



Evaluation of Layers of History: Executive Summary

Layers of History

Durnin Research was appointed in October 2019 by the Heritage Trust of Lincolnshire to evaluate the Layers of History project.

This evaluation was tasked to capture and assess the extent to which the project has performed in terms of meeting the conditions of its support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and capture wider learning from the project to shape how Heritage Lincolnshire approaches the delivery of community volunteering and delivering health and wellbeing activity (both on its own and in partnership with others).



'Layers' was created to give volunteers the opportunity to discover, understand and investigate those aspects of Lincolnshire's historic landscapes that are less obvious, perhaps only a few lumps or bumps in the ground, or an abandoned lump of concrete with mysterious metal protrusions.

Starting in 2017, Layers set out to engage over 200 volunteers during a three-year period across eight sites:

- d Aslackby
- d Freiston Shore
- d Hackthorn
- d Hainton
- d Harlaxton
- d Revesby
- d South Ormsby
- d Southrey Woods

The project aimed to show volunteers how to study and research the landscape using archaeological surveying techniques and other research tools; it achieved this through online courses and local workshops.

Building on the success of predecessor project Lincolnshire Heritage at Risk, Heritage Lincolnshire wanted Layers to focus on particular aspects of the county's heritage (medieval earthwork remains, parks and gardens, and military landscapes) which make a significant contribution to the character of its historic landscape.

Layers of Performance

“A very capable, confident project that has delivered well” Charlotte Mulliner, National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Volunteers that participated in Layers came to the project from several different routes:

- d. Some volunteers were involved in previous Heritage Lincolnshire projects (such as Lincolnshire Heritage at Risk, Down Your Wold, The Old King’s Head, Kirton), and/or having engaged in previous events and courses.
- d. Some volunteers were new to the area and found Layers to provide an opportunity to get to know the local area and meet new people.
- d. Some volunteers have experienced a significant life change (such as recent retirement, recovering from serious ill health, bereavement etc), and Layers provided an opportunity for them to manage the transition to be engaged and active.

For the first couple of years of delivery, Layers focussed on recruiting, and providing activities for volunteers. In the third year the project both broadened its scope and delivered more instances of participation overall, with over 30% of participations being from outside the core group of Layers volunteers.

In total there were:

- d. 230 unique volunteer participants in the project across eight study sites, with 90 workshops and training days covering diverse subjects such as geophysical surveys to historic cookery.
- d. Over 1,425 participations in Layers events over the course of the project, 1,165 of which were by registered volunteers, and the remainder were made up of attendees who engaged in specific events (including target beneficiaries).

Layers achievements also included:

- d. Providing unique learning experiences for 6 schools and over 180 pupils.
- d. Providing local historic landscape information to over 1000 members of the public.
- d. Creating 18 sets of loan equipment including surveying equipment, digital cameras and digital oral recording equipment.

Layers of Impact

Layers has provided a general historic environment understanding of each of the study sites, and provided the opportunity for volunteers to engage to a depth that suits them, from exploring and finding out more about their local area and how it evolved over time, to in depth research and archaeology related activity.

Volunteers felt that they had significantly benefited from their involvement in Layers, and always felt welcome. Most volunteers noted that Layers kept them connected and engaged

with other people, addressing loneliness and social isolation issues with older adults in rural areas, with many reporting positive benefits in terms of their mental wellbeing.

Volunteers were really pleased that their work contributed to the Historic Environment Record (HER) in Lincolnshire, with some going onto volunteer with the HER team directly as a result. Others have looked at the HER in relation to their own communities and gone on to do further work.

Friendships had developed and flourished, and many had gone onto do other things, such as engage in local history groups, enrol on GROW¹ course and other Heritage Lincolnshire courses and events (including many becoming Heritage Lincolnshire members), and to pursue further volunteering opportunities.

There is a consensus that Layers was a volunteer led project that empowered many of those who participated and improved their lives. Participants reported increases in confidence generally, and a willingness to go onto try other things, and most had a very high-quality experience.



“I just wish I could do it every day”

Layers of History has **generated a sense of ownership in Lincolnshire heritage by participants**, many of whom feel empowered to go on and get involved with further work and projects.

“It is very clear that the volunteer experience was a top priority”

“There is nothing quite like Layers out there”

Some volunteers noted that they had, or had developed, a range of heritage skills, and suggested that Heritage Lincolnshire could usefully do a **skills audit to capture the heritage skills and competencies of the Layers volunteers**.

Layers struggled to engage schools and young people aged 18 to 24, but the team learned valuable lessons about how to do so in the future.

Over time, Layers developed **delivery partnerships** to access and engage with potential target beneficiaries. This included partnering with The People’s Partnership, a charity that specialises in *‘providing access and amplifying the voice of hidden and hard to reach people of Lincolnshire²’*, and Dementia South Lincolnshire, working with those with early onset dementia.

¹ <https://www.2aspire.org.uk/grow/>

² <http://www.every-one.org.uk/>



The collaboration between Heritage Lincolnshire and The People’s Partnership was particularly successful, making sure there was enough lead time ahead of delivery at Southrey Woods, paying attention to the logistics needs, relating the content of sessions to the needs of the participants, and working hard to

ensure that sessions would be interesting and engaging. A deeper partnering arrangement between Heritage Lincolnshire and The People’s Partnership could be developed in the future, with the lead partner being interchangeable to match funder priorities.

“The collaboration provides a valuable template for developing such projects in the future”.

Most partners who engaged with the evaluation are thinking about succession activity beyond the Layers project, with a number highlighting that that the partnering approach that underpinned Southrey Woods and Aslackby should be taken as a model for future working wherever possible.

Consultees who were involved in this part of the project felt that there is significant potential for delivering Layers style activity to a range of cared for groups in the future.

“Practitioners really value this stuff, it gets people out and about and helps to generate new and shared interests”.

Heritage funders have become increasingly interested in wellbeing over the lifetime of Layers, and a well-researched and developed successor project, delivered in partnership with specialists, could be an attractive and fundable proposition for both heritage, community and health practitioner funders.

Recommendations

Recommendations are set out in the main report, and cover the following areas:

- d. Capturing the heritage skills and competencies of Layers volunteers.
- d. Getting the best out of the digital reconstructions.
- d. Engaging young people.
- d. Developing delivery partnerships, and next steps.

Durnin Research is most grateful for the insight, perspectives and the time given by all the consultees involved. Particular thanks to Cola Jennings at the Heritage Trust of Lincolnshire for guidance and support throughout the study.