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# Treasures from the Tablelands: communities, collaboration and collections

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The First World War Centenary has stimulated numerous activities throughout Australia, activating interest in heritage projects that have involved the broader community. This paper explores the value of community museum projects by analysing the development and delivery of the Tablelands Heritage Network's Anzac *Treasures of the Tablelands* exhibition. By examining the collaborative nature of the project, what it takes to develop participatory projects and showcasing some of the objects uncovered during the project, it reflects on the community and museological benefits of working collaboratively.

□ Atherton Tablelands, exhibitions, communities, collaboration, transformation, objects

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In 2014, Australian governments announced a series of unprecedented funding initiatives for First World War Centenary related projects. For the collection sector throughout Queensland, access to the Commonwealth's Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program and the state run Queensland Anzac Centenary Grants offered the opportunity of a lifetime – to fund the development of commemorative projects that could preserve, repair, present, interpret and/or revere tangible and intangible First World War cultural heritage. Access to funding resulted in numerous projects that have inspired debate, research, discovery and transformation. For the Queensland Museum (QM) Museum Development Officer (MDO) Program, it has been a chance to undertake projects with different regional museums and help realise some of their museological aspirations.

One of these projects took place in the Atherton Tablelands with the author, as the MDO for the far north Queensland region, working with Rhonda Micola from Atherton Chinatown and the Tablelands Heritage Network (THeN) to produce the *Anzac Treasures of the Tablelands* (Anzac Treasures) exhibition. The project was inspired by an interest in developing collaborative community projects, a commitment to their value and delivery, and a desire to promote the region's collections and volunteer workforce. Beyond the delivery of an exhibition, the project ensured groups within THeN had access to exhibition training, embraced a different way of doing exhibitions, worked collaboratively with volunteers in other groups, and uncovered a range of significant material culture relating to the First World War.

## **DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY EXHIBITIONS**

In 2014, the concept of developing a collaborative community museum project was anything but radical. Such an approach has its origins in 1974 when the 10th General Assembly of ICOM broadened the definition and scope of museum activities as being 'in the service of its society and development'

(International Council of Museums, 2001). This definition still holds and provides a rationale for museums to work more closely with communities (however you might define them). Indeed, one could argue that it carries an implicit sense of reciprocity, one in which relationships, dialogue and negotiation are an integral component of museum work.

The emergent discourse from this reimagining of museums that turned the lens away from objects and onto the museums relationship with the public was substantial (Bennett 1988, 1995; Vergo 1989; Van Mensch 1992; Weil 1999, 2002; American Association Of Museums 2002; Witcomb 2003). Since the turn of the twentieth century, the new museology has also embraced the idea of collaboration and engagement, diversity and accessibility and, particularly, social inclusion (Amdur Spitz & Thorn 2003; Archibald 2002, 2004; Dodd & Sandell 2001; Matarasso 2000; Sandell 1998, 2002; Wills & Vanclay 2004; Wills 2007; Simon 2010). It has also inspired a rapid development in visitor and audience research, focusing on learning styles for those visiting and 'consuming' museum products (Dierking et al 2004; Falk & Dierking 2000; Lavine 1992; Scott 1997, 2002, 2003). To some extent, this has overshadowed the notion of valuing communities' roles in developing museum projects. Although museum evaluation specialists are now exploring the concept of transformative learning to look for indicators of behavioural change (Kelly 2017) this has meant that the qualitative value of collaborative processes and projects has often been overlooked.

Despite the recognition of collaborative ideals within museological literature, many museums still develop community projects with little or only one-sided consultation. The impact of such projects, as Hirzy (2002) noted, is questionable and frequently negative:

One-sided 'collaborations' created wholly in service to the museum's mission or in response to funders agendas, with inadequate attention to the mission of other participating organisations, leave the partner organizations feeling manipulated, exploited, and sceptical of the museum's motive. When audience

development is the focal point and “community” is a code word for race, class, ethnicity, educational level, or other demographic characteristics, a museum’s efforts can seem token and patronizing.

The reality of running collaborative projects is complex. Making sure the deliverables, learning and social dynamics in a project remain balanced is not always easy and can create unanticipated tension. On the one hand museums want to work with communities and explore the dynamic potential of projects. Yet on the other they often have very specific needs, outcomes and deadlines which can alienate communities and participants. Projects can be derailed due to difficulties, conflicts and negotiations, and the collaborative association lost. Conversely, an overly consultative process can lead to timelines being missed, indecisiveness and disengagement.

By inviting the public to be cultural participants rather than passive consumers in the museum arena, Simon (2010) challenged the industry to recognise the importance and dimensions of participatory engagement. She identified collaborative projects as contributory projects, and often those in which a small sector of the community made time consuming and intimate contributions. Despite the contribution of this thesis, there is no definitive guide to running a collaborative community project in museums. However, there are some general principles that can contribute to their success including: accessibility, courage, diversity, flexibility, inclusion, learning, practicability, respect and honesty, transparency, trustworthiness (Wills 2007, p. 394). It is also incumbent on the museum to understand what type of community they are developing a relationship with and what type of engagement and process they are going to attempt. Inherent in this is recognising that collaborative projects have the capacity to be transformative by promoting change in the way participants think, approach and value a topic or project. To understand the different layers of collaboration in museum projects requires practitioners to better understand their value:

- Valuing people, individuals or groups that contribute their stories and participate in the production of museum products.
- Valuing that which is learnt via the project process, including the way the project is devised, developed, negotiated, managed, delivered and so forth.
- Valuing the applied learning within the project, that which is designed to be developmental and transformational for participant individuals, communities or institutions beyond the life of the project itself.
- Valuing the information and research material gathered in the course of the project, and its ability to extend institutional knowledge and learning. That is, valuing the tangible and intangible material culture that such projects produce (Wills 2007, p. 8).

This approach allows museums to integrate a form of tiered participatory engagement whereby sections of the project are collaborative, while others are more tightly managed and controlled. If the process of project development offers transformative learning opportunities for participants to build skills, knowledge and confidence, then this fits into the concept of museums providing a service to society. I would also contend that a collaborative approach requires understanding projects’ development and production phases and identifying how to compromise and negotiate with communities. This does not make the project any less collaborative. Rather, it ensures there is a commitment to open and transparent communication about perceived outcomes and benefits right from the outset.

What does influence a project is whether or not a museum has relationships with a community prior to the development of a project idea. Collaborative projects do not happen overnight, nor does the trust required for disparate organisations to lend collection items for a joint project.

## **THEn: A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE**

THEn is an unincorporated network that comprises of volunteers and staff from museums, historical societies and visitor information centres across the

Atherton Tablelands Region.<sup>1</sup> The network formed in 2012 as a direct result of groups in the region participating in the Museum and Galleries Queensland Standards Program in 2011. Buoyed by the exchange of ideas and practical museological education they derived from participating, groups expressed a desire to continue meeting in an informal manner in the Tablelands region. There are no meeting minutes, memberships or formal requirements for participation other than being linked to one of the region's collecting groups. During the development and delivery of *Treasures of the Tablelands* (Anzac Treasures), the Coordinator for Tourism Culture and Events at the Tableland Regional Council, Gwyneth Nevard, acted as a group mediator and organiser while also engaging with the MDO program to identify speakers and activities or deliver training.

THeN meets approximately three times a year. Held at various organisations across the region to ensure it is accessible to all participants, gatherings involve guest speakers or hands-on museum management, curatorial and conservation workshops. While meetings provide educational value to participants, they also afford important opportunities for social interaction and exchange. Volunteers from different organisations get a chance to renew acquaintances and friendships, and discuss museum issues or projects. With its established meeting framework and commitment to learning, therefore, the group plays a significant role in preserving and sustaining the region's cultural heritage, while also contributing to community wellbeing (Chatterjee & Nobel 2013; Silvermann 2009).

From a participatory perspective, THeN can be defined as a community of practice, a group that actively seeks to engage in learning opportunities that enhance their knowledge and advance their skills (Lave & Wegner 1998). More than just the exchange of ideas and learning, however, communities of practice are underpinned by social relationships and interaction:

For a community of practice to function it needs to generate and appropriate a shared repertoire of ideas, commitments

and memories ... The interactions involved, and the ability to undertake larger or more complex activities and projects through cooperation, bind people together and help to facilitate relationship and trust. (Smith 2009)

The pre-existence of THeN and its connection with the MDO program played a critical part in the *Anzac Treasures* project's development. It was an obvious step to develop a collaborative program with this group. After two years of working with them, the group demonstrated an appetite for working on a joint project, and the ANZAC funding was a suitable mechanism through which to activate such an idea. Pragmatism also played a part, with many of the groups reasoning that one joint First World War project would lessen the pressure on each to produce individual works. Prior to developing the funding application through the Federal Government's Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program, the group was approached to gauge if this was something they would be interested in. Their positive response led to an application auspiced through one of THeN's groups, the Friends of the Atherton Chinese Temple, and supported through the Tablelands Regional Council. Thirteen different collecting groups elected to participate, with key deliverables including exhibition training workshops and an exhibition to mark the 100th anniversary of the First World War. At the outset, my involvement was to deliver applied workshops which meant groups not only had access to training, but also to a safe and familiar trainer with whom they had an established rapport. Following the exhibition, the groups would take their objects back and integrate the interpretation into their museums.

The groups were not the only ones seeking outcomes. I also stood to benefit from running a joint project that drew on my interest in community museum work and a belief that a thematic exhibition could raise the profile of museums and generate a better understanding of the Tablelands' First World War history and material culture. Applied training I felt certain could result in both learning and outcome. Display development training would build

confidence and practical skills whilst drawing on their local knowledge and collections. Conservation and presentation discussions would promote the care and preservation of the region's First World War material culture. And participation in a large group outside their usual museum boundaries would facilitate knowledge exchange and the region's first collaborative museum exhibition. *Anzac Treasures* also offered a chance to explore some of the region's First World War collections and stories encountered while working on *Defending the Pacific* another First World War project developed by the MDO program. This small travelling exhibition was inspired by North Queensland's prominent role in Australia's first military mobilisation in August 1914, and drew heavily on stories of Tablelands soldiers who travelled to Torres Strait and German New Guinea on the troopship *HMS Kanowna*. The project had highlighted the strength of First World War collections throughout north and far north Queensland, and the chance to delve more deeply into this topic was an added incentive.

Other beneficiaries included local councils who used some of the design elements created for the *Anzac Treasures* project as the basis for their Anzac Heritage Trail projects and brochures (Tablelands Regional Council 2015; Mareeba Shire Council 2015). Tablelands tourism also gained momentum, with museums promoted beyond the region to the wider collection sector. Some members of THeN also went on to participate in other First World War activities, such as the Heritage Leaders Conference at the State Library of Queensland and the Australian War Memorial's *Spirit of Anzac* Centenary travelling exhibition. In addition, the project has led to more First World War collections and stories have being uncovered.<sup>2</sup>

## CURATORIAL DIRECTION AND REFLECTION

With the First World War being such an extensive topic, creating boundaries and criteria for inclusion was important. Three training workshops were incorporated into the project to ensure participants had an overview

of exhibition development processes, and to establish key parameters which would also affect the project. Topics included exhibition planning, design and layout, and text and label writing/making.

In the first workshop an exhibition outline was developed to help structure the work. This was created to stimulate discussion about exhibition development and to encourage the group to embrace the notion of a thematic display rather than producing 13 individual displays. The outline was debated in the first meeting, and after some discussion, five sections were agreed upon to help structure the display:

- Introduction: before the war
- The War begins: first actions and enlisting
- Voices from the front: letters home and keep sakes
- On the home front: life continues on the Tablelands
- Aftermath of war: remembrance, recovery, and renewal

The group was also challenged to only include stories for which they had objects or images, and participants were asked to create a rationale for including the item. Object driven storytelling is not revolutionary museology – indeed it is most traditional. What it does, however, is create a framework for inclusion and provide a training methodology for interpretation. For the exhibition, it also ensured there was a point of difference between this project and the many other First World War projects that were emerging across Queensland. By focusing on the special medium of museums – objects – there was a chance that participants would develop interpretative skills and visitors would come in and learn not only about the First World War, but also get an insight into the important work local museums and volunteers do in preserving history and material culture (see figure 1).

Participants then considered where their objects best fit into the structure and what items from other organisations they might be displayed alongside. Combining collections in this way was a new approach for the participants and, at first, a challenge. While discussing the projects historical context, many fantastic stories emerged. If we had



FIG. 1a. *Time for War, Time for Love*, in *The Tablelander*, 3 February 2015, p. 10. Image David Anthony / Newspix.



FIG. 1b. *Time for War, Time for Love*, in *The Tablelander*, 3 February 2015, p. 10.

included all of them, however, the exhibition would have been more narrative than object driven and, given the limitations of time and space, we chose to focus on objects. Subsequently, to ensure artefacts from individual organisations could still be identified by collecting agency, an object label template was created which included object name, collecting institution and logo designed specifically for the project (see figure 2). This approach alleviated fears that the efforts of individual museums or collecting groups would be invisible. On a more practical level, of course, the template also served another use – making sure everyone conformed to the same font and text size.

Training workshops also included understanding the limitations of space (the Post Office Gallery in Atherton Chinatown with a floor space of approximately 27 m<sup>2</sup>), fittings and fixtures (e.g. a hanging system, plinths, text board stands) and environment (e.g. security and staffing, not climate controlled, light issues). Although the purchase of ten large format timber frames was included in the grant application, the provision of cases was an outstanding issue. As we worked through our object lists, it quickly became apparent that more cases would be needed. Participants rallied to identify suitable cases in their museums, with some even creating purpose built cases. In the end, however, seven cases from Cairns Museum still had to be borrowed.

Exhibition development is rarely smooth sailing, particularly those involving multiple stakeholders. The MDO role evolved from trainer/facilitator to project manager, and provided room for debate and consensus, and also ensured there was a line for closure. During discussions about the exhibition sections, I put up draft text panels for the groups to review and critique during one of the workshops. Participants debated the issues around what makes a good text panel and whether they had captured the issues correctly. Although colourful exchanges arose around historical accuracy, the process of negotiating content provided participants with a form of applied exhibition text writing training whereby they actively shaped the exhibition format and style and reached consensus regarding how to move forward. A key exchange focussed on the notion of commemoration and celebration. With



FIG. 2. *Anzac Treasures of the Tablelands* exhibition logo, designed by Nettie O'Connell.

the final section addressing the end of the war, some were concerned that a celebratory 'we won' approach provided an inaccurate message about war. Economic hardships brought on by war and its consequences meant that communities suffered on all fronts. Participants wanted to ensure visitors left with a sense of this adversity rather than the triumph of war. They rewrote the introductory panel to read:

War changed the Tablelands. Four years of conflict, failing industries, a drought, a cyclone, and a flu epidemic all left their toll.

After Armistice was signed in 1918, and the peace celebrations were over, communities embarked upon a long and challenging period of regrowth and renewal.

Family lines and dynasties had been broken. Grieving communities established memorials to honour those that had died in the war. Those who did return were also altered – forever marked by their experiences, wounds and losses.

Some towns, like Stannary Hills and Evelyn, never recovered. The mining, timber and pastoral industries gradually declined, giving way to agricultural production, like dairying, maize and peanuts.

Farmland that had been leased to Chinese settlers was resumed under the Soldier Settlement Scheme. Atherton Chinatown was all but deserted, and many evicted Chinese residents left the region. Soldier settlements at Atherton, Tolga, Kairi and Evelyn were not a success – isolation and despondency doomed many settlers to failure.

As the exhibition opening loomed, additional project management was required. Requests for school guides, invitations, advertisements and production procedures escalated. Though critical, these elements of exhibition development were not factored into the overall group project and, on reflection should have been integrated more fully into the participatory process (see Figure 3). I absorbed these tasks while Rhonda Micola liaised with all organisations and devised a schedule for object transportation and delivery in a way that allowed appropriate time for loan agreements and paperwork to be managed. Although groups liaised with me regarding labels via email, each wrote, printed and produced final labels and transported them with the objects. Without fail, every item offered and discussed was delivered and placed in the gallery by section ready for installation.

Short timeframes for installation and the number of groups involved meant that installation was not a collaborative activity – only Rhonda, the MDO from North Queensland, Ewen McPhee, and myself were involved. Some mentioned they wanted to see how the exhibition would look now that they had been through the process without being involved in the installation. Interested participants dropped into the gallery over the two days of installation and provided guidance and help as required. The mediated engagement framework allowed me to work with a large group of disparate organisations and ensure participants could engage in and contribute to exhibition development training and still deliver an outcome within specific guidelines and timeframes.

### **TREASURES FROM THE TABLELANDS**

The use of objects as the focal point for training workshops allowed participants to explore and exhibit some of the region's significant First World War material culture. As the project progressed, new artefacts were uncovered and fresh information about existing collections emerged. Participants also began to consider their objects more critically,

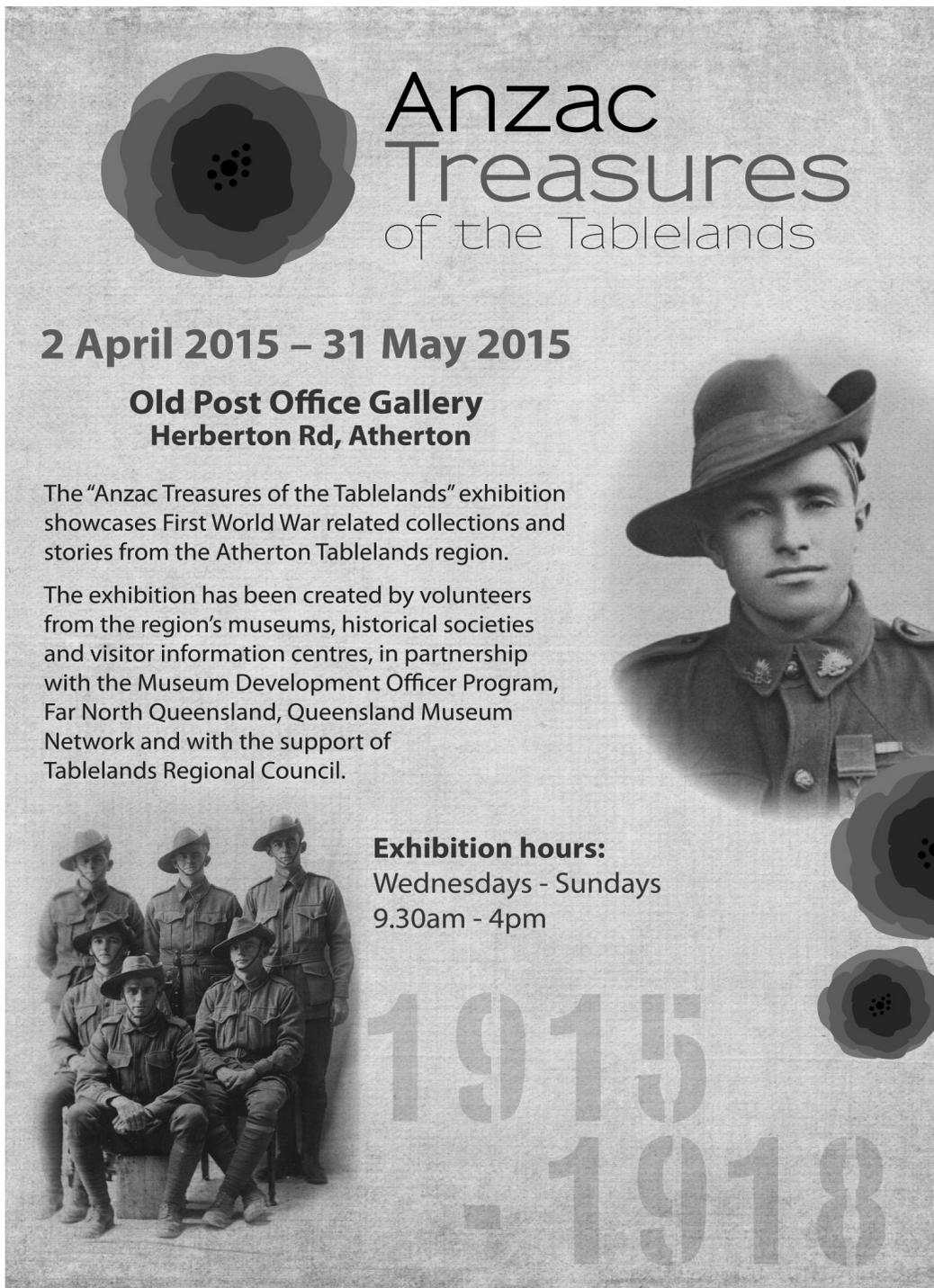


FIG. 3. *Anzac Treasures of the Tablelands* exhibition flyer, designed by Nettie O'Connell.

questioning provenance, context and materials, and striving to develop engaging interpretative labels. This was part of the training objectives – to get the groups to read objects from a variety of perspectives and expand their interpretive gaze. The following section presents some of the artefacts that were uncovered by different groups during the *Anzac Treasures of the Tablelands* project.

Irvinebank's Loudoun House Museum holds a variety of First World War artefacts. The strength of this material reflects Irvinebank's status and prosperity prior to 1914 (Kerr 2000). Home to John Moffat's Loudoun Mill and a range of other mining enterprises, pre First World War Irvinebank was a bustling commercial hub with an active sporting community. The rifle club and cadet corps was particularly strong associations, and would prove to be an important training ground for future Australian soldiers who participated in regular rifle competitions and events that were held across the Atherton Tablelands region. Loudoun House Museum holds a number of rifle related trophies: the Walsh District Rifle Association Cup, the Distillers Company Limited (DCL) Challenge Bowl and the Minister's Cup. These artefacts provide an insight to the community from which many of the soldiers who enlisted to fight emerged and are held in Loudoun House Museum. Two are discussed here.

The D.C.L. Challenge Bowl was one of the most sought after trophies (see figure 4). Valued at 35 guineas, it was presented to the community by P. J. Doyle who was the Cairns agent for this particular brand of whisky. Newspaper reports reveal the cup was originally intended for the Cairns Yachting Club but was subsequently assigned for competition among the rifle clubs when that club dissolved (*Cairns Post*, 24 December 1907, p. 5). Rivalry was fierce from the outset – the first two clubs to compete were Cairns and Irvinebank. By 1906, clubs from Atherton, Chillagoe, Nelson (Gordonvale) and Herberton had all joined the competition. Indeed, interest in rifle shooting was so strong that the club captains discussed forming a Northern District Rifle Association. In a move strongly supported by defence authorities, the

Cairns and Inland District Rifle Association was formally established in 1907. This meant that the Defence Act 1903–1912's goal to mobilise north Queensland's Kennedy Regiment and the Citizen's Forces (made up of men from the region's rifle clubs) in times of war, became more achievable.

Competition for the Minister's Cup also began years before the outbreak of war. It was instigated by the Minister for Public Instruction, Mr Barlow, in 1906 and was awarded to the cadet's for rifle shooting. Each year, funds were set aside to purchase silver cups which became the property of the winning schools. Irvinebank State School Cadets won the trophy in 1909 and 1910, and the trophy was displayed in the window of the town's Jack and Newell store. Barlow saw the program as part of training preparation for citizen soldiers, a vision that was borne out in 1914 when the MV *Kanowna* set sail to Thursday Island.

Volunteers at Herberton Mining Museum and Visitor Information Centre uncovered an original flag that belonged to the Herberton branch of the Red Cross

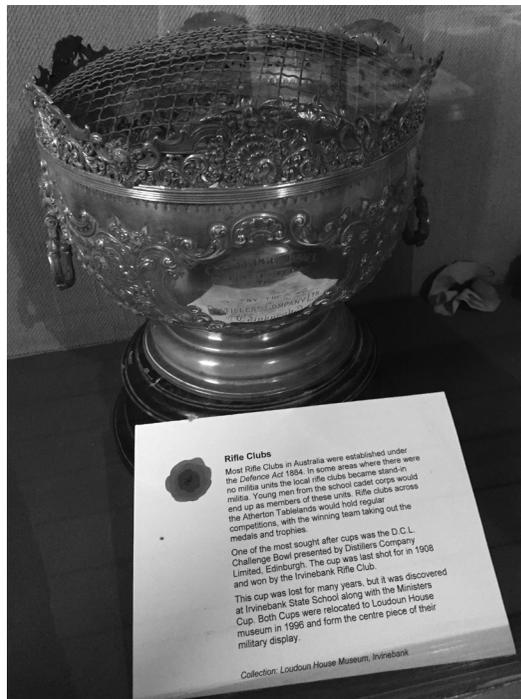


FIG. 4. D.C.L. Challenge Bowl. Image: Jo Wills.

Society (see figure 5). Further research has revealed that the Herberton Red Cross was the first registered branch of the Red Cross in Queensland. It was formed by Alice Hannah Bonar, married to Herberton's mayor, shortly after the Australia announced its intention to enter the war in 1914 and swung into action quickly. Newspaper reports from September 1914 show that the branch sent flannel, linen and other supplies to Cairns by train for troops heading into service (*Cairns Post*, 21 September 1914 p. 6). Although the Bonar's reasons for starting the branch are unknown, their involvement in the war became personal when both their son and daughter enlisted. Twenty eight year old David Welbourn Bonar joined up as a mining engineer and eventually became a sergeant (NAA, B2455, Bonar D W). He received a Military Cross while a member of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company. A year later, May Frances Bonar enlisted as a staff nurse with Australian Army Nursing Service No 6 Section in 1917 and served on transport duty between Australia and England until 1919 (NAA, B2455, Bonar M F). Both May and David survived. Given the age and significance of the flag, advice was sought from one of Queensland Museum's conservators to ensure its display would cause minimal impact or damage. Two of the volunteers created a purpose built frame to display the flag, while another followed conservation instructions and made a Velcro strip loop that is used to hang flat textiles.

Portraits of soldiers are found in a number of collections across the country. Mareeba Historical Society holds a rare collection of 30–50 original glass negative portraits that depict local soldiers from the Mareeba district (see figure 6). As the Australian War Memorial holds only one First World War portrait from Mareeba, the collection is considered rare and tells the story of a community's contribution to the war effort. Despite their uncertain provenance, this rarity and their interpretative value made their inclusion essential. As a group of glass negatives, they also provide an insight into the photography industry of the period. As such, although we know little of the studio or photographer's details, they remain an important illustrative collection of social life and enlistment.

To capture voices of local soldiers who went to fight overseas, groups selected postcards, letters and diaries from their collections. In one of four diaries held by Loudoun House Museum, we discovered the experiences and life of William George Fraser, a member of one of Irvinebank's most prominent



FIG. 5. Herberton Red Cross Flag. Image: Herberton Mining Museum and Visitor Information Centre.



FIG. 6. As well as the glass negative collection, Mareeba Historical Society uncovered a strong collection of First World War materials and undertook a separate project to conserve them. Image: Joanna Wills.

families. The three earlier diaries provide us with a unique insight into the thoughts and life of a robust young man who was a writer, a romantic and a man that lived life to the fullest. Known as George, he was conservative by nature, and close to his mother. He was also a unionist, voted labour and supported conscription. He enjoyed an active social life and was a keen rifleman. His spare time was spent prospecting, kangaroo hunting and rolling boulders down hills. From the 1916 diary we know that Fraser and a couple mates enlisted on the 22 January 1916 at Herberton. At the time Fraser was working at Watsonville as a Tin Dresser. The 1916 diary almost exclusively covers the period of his enlistment, his training in Brisbane, the voyage on the troopship to England and time spent there before his final departure to France. George Fraser was killed at the battle of Bullecourt on the night of 17th April 1917. He was 25. Loudoun House Museum holds his commemorative medal and other artefacts belonging to the family.

Although some groups held little First World War military artefacts, they did hold materials from businesses and activities prevalent during the wartime period. These were included in a section on the home front and ensured that all those who wished to participate in the exhibition could. While some industries like mining faltered with the onset of war, others flourished. Many men chose to remain working at home, particularly those in the dairy industry around Malanda and Millaa Millaa. The district's maize industry also continued during the war, with Chinese farmers increasing production rates despite the overall downturn in agricultural production. Material culture associated with both these topics was sourced – Chinese agricultural tools from Atherton Chinatown and a butter boxes from Atherton's Golden Grove butter factory.

Malanda Falls Visitor Information Centre looked outside of their immediate collection to ensure they could participate. Centre manager, Caroline O'Reilly, worked with local resident Bob Prince to tell the story of the Malanda Red Cross Equipment Guild by exhibiting a badge belonging to his grandfather, Eli Prince. Awarded in recognition of Eli's contribution during the war, this tiny object recognises the effort

and accomplishments of this branch of volunteers. After using Prince's sawmill to cut the timber, Eli and the other guild members manufactured equipment for injured soldiers in the workshop under his house. The group exhibited at the 1916 Malanda show:

One of the chief hall exhibits at the Malanda Show was a display of manufactured articles by the Malanda centre of the Equipment Guild. The articles comprised crutches, folding table, extension chair, with leg rest, and camp stool. Considering the Malanda centre has just been formed they deserve the greatest praise for so quickly bringing their work before the public. (*Northern Herald*, 15 September 1916, p 65)

Measuring approximately two centimetres in diameter, the challenge was to display it secularly and to make it visible. The group decided to photograph the item, display an enlarged image beside the original article and rewrite the inscriptions onto the object label.

There were multiple objects proposed for the exhibition's final section, the aftermath of war. Many organisations like churches and clubs issued certificates to soldiers acknowledging their participation in the war. Two commemorative medals, 'Dead Man's pennies', were displayed along with other medals and remembrances. Honour boards formed a key part of the display in the final section, and two in particular are worth mentioning (see figure 7). Mareeba Heritage Centre and Loudoun House Museum (at Irvinebank's School of Arts Building) each hold ornate pressed metal honour boards manufactured by the Wunderlich Company. Neither had been removed from their locations for many years so the act of moving them for the exhibition was significant in itself. Made from pressed copper and stamped metal, they are striking artefacts and invite curiosity and query. They are decorated with patriotic symbols such as flags, laurel wreaths and cannons, and are art nouveau in style. Research reveals they were both manufactured by Wunderlich Limited, one of Australia's foremost makers of military badges and memorials, and there are numerous examples of their work in collections around the country.



FIG. 7. Irvinebank Wunderlich Honour Board, Loudoun House Museum. Image: Jo Wills.

During the label writing workshop I encouraged participants to interrogate their objects creatively. Having found many examples of Wunderlich products around Queensland and Australia, including items in the Powerhouse Museum, Burketown, Thursday Island and archival information at the State Library of Queensland, I felt there was a lot more to be said about the pieces than a mere description. Wunderlich's directors, brothers Ernest Julius, Frederick Otto and Alfred, were manufacturers, specialising in pressed metal ceilings and other metal linings, roofing tiles and a range of other architectural materials. This research illustrated another interpretative angle – the issue of anti-German discrimination in Queensland during the war. Wunderlich overcame this stigma and became one of Australia's foremost manufacturers of military badges and memorials. These honour boards, therefore, provide a window into the social issues and tensions of the time and as such are of great value both locally and from a national perspective.

Six weeks before the exhibition opened, Mary Searston from the Herberton Mining Museum and Visitor Information Centre made an exciting discovery. Her research had uncovered a picture of local soldier called George Richard Bimrose playing a drum in an Anzac Day parade on the Tablelands. Private Bimrose enlisted in Townsville in October 1915 and joined the AIF 41st Battalion (NAA, B2455, Bimrose, G R). He was sent to Enoggera where he purchased a brass band drum and played it on a march through Brisbane. He disembarked from Sydney on HMAT *Demosthenes*. According to later newspaper reports, Bimrose took the drum overseas with him, playing it in Cape Town, England and France before being gassed in 1917 (*Cairns Post*, 2 May 1941, p. 4). The legacy of the drum continued when Bimrose returned to Australia became a member of the Cairns City Band and played in many subsequent Anzac Day parades (*Cairns Post*, 26 April 1949, p. 5). Mary tracked down the drum to the Cairns Returned and Services League (RSL) collection and asked the MDO to facilitate a loan so it could be included in the exhibition. Although a last minute discovery, it was important to be flexible and include

it in the exhibition. Mary's enthusiasm in identifying the artefact was palpable and reflected the energy many of the participants had put into the exhibition.

Two additional First World War 'treasures' appeared after the exhibition had closed. This is not uncommon – public events often help to identify draw out collections in the community. One was uncovered as part of a significance assessment undertaken at Loudoun House Museum. Volunteers came across a cloth certificate awarded to James Campbell Dawson Esq, dated 30 March 1917 (see Figure 8). Further research revealed Dawson worked as underground manager for the Vulcan Mine and resumed that position when he returned to Australia in 1919. The Vulcan tin lode at Irvinebank was discovered in September 1888 by a party of Italian woodcutters and miners and went on to become one of the most successful tin mines in the district. A feature of the workings was their depth. By 1903, the Vulcan was being described as one of the deepest mines in the southern hemisphere, as well as being called 'the premier lode tin mine of Queensland'. In 1905 the

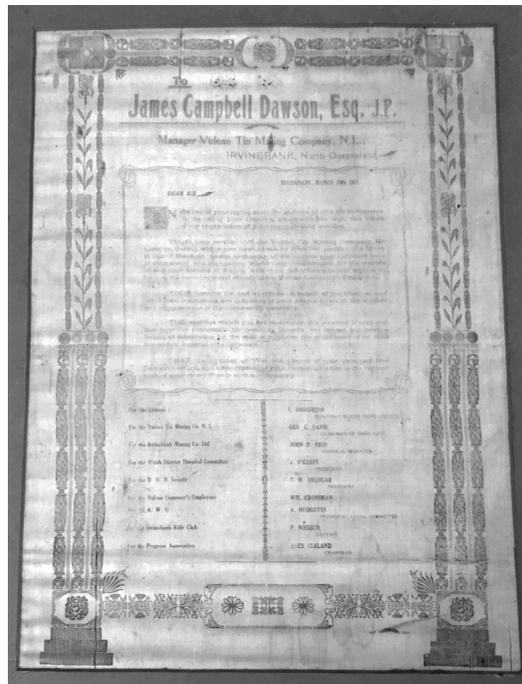


FIG. 8. James Campbell Dawson Esq Certificate from Vulcan Mine, Loudoun House Museum. Image: Jo Wills.



situation was broadcast internationally, and many of Australia's initial charitable activities were designed to raise money for Belgian refugees. One such activity was held in Kingsborough, a small mining town on the Hodgkinson goldfield in the hills behind Cairns and Port Douglas. In 1915, the *Pugh's Almanac* reports Kingsborough had a baker, blacksmith, butcher, aerated water manufacturer and two hotels and Kingsborough State School No 359 where children were taught by Ms Amelia Boyns. In January 15, *The Telegraph* reported that Amelia donated the proceeds of an autograph cloth (£1 16s) to the Belgian Fund which were disposed of by the art union. The paper also reported she ran a guessing competition for a doll, raising 16 shillings and putting that towards wounded soldiers. In September 1915 the *Cairns Post* reported that Amelia sold a boy's hat for 8 shillings and sixpence and put that towards the Belgian Fund as well. Amelia appears to have been a passionate supporter of the war effort, and the items illustrate the type of activities that women undertook on the home front. After negotiating with the owner the item was donated to Mareeba Historical Society.

## VALUING COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY MUSEUM PROJECTS

One way of better understanding collaborative projects is to consider it as process or, in essence, a methodology. Collaborative projects involve stages – developing relationship, creative ideas, outlining and modifying projects, review, reflection, delivering projects etc. These stages are often time restricted, and require ongoing negotiation and review. They also need to be flexible and unfold to the needs of the community, and evolve so that the community gets a positive outcome (where possible).

The process of valuing a collaborative project is complex. What do we construe as value and is it tied up with success? Is it measured by the number of participants in pulling the project together (23)? The number of visitors over two months in a venue open 4 days a week (750)? The number of artefacts identified (more than 80)? The amount of media reports and articles (6)? Or the fact that the exhibition

won two awards – a high commendation in the 2015 National Trust of Queensland Heritage Awards interpretation and promotion category, and winner of the Queensland's Gallery and Museum Achievement Award for a project developed by volunteer organisations in the sustainability category?

For *Anzac Treasures*, the group determined that the critical creative and learning component for them was in the research and writing phase of the project – the identification of themes, objects and stories, and the layout and flow. Their learning needs with regards interpretation and label writing arose as an important component and so we focussed training on this while I pulled together the administrative and production phase of the project. After the exhibition opened, the groups were given an evaluation form and asked to reflect upon their experience:

I think the final exhibition was a great example of collaborative workings from a selection of small groups in a large area, and how we can all work together to enable combined publicity and knowledge. I think well done to THeN, Queensland Museums FNQ and TRC. (Anon, 2015b)

I felt a sense of pride and achievement when I walked through the exhibition. I have also had very positive feedback from friends and associates as to the wonderful job done by all stakeholders and the excellent way that the final exhibition was presented to the public. I would not hesitate to be involved in such a project again. (Anon, 2015b)

Workshops played an important part of the exercise making sure each of us had the necessary skills to participate. (Anon, 2015b)

Two participants recognised the value of training for future projects, highlighting the transformative capacity of collaborative projects:

The label making skill and how to display an exhibition were of the best use as I have used them again making all the labels here ... standard which shows a development of

consistency throughout the centre. The fact that most workshops were 'hands on' allowed me to use the news skills in a practical way and I think retain the knowledge easier. (Anon, 2015a)

I found working as a collaborative group was a wonderful way to share ideas and knowledge and allowed me to learn and utilise skills that I did not have before. I was amazed at the depth of understanding of the other museums etc., and I feel that we will work together as a more collaborative group in the future. (Anon, 2015a)

The collegial ability of THeN as a community of practice meant that the project could highlight the benefits of collaborative museum exhibitions and integrate principles inherent in this approach. For the *Anzac Treasures* exhibition, participation and engagement centred on the development phase of the project more than the production phase. Using the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Engagement Spectrum, one can argue I worked collaboratively with participants in the exhibition workshops and development phase, and then involved participants in the overall design and layout (International Association for Public Participation Australasia 2017). The spectrum, which outlines five degrees of engagement – inform, consult, involve, collaborate and/or empower – shows the degrees to which participation can be managed. Unlike other models or ladders of engagement (Arnstein 1969; Trotter, 1996), the IAP2 spectrum has been designed to demonstrate the degrees of engagement that can occur rather than rank in order of effectiveness.

Further analysis of the engagement format shows that, from the outset, with just three workshops in which to train participants and develop an exhibition, someone was always going to have to play more of a project management role. While it was clear that the groups needed to own the vision and concept, there also needed to be a unifying voice around which these different organisations could rally. This worked for a number of reasons, but principally because

of the forthright relationship developed with the group in my work as MDO. Having worked with the individual groups previously, I was in a position to provide advice and support without worrying about power dynamics within the group. By defining the engagement style at the outset, participants had a clear sense of what aspects of the project they would influence, and when it had to move on. Although the desire for an organic, collaborative project was compromised, by outlining the stages of exhibition development where communities had active decision making roles ensured both engagement and delivery occurred. This suited the participants whose engagement in the topic, objects and stories meant they were focused on research which then filtered into the collaborative workshop discussions.

Can we conclude, therefore, that a mediated engagement experience is still capable of providing the benefits that collaborative projects can offer on numerous levels? The collaborative nature of the research phase demonstrated the value of an engaged community of practice within the region and the role it plays in identifying and preserving material culture. *Anzac Treasures* and the First World War Centenary has been a vehicle through which THeN could explore their collections, expand their knowledge and sustain their social interaction. In the process, the project has revealed stories and objects to new audiences, and increased the region's interest in history, increased collecting groups capacity to develop displays and deepened the relationship between myself and the groups the MDO program works with.

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## □ ENDNOTES

1. Atherton Chinatown; Herberton Visitor information Centre and Mining Museum, Historic Village, Herberton, Malanda Falls Visitor Centre, Malanda Dairy Centre, Millaa Millaa Museum, Eacham Historical Society, Ravenshoe Visitor Information Centre, Tolga Historical Society, Mareeba Heritage Centre and Museum, Mareeba Historical Society, Loudoun House Museum (Irvinebank), Chillagoe Courthouse Museum and Mount Garnet Visitor Information Centre.
2. In another side project that ran concurrently with the Anzac Treasures Project, Mareeba Historical Society worked with the MDO and a conservator from Queensland Museum to undertake a conservation and storage project, focussing specifically on First World War soldier portraits and other related materials, some of which featured in the 'Treasures of the Tablelands.'