaged a mass audience as participants, inviting visitors to co-create a sculptural memorial to the soldiers of the North Staffordshire Regiment. It formed one of the major installations at the British Ceramics Biennial 2015 and generated visitor numbers of 39,225 over the eight weeks of the ceramic festival **[C]**. 1,217 of these visitors actively participated in the co-creation of the artwork. They attached hand-made ceramic forget-me-nots and individual messages of condolence and contemplation to a structure that supported a monumental clay head, based on the Inter-Allied Victory Medal of 1919. The flowers were made by an *army* of BCB volunteers, some of whom also assisted Dixon in the construction of the head sculpture, ... 'an eight-foot-high coil pot made from red Etruria marl, the clay on which Stoke-on-Trent sits' **[D]**. Visitors commented on the emotive effect of the exhibition, and a raised awareness of the scale of the loss of life in the First World War: "We're absolutely blown away, the statue just totally depicts the common man...the number of men that were killed, it's unbelievable really." **[D]**.

*The Lost Boys* project (2016) also employed a model of shared making in the production of commemorative ceramic works. 120 students aged 14 to 18 from schools and colleges in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme were recruited as active co-researchers and co-creators **[E]**. Examining the death notices of underage soldiers, using the Staffordshire Sentinel microfiche library in the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire County Archives, gave them a unique insight into the experiences of First World War soldiers of their own age. The

exhibition attracted 421 visitors, who: "...particularly enjoyed hearing the young people's reflections on what they had gained from this project and their involvement in it." [F]. *Voices of War and Peace* project coordinator, Dr Nicola Gauld, commented: "Professor Stephen Dixon's *Lost Boys* project brought many different approaches, issues and insights to the wider VMAP project. The production of the ceramics, which included visualisations of the lost boy soldiers, had the effect of giving a sense of immediacy in terms of filling the gap between the past and present, and added a level of emotional engagement which documents cannot always deliver. In an age of visual literacy, the use of ceramics was an effective way of reaching out to larger publics. The experience of participating in the project helped to bring the past alive for the volunteers and enabled them to have an emotional connection with those young people from the past who had also volunteered but in a very different context." [G].

Collaboration also underpinned *Passchendaele: Mud and Memory* (2017) where 108 museum visitors and volunteers participated in handling sessions and drawing workshops, using archive material sourced from the collections of the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917. Working with the excavated personal artefacts of fallen soldiers from both sides of the conflict, participants gained new insights into the brutal reality of the First World War. This hands-on engagement with the materiality of the battlefield resulted in the co-creation of a ceramic installation, in which the participants transfer-printed their poignant drawings in iron oxide onto facsimile army canteen plates. The exhibition attracted 3,598 visitors to the National Memorial Arboretum [H] and a second showing, at the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917 (2019), attracted an audience of 52,411, where visitors were ... "surprised by the claywork" and "touched by the stories that were used", with one visitor stating: "It is a very moving memorial to all those who gave the most precious thing they possessed during the Great War. It is hard not to shed any tears." [I]. In January 2020 the central artwork of the exhibition, a ceramic 'everyman' made from clay from the Passchendaele battlefield, was permanently installed in the Visitors Centre at Tyne Cot Cemetery, the largest Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in the world. The Tyne Cot Cemetery is the most visited site in the Flanders Fields region and has visitor numbers of approximately 350,000 each year. The Director of the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917 also stated that the exhibition had changed the museum's curatorial practice: "It was the first time we had organised this kind of art exhibition. The *Mud and Memory* exhibition made us think differently about using this space. We are currently planning other exhibitions in this gallery, as the adaptations we have made could be used for that as well. Having such exhibitions is another way to interact with other domains and to put the story of the First World War in another perspective. In this way, the exhibition had a huge impact on our exhibition policy." [J].

The *Refugee Tales* project (2017-2019) involved 19 contemporary refugee and asylum seekers, from the Burslem Jubilee Group, as active co-producers. The refugees' first-hand experience of displacement and marginalisation was expressed through storytelling and object-making workshops. These involved responding to historic artefacts relating to Belgian refugees in the First World War, and resulted in a ceramic installation, *Medals for Peace*, shown as part of the British Ceramics Biennial 2017, which attracted 60,000 visitors. Participants spoke about how the project had empowered them and given them a sense of agency as co-creators. "We felt that there is a support and understanding from the team working with us, they gave us the freedom to shape our ideas the way that we can, the way that we want. We were not told to do one, two, three, we were given an absolute flexibility in having this project and it made us, refugees and asylum seekers, feel that there is a role that we need to pay attention to. Nobody would understand the message unless we say it and unless we tell it. [J]. Group organisers attested to the positive effects of the project on the participants saying: "... it told a story which they could relate to from their past. These workshops are good for their mental health and wellbeing. They engage with people from all aspects of our community and they feel human and not a Home Office number." [K].

The related artist film *Breakable* (2019) built on this success to engage with wider audiences as part of the AHRC *Voices of War and Peace* Festival. Screenings at MAC in Birmingham



and at Manchester Met attracted a combined audience of 133. Audience members commented on how it changed their perceptions and understanding of the experience of refugees, both historical and contemporary. [L]

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. *Resonance* evaluation summary, Staffordshire Museums Service evaluation report for Arts Council England. Corroborating the reach and significance of the *Resonate* exhibition.
- B. Copp, C. 2016, 'Resonance: Reflections on the Great War through artworks inspired by Staffordshire collections', *Social History in Museums*, vol. 40, pp. 57-63. Corroborating the innovative nature of Dixon's methodology.
- C. British Ceramics Biennial 2015 evaluation report for Arts Council England. Corroborating the reach of *Resonate* exhibition.
- D. BBC Midlands Today news broadcast, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2015 (Quotes sourced from British Ceramics Biennial Director and project participant) Corroborating the emotional impact of *Resonate*.
- E. British Ceramics Biennial *Lost Boys* recruitment flyer. Corroborating co-creation of *Lost Boys*.
- F. MMU Special Collections Exhibition Summary, *The Lost Boys: Remembering the boy soldiers of the First World War*. 13<sup>th</sup> June to 26<sup>th</sup> August 2016. Corroborating the impact of *Lost Boys* on visitors.
- G. *Voices of War & Peace: The Great War and its Legacy*, AHRC First World War Engagement Centre report and testimonial (Dr Nicola Gauld). Corroborating the impact of Manchester Metropolitan within *Voices of War and Peace*.
- H. *Passchendaele: Mud and Memory* visitor numbers, National Memorial Arboretum. Corroborating the reach of *Mud and Memory*.
- I. Director's testimonial, Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917 (Steven Vandenbussche). Corroborating the impact of *Mud and Memory* on museum practice.
- J. *Refugee Tales* project, participant testimonial (Ayad Mosab) Corroborating personal impact on project participants.
- K. *Refugee Tales* project, Burslem Jubilee Directors testimonial (Sheila Podmore). Corroborating the impact on project participants.
- L. *Breakable*, film screening audience testimonial. Corroborating impact on public knowledge and perceptions.