

National Memory – Local Stories video segment transcript:
Nick Oldham, Director, and Belinda Williams, Producer, Media 19, on
the workshop experiences at four of the five partner museums.

Oldham:

This project had what for us was an interesting combination of creative practice, art and media but also was enabling young people to connect with something that is so resonant in the nation's history at this particular moment.

Looking at historical events was a real challenge and how you find a way of allowing young people to enter that, to events of a hundred years ago to which they've got no seeming connection at all.

Williams:

The uniqueness of the project lies in not only facilitating young people to create their own piece of work but also to connect them with their own history which may be their family history to connect them with local and national museums and also to connect them with their own emotions so it's about what do they feel about the events of World War I.

The way in which it's connected them with what is very significant anniversary. Both within their own nation but also on the international level so I think it's opened up their eyes to where World War I took place and how it happened and why it is important to remember.

Oldham:

It's very much about finding a starting point, about finding what event or what story, or what emotion, a young person might connect with, and I think once you've got that starting point people will dig into it, they'll go a bit deeper, and that just opens up a whole new avenue of thoughts, ideas and exploration of history.

The workshops had a number of dimensions to them. One of them was to show young people imagery from the time, so that might be propaganda posters, might be paintings, some portraits, and it was to give them a context of what was happening, what things were like.

Any sense of participation is for them to kind of get hold of something and then shape it into something that is about themselves, so they've got that connection, they've got that tangible way of connecting with and understanding what went on.

A number of people did find stories, connections, objects, photographs, documentation, that they never knew existed, that came out of drawers, cupboards, other family members and I think for them that was a revelation, it was 'oh my God this has been there all that time, nobody ever said anything about it.

All the objects were great, and I think just the fact that people can pick up things and handle them and feel the weight of something, or the texture of materials, I mean, the objects ranged from shells to guns, weaponry, but through to postcards and pin cushions – very soft textiles, but also what was key is that understanding

what that object represented: what was the story behind it? Who was the person behind it? And I think that just gave people a tangible connection to what was going on; to be holding and feeling something from a century ago is quite a sort of stirring and inspirational moment.

The personal diaries countered the official war diaries and we had an interesting session where we matched the war diary's account alongside the personal account. And I think for the young people it kind of opened their eyes to how war is documented, official and personal, and the differences and the emotive language, which is lacking, by and large, in the official reports.

It's just opening up history with a different set of eyes and allowing young people to make their own connections with it – what interests them, what's tangible to them and what can they do with it.