

<b>Institution: Manchester Metropolitan University</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: D28 History</b>		
<b>Title of case study: Transforming the Commemoration of Conflict: Empowering Communities and Foregrounding Marginalised Voices</b>		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010-2020</b>		
<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 Sam Edwards Steve Hawley Marcus Morris	Professor of Contemporary Crafts Reader in History Professor and Associate Dean Senior Lecturer in Modern European History	1998 - present 2010 - present 2003 - 2017 2012 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015 to 2020</b>		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N</b>		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b>          This case study describes the social and cultural impacts from a portfolio of artist-led commemorative projects united by a commitment to methods of inclusive co-production. Funded by Arts Council England and the AHRC, these projects have resulted in exhibitions, film screenings, documentaries and theatrical performances that have reached a total audience of 1,938,559 people. 282 active participants have generated a new understanding of wartime experiences and brought a greater sense of ownership to both the processes and the artefacts of remembrance. These projects have transformed marginalised groups, volunteers, soldiers' families, young people and communities from passive audiences into active and emotionally engaged creators of new forms of commemoration.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b>          Building on their partnership with the University of Birmingham's AHRC / Heritage Lottery Funded Engagement Centre, <i>Voices of War and Peace: The Great War and its Legacy</i>, Manchester Metropolitan researchers have continued to challenge national narratives of international relations and memorialisation. Their research focuses on perceptions of war and practices of remembrance within marginalised and hitherto overlooked communities, both past and present. Much of the research applies co-production methods to a variety of historical, creative and artistic projects, many drawing upon local archives, including the North West Film Archive (NWFA), part of Manchester Metropolitan University's Library Services and a key resource for the generation of impact in history. In demonstrating the importance of localising acts of remembrance, the research has generated new ways of understanding how conflict is remembered, memorialised and commemorated. In particular, it has shown how active participation inspires an emotional connection and deeper understanding of historical experiences of conflict.</p> <p>The interplay of local and global remembrance is central to Edwards' research, which explores the construction, use and meaning of memorials to US soldiers in the towns and villages of East Anglia and Normandy, regions with particular significance in WW2 [1]. The research has broken new ground in demonstrating the importance of local – as well as national – commemoration in defining post-war international relations between the USA, Britain and France, and in showing how local experiences and perceptions of conflict shaped these commemorative practices. The findings from this research fed into the delivery of the Heritage Lottery funded <i>Shellshock</i> project [G1] in which Edwards worked with volunteers at The Atkinson museum in Southport to commemorate the local impact of global warfare [1, 2]. Hawley extends these ideas by examining global-local connections in his research on <i>Calling Blighty</i>, a unique set of films, made in 1944-1946 and held in the NWFA, in which soldiers serving in the Far East can be seen speaking in their own voices in a series of 'filmed letters', which were sent home to their families. Hawley's interrogation of these messages home as historical documents has provided important new insights into the self-representation of soldiers, especially in terms of masculinity, as well as soldiers' emotional responses to absence and long-term separation from their families [3].</p>		

Investigating the links between everyday local craft-making and global conflict, Dixon has drawn on the collections of WW1 memorabilia held in seven Staffordshire museums as a departure point for the creative co-production of commemorative artefacts. His project *Resonance* [G2] included workshops in which members of the local community designed digitally printed ceramic artefacts to commemorate relatives who took part in the war. Dixon's aim was to explore how this helped to localise and 'make real' global conflict [4]. Through two subsequent projects Dixon explored the ways in which marginalised groups experienced conflict and how their experiences then went on to be commemorated. *The Lost Boys*, funded by the AHRC [G3], drew attention to stories of underage soldiers in WW1 by engaging young people aged 14-18 (the same age as the 'lost boys' of the war) in co-creating a body of commemorative ceramics which were subsequently exhibited at the Wedgwood Museum, Stoke-on-Trent, and in Manchester Metropolitan's Special Collections [5]. In *Refugee Tales*, Dixon potentially juxtaposed the experiences of WW1 Belgian refugees with those of contemporary refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, again utilising the co-creation of art objects, this time to construe and examine narratives of identity, displacement and refuge [4]. The project received a 2016 AHRC *Voices of War and Peace* public engagement award [G4].

The themes of young people, marginalisation and neglected perceptions of war were continued in Morris's AHRC-funded project *Being Young on the Home Front* [G5]. This examined the emotional impact of war on the nation's youth by addressing issues of disempowerment, the effect of family loss and young people's contribution to the war effort [6]. Working with youth groups and schools from deprived areas of Salford, Morris's research used young people's experiences of the Great War to contest contemporary youth's commonly held perceptions of the war through innovative artistic co-production of historically informed dramatic performances.

Taken together, this interdisciplinary and publicly engaged research has highlighted the need to instigate a broader range of narrative engagements with processes of commemoration. It also illustrates the social and emotional value of showcasing and celebrating enhanced popular understanding of wartime experiences.

### 3. References to the research

1. **Edwards, S**, 2015, *Allies in Memory: World War II and the Politics of Transatlantic Commemoration, c. 1941-2001*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
2. **Edwards, S**, 2017, 'Monument missions: remembrance, reconstruction and transatlantic memory in post-war Europe, 1945-1962', in S. Bélanger and R. Dickason (eds), *War Memories: Commemoration, Recollections and Writings on War*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal.
3. **Hawley, S**, 2016, *War Memorial*, experimental film inspired by *Calling Blighty*
4. **Dixon, S**, 2019, 'Ceramics, narrative and commemoration', *Craft Research*, 10 (1), 121-131 DOI: 10.1386/crre.10.1.121\_1.
5. **Dixon, S** and Magee, J, 2016, *The Lost Boys: Remembering the Boy Soldiers of WWI*, Exhibition, The Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire.
6. **Morris, M**, Andrews M, and Fleming, N (eds.), 2020, *Histories, Memories and Representations of Being Young in the First World War*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.

### Funding and quality indicators:

- G1. *Shellshock* (PI: Edwards) Heritage Lottery Fund (via The Atkinson Museum) £5,200 (2017)
- G2. *Resonance* (PI: Dixon) Arts Council England, Grants for the Arts (G4A) 26573184 GBP20,000 (2015)
- G3. *The Lost Boys, Remembering the Boy Soldiers* (PI: Dixon) AHRC/HLF (via University of Birmingham) AH/L008149/1, GBP11,961 (2015)
- G4. *Refugee Tales: viewing the Belgian refugee crisis of WW1 through the lens of contemporary experience* (PI: Dixon) AHRC/HLF (via University of Birmingham) AH/L008149/1 GBP14,951 (2016)

G5. *Young People and the Home Front* (PI: Morris) AHRC/HLF (via University of Birmingham) AH/L008149/1 GBP11,859

*Allies in Memory* [1] nominated for the Gladstone History Book Prize (2016)

*War Memorial* [3] nominated for Best Short Documentary award at Sheffield Doc / Fest (Sheffield International Documentary Festival) in 2016.

#### 4. Details of the impact

The centenary of the First World War and 75th anniversary of the Second World War have been major civic occasions in Britain. Memories of these wars and commemorative activities inspired by them play an important, but increasingly contested, role in the construction of national identity. The group's collaborative research with schools and community groups has led to significant impacts through the development of new and emotive approaches to the practice of commemoration in the twenty-first century.

#### Empowering communities of commemoration

The *Calling Blighty* films were screened to an audience of 250 relatives in Manchester and rescreened in York, Birkenhead and Brighton. Hawley's experimental film, *War Memorial* (2016), responded to *Calling Blighty* by embellishing the uncovered material with artistic interpretation and reaction from the audiences. Premiered at the Sheffield Documentary Festival, *War Memorial* was nominated for the Short Documentary award. The project led to extensive national media exposure and raised awareness of hitherto little-known material held by NWFA, ensuring its sustained accessibility to future generations. It also inspired Oxford Scientific Films to produce *Messages Home: Lost Films of the British Army*, a one-hour documentary for Channel 4, incorporating and made possible by Hawley's work (first aired in 2016). This highlighted three important impacts linking individual and collective remembrance of conflict and loss [A]. First, it showed the construction of communities of remembrance: in a process that is still ongoing, 600 living relatives of soldiers featured in *Calling Blighty* were traced for the first time, establishing new networks of relatives, veterans and subject specialists. One family, whose father was in the Chindits, was introduced to a surviving veteran. They were able to share memories and gain a better understanding of the trauma experienced by their father [A]. Second, it showed how Hawley's film and research helped to connect audiences to their own (family) history and provided a new sense of 'authenticity' born of seeing 'real people' on screen. One attendee commented on seeing his father: 'Watching this film is like having a time capsule, a lens back on to the 1940s in Burma, incredible to watch. I feel like I'm there with him.' Others were driven to investigate long-forgotten family histories. One family discovered the bravery behind a medal, but were prompted also to reflect on how heroism could lead to PTSD: 'I can imagine why it upset him so much ... Because he was Roman Catholic and he used to say to me, "How can I go to heaven when I've killed these people?"' The daughter of one soldier seen in the films was inspired to travel to Burma to see the grave of a father she never met in an act of private commemoration and family connection. 'I'm so sorry that we never knew each other,' she says. 'The last few weeks I have got to know so much more about you, and what a fine, brave man you were. We're very proud of you. I hope you'd be proud of all of us' [A]. Third, *Messages Home* brought the insights and experiences created by Hawley's work to a national audience, reaching over 1,800,000 viewers in two screenings and receiving considerable critical acclaim. It was described by *The Observer* as 'the best documentary of the week' and the *Evening Standard* wrote that it was 'full of poignant, heart-warming, and heart-breaking scenes. The Forgotten Army will certainly be remembered by those who tune in' [B].

Dixon's ground-breaking *Resonance* tour and exhibition (2015) also drew on little-known archive material to empower communities of commemoration in Staffordshire. Working with WW1 memorabilia held in seven Staffordshire museums, 78 volunteers participated in the co-creation of a ceramic installation, *Column*, exhibited at each of the museums. Through individual research into their own family history, the volunteers gained a new understanding of the WW1 contribution of their relatives. The commemoration of forgotten family members was made tangible through their active participation in research and artistic creation. The

exhibition drew 65,848 visitors, and evaluation from the participating museums indicates that the use of co-produced art as a strategy for reflection and interpretation increased visitor numbers and dwell time, and opened archives and collections to new audiences [C]. Feedback from partners highlighted the exhibition's innovative methodology and presentation of new narratives: 'The whole project has been immensely rewarding...The contrast in approaches is stimulating and imaginative and has made the museums look at their collections in a new and inspiring way' [D].

### **Transforming the commemoration of and by marginalised groups**

The *Shellshock* project (2017-18) led by Edwards and funded by the HLF provided archival research training that helped 25 local volunteers develop new skills to chronicle the history of the UK's first military hospital for sufferers of 'shellshock' (later known as PTSD), at Maghull in Merseyside. The project responded directly to local people's feelings about the loss of the hospital building, which was demolished in 2010 [E]. Volunteers unearthed old case records which were combined with the moving stories of present-day veterans with PTSD, collected at events coinciding with Remembrance Sunday in 2017 and 2018 [F], to create a joint exhibition on PTSD at The Atkinson Museum which attracted 11,940 visitors. The project developed research skills among the local community. As the manager of The Atkinson stated, 'It's wonderful that local volunteers have been able to carry out so much original research' [E, F]. The project also created a more sympathetic understanding within the wider public of this group of sufferers; one visitor commented: 'It has been very thought-provoking and increased my children's knowledge of the effects of war' [F].

Dixon's *Refugee Tales* (2017-19) likewise deployed new mechanisms to involve those directly impacted by war yet normally marginalised from its commemoration and memorialisation. *Refugee Tales* worked with 19 contemporary refugees and asylum seekers from the Burslem Jubilee Group as active co-producers. The refugees' first-hand experiences of displacement and marginalisation were voiced through storytelling and object-making workshops in response to historic artefacts relating to Belgian refugees in WW1. The project 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: 'We felt that there is 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'. One added that '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.' The Burslem Jubilee Director underlined the positive effects on the participants: 'The workshops are good for their wellbeing' allowing them to 'feel human and not a Home Office number' [G].

### **Shaping young people's perceptions of conflict and experiences of commemoration**

In *Being Young on the Home Front* (2017), Morris worked with schools, colleges and youth groups, in partnership with Little Hulton and Walkden Neighbourhood Community Team, Salford. He directed five group leaders in the development of a participatory project that empowered 40 young people from areas of socio-economic deprivation to research, devise and perform their own cultural productions. The project showcased innovative co-production techniques that created teams in which young people had an equal footing in terms of knowledge and perspectives. Drawing on historic accounts, the young people created drama, dance and poetry on the theme of youth experiences in wartime. A final performance at the Sir Ben Kingsley Theatre in Pendleton attracted an audience of approximately 100. This was a new and transformative experience for the young people, with one participant noting how they were learning new skills and 'enjoying creating something new [by] doing something different that I've not done before'. The nature of the impact was evident from a change in the local community's view of the young people themselves. An audience member at the final performance felt that it was 'wonderful to see the engagement and ideas of today's young people, giving different and thought-provoking views' [H].



Through cross-disciplinary collaboration with the historians, Dixon's *Lost Boys* project engaged 120 volunteers aged 14-18 from Staffordshire schools as active research collaborators. By examining the death notices of underage soldiers from the *Staffordshire Sentinel* (newspaper) the youngsters gained a unique insight into the experiences of First World War soldiers of their own age. Their understanding was deepened by the collection of objects, images and ephemera that fed into the creation of a series of ceramic artefacts that commemorated the teenage soldiers. 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' [I]. AHRC *Voices of War and Peace* coordinator Nicola Gauld commended the project which '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' [J].

Collectively, the group's research has shifted public understanding of what constitutes commemorative practice from the exclusivity of traditional ceremonies, memorials and statues towards a wider range of popular, community-based creative interventions, enabled by local crafts, theatre and documentary film. It has strengthened the local, tangible and emotional resonance of commemoration experienced by a wide range of diverse people through involving them as co-producers of new memorials to war, often featuring their own family members or other people 'like them'.

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Channel 4 news release: *Messages Home* - <https://www.channel4.com/press/news/messages-home-lost-films-british-army> corroborates the significance of the impact of *Calling Blighty* and *War Memorial* on families and relatives.
- B. Oxford Scientific Films: *Messages Home* - <http://www.oxfordscientificfilms.tv/portfolio-item/calling-blighty/>; Data from Oxford Scientific Films on Channel 4 audience reach corroborates the critical response and reach of the impact of *Calling Blighty* and *War Memorial*.
- C. *Resonance* evaluation summary, Staffordshire Museums Service evaluation report for Arts Council England corroborates the reach and significance of *Resonance* on visitors.
- D. Copp, C. 2016, 'Resonance: Reflections on the Great War through artworks inspired by Staffordshire collections', *Social History in Museums*, vol. 40, pp. 63-69 corroborates the impact on curatorial practice in museums.
- E. *Sacrifice, the Impact of Conflict on Lives and Minds: Project Evaluation Report* corroborates the reach and significance of *Shellshock* on visitors and partners.
- F. Moss Side Great War Remembered, The Atkinson Event information corroborates details of the *Shellshock* project.
- G. *Refugee Tales* project, participant testimonial; Burslem Jubilee Director's testimonial corroborates the impact on individual participants and the Burslem practice.
- H. Being Young on the Home Front Project website and testimonials corroborating impacts on participants and audiences.
- I. MMU Special Collections Exhibition Summary, *The Lost Boys: Remembering the boy soldiers of the First World War*. 13 June to 26 August 2016.
- J. Testimonial from *Voices of War & Peace* coordinator on the impact of *The Lost Boys*.