

Institution: Kingston University		
Unit of Assessment: 19 – Politics and International Studies		
Title of case study: Enabling preservation, accessibility and use of WW1 volunteer records		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010 – 2017		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name: Susan Hawkins	Role: Senior Lecturer	Period employed by submitting HEI: Apr 2010 – Jul 2018
Period when the claimed impact occurred: Aug 2013 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

The British Red Cross (BRC) approached the Centre for the Historical Record to lead on the preservation of Voluntary Aid Detachment records due to its expertise, and notably Hawkins' research with novel prosopographical techniques and the production of databases from archival records. As a result:

- 250,000 record cards were transcribed by 800 volunteers and preserved in an accessible format for the BRC and for the public.
- BRC educational materials, built from and using the records, to commemorate the WW1 Centenary have been downloaded over 2000 times.
- An international, multigenerational volunteer network was trained, with benefits such as learning new skills, improved wellbeing and increased historical awareness.
- Over eight exhibitions were directed by local museums; leading to a variety of community engagements including volunteer projects, school workshops, creative writing classes and grave restorations.

2. Underpinning research

Hawkins' research interests cover the history of medicine and women's role in society, with a particular focus on nursing, and the opportunities for emancipation at the end of the nineteenth century. Through novel prosopography, the study of characteristics of a group, **Hawkins** has enabled the generation of databases of and biographies for ordinary people in history. She challenged the reliance on the writings of privileged nurse leaders, and instead used new material within institutional archives to uncover the lives of ordinary nurses who worked in hospital wards **[R1]**. The demonstration of these new exploratory techniques challenged previously held assumptions, such as those about the conditions and attitudes in workhouse infirmaries.

In 2012, Hawkins published 'Nursing and Women's Labour in the Nineteenth century: The quest for independence' **[R2]**. This book showed how pioneering prosopographical techniques, which combined archival and census material to produce databases, could be used to produce biographies of ordinary nurses at St George's Hospital, London, revealing the evolution of nursing at that hospital. A subsequent book chapter, titled 'Myth, Marketing and Medicine: life in British children's hospitals 1850-1914' **[R3]** analysed patterns of admission and diagnosis for three non-specialised children's hospitals to draw conclusions about the visitation rules of and the moral purposes of such institutions in this era. This research demonstrated the importance of analysing archives to accurately understand the lives of "ordinary" individuals.

Hawkins' expertise in examining the history of nursing ran concurrently with her co-creation of the Historic Hospital Admission Records Project (HHARP) (<http://www.hharp.org/about/>) – which represents several projects undertaken by Kingston University's Centre for the Historical Record (CHR) from 2001-2015 **[R4]**, primarily working with the archives of four children's hospitals. All CHR projects are volunteer based. It began as a project to create a database of late 19th and

early 20th century admissions to the Hospital for Sick Children, whose extensive archive is still maintained and housed within the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust. Subsequently, the project expanded to include admissions for three other children's hospitals: the Evelina Hospital (now part of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust), whose records are held at the London Metropolitan Archives; the Alexandra Hospital for Children with Hip Disease (records held at the Museum and Archive Department of St Bartholomew's and the London NHS Trust) and the Royal Hospital for Sick Children (Yorkhill) in Glasgow, whose records are held by the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Archive. The same methodology was applied to each set of hospital records: building a volunteer programme and constructing a database with algorithms to update it. This became a rich mine of information; for example, the case notes represented a valuable resource about the family background of poor juvenile patients. The databases were also used to study the incidence of breast-feeding among the poor communities who used the hospital [R5]. HHARP brought together, in a single digital repository, all but two extant admission registers for nineteenth-century UK children's hospitals. Working with King's College London Archive, the CHR also produced an online searchable directory of members of the Royal British Nurses Association.

The success of HHARP led to the CHR, after recommendations from the archivist at Kings College London Archive, being approached by the British Red Cross (BRC) in 2013. The BRC decided to collaborate with the CHR on a project to commemorate its involvement in WW1 through the creation of an online database containing the members of Voluntary Aid Detachments. This would also help to mark the lives of "ordinary" volunteers in the mid-twentieth century. The BRC approached the CHR for this project because of its reputation for successful completion of similar projects, its valuable expertise, knowledge and experience, and its commitment to making historical records accessible to as wide an audience as possible, with no pay-wall barriers.

3. References to the research

R1 – Hawkins, S., 'From Maid to Matron: nursing as a route to social advancement in nineteenth-century England', *Women's History Review*, 19, (2010), pp 125-143. DOI: [10.1080/09612020903444718](https://doi.org/10.1080/09612020903444718)

R2 – Hawkins, S., *Nursing and Women's Labour in the Nineteenth century: The quest for independence*, (2012), ISBN-10:0415551692. DOI: [10.4324/9780203854464](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203854464)

R3 – Hawkins, S. and Tanner, A., 'Myth, marketing and medicine: Life in British children's hospitals 1850-1914', a book chapter, pp 209-236, in *Hospital life: Theory and practice from the medieval to the modern*, Abreu, L. and Sheard, S. (eds.), (2013) ISBN 9783034308847. DOI: [10.1093/shm/hkv042](https://doi.org/10.1093/shm/hkv042)

R4 – Hawkins, S., 'The Historic Hospital Admission Registers Project: a unique new online resource for historians of child health', *Local Population Studies*, 89, (2012), pp 82-90. ISSN (print) 0143-2974. DOI: [10.35488/lps89.2012.82](https://doi.org/10.35488/lps89.2012.82)

R5 – Tanner, A. and **Hawkins, S.**, 'Food, Glorious Food: the Functions of Food in British Children's Hospitals, 1852-1914', *Food and History*, 14, 1, (2017), pp 107-133. ISSN (print) 1780-3187. DOI: [10.1484/J.FOOD.5.113857](https://doi.org/10.1484/J.FOOD.5.113857)

4. Details of the impact

The British Red Cross appointed Hawkins and her team as project partners due to their work on HHARP digitising and databasing hospital registers. The BRC Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) database manager said 'the team from the University's Centre for the Historical Record was able to bring valuable expertise, knowledge and experience to the project' [S1]. Through the construction of the VAD database, Hawkins' research has led to an impact on the knowledge and awareness of the public by massively increasing accessibility to an important archive. It has led to the creation of a volunteer network of over 800 people, establishing networks of interested participants beyond the academy. It has also informed work in the heritage sector, as the resources of the database have been drawn on by a number of museums and galleries.

Impact on public awareness

250,000 record cards relating to members of VADs were entered into a database during the project, using the HHARP online transcription system. The information on the cards provides invaluable insight into the BRC volunteers during the war effort. On the project's launch in January 2014, Helen Grant, Minister for the First World War Centenary described the VAD indexes as being '*extremely valuable as a unique archive*' and described the Heritage Lottery Fund grant as '*really important as a way of preserving forever records of what these wonderful people – mostly women, of course – did*'. Phil Talbot, Director of Communications for the BRC, commented that the database '*is a fitting way to commemorate and pay tribute to those who gave their time in non-military service*' [S2].

From October 2014, the database was released in weekly updates on the British Red Cross website, providing unprecedented access and insight into the contribution of non-combatants, especially women, to the British WW1 war effort. The resulting database is an unparalleled resource for studying these contributions through the preservation of BRC heritage – now protected from damage through overuse [S3]. Prior to the project, the BRC received fewer than two enquires a day for this collection, whilst in August 2016 an average of over 650 cards were being viewed daily. Further, the BRC Learning Design Manager produced a series of webpages and educational resources for 11-16s. There were 1,280 unique downloads of the educational resources as well as visits by 2,704 unique users between 15 August 2018 and 15 December 2018, when schools were studying the WW1 centenary. In total the pages have been viewed almost 5,173 times and there have been 2168 unique downloads. [S4].

Creation of a volunteer network

Hawkins and other CHR staff recruited, trained and supported the network of over 800 volunteers - 80% of the transcribers had not worked for BRC before. Most volunteers were from the U.K. but there were participants from Europe, the USA, and Australasia. There was a considerable range of ages, with 40% being 60 or older. At the other end of the spectrum, a 14 year old DoE volunteer commented how he was '*grateful for the opportunity, and found it very informative too*'. Volunteers were struck by the scale of the VAD enterprise, and learnt about the reality of class and gender amongst the detachments: '*It really did throw me into a whole new world which I thought I knew about but learnt so much more*'. 97% of survey respondents said they enjoyed the experience. They commented how they '*just love doing it, I have CRPS [chronic regional pain syndrome] - it helps relax me and eases the pain a little*' whilst another commented that after breast cancer treatment it '*gave me heart that I could commit to something made me feel more my old self*' [S5].

Impact on the heritage sector

The project stimulated a range of activities from the archival community, who have made use of the resource in their own WW1 projects. These include:

- Surrey History Centre (SHC)

SHC utilised the VAD card transcriptions in their five-year *Surrey in the Great War* project. This '*increased significantly the number of records*' on the website boosting the civilian angle on the project both in terms of local heritage and also, still on-going, volunteer research engagement. The Heritage Projects Officer explained how this resource meant they were able '*to deliver talks on Surrey VADs at [our] events held all over Surrey*' and in school workshops (Years 1-9) tailored to the local area [S6].

- Doncaster Museum

A large focus of the *Doncaster 1914-18* project was on the home front and the contribution of women. The project researcher found the '*Red Cross database provided a huge resource*' and very often '*the record cards acted as a first step, a springboard, into further research*'. The information on the cards allowed nurses to be tracked across time and cross-referenced with other sources. She commented '*this research was used in exhibitions, events and on our website by the public, project volunteers, community partners and more*'. The exhibitions received over 140,529 visitors. Other uses of the cards include the authentic reproduction of a nurse's bandaging station and a small hospital for an exhibition; the restoration of the dilapidated grave of Arnold Hospital commandant Alice Pickering, the development of resources for schools, and a drama performance based on collected stories [S7].

- Sutton Local Studies and Archive Service

The *Past on Glass* project from 2014-2018 found the VAD cards 'were invaluable to our research', often being the only means of identifying individuals. A 2018 *Women in the Frame* exhibition, of which '*the VAD cards made up a significant part*', recorded over 12,850 visits – with feedback such as '*this project ticks all the boxes. It preserves, informs and challenges*'; 530 people came to public talks about the project; workshops series were held for 42 school students, 12 adults with learning disabilities, and eight female refugees. A community creative-writing workshop generated a book (*Writing on Glass*, ISBN 978-0-9955384-2-9) based on the collection.

Local volunteers have remained with the Archive Services, even two years after the official end of the project, commenting about '*learning new skills*' and having a '*sense of achievement*'. The opportunity of an online presence has increased average visits per year from an average of 720 to 4,625 through the blog and over 500,000 visits by Flickr, as well as new connections with other online user groups [S8].

- Worcester County Museum.

The HLF-funded *Worcestershire World War 100* project used the VAD cards extensively, including as a '*priceless resource*' for the exhibition *A Happy Convalescence: Hartlebury Castle's History as a WW1 Voluntary Aid Detachment Hospital* which opened in March 2016 [S5].

Other cultural endeavours have included talks at the National Army Museum, The Historic Dockyard Chatham, and the Wellcome Collection. The audiences included older ex-service members, the interested general public, and representatives of community groups. Also, Joyce Branagh a writer-actor found the VAD records useful when researching for her musical play '*Boomtown Gals*' - which won Best Fringe Performance in the 2016 Manchester Theatre Awards [S9].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1 – [HeritageDaily Press Release](#)

S2 – [Heritage Fund News Story](#)

S3 – British Red Cross: [First World War Volunteers Database](#)

S4 – [Google Data Studio](#) showing frequency of visits to and downloads of schools materials

S5 – 'British Red Cross VAD Indexes Online: Personnel Records of First World War Volunteers. An Evaluation Report' by Susan Hawkins, 22 September 2016

S6 – Testimonial by the Heritage Projects Officer at Surrey History Centre

S7 – Testimonial by Assistant Museums Officer (Military History) at Heritage Doncaster

S8 – Testimonial by the Archive Manager of Sutton Archives

S9 – [Gateways to the First World War News Story](#)