

CONNECTING SMALL HISTORIES

ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY IN JEWISH HISTORY PROJECTS

Jewish Small Communities Network
& Swansea University
in partnership
supported by
National Lottery Heritage Fund



EVALUATION REPORT



CONTENTS



02

INTRODUCTION

03

PROJECT CONTEXT

04

CONNECTING SMALL
JEWISH COMMUNITIES

05

PROJECT AIMS &
OBJECTIVES

08

WHAT DID HAPPEN

11

EVALUATION

13

OUTCOMES

29

PROJECT
DEVELOPMENT AND
DELIVERY

34

NEXT STEPS

35

CONCLUSION

CONNECTING SMALL HISTORIES

INTRODUCTION

In 2020 the Jewish Small Communities Network (JSCN) received a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant of £73,000 for *Connecting Small Histories: Ensuring Sustainability in Jewish History Projects*. In partnership with the history faculty of Swansea University, the project set out to record the footprint of small or no-longer-extant Jewish communities, to collect and document their stories and contributions, and connect these to the wider Jewish history of the UK, and to reconnect communities, fostering an exchange of stories, memories and communities via a dedicated "Heritage Hub".

This report is a final evaluation study of the project prepared by Sefryn Penrose of ButCH (Bureau for the Contemporary and Historic), an independent heritage consultancy appointed by the project in February 2021. The evaluation has been prepared in accordance with the National Lottery Heritage Fund's evaluation requirements and guidance, in particular the outcomes identified in the project's application, for heritage, for people, and for communities.

In March 2020, just as the project was given the go-ahead by the NLHF, the implications of the Coronavirus pandemic began to emerge. The lifetime of the *Connecting Small Histories* project is almost exactly concurrent with the pandemic and the ensuing upheaval. This evaluation takes into account these extremely difficult circumstances.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Connecting Small Histories brought together volunteer researchers to look into the heritage of six target areas: Eastbourne, St Annes, Sunderland, Bradford, Somerset, and Cumbria.

The volunteers and Project Team:

- *Conducted interviews and oral histories*
- *Ran an online Reading Festival*
- *Put on an online History Festival*
- *Produced a project book*
- *Produced a ks2 educational resource: Heritage Detectives*
- *Produced an online **Heritage** Hub resource*
- *Gave presentations and talks*
- *Brought to light unknown heritage connections across the six small communities*
- *Created a project community during a difficult and uncertain period.*

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PROJECT CONTEXT

THE JEWISH SMALL COMMUNITIES NETWORK (JSCN)

The Jewish Small Communities Network (JSCN) was started in 2003 by Ed Horwich who remains its Director, and is Project Manager of Connecting Small Jewish Communities. JSCN serves to bring together small Jewish communities in a self-supporting network. 72 towns are represented in its membership, equivalent to approximately 55,000 members, around 20% of the UK's Jewish population. The network offers support and access to a larger community to its members, and also serves as a resource for information, aid, advice, as well as offering news and content.

JSCN's Charitable Objectives are to advance the Jewish faith for the public benefit by: a) providing information & advice to enable members of Jewish small communities to practice & live within the faith; b) relieving need related to ill health & disability in Jewish small communities and others; c) advancing education in Jewish history and culture; d) promoting the elimination of antisemitism and education about antisemitism.

The *Connecting Small Histories* project emerges out of the broader work of JSCN and its commitment to connecting its member (and other) communities, providing a network hub to support and disseminate relevant projects, and to the ongoing wellbeing of member communities and their heritage.

CONNECTING SMALL JEWISH COMMUNITIES

THE EMERGENCE OF THE PROJECT

Through the interaction of JSCN community members with the network over the years since its formation, it has become increasingly apparent that there is an urgent need to document and record the heritage of the communities it represents before they are lost.

Why communities shrink and why the heritage of small communities matters

Aging or dispersed communities hold understandings of former networks and lifeways – and their influence on the places in which they once thrived – that are at risk of being lost. Further, investigation into the benefits of heritage work among communities have been shown to have beneficial social and health effects on both individuals and groups – a key commitment of JSCN.

The wider opportunity – through JSCN's global membership – offered an audience across the world, but perhaps paramount to any heritage project surrounding small and no longer extant communities was the opportunity of acknowledging the impact that Jewish histories have had on the areas in which they have been based, disseminating these histories to new audiences and creating new awareness.

The *Connecting Small Histories* project emerged from these observations. In collaboration with members of Swansea University's history faculty, a plan was drawn up to put together a project that addressed these issues, to be properly supported by expertise in heritage and history.

In May 2019, JSCN undertook a consultation with network members in order to fully understand the perceived needs of the community with relation to its heritage. This consultation helped to shape the project's aims and objectives, and was key to recognising the fundamental difficulties of accessing the heritage in question.

CONNECTING SMALL HISTORIES



PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

THE PROJECT AS ORIGINALLY PLANNED

The project was constructed around three key objectives:

- 1. Record the footprint and heritage of the UK Jewish community where they are now small or non-extant;*
- 2. Connect these to existing Jewish history and heritage projects and resources;*
- 3. Foster exchange between communities through a dedicated Heritage Hub hosted by JSCN.*

A survey of JSCN network members helped to identify six areas in which to base the project: areas that had once had flourishing Jewish communities but had seen them shrink. The areas selected represented different kinds of community base – two were rural (Somerset and Cumbria); two were urban (Bradford and Sunderland); and two were coastal (Southport and Eastbourne). Only one of these areas (Bradford) had been the subject of a Jewish heritage project previously, and none had been part of a concerted attempt to bring community heritages together in a wider network.

The project was planned around the recruitment of a number of volunteers and a Project Officer to undertake research, followed by community engagement.

CONNECTING SMALL HISTORIES

THE PROJECT AS ORIGINALLY PLANNED

A series of training events were planned for the volunteers to develop skills in oral history and heritage research, and a period of desk-based research programmed for the team to understand the background of the project areas.

Work was initially organised along two strands:

Connecting Small Histories Community Strand

Aimed at older volunteers with stories to tell

Our Jewish History Schools Strand

Aimed at schools within the target areas that had expressed an interest in Jewish history via JSCN

The Past and Present Roadshow:

Six pop-up workshops were scheduled in the target areas aimed at schools and communities. Project staff and volunteers were intended to take part in the pop-ups, collecting and sharing stories within the target areas.

Sharing the results

- An online exhibition was planned to coincide with Holocaust Memorial Day in January entitled “Stand Together”.
- A *Connecting Small Histories* History Festival was planned to be held in Manchester, featuring talks and workshops. The festival would also have had a significant online presence with videos shared on Youtube.
- A project resource pack was planned based on the work undertaken in the six areas which could be used by others to develop similar projects in other areas.
- An online “Heritage Hub” hosted on the JSCN website was planned to provide a forum for blogs, news, research, and coming together as the project progressed, and to enable the project and volunteer involvement to continue beyond the lifetime of the funded project.
- Online and in-person reading circles were planned as a method of dissemination of results.

CONNECTING SMALL HISTORIES

CORONAVIRUS

Connecting Small Histories was programmed to start just as the implications of the Coronavirus for face-to-face engagement and travel were becoming apparent. As the first “lockdown” was implemented, it became clear that much of the project could no longer take place in the way it had been intended. This included volunteer training, the “roadshow”, in-person reading circles, the schools strand, and the History Festival. The Project Team were forced to reorganise the project significantly, transferring all face-to-face meetings to online forums.

Volunteers

Many volunteers had already been identified and training workshops planned. These were revised to be delivered online.

Roadshow

The roadshow became an impossibility due to restrictions on travel and face-to-face meeting. The roadshow could no longer take place. Instead, social media engagement became increasingly important. In addition, it became imperative for volunteers to adapt to online or telephone engagement with potential participants and interviewees.

Research

Research also needed to be moved online as library resources and record offices closed.

Sharing the results

- The History Festival had to be relocated online. It had been hoped that it would still be able to go ahead following the easing of restrictions in summer and autumn 2020, but restrictions were reimposed in December, forcing the festival online. It had been intended to have a significant online presence with videos shared on Youtube.
- As travel to the six areas had not been possible, resources for the project resource pack were redirected into a project book.
- The online “Heritage Hub” was able to go ahead and continues to provide a valuable resource.
- A school resource pack was able to be produced allowing the project's designed schools element to happen at least in some form.
- A series of talks and activities was organised to disseminate the project's results including online talks, videos, articles, and presentations. These were a mixture of public-facing, and directed at particular organisations (such as the NHS and Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs)).

WHAT DID HAPPEN?

100

**COPIES OF THE
PROJECT BOOK SENT**

260

**COPIES OF HERITAGE
DETECTIVES SENT TO
SCHOOLS**

370

**INDIVIDUALS
REGISTERED FOR THE
HISTORY FESTIVAL**

2375

**INDIVIDUAL HITS ON
THE HERITAGE HUB
FRONT PAGE**

20

**PRESENTATIONS IN
THE HISTORY
FESTIVAL**

10

**PRESENTATIONS IN
DISSEMINATION
SERIES**

16

**ARTICLES PUBLISHED
ON THE HERITAGE
HUB**

65

**JEWISH HERITAGE
PROJECTS IN THE
HERITAGE HUB INDEX**

WHAT DID HAPPEN?

Recruitment and research

A Project Officer was recruited, and alongside the Project Manager undertook significant background research around the target areas. Volunteers were recruited through JSCN who were equipped to undertake their own research, and supported to recruit project participants and find research themes within the target areas.

Volunteer training

Initially intended to be delivered in person, the volunteer training sessions were given online. Volunteers received six training sessions covering a variety of skills including undertaking research during the challenging circumstances of Covid. Through regular meetings - both group and individual - the Project Team were able to build a volunteer community. Regular speakers on relevant subjects were programmed, and informal training sessions given.

*6 volunteer
training events
delivered online*

Interviews and oral histories

Volunteers undertook research, including peer-to-peer interviews and oral histories from community members in the target areas. The project's intention to bring together volunteers and research participants could not occur due to the limitations of Covid. However, using Zoom and social media outlets, as well as email and telephone, volunteers, with the help of the Project Team, were able to interview participants and to conduct online workshops with community members.

*66 participants
36 interviewees*

Reading Festival

An online Reading Festival took place online in August 2020 as a means of meeting the original intention of in-person and online reading circles. Eight online talks took place: writing workshops, authors talks, and practical heritage talks. An online "Bookshelf" allowed festival attendees to download pdfs of books, extracts and chapters from some of the works under discussion, and other relevant publications. The Bookshelf continues to provide a base for reading matter shared in connection with the project, including the project books.

*70 readers at the
Reading Festival*

"As a community historian, the Reading Festival really resonated with me. Well presented, the enthusiasm shone through"

CONNECTING SMALL HISTORIES

Schools Activity Strand

Due to the restrictions of Covid, working with schools became particularly difficult. However, project resources were repurposed to produce an educational booklet - *Heritage Detectives: a cross-curriculum local history activity book for key stage 2* - to be circulated initially among schools originally intended to be involved in the project, subsequently to others that expressed interest. A book launch allowed further dissemination of the book, and a purpose-built page incorporating educator guidance, resources and videos was hosted on the Heritage Hub.

*260 copies of Heritage Detectives sent to schools
16 downloaded from the Heritage Hub Bookshelf**

*Figure excluding copies sent out as pdfs or accessed via ISSUU

Heritage Hub

An online space was set up on the JSCN website. The Hub hosts a number of articles by *Connecting Small Histories* members as well as other blog and news posts. It has received thousands of visits (including 5041 hits to the History Festival page). The Hub and the History Festival brought many projects together, raising the profile of Jewish history and heritage for Jewish and non Jewish audiences.

History Festival

Originally intended to take place in Manchester, the History Festival was held online over ten days in March 2021. 25 speakers presented across the festival, giving 20 presentations, representing 14 organisations, and 12 heritage projects, including 5 from the *Connecting Small Histories* project. The festival was also supported by a number of partner organisations.

*370 registered delegates;
25 speakers; 20
presentations from 14
organisations; and 12
heritage projects;
5 presentations from
Connecting Small
Histories*

Connecting Small Histories Book

An adjunct to the original plan, the Project Team were able to put together an edited volume of chapters written by the *Connecting Small Histories* volunteers themed around Life, Creativity, Diaspora, and Connecting Future Heritage. The book acknowledges 75 participants and volunteers whose contributions fed the ten chapters (contributed by six volunteers and the Project Manager). 100 hard copies have been distributed, and the book is available to download and view online on the JSCN website.

“As a scholar 5,000 miles away, I greatly appreciate the digital exhibitions and conferences!”

EVALUATION

PROJECT EVALUATION

Sefryn Penrose, ButCH (Bureau for the Contemporary and Historic), was contracted in February 2021 to undertake evaluation of the *Connecting Small Histories* project with the purpose of:

- *determining whether the outcomes laid out in the project application had been achieved by the project;*
- *analysing the project's enaction and contents in order to better inform any further iteration of the project and further work undertaken by the project team;*
- *building an understanding of what went well for the project and what might have gone better.*

This report acknowledges the extraordinary work undertaken by the Project Team and the volunteers in going forward with the project under the most difficult of circumstances and is testament to the powerful work undertaken.

EVALUATION METHODS

This evaluation puts a greater weight on qualitative methodologies due to the difficulties inherent in producing meaningful quantitative analysis during the Coronavirus pandemic. Data used in this analysis has been collected in the most part by the Project Team throughout the project and consists of considerable feedback - following events, and from volunteers.

In addition, semi-structured group conversations with volunteers have been undertaken over Zoom in order to understand their conceptions and experiences of the project. Interviews with members of the Project Team have also contributed to the analysis herein.

A survey of delegates at the project's History Festival has also been used to some extent to illustrate the conception of the project from outside the immediate Project Team and core volunteer groups.

At all times, the difficulties of conducting such a project when face-to-face contact has been impossible and many resources unavailable, has been borne in mind,

THE PROJECT TEAM

THE PROJECT TEAM

PROJECT DIRECTOR/MANAGER

Ed Horwich, JSCN

PROJECT ADVISORS
(SWANSEA UNIVERSITY)

Patricia Skinner (History)

Sarah May (Heritage)

PROJECT OFFICERS

Carter Weleminsky (to Jan 2021)

Toni Griffiths (from Jan 2021)

CORE VOLUNTEERS

ST ANNES

Hilary Thomas

SOMERSET

Jane Warner

EASTBOURNE

Anne Krisman Goldstein

CUMBRIA

Lisa Novernstern

Jeremy Topaz

SUNDERLAND

Rachel Lewis

BRADFORD

Bella Westlake

OUTCOMES

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The National Lottery Heritage Fund lays out a number of outcomes by which to measure the success of its funded projects. This section of the report evaluates *Connecting Small Histories* against the outcomes as outlined in its original application to the Fund:

A wider range of people will be involved in heritage

Heritage will be identified and better explained

People will have developed skills

“The darkness of lockdown was made positive through the project”

Core volunteer

The impact of Covid-19 is taken into account in this consideration. *Connecting Small Histories* was initially envisaged as hands-on face-to-face project with considerable interactions in the six target areas. As this was unable to happen, the project was forced to make drastic changes. Although these changes altered the shape of the project considerably, they also engendered a very meaningful shift in purpose – in particular, by reaffirming the “connection” element of the project through online interaction, and in effect creating a new community which in turn performed useful and meaningful work for other participants in the project during a very difficult time in which many struggled with restrictions on movement and meeting and an epidemic of loneliness. This is addressed in the evaluation and considered one of its chief successes. The Project Team were able to recognise the benefits of the project reformulated in this way and to adapt it accordingly.

“It was wonderful feeling connected in a time where being on your own was very prevalent”
History Festival delegate

A WIDER RANGE OF PEOPLE WILL BE INVOLVED IN HERITAGE

The six target areas selected for the project were chosen as places that had once had small Jewish communities which had made a traceable impact. The funding application stated:

“Through focusing on locality, connectivity and visibility, this project will involve more people (Jewish and non-Jewish) in Jewish heritage, challenging the segmentation of historical practice into 'majority' and 'minority' interests. It will reach out to local schools and colleges, engage explicitly with older people in every community, and be fully inclusive in its activities.”

The impact of Covid made the very tangible designs of the project impossible. However, already adept at the use of social media, the Project Team were able to reach out to community members current and historic, and to build remote yet strong connections to each of the places. The projects in each area therefore took significantly different shapes according to the interests of individual volunteers and research and resources available. This diversity in itself reflects the diversity of the small communities that the project sought to shine a light upon.

Volunteers

Although some of the volunteers had experience of history or heritage research, others did not. One volunteer with no heritage research experience at the beginning of the project described her initial engagement:

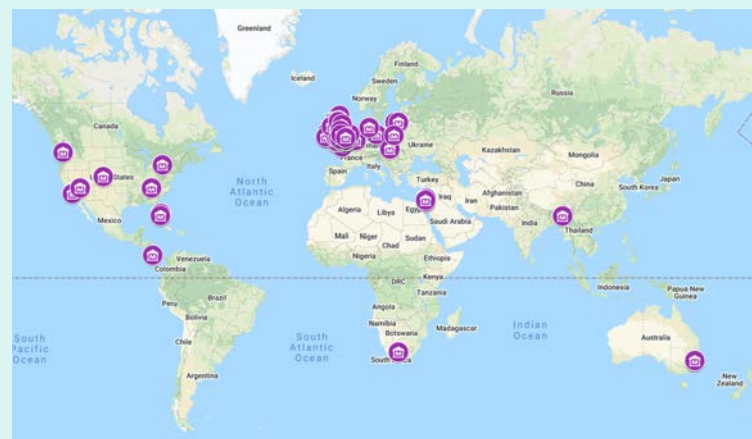
“While other volunteers had a lot of experience in this type of research, if there ever was a stage way below the category of complete novice, that was yours truly. The only time I'd tried using an online genealogy site confirmed two nuggets of information: firstly, that I was in full possession of a name, date and place of birth – probably because I'd already entered these facts onto their database less than five minutes previously. The second nugget was that I didn't actually exist, and neither did my parents or grandparents. So, the fact that I found myself in the company of some amazing historians and equally amazing volunteers, but was always made to feel so welcome, was truly humbling. If I'd been my own mentor, I would have despairingly blocked myself on each and every Zoom meeting, and let the 'grownups' get on with things, but all the volunteers and mentors remained constantly upbeat and positive.”

A WIDER RANGE OF PEOPLE WILL BE INVOLVED IN HERITAGE

The History Festival

The History Festival provided the project with an opportunity to showcase the research undertaken by its volunteers but also to connect the project with others working on Jewish heritage. Although originally intended to take place in Manchester, the decision was taken to take the event online. 370 individuals registered for the festival – which was free to attend. 12 themed sessions were spread over 10 days. Speakers in the sessions were either directly invited or responded to a call for papers. They ranged from volunteers in the project to academic teams presenting work derived from research projects. The Project Team partnered with other research groups in order to expand the reach of the festival and to connect the project beyond its own borders. These external project groups included Hidden Treasures (a national online network of Jewish archives), Jewish Heritage Europe (a Europe-wide online resource portal), Lily's Legacy (project addressing the history and legacy of Liberal Judaism), the Foundation for Jewish Heritage (working to protect Jewish tangible heritage), British Jews in the First World War (a cross-community project to record the contribution of British Jews in WWI).

There was much discussion to determine the best way to host the festival online – intensively over one weekend, or spread over a longer period; during the day, or evening. Based on as broad a consensus as was achievable, the Project Team built the festival over a longer period with both morning and evening sessions. Sessions were recorded and remain available online. The festival ended with an online party – the delegates pack included cocktail recipes themed around the target areas (a Bradford Martini and a North Sea Sunderland Breeze for example) – aimed at providing a social space equivalent to a live conference closing event. Over the festival period, 25 speakers presented work, in 20 presentations, representing 14 organisations, and 12 heritage projects. 5 presenters were from the *Connecting Small Histories* project. The online nature of the event allowed an international audience, as evidenced by the map produced below.



A WIDER RANGE OF PEOPLE WILL BE INVOLVED IN HERITAGE

Feedback was mostly positive. Other than technical issues, criticism was mostly reserved for the lack of networking opportunities. A limited number of open text responses expressed regret that contact information was not easily attained (the delegate pack gave details of speakers and their affiliations, but not contact details).

"Perhaps not enough focus on who can be contacted for further conversation and connection?"

Similarly, opportunities for discussion with speakers and other audience members was identified by some as limited, with the Zoom chat function identified as too limiting. A survey question asked delegates whether they would be likely to keep in contact with people met through the project and festival was the least well-scoring of the survey questions (40 responses were recorded, with an average score of 2.9 (0 as negative; 5 as most positive). However, while the survey is anonymous, open text answers allow some identification of whether respondents were connected with the *Connecting Small Histories* project, and among these, scoring is significantly higher.

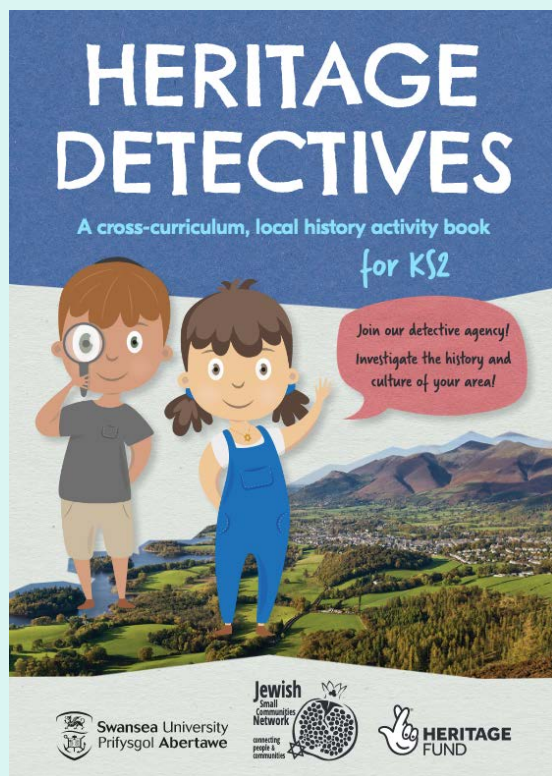
Figure 2 shows the diversity of responses to the question: scoring in the two highest categories is higher than in the two lowest categories.

A question regarding whether the festival had connected delegates to other researchers was relatively positive – scoring in the higher categories, but scored most highly (10) in the more neutral central "3". Given the nature of the event, this is again perhaps inevitable but does support the finding that a more concerted attempt to connect delegates might have been welcomed. For others, personal connections were made (eg. in response to a question on the highlights of the festival, *"Seeing people on zoom, especially my old teacher Mrs K"; "Making contact with my local Taunton group organiser. Also simply enjoying the lectures"; "It was nice to see my mother's cousin [...] talk about his childhood!!"*). The importance of "being part of the network" was also highlighted (see below). In response to a question on how the project should develop, a number of delegates (8) specifically called for the event to become a repeated event (eg. *"Bi-annual event?"; "I'd love to see it continue and expand"; "It would be great to see a similar event next year"*).

A WIDER RANGE OF PEOPLE WILL BE INVOLVED IN HERITAGE

Heritage Detectives

Although the engagement with schools that had been intended by the project in its planning stages was impossible due to the pandemic, the project was able to produce *Heritage Detectives*, a resource for children that explores the themes of the project, using elements of the volunteer's research and images from the target areas to explore heritage and diversity. The booklet integrates ideas of natural and cultural heritage, and connects personal and wider viewpoints as a Key Stage 2 teaching aid, beautifully simplifying issues sometimes considered complex.



260 copies of the book have been sent to over 200 schools, including many within the target areas with whom the project had originally intended to work closely. While the intergenerational element that the project had originally intended cannot be said to have been achieved in the way it had been intended - feedback from the History Festival included an observation that delegates did not represent a wide age-range - the schools element is likely to gather momentum through *Heritage Detectives* as restrictions ease. The book launch for *Heritage Detectives* helped to disseminate the work further, and a resource page offers educational guidance and videos (including by core volunteers).

Heritage Detectives as well as the project book were included in the Lancashire schools newsletter and was included in the Schools History Conference.

Interfaith

Heritage Detectives supports Religious Education curriculum in schools but the project's interfaith reach is broader. The engagement of SACREs (Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education) with the work of the project is an important and successful partnership. The Project Team have engaged and made presentations with regional SACRE audiences.

"[Heritage Detectives] looks perfect to interest and engage the children"
Headteacher

A WIDER RANGE OF PEOPLE WILL BE INVOLVED IN HERITAGE

Heritage Detectives

"This excellent booklet uses examples of Jewish heritage to encourage pupils to explore their own heritage. It inspires them not only to look around their local area but to think about the importance of community and learn more about their own family background. There are also links to various videos and extended resources to help both teachers and pupils. A lot of work, including many revisions, have gone in to making this a must for all key stage 2 pupils."

Reviewer

"[Heritage Detectives] looks perfect to interest and engage the children"

Headteacher

CONNECTING SMALL HISTORIES



CONNECTIONS

FIGURE 1

CONNECTIONS

FIGURE 2



CONNECTING SMALL HISTORIES

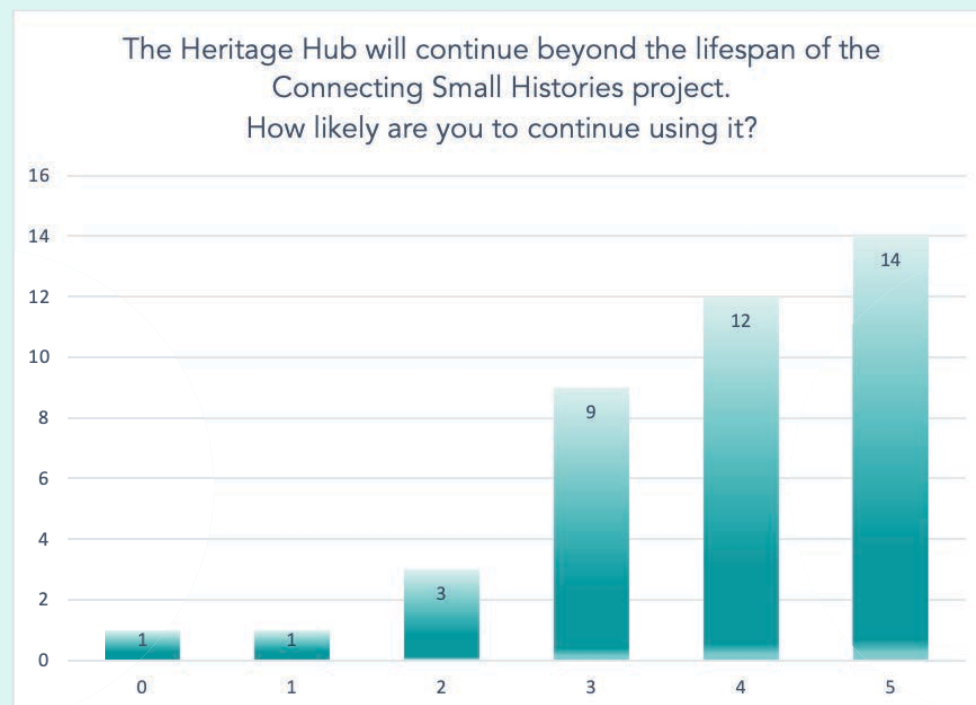


RESOURCES

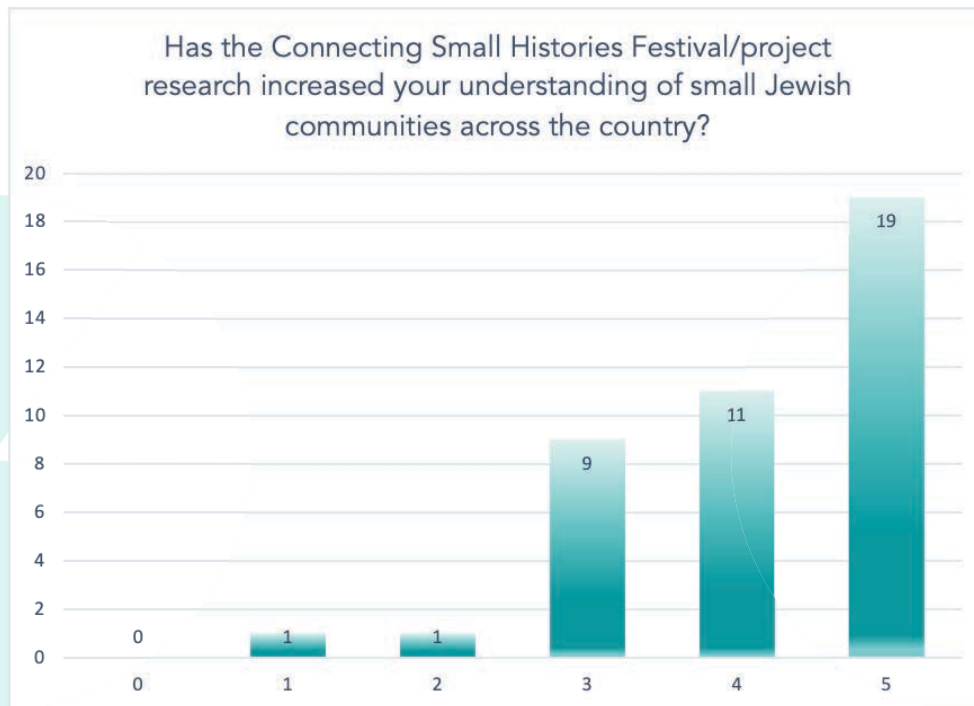
FIGURE 3

RESOURCES

FIGURE 4



CONNECTING SMALL HISTORIES



UNDERSTANDING

FIGURE 5

UNDERSTANDING

FIGURE 6



HERITAGE WILL BE IDENTIFIED AND BETTER EXPLAINED

Target Areas

In *Eastbourne*, one of the core volunteers, Anne, was drawn to the history of performance and entertainment in the town. She uncovered a wealth of material relating to Jewish performers, empresarios, musicians, entertainers whose impact on the town during its heyday she brought to light. In terms of one of the project's primary intentions – to bring into relief the impact that Jewish communities have made on the target areas – Anne's recreation of an era in which Jewish presence literally lit up the town is strikingly relevant. Anne was able to make contact with the grandson of one of the entertainers she researched and gave a presentation on him and his family for Holocaust Memorial Day 2021.

Hilary worked to recover the Jewish heritage of *St Annes*, connecting individuals and families to the town's built heritage and businesses, bringing to life a rich and integrated heritage still legible to those looking for it.

Jane's discovery of a reference to Myer Jacobs – onetime mayor of Taunton in *Somerset*, a town with very little recognised or commemorated Jewish history – led her to an in-depth study of this 19th-century businessman who was elected twice to the position of mayor, despite blatantly anti-semitic objection.

Jane brought to life a moment of local history. Her dedication evinced the possibilities heritage work has for reanimating what is past, showing its relevance for current times.

Likewise, Jeremy's examination of a commonplace – the picture postcard – put flesh on the people behind the way that we still see the world and presented the work and hobbies of a Jewish community now diminished in number, but whose work has had a lasting impact.

Rachel gathered the voices, recollections, memories – the heart – of a *Sunderland* community no longer as sizeable as it once was. By bringing together recalls, she recreated a picture of a community that had drifted, enabling a lasting imprint and putting in train possibilities for more: for some, lived experience does not always stand out as heritage. Shepherds are needed to bring out what might otherwise drift.

Lisa brought out the layers of Jewish presence, the differences between generations, in *Cumbria* – registering longevity and lives lived there – as well as those whose presence was more fleeting.

Bella tied the layers of experience and immigration into a present-day acknowledgement of diaspora and palimpsest in *Bradford*. The story continues....

HERITAGE WILL BE IDENTIFIED AND BETTER EXPLAINED

The research undertaken by the volunteers is an original contribution to the knowledge and understanding of small Jewish communities - providing diverse, in-depth, considered understandings of the heritage of the areas. The record produced in the project book ensures its reach. The book has been taken into library collections, and outside the History Festival, the Project Team including volunteers have worked to take the project stories to new audiences, ensuring the projects tenets - that Jewish communities have been strong and lively presences that have shaped places and people and continue to do so.

The project's outreach ensures the embedding of the heritages identified and explained by the *Connecting Small Communities* team.

The work of the Project Team including volunteers to record the history has also included the production of online maps documenting the findings of the research work. In addition, a number of other outputs including journal articles as well as more mainstream media outputs have also searched to translate and explain the work to broader audiences.



M^{RS.} MYER JACOBS

HERITAGE WILL BE IDENTIFIED AND BETTER EXPLAINED

The History Festival

The History Festival's reach is explored above. Its content speaks to the way the project has identified and explained heritage. The feedback generally spoke to both the need for and the success of the project's central focus on small communities, with a number of delegates wishing for further coverage. Others recognised connections with their own histories (eg. one commentator's response to a question on what they had particularly liked about the festival: *"A recognition that not all Jewish families went to London. My great grandparents came to UK between 1865 and 1875 and they went to Hull and then Grimsby and Sheffield, Manchester – and some to Cheshire, Liverpool – and some to North East Wales, and Edinburgh – and some to Fifeshire"; "[hearing about] the history of the town and people where I grew up"; "Learning about the diversity of small communities"*).

Such answers demonstrate an abstract understanding of the possibilities for exploring the heritage of small communities, and a thirst for presentations that undertake this work. A further set of answers suggested expanding or increasing networking possibilities and particularly highlighted possibilities of expanding the network of small (and other) communities included in the coverage:

(eg. *"Perhaps more communities could be brought into the spotlight?"*; *"Cover other communities, even some of the larger ones"*; *"Continuing general information of Anglo-Jewish history, on a locality basis"*).

Delegates were asked in the feedback survey what they had particularly gained from the festival, with a choice of five options (learning the history; learning new skills; the resources; chatting with other volunteers; being part of the network) (see Figure 6 above): *Learning the history* scored mostly highly.

PEOPLE WILL HAVE DEVELOPED SKILLS

Project Team and Volunteers

Training provided by a historian and heritage specialist from Swansea University as part of its partnership with the project introduced the volunteers and Project Team to a number of techniques and concepts that enhanced their abilities and understanding of heritage work, of gathering histories, narratives, stories, and recording and presenting them. This included map work. A “live” map on the Heritage Hub allows contributors to continue to log Jewish heritage. The concept of heritage “in place” has clearly had an impact on the project which successfully embeds the stories and memories gathered by volunteers into the target areas.

It was not only the volunteers that benefited from this training. Project Team members benefited by the expanded conceptualising of “heritage” offered by the Swansea team.

Much of the work undertaken by the volunteers brings out this concept to great effect, drawing out Jewish presence in buildings such as shuls, synagogues, homes, business premises, entertainment venues which in many cases are still extant.

“Because of lockdown people’s stories became more important. I took pictures of buildings, things, places, but they were not as important as the stories – the “embodied” memories... [Jewish] heritage is more than physical heritage.”

Core volunteer

“[The Swansea staff] showed us how to look at the past, and research bloomed through personal discovery, but the academic structure has allowed that to happen”

Project Team member

“It was my first encounter with the academic concept of heritage... the personal side, the links came out, but needed the structure of the heritage side”

Project Team member

PEOPLE WILL HAVE DEVELOPED SKILLS

In addition, online events offered valuable skills that addressed the practices and processes of researching and writing. Volunteers ended up co-authoring the project's book, as well as articles.

In their continuing work, volunteers took (and are taking) their skills to the next level - using heritage themes to develop performances; using research skills to find previously unrecorded aspects of Jewish heritage (including via land records and genealogical research). Two reported having been asked to do research by other bodies - one a synagogue - to further expand the knowledge of the areas they had been researching. Most had been asked to talk about their research in different spheres.

Volunteers reported a range of feelings and emotions emerging as they learnt more about the process of research as well as about their research targets, ranging from astonishment at finding themselves roaming streets or fields - camera in hand - to new respect for the heritage professionals (*"I'd never truly appreciated that archivists were almost certainly the most unsung heroes of our lives, deserving our deep respect"*) - to the *"sheer delight of making new discoveries"*.

"[I've most enjoyed or benefited from] writing about my findings from the project for other sources, such as the House website for Parliament for Holocaust Memorial Day"

Core volunteer

"There are things I would never have seen or done if it hadn't been for volunteering for this project"

Core volunteer

"[The project's] just changed me"

Core volunteer

PEOPLE WILL HAVE GREATER WELLBEING

UNEXPECTED OUTCOME

In addition to the three specified outcomes laid out above, this report acknowledges that an unanticipated outcome emerged from qualitative feedback, particularly in discussion with the core volunteer group.

People will have greater wellbeing

As this was not a targeted outcome and emerged most clearly late in the project through discussions with the evaluator, it has not been possible to collect specific measures. However, all volunteers were emphatic about how the project had helped sustain them over the testing times of the Covid-19 pandemic.

One volunteer who lived in an area with little Jewish community stated that her research (into historical Jewish presence in the area) gave her a “heritage home”. “It grounded me to know that I’m not the first [Jewish person in the area] and I won’t be the last”.

Associated with this 'presencing' – populating – of historic antecedents was the recurring theme of connections and networks.

At several times in the project, and associated with different target areas, real-life connections were made with people who had left the target areas but had been alerted to the project’s work (often through social media, occasionally through the published press). These introductions and reintroductions served to mend severed connections not only through populating the emerging stories of the project, but also personally: volunteers “met” subjects associated with those they had been researching and on occasion discovered estranged family. In this way the idea of loss inherent in investigating no longer extant small communities was complexified: people and families that had been names, photographs, records, were suddenly made flesh – on more than one occasion via Zoom.

Central to a wellbeing measurement for the project is the sense of community that the volunteers and Project Team developed - engendered by regular meetings and discussions centering around the work of the project. This establishment of community was clearly beneficial for all.

“[The project was] a personal exploration in unexpected ways: the world can expand. I went into this thinking the world was contracting...”

Core volunteer

“Inspirational stories to focus on became very important. Looking for hopeful stuff among the gloom led me to think how do I take what I learnt from the project forward...”

Core volunteer

“The main aspect for me has been how [the project] has uplifted me through lockdown and given me a strong focus at a tough time for the world. Among many people, I did lose special people in my life at the time. But exploring somewhere sunny and optimistic and learning the stories of Jewish people who were enterprising, resilient and creative, was a true blessing.”

Core volunteer

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY

The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic cannot be overemphasised with regards any project planned just before it hit and implemented during the nebulous first few months of its impact. *Connecting Small Stories* is no exception and indeed, due to the nature of its intended plans - to conduct a "roadshow", to work with schools and organisations in a face-to-face setting - it has suffered more than many. Since it relied on engagement with the young and the old, the enhanced communications possibilities of the Zoom landscape - while they certainly did augment elements of the project - cannot be said to have been as beneficial as they have proved in some spheres.

Nevertheless, *Connecting Small Stories* response to the pandemic has been exemplary, and although the course of the project had to be drastically altered, its results testify to the strength of the Project Team and its volunteers.

WHAT WENT WELL?

This section is derived from conversations with the Project Team and core volunteers, as well as analysis of the project's events, outputs, and the feedback and documentation it has gathered along the way.

The Volunteers

The core group of volunteers has undoubtedly formed the stronghold of the project, producing diverse, high-quality research under challenging circumstances. In addition, the collegiate and collaborative atmosphere the group developed through the project has enabled other elements of the project to work well. The volunteers testify to the support they were given by the Project Team as well as each other.

The History Festival

Although forced online due to the pandemic, the History Festival proved immensely popular. It provided a strong forum for a number of projects beyond *Connecting Small Stories* to come together, and attracted a healthy attendance. The fact that core volunteers - the experienced and inexperienced - were able to present their own work among seasoned academics and heritage professionals is testament to the strength of the project and the commitment of the Project Team.

The Project Book

Not part of the original plan, the Project Book provides a strong legacy for the project and permanent home to the research of the volunteers.

LOVE

*keywords given by core
volunteers reflecting their
feelings about the project*

CONNECTION

COINCIDENCE

SUNSHINE

SHARING

DIVERSITY

*keywords given by core
volunteers reflecting their
thoughts on the project's
meaning*

LEGACY

VOICE

GESTALT

NETWORK

CONNECTING SMALL HISTORIES

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY

Training

The training package put together for the volunteers enabled a high degree of research skilling. While some of the volunteers had a track record in heritage research, others did not. The integration of different aspects of heritage understanding in their work, as well as volunteer's own testimony, testifies to a well put-together training package and continued support.

Project Communication

Communication between the Project Team and volunteers and participants seems to have worked well. Volunteers particularly praise the Project Team's efforts to coordinate and keep in touch during trying circumstances.

Adaptation

The project needed to adapt almost immediately to changing circumstances and yet achieved a strong level of engagement with project members and managed to build a strong output.

"The title of the project is 'Connecting Small Histories' and that's a nice way of putting it!"
Project Team member

Connection

While the intentions of the project were to make more connections with organisations and communities - particularly in the target areas - personal connections, close-to-home and further-afield abounded. During a time in which connections were hard to make and maintain, these unintended connections - mainly made through the work of volunteers - even made the press, as friends and family were occasionally reunited. While these unintended consequences may seem whimsical, they are emblematic of the success of the project's main aim - to connect people with the heritage and history of Jewish communities. As one of the volunteers put it, *"the world can expand. I went into this thinking the world was contracting..."* This evaluation makes particular note of this outcome.

CONNECTING SMALL HISTORIES

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY

This section acknowledges the successes of the project and also takes into account those elements of the project that might have gone better. It is designed to help and enable further projects to build on the work done during *Connecting Small Communities*. Lessons are at different levels and for different audiences.

LESSONS LEARNT

This section is derived from conversations with the Project Team and core volunteers, as well as analysis of the project's events, outputs, and the feedback and documentation it has gathered along the way.

Project start up

Investment in Project Team time at the commencement of a project enables a smoother start. A more concentrated lead-in to the project allows the Project Officer in particular more time and space to develop the project and their own contribution, especially during a time in which adaptation is inevitable (arguably, this period is a period of adaptation in all projects regardless of external impositions!).

Project management

Clear lines of management within the Project Team need to be established especially when more than one organisation is involved. This is necessary to ensure that Project Team members are not reproducing the work of others. It is especially costly to junior members of project teams have clearly defined roles, confirmed schedules of work, and clear lines of management. Acknowledgement of hiccups early in the project allowed the latter stages to operate more smoothly.

Timely responses by funder

While Coronavirus was an unexpected and wholly unprecedented occurrence for all parties, responses from the funder could have enabled smoother decision-making at project level. The Project Team operated entirely within the guidance offered by the funder organisation and within that offered at government level. While this evaluation acknowledges the difficulties faced by all organisations, more timely responses at funding-level and above could have allowed for more timely project planning.

Monitoring and evaluation

Evaluation is always easier when evaluators are brought in at the start. This helps to establish pathways to achieve outcomes, as well as to put in place measurement criteria. Earlier evaluation involvement could have allowed for stronger conclusions as well as identified problems. Iterative feedback can enable project teams to improve day-to-day functioning of projects.

Allowing networking time

Events always benefit from more networking time. Build in more opportunities for exchanges of ideas and connections.

NEXT STEPS

Connecting Small Stories was enormously successful in its core aims. The impact of Coronavirus, however, impeded its intentions to build connections across generations and across faiths. The closure of schools and difficulties in working during lockdowns especially hampered these aims. This section acknowledges that these two elements were practically impossible to reconcile during the period of the project and recognises that they remain an enormous opportunity for further work for any further iteration of the project. The network of small communities represented by the JSCN clearly has more stories to tell.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

This section is derived from conversations with the Project Team and core volunteers, as well as analysis of the project's events, outputs, and the feedback and documentation it has gathered along the way.

Intergenerational connection

The initial intention of *Connecting Small Stories* was to bring together school age young people and older community members, as well as to take the stories of small Jewish communities into schools. Due to the pandemic, this element of the project could not be undertaken. However, it is recognised by the Project Team and others close to the project that reaching out to young people is essential for meaningful engagement. The *Heritage Detectives* output of the project shows how the themes can be used to teach across a number of areas. Further work to pursue engagement with young people *and* to bring together young people with existing and former communities would help to cement the work of the project.

Beyond history...

While the strength of the heritage research and historical understanding produced by the project is not in doubt, there remains further opportunity for diverse engagement with an enormously rich resource. One of the core volunteers of *Connecting Small Stories* demonstrated the strength of creativity at the heart of the Jewish community that she researched, and her own interpretations hinted at the possibilities of more creative engagement with the resource. More creative partnerships - with artists, performers, writers - could bring further life to the research.

Online resource

The Heritage Hub has been a strong and welcome outcome of the project. There is room for further development of this as a showcase for the work undertaken, and a home for future work. This will help keep the work of *Connecting Small Stories* alive, and provide a home for further work. It is an enormous boon to have digital longevity in place.

CONCLUSION

In a remarkably short time and in remarkably challenging circumstances, *Connecting Small Histories* has brought out into the light a series of illuminating snapshots of people and places that enhance our understanding of the past and in particular, the place of Jewish communities in it. The project has demonstrated the power inherent in skilling volunteers to investigate histories on their doorstep. While such an understanding is not new, the stories represented by the project are not assured: they must be looked for, and to some extent, they are endangered.

In a period of division and increased racism and antisemitism, seeking to tell the extraordinary ordinary stories of normal places and normal people becomes increasingly important, and to share these stories with current communities is an act of place-building in the now as much as historical reconstruction. Wrapped up in this is the notion that heritage is part of "now". These stories and narratives are for people engaging with them in the *here and now* as much as they are for posterity. This has been further brought out by the circumstances of Coronavirus and in this project, we have seen how volunteers, participants, Project Team members, and festival delegates were all enriched by the work of the project which, in turn, has enriched others - both places and communities. The necessity of simplifying the project so that it could be shifted online, and the success of the Project Team in enacting that shift demonstrates the depth and strength of the project, and the beauty in simplicity of heritage world-making.

"This turned out so much more everything, more enriching, so close to everybody"
Core volunteer