

Food Away from The Western Front Evaluation Report

Context

Food Away from the Western Front took place during Autumn 2018 as a joint project between Away From the Western Front and the Holst Birthplace Museum.

The project used the theme of food to link the story of Gustav Holst's time in Salonika with people living in Cheltenham today. Looking specifically at food eaten by countries who participated in the campaign on the Macedonian Front, the project sought to engage local people with the history of the First World War through a subject which was of importance and common daily interest to us all.

Staff and volunteers from the museum were engaged in research to inform and produce a "Salonika Recipe Book". Food from this research was then served at a community event including food, educational activities and music. The event was held in Saint Pauls a less affluent area of Cheltenham that is geographically close to the Holst Birthplace Museum. The event was filmed and a short video was produced which can now be seen on both the HBM and AFWF websites. Our findings were also presented at the Away From the Western front Conference in October 2018.

Data Collection

Quantitative data collected during the project comprises participant numbers collected during research workshops, at the event and during the conference as well analytical data from HBM website and social media streams.

Qualitative data collection was carried out in the form of interviews – with staff and volunteers and questionnaires given to attendees at the event.

Findings

Quantitative

In total we engaged.....

12 HBM volunteers as either researchers or musicians

38 adults and 12 children attended the event

15 people visited our stand at the AFWF conference

100 people have hard copies of the Salonika cookbook.

Our film has had a reach of 146 from our Facebook Page and 56 from our website

Other posts about the project have reached 435 people

Qualitative (In line with Generic Learning Outcomes)

Knowledge and Understanding

We found that participants learnt more about both the Salonika Campaign and Holst and his music....

"I have only eaten corn (maize) bread in the USA before, I didn't realise it came from Greece". (Event attendee)

"I came to the event to understand more about a member of my family who fought in Salonika" (Event attendee)

"It is surprising to hear that some soldiers ate well during WWI" (event attendee)

"I didn't know the war had been fought near Greece". Event attendee

Attitudes and Values

HBM volunteers were delighted to be given a research project but it was a struggle to engage the local community of Saint Pauls

"I have really enjoyed researching a different side to Holst especially reading his letters to Isobel." (HBM volunteer)

"Being able to give our volunteers more in depth research has given them a renewed sense of purpose and inspired them to spend more time working with the museum" (HBM member of staff)

"This looks boring, there's not much to do, we won't stay" – visitor to the event from the local community

Enjoyment Creativity and Inspiration

Music and craft at the event was enjoyed by many...

"Holst lived here with soldiers" – Child age 7 who made a YMCA hut

"It has been enormously enjoyable to play with John he is such a talent" – (HBM musician)

"I enjoyed the music, my granny sang these songs" – Event Attendee

Challenges

The event had initially been conceived as a joint venture with Food Impact, another charity in Cheltenham. Sadly they pulled out fairly late into the project around a month before the event due to staff illness. This meant that some parts of the meal had to be scaled back as HBM staff stepped in to replace Food Impact Chefs.

The event also did not gain as many attendees as had been hoped. This is perhaps because it was held during Cheltenham Literature Festival. A popular, large event that draws in most of the town.

One family who had booked to attend the event walked out within the first 5 minutes declaring it "boring".

We began with a larger band of musicians but ended with only two performing as others felt that their instruments didn't fit together.

It was difficult to find a videographer willing to work within budget.

Successes

The research and production of the “Salonika Cookbook” was very much enjoyed by volunteers. We found that giving them a research project injected new life into the volunteer role at the museum. Those that participated were able to share their knowledge with other visitors.

Some volunteers on our system who have social anxiety were able to work on the project from home.

The event did draw some people from the local community who did not previously know about the Salonika Campaign and had not visited the Holst Birthplace Museum.

The project gave a new angle and scope to our exhibition with staff and volunteer learning

We coped with Food Impact dropping out at short notice and were able to keep the event going.

Those who did attend the event were mostly very happy with 68% ticking the box to say they would like to come to similar events.