

Their Past Your Future 1945- 2005

By
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Partnerships

Their Past Your Future - a year long education project funded by the Big Lottery Fund - was just one part of UK wide programme of activity designed to mark the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. There were many partners including government departments and agencies, not for profit organisations and community groups - as well as museums, libraries and archives around Britain.

The inspiration for Their Past Your Future came from the Imperial War Museum - a national museum focussing on the history of conflict in the 20th century. A team from the museum headed up the educational strand of the 60th anniversary commemorations.

Aims

Their Past Your aimed to engage people of all ages including school children, veterans and anyone who lived through the War in this UK wide history project. People were encouraged to learn something about the conflict, especially how it affected people's lives and to reflect on each others experiences.

The Imperial War Museum Travelling Exhibition

Altogether nine copies of a travelling exhibition visited over 60 venues across the UK during 2005. Grants were awarded to museums, libraries and archives that could host the exhibition and deliver a supporting programme of cultural activities. This was an outreach opportunity for the Imperial War Museum - and the regional organisations benefited from the kudos of hosting an exhibition from a national museum.

Personal Stories

The content of the exhibition was based on the personal stories of people who lived through the War. Some of these stories were from the Imperial War Museum's large archive. Others were collected especially for this project. Displays of relevant local artefacts were provided by the host organisations.

Each host organisation chose a different way to engage people with the subject. Many incorporated the presentation of existing oral history collections into displays or ran reminiscence sessions as public events.

Their Past Your Future was not an oral history collection project -although this was often a by-product. It was about sharing and presenting ordinary people's personal histories and highlighting the ways in which individual lives - and society as a whole - were altered by the War.

There is an online version of the exhibition at www.theirpast-yourfuture.org.uk

Learning Opportunities

The partnering organisations were asked to provide learning opportunities for a wide cross section of the public; to appeal where possible to people who might not usually visit museums or engage with cultural services; and to encourage intergenerational learning. Larger grants were awarded to museums, libraries or archives that that could host the exhibition

in a non-traditional space such as a shopping centre – this having the added benefit of delivering museum activity in a place where new audiences would come into contact with it.

There was a large amount of flexibility in the type of activities that could be funded by the grants. Learning was defined in the broadest sense and any activity that engaged people with the subject was considered valuable. As a result the activities both supported and enhanced the content of the exhibition. These ranged from formal teaching sessions and talks to 1940s dance classes and tea parties.

Legacy

Results of the evaluation and an advocacy document will be made available by the Big Lottery Fund and MLA during 2006. www.mla.gov.uk

The Their Past Your Future website provides ongoing access to learning materials, an online exhibition and digitised audio and visual clips.
www.theirpast-yourfuture.org.uk

The Imperial War Museum website is at www.iwm.org.uk