

Evaluation report: 'Horses in the War'

Brief context

This project involved twenty members of Minehead Quilters. Taking inspiration from the book 'On that day I left my boyhood behind', by Susan Burnett, members of the group each chose a subject to record as a stitched square, culminating in a banner suitable to be displayed as a free-standing object, with pop-up information banners either side of it explaining the story depicted in each square. The project looked at the use of horses in the First World War in various campaigns away from the Western Front. The stories on the banner were chosen by the quilters to cover sourcing the horses at the start of the war, transporting them to the campaign areas, work undertaken by the horses (and their limitations) and what happened to them after the war. It soon became apparent to all involved with this project that conditions for soldiers and animals were very different than those on the Western Front. The quilters worked as a team, sharing ideas, skills and researching information. Susan Burnett visited the group early on in the project and talked about the contents of her book and answered questions regarding subjects for the banner. Rita Tremaine, from the Brooke charity also visited the group to give an insight into remount depots, sourcing different horses, transporting them, and the different type of work they were involved in during the First World War

Methodology of the evaluation

Before the group started on the project they were given a 'baseline evaluation questionnaire' which asked for each member's knowledge of the First World War generally and the war away from the Western Front, an indication of their knowledge of local/community history and the historical background of current affairs, as well as questions about their experience of historical research. The answers for these questions were rated from 1 to 4, 1 being definitely agree, 2 Mostly agree, 3 Mostly disagree and 4 Definitely disagree. Three other questions asked for full answers, how they expected working on the project to improve their knowledge and understanding, what new skills did they hope/expect to learn by working on the project, and why did they want to take part on the project.

It was apparent, from what they said before completing the questionnaires, that some of the ladies were not happy with the way the first 7 questions were worded. They seemed to be confused with the way they were supposed to answer, as the 'questions' were actually statements and they had to agree or disagree with them. I could only assume that they had not been involved with this type of information collection before. I went through the questionnaires with those ladies who were struggling, and explained what was needed in a way they could understand. One lady in particular was unhappy about completing the questionnaire saying that she didn't realise she would have to do "all this work" as well as making a square. However, she did eventually complete it with some gentle persuasion. Only fourteen ladies completed the questionnaires. There was a problem identifying who had and hadn't returned the forms as the form itself had a section (11) which asked if the

person completing the form would be willing to take part in further surveys about their experience of working with Heritage Lottery funded projects. It asked that if they were interested then to provide name and email address. This did not appear to be a popular subject so all but one form is anonymous. Quotes from this first questionnaire are attached as Appendix 1.

The quilters felt they were fairly well informed about the FWW generally, and of local history, but much less so about the FWW away from the Western Front. Most had not done historical research, especially using original sources such as those in museums, libraries and archives.

At the end of the project I handed out another evaluation sheet, put together by me, this time asking direct questions and this was more successful. Each lady put her name at the top of the sheet and so I was able to identify who had returned each one.

I produced two different questionnaire sheets, one for the ladies participating in the production of the stitched squares, and one for the ladies involved with piecing the banner together.

Questions included thoughts when the group started the project, the project itself and the subject, how the subject for their square was chosen, how did they source the materials to make their square, what problems arose and how they were solved, how research was undertaken, what skills were learnt, what was enjoyed the most about their contribution and working with others, what they gained from working as a team, examples of what they learned about the war away from the Western Front, what surprised them most about what they learned about campaigns in that part of the world, and any other comments. Some answers were very concise and others brief. Quotes from the Quilters are in the Appendix.

Quantitative findings

Of the twenty members of Minehead Quilters involved with the project 'Horses in the War', thirteen produced one, two or three squares for the banner, one member stitched the logos for the Heritage Lottery Fund and Away from the Western Front, three put the banner together (joining the squares to the rest of the fabric and wadding, and finishing the stitching, quilting, and sleeves for the poles. One member made the bag for the banner and poles, and one member stitched the labels for the back showing the names of those involved in the project. I was the project manager.

Demographics

Ages:

50-59 x 2

60-69 x 4

Over 70 x 14

Ethnicity: White x 20

Gender: Female x 20

Disabled: x2

The stand for the banner was specially made by a gentleman known to one of the members. A local stitching and haberdashery shop made available their workroom on three separate occasions for the banner to be spread out and stitched together.

So far the banner and explanation panels have been taken to the Away from the Western front National Conference, and five musical concerts, three in Chepstow and two in West Somerset. Each concert was a celebration of the end of the First World War, and had choirs singing songs from the era, poetry, and readings. The total amount of people who have seen the banner during the conference and the five concerts is approximately nine hundred, (eighty at the conference, four hundred and fifty at the three Chepstow concerts and three hundred and seventy at the West Somerset concerts. The display has gone down very well, with lots of comments of how good it is.

The following email was received by me from the organiser of the concerts at the Raleigh's Cross Inn, in West Somerset:

Hi Jane, lovely to hear from you and apologies for the late reply !

First many thanks indeed for bringing this work to our show - it is really appreciated and the icing on the cake :)

Ideally we would like to place your work right in front of the audience whilst they arrive at 7 pm. It would then need to be moved before our warm up act starts at 7.30 pm, hope that's ok. Ideally perhaps we could move it to the back of the stage area, or off to one side, but we can decide between us all tonight. I guess the best time to put it up would be after 5.30 pm - we will have rehearsed up until then and will then take a break for an hour and a half before the doors open at 7 pm.

Looking forward to seeing you later - hope that plan works ok for you but any queries at all just let me know.

Thanks again :)

Nigel.

After the two concerts I received another email from the organiser:

Hi Jane I just want to thank you, Alma and all your team for bringing your work up to our show. It just fitted in perfectly and I even think that one of slides that we used is also reflected in one of your panels - the horse being lowered down the edge of the boat.

Thank you again Jane, lots of lovely comments and genuine interest, such a poignant story

Nigel.

It was decided that it is not practical to have a lengthy questionnaire to complete at events such as short timescale events because the audience does not have time to be seated, watch the concert, have refreshments in a short space of time and then depart. Therefore we have both obtained a 'guest book' for comments. See Appendix.

When the banner and panels are displayed in one venue for longer periods questionnaires will be left for people viewing to complete.

Comments and results of questionnaires will be sent on as and when they are gathered from future venues.

Challenges and Successes

From the start of the project there have been challenges. The main one was the changes to the project from Norman Woodcock's story to 'Horses in the War'. Members of the group had it in their mind that they would be telling Norman's story and so had to change their ideas for the banner to that of Horses in the War.

At the start, one lady was not very interested in the project or the subject and was a little negative about it all. She refused to complete the baseline questionnaire.

However, she read Susan's book and helped the others with questions about their squares. She was instrumental in the construction of the banner at the end of the project. I drew up a separate end of project questionnaire for her and this time she completed it. I was surprised with her comments, which included that she learned patience, adaptability and problem solving. The part she enjoyed the most about her contribution was "Stretching my mind again, and then I got to enjoy it". She said that she had learned how many horses and mules were involved and also commented that she was surprised at how the group got involved in the project. I consider that this was a success, considering her attitude at the start of the project!

A challenge for one lady who wanted to be involved in the project, but who was receiving chemotherapy, was to work with another lady on one square between them. Both worked well together and were pleased with their efforts.

Illness and lack of drive were addressed by others in the group helping out to ensure the project was finished in time.

Conclusion

The project stretched everyone involved, taking the members of the quilting group out of their comfort zone, working to a deadline, and ensuring that research was done to broaden their knowledge about the war away from the Western Front.

They worked very well as a team to ensure that the banner was finished in time for it to be taken to the 'Away from the Western Front' National Conference. The ladies are all very proud of the finished item.

Appendix 1

'Horses in the War' evaluation data

1. Baseline questionnaire

| | 1= Definitely agree | 2= Mostly agree | 3= Mostly disagree | 4= Definitely disagree |
|---|---------------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1 I have a good knowledge of the First World War generally | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2 I have a good knowledge of the War away from the Western Front | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3 I have a good knowledge of local / community history | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4 I have a good knowledge of the historical background of current affairs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5 I have experience of general historical research | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6 I have used online archives for research | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7 I have visited museums, libraries and archives for research | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

14 forms returned

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|----|----|----|----|
| Question 1 | 2 | 8 | 1 | 3 |
| Question 2 | 1 | 4 | 6 | 3 |
| Question 3 | 1 | 8 | 3 | 2 |
| Question 4 | 0 | 6 | 7 | 1 |
| Question 5 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Question 6 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Question 7 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 4 |
| Total for each question | 12 | 35 | 30 | 21 |
| Total split into 'agree' and 'disagree' | 47 | | 51 | |

Interpretation

1 I have a good knowledge of the First World War generally

10 agreed (71%), 4 disagreed

2 I have a good knowledge of the War away from the Western Front

5 agreed, 9 disagreed (64%)

3 I have a good knowledge of local / community history

9 agreed (64%), 5 disagreed

4 I have a good knowledge of the historical background of current affairs

6 agreed, 8 disagreed (57%)

5 I have experience of general historical research

6 agreed, 8 disagreed (57%)

6 I have used online archives for research

even

7 I have visited museums, libraries and archives for research

4 agreed, 10 disagreed (71%)

The quilters felt they were fairly well informed about the FWW generally, and of local history, but much less so about the FWW away from the Western Front. Most had not done historical research, especially using original sources such as those in museums, libraries and archives.

2. Summative evaluation quotes

1) What were your thoughts when you started the project?

a) About the project itself

“Very Apprehensive”

“It was a good idea and interesting”

“Happy to participate, later on found it was more extensive than first thought”

“I did not know how we would all tell the story in our separate squares”

“I thought it was a lovely idea as I think people shouldn’t forget”

“It sounded interesting but probably beyond my stitching capabilities”

b) About the subject

“As the weeks went on and everybody was talking about how many horses had died, that caught my attention

“I didn’t know much about the war away from the Western Front”

“Did not know much about the First World War, but the project has shown much more in different areas of the world”

“It was a good subject for the centenary year”

“ I wanted to do a poem about the feelings the men had talked about and to achieve something lovely instead of war”

3) How did you source the materials to make your square?

“I used fabrics that I already had”

“Bought relevant colour threads to do semaphore figures. Was provided by project leader with a square of fabric in size suitable for the banner”

“I bought some and others were provided”

“ I searched my stash of fabrics, looking for muted colours and suitable textures”

4) What problems (if any) did you have and how did you resolve them

“The main problem was to get everything into an 8” square”

“I have never been able to draw, especially animals, but a friend came to the rescue”

“None”

“Designing the picture in the stated size of the material and exploring the art of applique”

“I did a square comparing a horse shoe to a mule shoe. I had problems sourcing the latter but I was sent a photo on-line”

“As my artistic skills are limited, I doubted my ability to draw anything, let alone create it in fabric. I used black and white photos, traced the main parts then used the tracing as a pattern to cut out fabric”

“Working to such a small scale was very challenging and quite a strain on my eyes. To resolve the problem I only worked for brief periods of time”

5) How did you research information about the subject

“Looked through books and postcards”

“I looked on-line”

“At the Library and on-line”

“By looking at books and reading books about it”

“I read Susan Burnett’s book, and then I researched on the internet to find information and photographs”

6) What skills did you learn from the project?

“Layering different fabrics and transferring a drawing onto fabric”

“Working together to a set formula”

“Designing a picture and applique”

“How to create free motion stitching using my sewing machine and a quilting foot”

“Patience”

“I learnt how to draw a horse!”

“How materials can depict landscapes, buildings etc.”

“I didn’t learn any new skills, but it did help me to refine and improve my original ones”

7) Did you enjoy participating in the project

“Yes, indeed”

“it is always a pleasure to work with like-minded people”

“Very much”

“Yes, more than I thought I would!”

8) What did you enjoy the most about your contribution?

“I was very happy (and a bit emotional) that I managed to create a fair interpretation of Norman and Timbuc”

“Just to see it finished”

“Working together and seeing the project grow”

“Seeing my completed squares forming part of the finished banner”

“I liked being part of a group working towards the final piece”

“The chance to contribute”

“I have always loved horses, so I enjoyed drawing and planning the squares”

9) What did you gain from working as a team?

“Exchanging ideas and views”

“It was good to see other people’s interpretation on each of their squares”

“The encouragement and support of the group”

“Friendship, having a common goal, exchanging ideas”

“Swapping fabrics”

“New sewing skills and techniques. Enjoyment and a sense of belonging”

“We were working towards one goal, it brought everyone together”

“Got to know them so much better”

“As a new member (of Minehead Quilters) I didn’t know many people and feel that this project has enabled me to settle into the group very quickly”

10) Do you know more about the war Away from the Western Front now than when you started?(Give examples of what you have learned)

“It was far more ranging than I previously knew. I thought it was mostly ANZAC troops that died in such great numbers, but actually just as many British, if not more, died in the battles”

Information I discovered was about Russia invading Prussia. This in turn led to further escalation of the Eastern Front”

“It was a disaster for us – not well planned”

“I learned that it was probably a mistake to embark on this campaign as they were under prepared, with inadequate supplies, and insecure supply chain. In contrast the Turks were in a better strategic position, with a better supply chain and healthier, better equipped, soldiers”

“Just how many Horses and Mules were used, and lost in this Operation”

“The conditions and lack of water, for men and horses, and also food”

“I Learned about the use of different animals to suit different countries on the Eastern Front”

“Learned of the severe hardships of the horses, donkeys and mules, as well as the transportation of these animals.”

11) What surprised you most about what you have learned about the war away from the Western Front?

“I think very poor information that was given, and just how many horses and mules were used, and lost in this operation”

“How many different nationalities were involved, and how many animals were used”

“How many animals were slaughtered or abandoned after the war ended”

“The number of countries they actually travelled through”

Any other comments:

“Getting involved with this project and seeing all the blocks that others had done made me want to know more about the war generally, but especially about the battle of Gallipoli. This has been a very moving and emotional experience, I feel that I have got into someone else’s life and seen the war from a completely different perspective”

"I think the idea and working out the squares and putting together, was very rewarding to see end product. Very Proud!"

"We had a very good Project Manager"

"I am very pleased to have been part of the project and very pleased and proud of the banner we had part in"

"I really enjoyed the conference 'Beyond the Western Front' held in Bristol. The lectures were interesting and informative. I also enjoyed listening to the other participants in the project and looking at their creative projects"

3. Comments from the 'guest book' which has been taken to events so far (November 2018)

This is just a sample of the comments received. Many are very similar

17th November 2018

"Beautiful and emotive, with much to think about" (SH, Wellington)

"Extremely interesting and beautiful work and great thought put into project" DC

"Beautiful work and moving story. Thank you" T St. C

18th November 2018

"Thank you, informative and beautiful" NN

"My great-grandfather, George Ayres, fought in WW! In the Royal Horse Artillery. He loved his horses and it broke his heart when they were hurt. He survived every major battle, and came home, gassed, to his 5 year old son Bert, my grandad, who was so proud of him. God bless you for this fantastic piece of important history!" BJ, Exeter

21st November 2018

"A beautiful and moving tribute, congratulations to all who took part" JJ, Minehead

"The banner is amazing, such beautiful detailed work telling the story of horses in the war so well. The pop ups give great detail too, and enhance the story. An amazing piece of work, thank you" AB

Jane Sharp, December 2018