

Starting the conversation: Exploring use of the Know Your Place and Herefordshire and Worcestershire Life Stories online platforms

March 2023

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Executive Summary

While the role of heritage in maintaining and improving people's wellbeing is known, especially for people with long-standing illnesses or disabilities, the focus to date has tended to be on the benefits of physically visiting heritage sites. This can create a barrier for some people, particularly when the physical environment is not accessible or dementia friendly. The Covid-19 pandemic has also highlighted the need to engage with heritage in less traditional ways such as online and virtual access.

The importance of maintaining social connections has also been brought to the fore by the pandemic. Life story work is one avenue for achieving this. As well as enabling people to share their stories to help others understand and appreciate them as individuals, life stories help provide a collective view of wider society. They offer the ability to see different views of everyday life and share informal experiences that would otherwise be lost or overlooked by official records, making them important from both a social and cultural perspective.

The Worcester Life Stories project developed two online platforms that combine digital technology and heritage with the aim of promoting inclusion and connecting community networks through reminiscence and life stories.

- ***Know Your Place Worcester*** - Hosted by Worcester City Council, the free website allows people to overlay and compare different maps of Worcester and see how areas have evolved over the years. Users can click on the maps to reveal images, memories and records uploaded by others, as well as digitised photographs and Historic Environment Records. Users can also upload their own photographs and memories for other users to access.
- ***Life Stories Herefordshire and Worcestershire*** - Hosted by Herefordshire & Worcestershire Care and Health NHS Trust, people can use the free online platform to create their own digital life story books. Each book contains fully customisable chapters where users can upload their own photos, text, audio and video, or add media from the internet. Books can be shared with others, enabling carers or family members to get ideas of how to engage with someone by finding out about their hobbies, interests or background, or learn about what is important to them such as past events or routines.

The Association for Dementia Studies, University of Worcester, undertook an evaluation of the two platforms to gain an understanding of how they are being used, and their impact on individuals. In addition to a literature review and monitoring engagement with the platforms, the evaluation conducted surveys with users and focus groups and interviews with different groups and individuals with relevant experience of using the platforms.

The evaluation identified the flexibility and versatility of both platforms that make it possible for them to be tailored to meet the needs and preferences of different audiences. They are suitable for use by individuals, on a one-to-one basis and as part of larger groups,

either as the main focus or as a supporting resource. Users can also adapt their role, being a creator, consumer or facilitator, as the platforms are relevant throughout the engagement process rather than just being an end product.

Although developed as online platforms, the ways in which they are used encourage both physical and social engagement. They can involve different forms of media that engage the senses and include resources that help to instigate and develop conversations and activities around a common topic, enabling everyone to be involved. This gives people the opportunity to share their stories and be valued as an individual with their own experiences. Sharing experiences and stories is generally an enjoyable activity for people, as is using the platform as a 'creator' and sharing their own knowledge for the benefit of others, contributing to their own sense of wellbeing. It was also found that using the platforms encourages people to explore and connect with their communities, as some people visited places after engaging with the platforms.

The platforms are relevant and important not just for individuals but also for different sectors within the community such as care, education and heritage. Current use indicates that they are important resources in schools as a means of enabling children to learn more about how their school relates to their local area and how places change over time. The platforms are particularly important for the heritage sector as they offer opportunities to share digital resources more widely and provide structured, but flexible, ways to engage with different audiences. The heritage aspect can also make engagement a more positive experience for people with dementia, taking the focus away from reminiscence and memory loss, and helping them feel part of a bigger initiative instead.

The evaluation identified a lot of untapped potential relating to the two platforms which could broaden their use in the future. Key recommendations include:

- Group activities need a skilled facilitator who can adapt the platforms to meet the needs of the group. They need preparation time to ensure that the platforms and their resources match the activity and are relevant to the specific audience. Facilitators also need to consider how they 'frame' the context in which they are planning to engage them with the platforms.
- Due to interest from users, the possibility of expanding the Know Your Place Worcester platform to cover the whole of Worcestershire should be explored, as should the idea of replicating it for Herefordshire.
- Different groups or organisations such as schools and heritage groups/museums should be engaged to create new content. The initial focus should be on images and information relating to living memory rather than historical content. However, content should not just be photos and images but should also include other information such as facts about buildings and places.
- Promotion of the platforms should be tailored to specific audiences and focus on elements that would be important to them.

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Introduction

Background

Heritage can play an important role in maintaining and improving wellbeing for both individuals and wider communities, with heritage organisations beginning to formally recognise the role that they can play (Historic England, 2022). Indeed, historic places and assets, and interventions related to them such as object handling, can have *“a wide range of beneficial impacts on the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of individuals and communities”* (Pennington et al, 2019: p73).

However, the focus so far has tended to be on the benefits of physically visiting a heritage site (Fujiwara et al, 2014). This can be a barrier to many individuals, such as people with dementia, for a variety of reasons including travel, cost, accessibility, and more recently restrictions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is particularly challenging when the physical environment at a heritage site is not dementia friendly and, by its very nature, is difficult to adapt to become so. Fujiwara et al (2014) suggest that people with long-standing illness or disability can derive higher wellbeing benefits than healthy people from visiting heritage sites, making access to and engagement with heritage even more important.

Initiatives such as the Heritage Pathfinders¹ have taken a range of heritage projects directly to people with dementia, and indeed enabled people with dementia to help shape and direct those projects based on their needs and interests. Recent work around sensory palaces has also looked at improving the engagement of people with dementia in heritage programmes, deliberately choosing to move away from ‘reminiscence models’ and focusing instead on a ‘here and now’ approach (Innes et al, 2021). However, reminiscence and life story work are often recommended for people with dementia (Age UK Sheffield, n.d.; Dementia UK, 2022; SCIE, 2020) as a way of encouraging communication and helping to find out more about individuals in order to improve care.

People generally enjoy talking about their memories and can often see the importance of recording their memories (Gridley et al, 2016). It enables people with dementia to share their stories and what is important to and valued by them, while allowing others to potentially see them in a new way through stories that may otherwise not arise in day-to-day interactions. Sharing life stories goes beyond helping people to understand and appreciate an individual, as they are also important from a social and cultural perspective, helping to provide a collective view of wider society. They offer the ability to see different views of everyday life and

¹ <https://www.leominstermeetingcentre.co.uk/heritage-pathfinders/>

share informal experiences that would otherwise be lost or overlooked by official records.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of maintaining social connections, not just at a personal level, but also in terms of accessing culture and arts activities remotely. While the pandemic has encouraged museums and other heritage and cultural organisations to explore different options around online and virtual access, many were already working in this area pre-pandemic². Having options available to enable people to connect with heritage in a way that doesn't involve them having to physically visit a venue or historic site, either as an individual or as part of a group, can therefore be beneficial.

Overview of the Worcester Life Stories project

The aim of Worcester Life Stories project is to promote inclusion, connected community networks through reminiscence and easily accessed and produced 'life stories' via digital technology and heritage. Consequently, two online platforms were developed focusing on different aspects of life story and reminiscence.

Know Your Place Worcester

Know Your Place Worcester (KYPW)³ is an online resource based on the Know Your Place Bristol website⁴, but specifically for Worcester. Hosted by Worcester City Council, it joins eight other locations across the country that have taken on and developed the platform for their own area. The website is based on different maps of Worcester, which allow people to overlay and compare maps from different times and see how areas have evolved over the years. Users are also able to click on the maps to reveal various images, memories and records uploaded by other people, as well as link to a whole host of digitised photographs and Historic Environment Records. This allows users to learn more about their area or specific parts of Worcester that they may have a connection with. Users can also upload their own photographs and memories of Worcester to enable them to be shared with other users. KYPW is free for anyone to access and use.

Life Stories Herefordshire and Worcestershire

Life Stories Herefordshire and Worcestershire (LSHW)⁵ is an online platform that allows people to create their own digital life story book.

There are different ways you can use the book, such as for your own benefit, to encourage connection with others, leave a legacy or as a group. If you create a book

² <https://econsultancy.com/how-museums-are-using-immersive-digital-experiences/>

³ <https://kypworchester.org.uk/>

⁴ <http://www.kypwest.org.uk/explore-the-map/>

⁵ <https://life-stories.hacw.nhs.uk/>

for yourself you can still share it with other people or export it as a pdf or video. You can do this for your whole book or just chosen chapters from it, depending on what you want to share with whom. Alternatively, carers or family members could use someone's book to help them get ideas of how to engage with someone by finding out about their hobbies, interests or background, or learn about what is important to them such as past events or their routine. You can also create a book as a group, maybe around a common interest such as football or music, and share it with other people allowing them to be able to edit and add to the same book. You don't have to choose how you use it as you can create more than one book within your account, so you could have ones focusing on specific topics or for different people to see.

Each book is split into different chapters, which are fully customisable. You can upload your photos, text, audio and video, even recording your own audio clips within the book to accompany images that you're adding. You can also add media from the internet and KYPW by copying a web link. You can add as much or as little to your book as you like, and you don't have to do it all in one go. Rather, you can add to it over time in smaller steps and just save your progress each time. The website is safe and secure.

On the Life Stories website Life Packs are also available, which contain photographs, other images and videos around a common theme. These can be used separately from the Life Story books, or you could link to some of the content within them from your book.

Hosted by Herefordshire & Worcestershire Care and Health NHS Trust, LSHW is free to all residents of Worcestershire and Herefordshire, but you do have to register on the site to be able to create a book or view a shared book. As part of the registration process, the user is required to indicate which GP practice they are part of in Herefordshire or Worcestershire. Life Packs are available and free to all.

Evaluation

The Association for Dementia Studies (ADS), University of Worcester was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the two platforms.

Aims

The overarching aim of the research project was to gain an understanding of how the two platforms are being used, and how their use is impacting on individuals.

Within this, the evaluation looked to explore:

- How heritage contributes to wellbeing and a sense of place and identity using the two platforms
- Ways to link heritage with dementia and the wider community, including:

- The potential of the two platforms to promote wellbeing and how they strengthen, connect and empower communities
- The reach of the two platforms across the community
- How heritage is meaningful to people in their everyday surroundings, and whether it impacts on engagement with their place/location/ heritage

Literature review

An initial literature review was conducted in late 2020 and updated in early 2023 to explore existing information relating to heritage and wellbeing interventions. The full findings from the literature review and its associated references are provided in Appendix 1.

Methods

A mixed methods approach combining both qualitative and quantitative aspects was implemented across both platforms to gain an understanding of the relationship and impact of the platforms to the role of location/place on a person's sense of identity and a person's health and wellbeing.

- Website/platform analytics will provide an indication of the use of the two platforms:
 - KYPW – information was available regarding views of the site, where people were viewing it from, and how they found out about it (i.e. referral route)
 - LSHW – the only information available related to the number of users registering on the platform for each GP practice.
- Two online surveys (one for each platform) will be used to gather information about how people are using the platforms. The broad areas covered in the surveys were:
 - Brief demographics to help understand who is using the platforms
 - Experience of using similar/related platforms
 - Use of the platform, e.g. who with, for what purpose, frequency, different features used, levels of satisfaction
 - Impact of using the platforms

The surveys were promoted through social media channels, via ADS blogs, to relevant contacts of the platform leads, and via a link on the KYPW platform itself. It was not possible to have a survey link on the LSHW platform as it was controlled by a third-party developer who had their own feedback survey. While not part of the formal evaluation, the responses to this feedback survey were shared with the evaluation team as supplementary 'anecdotal' evidence.

Herefordshire & Worcestershire Care and Health NHS Trust could not share the LSHW survey in its original format as the survey platform used was not permitted, but was able to recreate the survey in an approved format. It is not clear how or where this version of the survey was promoted and advertised to potential respondents, or what type of audience it could reach.

Additional promotion of both the KYPW and LSHW surveys took place on an ad-hoc basis when and where opportunities arose, such as when members of the evaluation team or the platform leads attended events or meetings with potential respondents.

- Three case studies had been planned with groups using the platforms to understand how they were being used in practice and gain feedback on what impact they were having. It was anticipated that the groups would receive training in how to use the platforms, with the evaluation activities being carried out once there had been time for the groups to gain experience of using them.

Plans were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic as the training sessions were delayed or in some cases did not end up taking place with some of the target case study groups. In one case, a session that was expected to be training for staff ended up being an intergenerational session facilitated by the platform leads, meaning that staff had minimal opportunities to learn how to use the platforms and take them back into practice.

In response to these challenges, the evaluation approach was adjusted. Instead, different groups and individuals with relevant experience of using the platforms were invited to take part in focus groups and/or interviews to explore the research questions around how they had been using the platforms with others and what impact they had seen. Where people were unable to take part in an interview or focus group, they were invited to complete the survey(s) as an alternative.

Ethical considerations

This work was approved by the College of Health, Life and Environmental Sciences Research Ethics Panel, University of Worcester (CHLES20210008-R). Interview and focus group participants were provided with project information in advance and required to give informed consent by completing a consent form. All interviews and focus groups were recorded with permission of the participants. As the survey was anonymous, participants were provided with project information at the start of the survey and required to confirm that they had read the information, were over the age of 18, and were happy to participate in the survey.

Analysis

Detailed notes were taken during the interviews and focus groups, and typed up by one of the research team, referring back to the audio recordings for clarification where required. Notes were then reviewed and analysed using thematic analysis to

identify common themes between participants. Due to the relatively low number of interviews and focus groups, this was done manually by the research team rather than using any specific coding software.

Survey data was analysed separately, with descriptive statistics providing an overview of the number of responses relating to each question. However, where there was overlap with the topics covered by the interviews and focus groups the findings have been considered under the same common themes and are presented together in the results.

We will draw on the place identity model developed by Lengen and Kistemann (2012) which considers places as concentrations of social relations and social practices, and zones of experience and meaning. They have identified ten dimensions of a sense of place identity that provide a useful overarching framework for the qualitative data: behaviour (how you act), body (physical presence in a place, belonging), emotion (how you feel), attention (points of focus), perception (engaging senses), memory (recognition of places), orientation (knowing how things link together or relate to each other), spirituality (ideas, significance), meaning/value (linking back to what is important to you) and culture/sociality (awareness of being part of something, social values). Although the evaluation findings are presented according to the themes that arose from the thematic analysis, they will also indicate how they relate to these ten dimensions by including, for example, [orientation] in the findings.

While the overall focus of the evaluation was not on people with dementia, it was acknowledged that some participants may be affected by dementia. Where this is the case, the analysis will aim to pull out any findings that relate specifically to dementia and see how they align with the elements of dementia friendly communities:⁶

- People – people living with dementia must be included and centred.
- Communities – the physical and social environment must be appropriate to the needs of people living with dementia.
- Organisations – businesses and organisations must develop dementia friendly approaches and strategies, in particular in healthcare settings.
- Partnerships – cross-sectoral support and collective action are crucial to effect change.

⁶ <https://www.alz.co.uk/dementia-friendly-communities/principles>

Evaluation findings

Overview of participants

Interviews and focus groups

Two focus groups and four interviews were conducted with a total of 10 individuals. These comprised:

- 6 staff and volunteers at a museum, including one who had facilitated group sessions
- 3 staff working on the Coffee and Memory Bus (CAMBUS) in Herefordshire, with a focus on working with people affected by dementia
- 1 oral historian with experience of facilitating group sessions

It was noted that across the participants there was a roughly even split of people with experience of the KYPW and LSHW platforms, with a few individuals having experience and knowledge of both.

Survey respondents

KYPW

Twenty-nine people responded to the KYPW survey, comprising 22 females and seven males. All respondents were White and covered a wide age range (Figure 1).

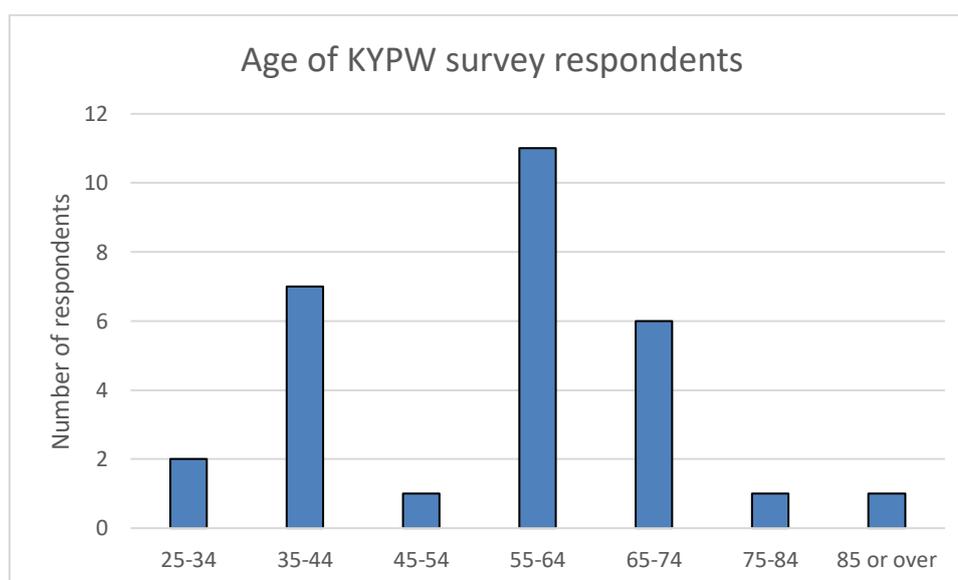


Figure 1: Age of respondents to the KYPW survey

All survey respondents had a good level of experience using the internet, saying that they used it daily for a variety of reasons (Figure 2).

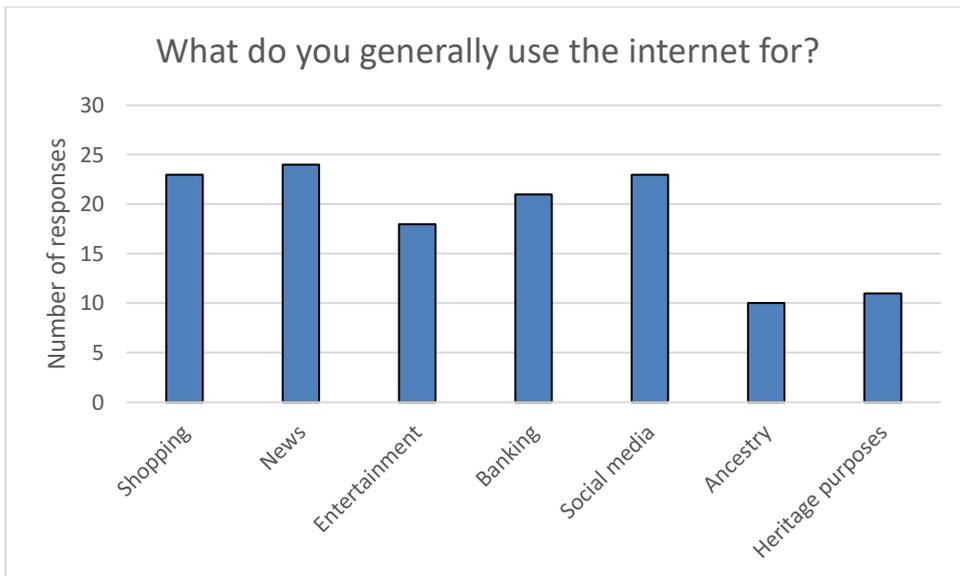


Figure 2: Reasons for using the internet - KYPW survey

Six respondents were already a member of a heritage/history/cultural society or similar and most had experience of using heritage-related websites (Figure 3).

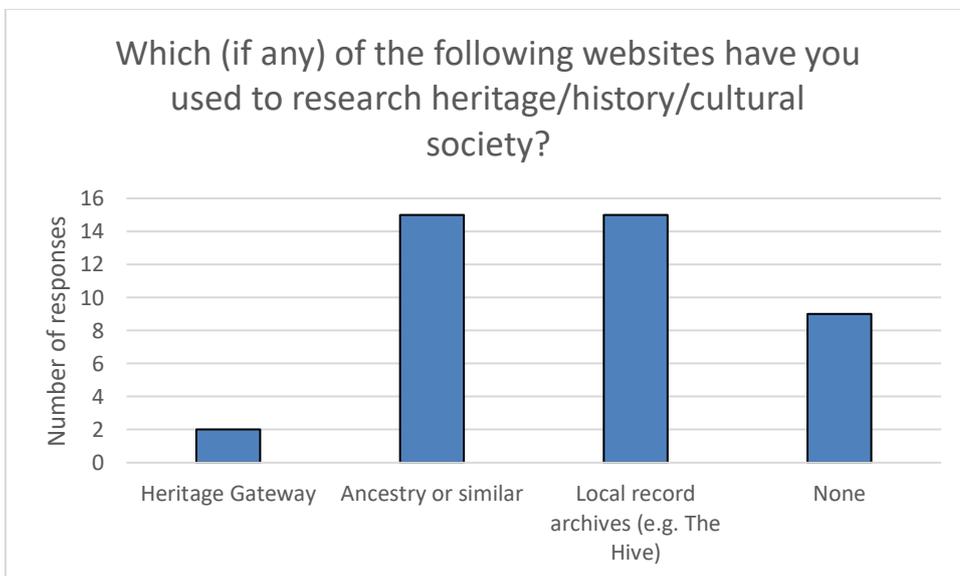


Figure 3: Previous use of heritage-related websites - KYPW survey

As can be seen from Figure 4, most of the respondents had used the KYPW platform 2-5 times, with the remainder being likely to have used it more often. Overall, the KYPW survey respondents were relatively experienced in terms of using online resources, were likely to already have an interest in heritage-related topics, and have used the KYPW platform often enough to form an opinion on it.

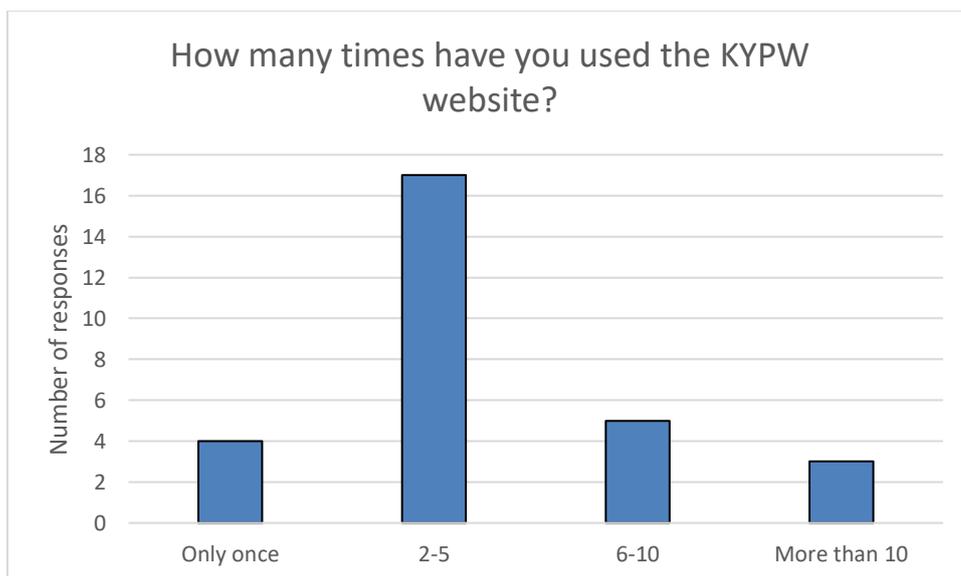


Figure 4: Number of times using the KYPW platform - KYPW survey

LSHW

Unfortunately, despite repeated efforts to promote the LSHW survey only four responses were received, with none coming from the separate version created by Herefordshire & Worcestershire Care and Health NHS Trust. Although it was known that a lot of work around LSHW was going on within the Trust, conditions of the ethical approval meant that the evaluation team was not able to directly contact NHS staff or patients. Additionally, as the LSHW survey was not able to be hosted on the platform itself – unlike KYPW – there was no way of directly reaching users or promoting it in places where it would definitely be seen. Instead, the evaluation team was reliant on more general methods for promoting the survey. Some of the difficulties around this approach were captured in a blog post about this evaluation and similar projects⁷.

The four respondents comprised two men and two women who were all White. Three of the respondents were aged 55-64 while the fourth was 85 or over.

As with KYPW, the LSHW survey respondents all had a good level of experience using the internet, saying that they used it daily for a variety of reasons (Figure 5).

⁷ <https://adsdementiablog.wordpress.com/2021/10/28/reaching-the-right-people/>

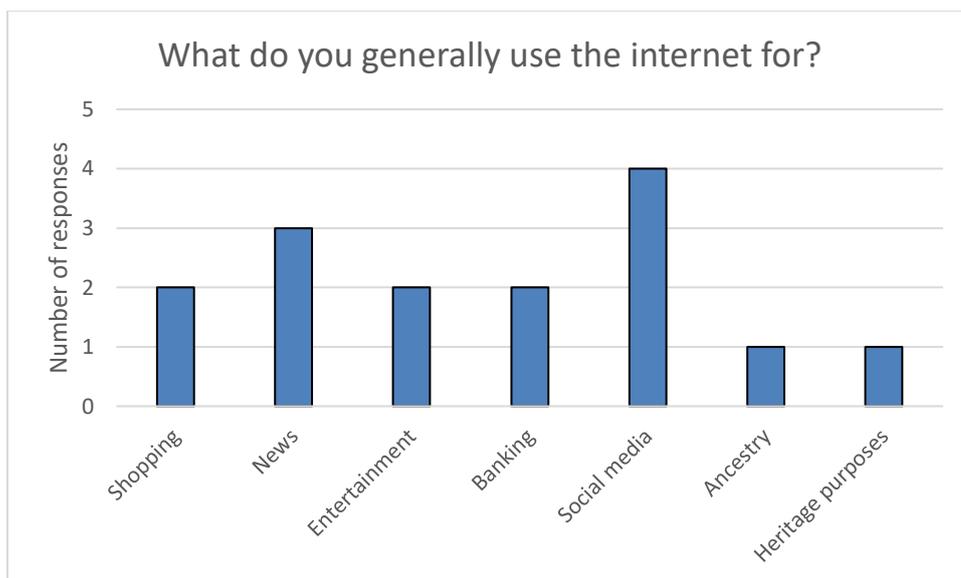


Figure 5: Reasons for using the internet - LSHW survey

None of the respondents was a member of a heritage/history/cultural society or similar. While one respondent had only used the LSHW platform once, two had used it more than ten times. The fourth respondent did not provide information about their use of the platform.

In terms of the supplementary ‘anecdotal’ evidence from the platform’s own feedback survey, there were a further seven responses, but no demographic information was captured for them. While the numbers are not particularly big, they do suggest that being able to host the evaluation survey on the platform would have helped boost responses.

Use of the two platforms

Know Your Place Worcester

As of the end of January 2023 the KYPW website had been viewed 12,646 times. People viewing the website came from 46 different countries (Figure 6), with the top five being: UK (11,650 views); USA (425); Canada (85); Australia (79); and Ireland (61). This indicates that despite being a very localised resource, KYPW has a broader appeal reaching around the world.

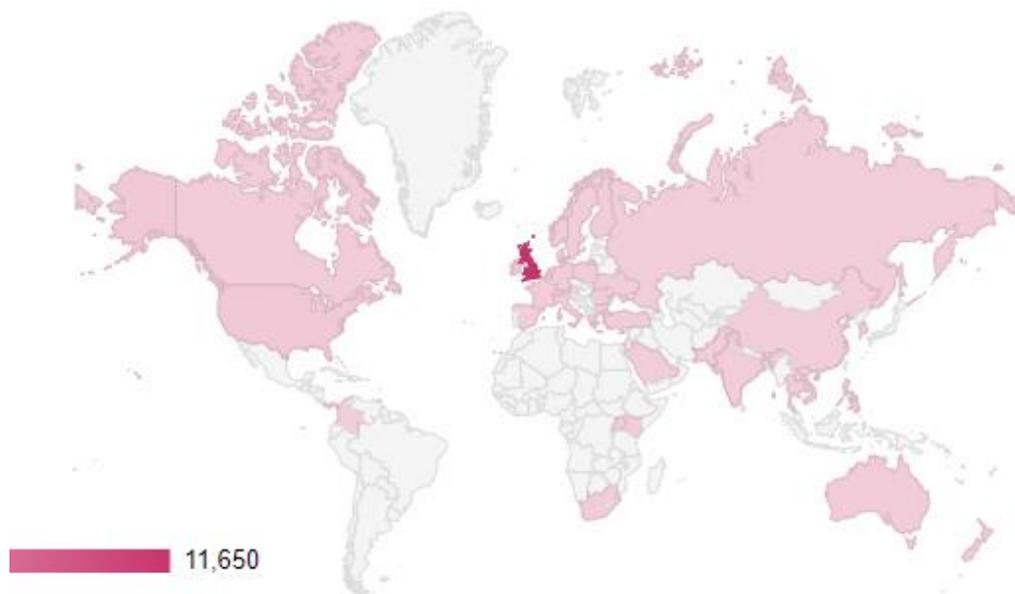


Figure 6: Map showing the countries where users were accessing the KYPW website

The top referral routes for getting to the KYPW website were: search engines (2068); social media (1862); the WLS website (71); the Worcester City Council website (45); and via local news (45). Other referrers of interest included:

- platformrail.org – a website initially connecting schools and children to railways, but which also identifies potential learning resources for schools to access. It is linking to KYPW as a resource to support learning in:
 - Geography Key Stage (KS) 3
 - History KS3
 - Humanities KS2
- communityarchives.org.uk – supporting and promoting community archives in the UK and Ireland
- visitworchester.co.uk – promoting Worcester as a tourist destination
- birminghamhistory.co.uk – Birmingham History Forum website
- historicengland.org.uk – Historic England website
- explorethepast.co.uk – exploring Worcestershire’s past
- whodoyouthinkyouaremagazine.com – the website for the Who do you think you are? magazine and television programme

Again, these indicate the wider appeal of the KYPW platform, particularly in terms of it being an educational resource. It is interesting to note that although a couple of the referral routes have a broader focus (i.e. City Council, tourism), the main promotion of KYPW appears to be through history or heritage avenues. The potential

for KYPW to support reminiscence activities or similar has not yet been picked up on by the care sector.

Usage of the KYPW website is shown in Figure 7, and indicates that after an initial period of very high interest usage has been fairly consistent with a few peaks that are assumed to relate to particular events or promotional activities. It is interesting to note that the vast majority of visitors appear to click through to the actual KYPW platform, suggesting a good conversion rate.

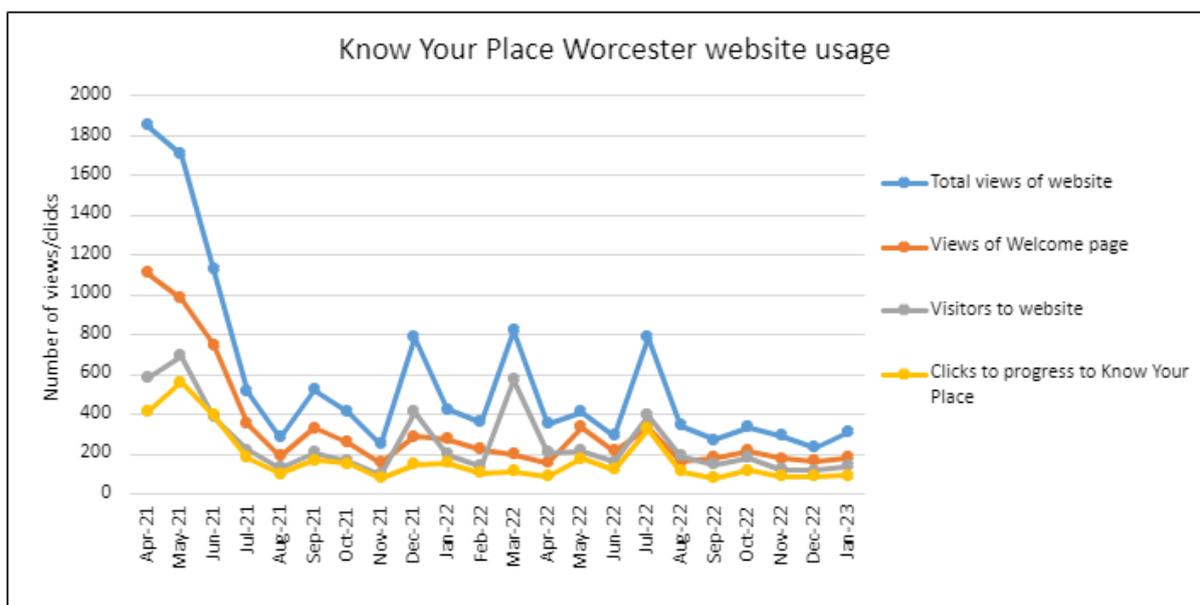


Figure 7: Usage of the Know Your Place Worcester website

Life Stories Herefordshire and Worcestershire

People register for the LSHW platform using their GP surgery, and of the 72 surgeries in the system users were associated with 46 of them (64%) by the end of February 2023. While this is fairly impressive, it should be noted that the Herefordshire GP surgeries were not actually added to the system for the first 6-12 months of it being available due to an oversight in the design process, and it is known that people from Herefordshire were using the platform by selecting ‘other’ when asked for their GP surgery. In reality therefore, users are associated with more than 64% of the available surgeries. An indication of GP surgery coverage is provided in Figure 8.

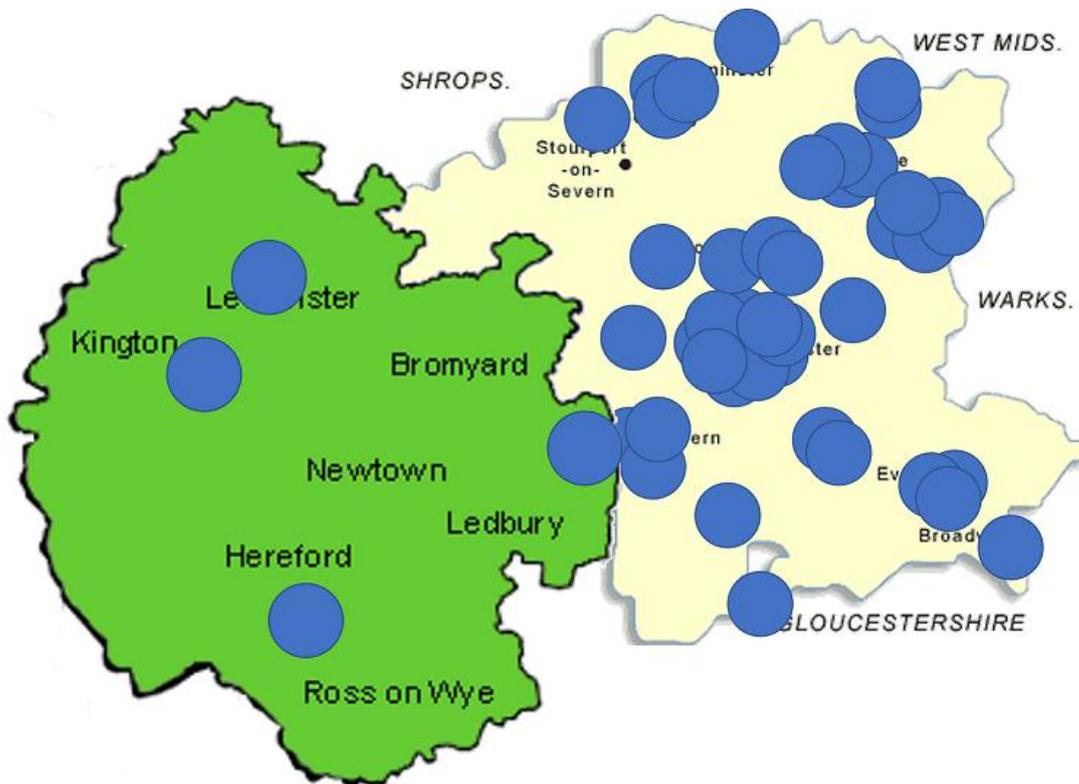


Figure 8: Map indicating GP surgeries that users were registered against in the LSHW platform

Based on information provided by the platform developers, nearly 200 Life Story books had been created by the end of February 2023, with a slow – and low – but steady number of books being added each month (Figure 9). Apart from the initial interest following the launch of the platform, uptake was quite slow. It had been anticipated and hoped that momentum around the LSHW platform would build organically and spread by word of mouth, but the low number of books indicates that this did not happen.

This suggests that more impetus and effort to promote the LSHW platform may be required to encourage uptake more widely. However, it should be noted that unlike KYPW where each website visit is captured, the LSHW numbers are based on when a Life Story book is created which is a one-off event. Numbers will therefore be lower by design. This could also have affected the ability to get people to complete the survey, as the relatively small numbers would have made it difficult to reach the right people when promoting the survey. It should also be noted that at least one other NHS Trust has already expressed an interest in adopting and using the LSHW platform within their own area.

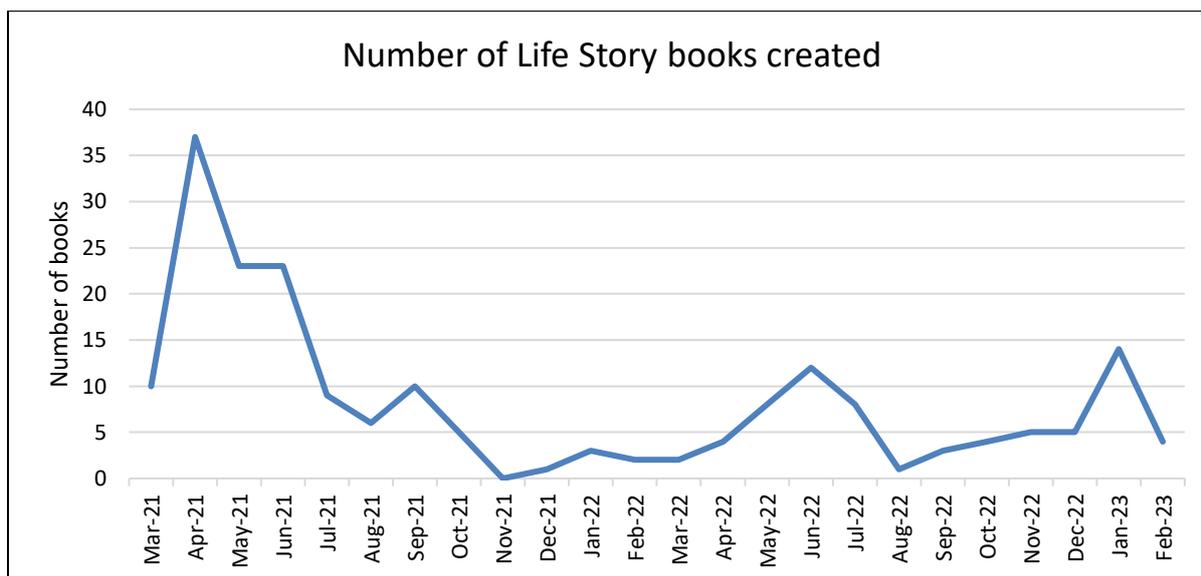


Figure 9: Life Story books created per month

Themes arising from the surveys, interviews and focus groups

Know Your Place Worcester

It would be easy to assume that KYPW is essentially an ‘end product’ in the sense that is a resource for people to use, but the evaluation identified that usage of KYPW extends beyond the obvious ‘outcome’ of a person looking at maps of their local area. Indeed, it was found to be useful and relevant at various stages in an overall, and ongoing, ‘process’ that engages people and communities at different levels. Four key themes arose from the analysis: creation; use & engagement; impact; and future potential.

Creation

Ongoing population of the ‘community layer’ within KYPW

It became evident that it is not just using the KYPW platform that is important to individuals, but also the experience of working on it. One example is helping to expand the platform by adding photos to the community layer through the ‘Changing Face of Worcester’ project which is digitising and describing several thousand images of Worcester [orientation, attention]. This is a social activity that museum volunteers enjoy being part of, and were able to carry on as a group during the Covid-19 lockdowns when social interactions were limited [body]. Most volunteers involved in the activity have a strong connection to Worcester, but it is not a prerequisite as the ability to look things up online or having an existing knowledge about cars, fashion and such like can be just as useful as local knowledge when trying to identify a date and location for a photograph. One volunteer who is relatively new to both Worcester and the group has an interest in local history and

genealogy, and has found it fascinating to learn more about Worcester as part of the process. Although it is not using KYPW in a 'traditional' way, the volunteers as a whole have found the group activity very interesting and fun, reporting that looking at the photos has triggered lots of memories for them [emotion].

While the team has been involved in helping to populate the platform by adding the photos to the community layer, they have also enjoyed using KYPW to assist them in this process. For example, many streets in Worcester have disappeared or changed, so being able to use the map overlay functionality has helped them to locate the photographs more accurately. The platform is therefore playing a key role in its own ongoing development cycle.

In addition to the 'Changing Face of Worcester' project, it is known that over 250 new items have been added to the community layer by more than 30 individuals. This includes a mix of people who are sharing one or two items, and others who are providing larger quantities of material. The majority of these items tend to be photographs, but they have also included web links, YouTube videos, audio recordings, and documents [culture/sociality].

Use and engagement

Through the analysis it was identified that there are multiple different ways in which people are use the KYPW platform.

Using the KYPW platform on your own

Of the 29 survey respondents, 28 said that they had used the KYPW platform on their own or independently, with 21 saying that this was the only way in which they had used the platform. Of these 21 people, most had used the platform to look at where they live, but some had also used it to look at new places and/or places that had come up in other conversations (Figure 10). This suggests that although an interest in your own area may initiate your use of KYPW, its wider applicability is likely to draw you back to use it again for other reasons [meaning/value].

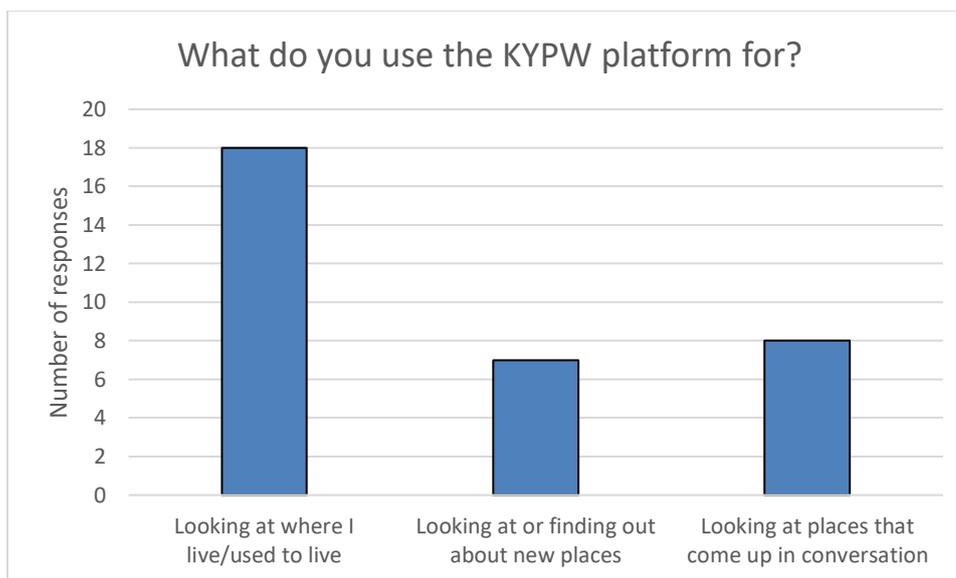


Figure 10: What people who have only used the KYPW on their own have used it for
Ad-hoc or unplanned sessions with individuals or small groups

KYPW is felt to be a good resource to use in an ad-hoc way to explore different topics ‘in the moment’ in response to comments that arise from wider discussions and conversations [body]. For example, a user can actively search for content that ties in with what people are talking about.

“Somebody mentioned something. I think it was a school or something. And I was able to say, ‘oh, let’s have a look and see if I can find something on the map”

“We looked at some maps to see how the block has had changed. We looked at some photos of the area.”

A key factor of this, especially when working with people living with dementia, is the ability to find relevant maps, photos or information quickly due to potentially shorter concentration spans.

Having KYPW available can also be useful as an additional resource when doing a wider session looking at history/geography/heritage or similar with a group. It was found that even when KYPW was not planned to be used, there were occasions where a topic arose during conversation and the platform could provide extra information to enhance the conversation or help resolve a query.

These interview findings were supported by the KYPW survey. Four of the survey respondents said that they had supported someone else to use the KYPW platform, with the other person likely to be a family member (three people) or a colleague. As well as looking at places where they live, during these supported sessions people were also looking at new places and places that came up in conversation, suggesting that KYPW was being used in a responsive way [body]. One respondent said that

they liked being able to access the information quickly and having it to hand rather than having to look it up separately. It was also commented that in one supported session the KYPW platform was being used as part of reminiscence activities with an older parent.

A further survey respondent indicated that they had used KYPW as part of a family group activity, while two respondents said that they had used it with support from someone else [body]. It was interesting to note that one person said that they had used the KYPW platform with support from someone else, on their own, and to provide support to someone else, indicating a learning process that has increased their confidence.

As part of a pre-planned session with a group

Using KYPW as part of a pre-planned session was considered a valuable option and opportunity, but its use did come with a few recommendations that potential facilitators should bear in mind. The importance of preparing the session in advance was highlighted, especially if that session is due to take place in a school, as you *“can’t just expect it to happen”*.

Firstly, any session needs to fit into the school’s curriculum and work plan, particularly around geography and history. It is therefore interesting to note that KYPW is already being promoted by the platformrail.org website as a relevant learning resource, indicating that KYPW should align with the curriculum [culture/sociality].

Secondly, a facilitator needs to explore the KYPW platform in advance to ensure that they understand how it works and how to navigate around it, as this should help the session to run more smoothly.

“I don't think you could just switch it on and go”

“I think you'd have to find your way around it”

Thirdly, it is vital to explore what content is already available on the platform and how it will be relevant to the group [meaning/value]. This is of particular importance if you are intending to focus on a specific area as there is no guarantee that there will be many photographs of that area.

These points will be of particular interest to one survey respondent who said that they were planning to use KYPW *“in the classroom as part of the local history aspect for the National Curriculum”*, in order to *“demonstrate changes over time to children”* [orientation, culture/sociality].

As part of sessions with a broader focus

In addition to sessions where the focus is on using KYPW to provide content, there have been training sessions around how to carry out oral history and reminiscence activities which have included KYPW as a useful platform that supports these activities. It had been recognised that not everyone can do reminiscence work or deliver sessions as you need the right skills, and you also need to know how to adapt those skills to work successfully with different groups. The aim was therefore to teach people the skills required to facilitate activities with different groups of people, but also how to use the KYPW platform (and LSHW) as part of those activities [behaviour].

These sessions were initially aimed at carers and care staff, but unfortunately there was a lack of interest. In response, the sessions shifted to focus on heritage staff and volunteers who are looking to engage with new audiences and older people. These sessions were oversubscribed so further ones are planned and there is also a waiting list. There has also been interest from outside of Worcestershire, suggesting potential to expand the sessions in the future. It was however interesting to note that there has been better engagement from history/heritage groups than the care sector.

Engagement

As seen from the way KYPW is being used, people are engaging with the platform and its contents in a variety of ways, including on an individual, one-to-one and group basis. Reasons for using KYPW mentioned in the survey included: family history, accessing historical information, researching the local area, looking at the photos (sometimes in general and sometimes for specific locations), seeing what areas used to look like, nostalgia and curiosity, to see if there were any *“gaps in information I may be able to fill”*, and to upload *“loads old of photos to share with others”* [orientation, meaning/value, culture/sociality]. The survey respondents had fully engaged with the KYPW platform as they had used a variety of the features within it (Figure 11). The survey and interview findings combined indicate that people are engaging in different roles such as creators, consumers and facilitators, illustrating how flexible KYPW is.

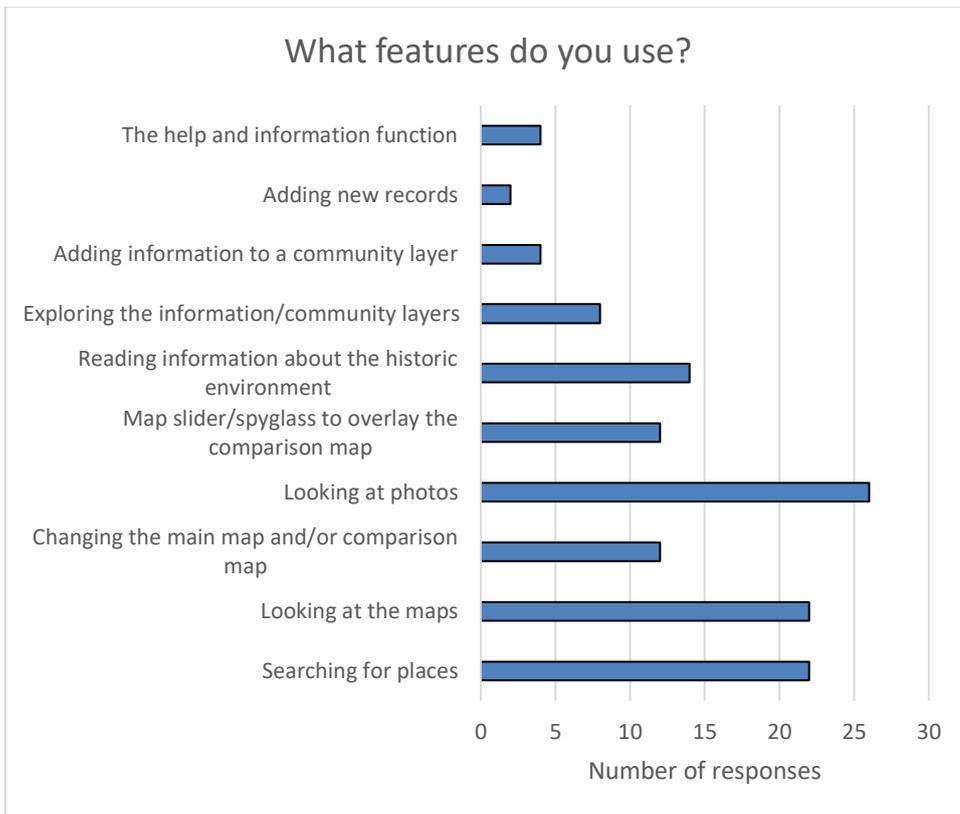


Figure 11: Features used within the KYPW platform

Having engaged with the different KYPW features, it was reassuring to see that the survey respondents were generally positive or neutral about how easy the KYPW platform is to use (Figure 12) and were largely ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with the platform (Figure 13). One survey respondent, unprompted, indicated that they had already “shared the website with family and friends who may also find it interesting”. Another said:

“I think this is a brilliant resource, and wish it had been available 10 years ago”

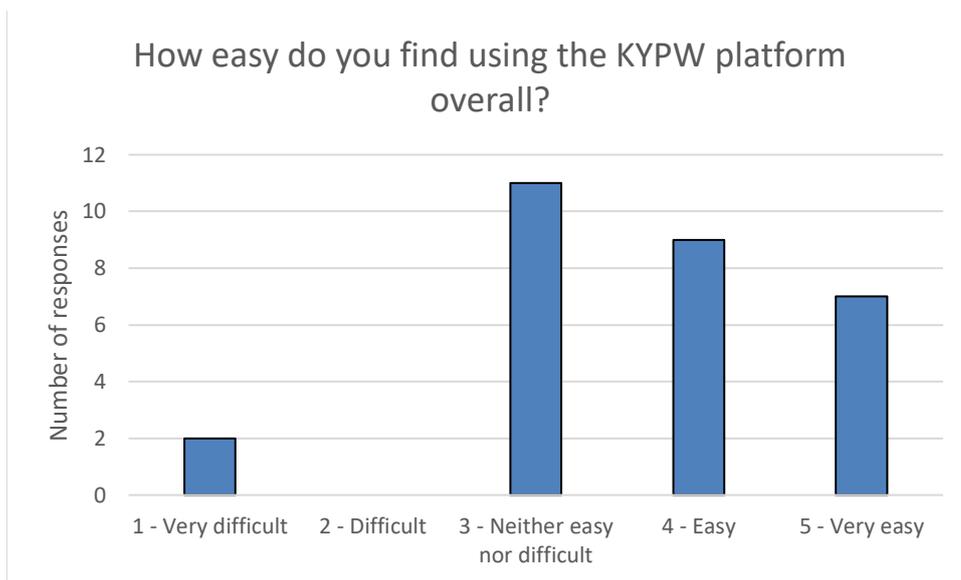


Figure 12: How easy the KYPW platform is to use

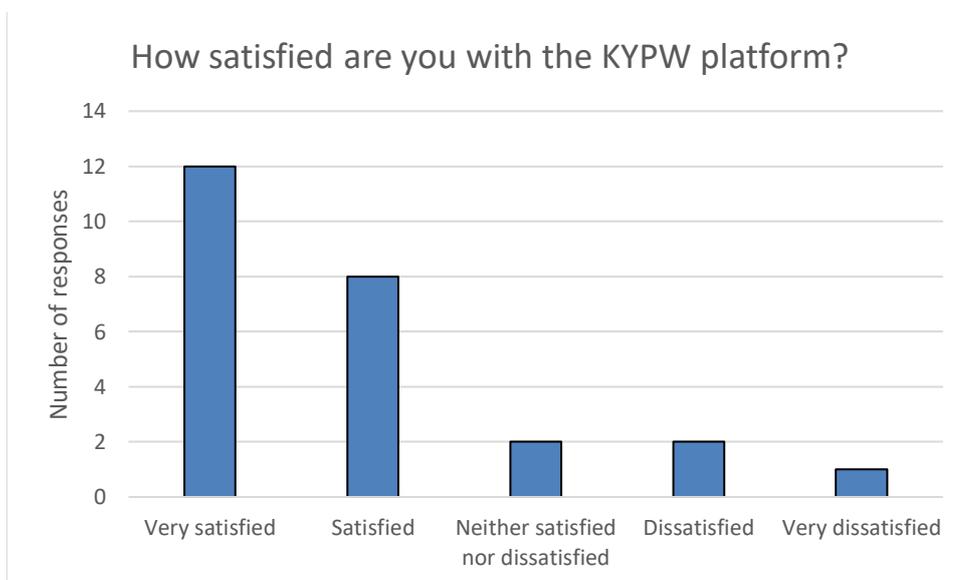


Figure 13: Levels of satisfaction with the KYPW platform

Things that people liked about KYPW included: the photos, layout, the ability to overlay maps, accessibility, user friendliness, ease of use, how open and generous it is [culture/sociality], and that it is fun as well as being informative.

Suggestions for improving the platform included: easier navigation of the maps, faster loading times for the maps, encouraging more people to contribute so there are more photos, and providing written instructions as videos do not suit everyone. While it was recognised that loading times were dependent on Wi-Fi connections and internet speeds, the amount of data contained within the maps could also have an impact.

Survey respondents also overwhelmingly found it ‘enjoyable’, ‘interesting’ and ‘informative’ to use the KYPW platform (Figure 14), although a few had slightly less positive experiences with one person saying that *“it seems to be too mysterious!”*. However, another respondent commented that they only said ‘frustrating’ and ‘annoying’ because they were hoping for more photos of the area they were interested in, but appreciated that it would take time for them to be added. This did not seem to put them off the platform as they were planning to *“check back for updates”*. One suggestion indicated that they would like having the ability to be *“notified when a new contribution has been made to the map”*.

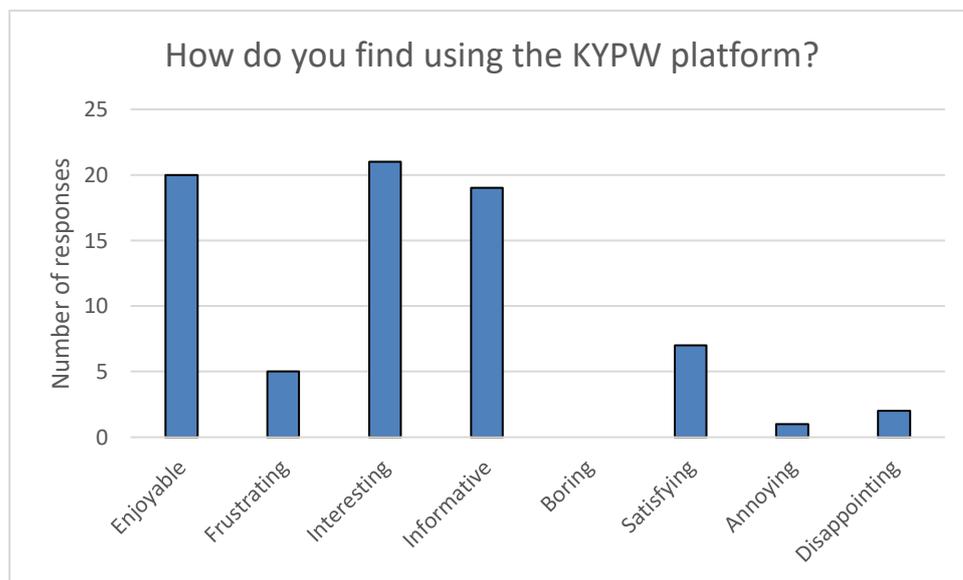


Figure 14: Experience of using the KYPW platform

While it useful having all of the KYPW content available online in one place, it was acknowledged that working online does not necessarily suit everyone. For example, when working with older people, people living with dementia, or in group situations people may be less keen or able to view things on a screen unless it is projected onto a big screen.

However, a solution was to print out photographs so that people had physical, tangible copies to hold, view and pass around [perception]. The physical copies of the photos were found to be *“very, very popular with everybody”* and *“they did stimulate a lot of conversations”*.

It was commented that the KYPW platform is very visual but relying on images may not suit people who have visual difficulties. The ability to add and find different types of media (e.g. audio clips, video clips) in the community layer was not well known, and it was felt that this should be made more obvious to increase awareness as this could enable more people to engage with the platform [perception].

Impact

Using the KYPW platform was found to have increased the survey respondents' knowledge of where they lived (Figure 15) [orientation].

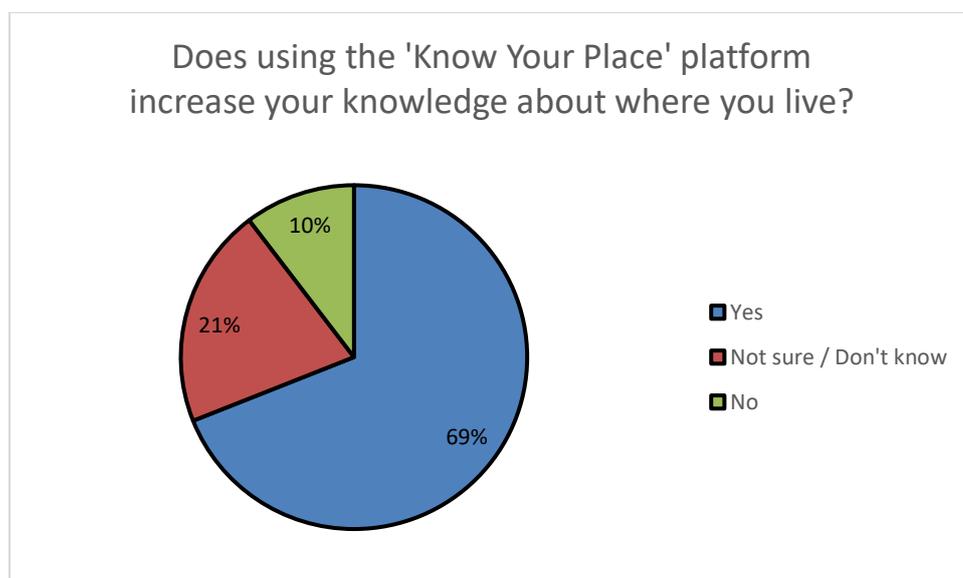


Figure 15: Increase in knowledge after using the KYPW platform

It is interesting that KYPW has already been picked up and promoted by visitworcester.co.uk as a tourist resource, as one of the survey respondents commented that using the KYPW platform “*makes Worcester much more of an interesting place to visit*”. Additionally, nine of the respondents reported that as a result of using KYPW they had been out and visited places [body]. If that reflects how it makes residents view the city and actively visit different locations, there is huge potential for making it an attractive destination for tourists [culture/sociality].

Initiating conversations

One of the main impacts reported from using the KYPW platform was that it helped to initiate conversations by providing a common topic of interest. Even people who are not necessarily from the Worcestershire area are able to join in conversations as the KYPW content provides a visible cue for them to respond to [attention].

These conversations also took place in different ways [emotion]:

“it started conversations between the carers and the people that they were with. It also started conversations between different carers”

“[he] started talking about something and the room went silent and everybody listened to him”

In one session where KYPW content was being used there were residents from two different care homes, but this did not appear to restrict engagement:

“it started conversations across, between the, the different people who had never met before.”

In some cases conversations involved the whole group but breakaway conversations between smaller groups were also seen.

Prompting reminiscence and memories

Overall, the KYPW maps and photos were found to trigger a lot of memories, not just for people affected by dementia but more widely [memory]. There was a recognition though that while the historic images are good, those that related to living memory tended to be more popular and generated more interest. For example, people were more interested in and found it easier to engage and connect with images from within their lifetime than a historical image of the same location [spirituality].

This could potentially help to prioritise new content being added, as it suggests that for many people photos from the 1950's and 60's could be more relevant than those from the 1920's. If KYPW wishes to build on its role as an educational resource, it could also suggest that work to include more recent images should be a priority.

Sessions tended to work better with people who were local to the Worcester area as the KYPW content tends to be focused on the city and people were able to recognise a lot of the places featured [memory]. However, even when people were from further afield, for example growing up elsewhere and moving to Worcester later in life, they were still able to join in with conversations. While the level of engagement may have been slightly lower due to being less familiar with Worcester, the images provided visual cues that they could link back to memories of their own area and could relate to the memories being shared by others [orientation].

Forming connections

Using the KYPW platform also promoted opportunities for new connections to be made. For example, during sessions with school pupils it was seen that being able to compare the old and new maps was impactful. The sessions helped the students to connect to their local area and learn a lot about it, as they could see how the photos and older maps related to the modern landscape that they were familiar with [orientation, meaning/value]. It was noted that teachers tended not to be present during the sessions which was felt to be disappointing as they were not able to see how to incorporate KYPW into their lessons or how students were engaging with it.

Connections were also formed between different groups, such as those living in different care homes who participated in joint sessions. Intergenerational connections were initiated during sessions where students worked with older people in the community [culture/sociality]. It should be noted that these sessions also

included the LSHW platform, with students being encouraged to ask older people about their lives, so this impact applies to both platforms.

The survey also reiterated the ability of KYPW to help form connections, as it was commented that the platform is “*bridging between community and professional*”, and the fact that the community layer is growing “*gives a good sense of community from the individual contributions*” [culture/sociality]. Unfortunately this was not necessarily reflected in the quantitative responses relating to feeling more connected to the community (Figure 16) and feeling more socially connected (Figure 17) with fewer than 50% of respondents reporting that they felt more connected. However, it is positive that the ‘yes’ responses outnumbered the ‘no’ responses in both cases. Additionally, three survey respondents said that they had contacted someone as a result of using KYPW [behaviour].

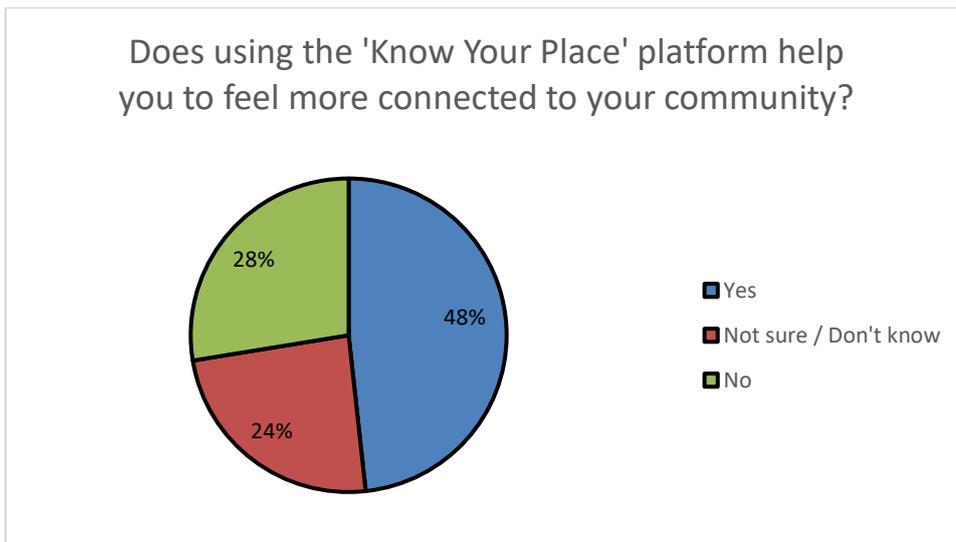


Figure 16: Connection to the community after using the KYPW platform

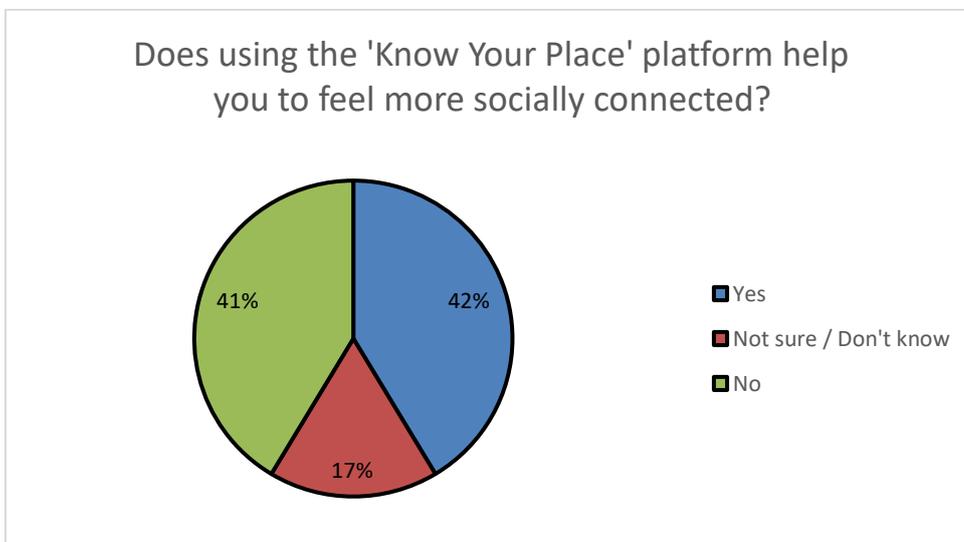


Figure 17: Social connection after using the KYPW platform

Future potential

Expanding on existing audiences as consumers and creators

To date, the majority of engagement with KYPW appears to have come from the history/heritage and education sectors. It may therefore be worth exploring avenues to promote the benefits of the platform to the care sector. However, it should be acknowledged that this may already be happening but has not been captured by the evaluation. It was also suggested in the survey that it could be useful to explore its relevance to tourism, and potentially include links and images for events within the platform. More generally, one survey respondent suggested that:

“promoting more on social media could help expand [KYPW] further with more contributions [for the community layer]”

KYPW is a useful resource for heritage groups in various ways. Such groups are often looking for ways to engage different audiences, and feedback from the interviews indicate that heritage professionals can see huge potential for using KYPW as a core element when facilitating sessions with groups of people affected by dementia. Additionally, heritage groups are being encouraged to improve their digital content, so being able to upload their own photos and information to an existing platform is essentially a quick win for them. One survey respondent requested *“more historic facts about the buildings”*, while another made a rather specific request to add *“Walter Ritchie’s diagrams from the 1946 County Town... and other plans and schemes not realised”*. These indicate that there is an appetite for increasing and expanding the heritage aspect of the platform. Raising awareness of these different ways of using the KYPW platform should therefore be encouraged as a means of promoting KYPW within the heritage sector.

While KYPW has already been used to some extent with schools and is included on the platformrail.org website, there is untapped potential for promoting KYPW as an educational resource. Such work could also be of benefit to the ongoing development of the platform itself. For example, if schools are encouraged to undertake projects using KYPW to help explore the history of their local area, they could in turn upload some of their own information to the platform’s community layer and expand the content available to other users. Indeed, one of the survey respondents supported this idea by saying that working with schools could help to increase the number of ‘points of interest’ within the platform.

Taking this a step further, one survey respondent had suggestions for additional community layers. They proposed:

“commissioning additional layers to do with race or gender or social concern”

“commissioning new/alternative layers by artists, poets, geographers, etc.”

Exploring different versions

Although KYPW focuses on Worcester City, there has already been interest in expanding the platform to cover a wider area, or even creating separate versions for different locations. One survey respondent indicated that KYPW should be expanded to cover the whole county, another hoped that the historical maps could “*cover the Warndon area up to the motorway*”, while a third person requested Powick. In particular, it was felt that covering Droitwich Spa would be useful. One interview participant had previously worked with an A-level geography group in Droitwich whose curriculum focused on looking at the local area and what people thought about it, and having the maps and content for that location would have enhanced the sessions and linked in with the work the students were doing.

Similarly, people living and working in Herefordshire who had explored KYPW could see the potential of having a similar platform covering their own county, with history groups and museums already having lots of photos and possible content to help populate it.

Life Stories Herefordshire and Worcestershire

As with KYPW, the evaluation found that LSHW was more than just an ‘end product’ where people upload their life stories. Rather than being part of the ‘process’, the life story element of the platform is more of a bookend as it provides a prompt or stimulus to initiate life story conversations, then a repository to record those stories. The platform itself may not necessarily be used as part of the conversations, but the Life Story Packs can be as they can help to trigger memories or respond to topics that may arise during those conversations. Four key themes arose from the analysis, three of which tied in with those for KYPW: introducing the platform; use & engagement; impact; and future potential.

Introducing the platform

Introducing the platform to individuals

It would be easy to assume that encouraging people to share their stories and use LSHW would be straightforward, but the evaluation found that the reality was more challenging. Some challenges related to practical issues, while others were more about perceptions of the life stories concept.

In terms of practicalities, it was reported that even when people were interested in LSHW the process of creating an account was off-putting [behaviour]. Some people do not necessarily have an email address to be able to register for themselves, so would need someone else to do it on their behalf. One facilitator attempted to overcome this by using their own email address, but this was not ideal. Apart from potential data security issues, they found that they were only able to create five

separate life books with one email address. This could also be a problem for organisations such as care homes who may need to create life books on behalf of their residents who may not have individual email addresses. Therefore, before attempting to start life story conversations people should think through the logistics to ensure that this is not a stumbling block.

Another aspect of the registration process which was found to put people off was the need to enter your GP surgery. Initially, there were no options for Herefordshire, which made some people feel a bit left out. Additionally, being asked for your GP surgery changed how some people viewed conversations about life stories. As well as making it feel more 'official', it was reported that people worried that a facilitator would pass on their information to the GP which could impact on what they were willing to say [behaviour].

Another practicality was where people tried to introduce, and use, the LSHW platform. It was the intention that people visiting the CAMBUS would be encouraged and supported to complete a life story, but in practice this did not really work well as there was limited space available and a lack of privacy. Again, this could affect what people were willing to have conversations about, as the setting was not really conducive to spending the necessary period of time talking about relevant topics [body, behaviour].

Perceptions of life stories can also influence a person's willingness to engage with such activities, as they can often be linked to dementia. Indeed, when working with people living with dementia there was found to be a need to change how life story work was approached. It was mentioned that some people with dementia cannot see why they need to capture their life stories, especially if they are relatively newly-diagnosed, and tend to wait until they are either at imminent risk of losing their memories or have already started to do so. For some people, there can also be a feeling that starting to write down your life story is an admission that you are on a downward path, which can be negative or scary for them [emotion].

To address this, different approaches were tried when engaging people with the LSHW platform. While still focusing on the care angle, one option was to encourage people to consider what might happen if they were cared for by someone who did not know them, and how knowing a person's life story could improve this. Other options considered a broader 'social relevance' angle by ignoring a person's dementia diagnosis and getting them thinking about having interesting stories and the heritage and cultural aspect of capturing different perspectives on everyday life [culture/sociality]. These can help to provide a more balanced, and even positive, view of life stories as it can be easy to overdo the importance of capturing information before it is forgotten, rather than the wider range of benefits that LSHW offers.

It was noted that it can be easier to introduce LSHW to individuals who are already in a care or support setting. This suggests that if someone is in a situation where they have already lost some level of independence or are relying on others, they may be more willing to share their story, or can see the benefits of doing so, than someone who is still living at home and enjoying an independent life.

A person's motivation for starting a life story can also play an important part, as ideally needs to come from the individual. On occasions where it was felt to be a carer or family member 'making' a person do their life story, it has not worked as well. When working with individuals it is also important to judge each conversation as some people will just not be that interested in talking about their life story [behaviour].

Essentially, when introducing the LSHW platform, and indeed life stories more generally, it is all about how you 'frame' it and adapt it on an individual basis.

Introducing the platform to groups to take forward

Introducing the LSHW platform in a group situation was found to require a slightly different approach, as it can be difficult to try and complete life stories with multiple individuals. In such situations, the emphasis can be more about introducing the concepts and ideas around life stories to generate interest, and promoting LSHW as a means of capturing information, rather than actually using the LSHW platform in practice. Unless a facilitator is able to work with a group on multiple occasions and focus on a different individual each time, the preferred approach is to get the life story process started for others to continue.

For example, it can be useful to work with local groups who can take the work forward, or direct people to appropriate support such as Age UK Digital Inclusion Champions who can help people with the technology aspect and spend time showing people how to use the platform. Groups who already have an interest in history or heritage, such as a local history society, are more likely to see the relevance of life stories, so introducing the LSHW platform in those situations can focus more on how to use the platform than the life story aspect [attention].

As with introducing LSHW to individuals, when working with groups it is important to use a tailored approach that focuses on their interests and needs, as well as the capacity of the facilitator to take work forwards.

To assist with introducing the platform, it was suggested that having a small flyer or card with key information, including how to access the LSHW platform, would be useful. It could be handed out to groups to encourage use when a facilitator is no longer involved, and also distributed at different events.

Use and engagement

Using the LSHW platform on your own

Although not a big sample, it was seen that three of the four survey respondents had used the LSHW platform on their own and without help from others. These respondents found the platform easy to use, 'interesting', 'informative', 'enjoyable' and 'satisfying', although one respondent did say that it was also a bit 'frustrating'. From the anecdotal responses, six of the seven respondents indicated that they found the LSHW platform 'very easy' or 'easy' to access and use. One person commented "*I found it easy to write about myself and did not struggle for inspiration because of the many prompts and existing page titles*". The seventh respondent said it was very difficult as they were not clear where they needed to log in.

One-to-one with individuals

While not without a few challenges, some of the participants had successfully used the LSHW platform to create a life story as part of a one-to-one activity. Additionally, two of the survey respondents had provided support to enable someone else to use the platform, with the other person being a parent. One of the anecdotal responses commented that it was "*Easy to navigate and use alongside those living with dementia*".

One of the main challenges arose when trying to use it in an ad-hoc manner, especially when the facilitator had no prior contact with or knowledge of the individual. It was found that the facilitator could spend 15-20 minutes explaining what the LSHW platform is and how to use it, but people would not really get it. In such cases, it was better to use a different approach and just sit with people and have a conversation with them. They could then prompt people to talk about different topics and take notes about what they were saying, then use those notes as the basis for creating a life story for them in slower time.

As mentioned previously, the CAMBUS was not an ideal place to try to carry out life story work, but as part of their outreach work they were able to go into care settings which were more comfortable, where they were able to work with people on a one-to-one basis [body]. While these sessions worked well, it was noted that staff would rarely sit in on the sessions and so were unaware of the LSHW platform or how they could use it. They did not necessarily understand how it worked and felt that residents would generally not be able to use it on their own, without recognising that they could support residents and use the platform with them. While some care staff saw it as an extra activity or additional work, others were positive about the platform and would appreciate some training to feel comfortable using it with residents.

There was an overall feeling that life story work would work well in care settings, particularly in those where there is more scope for flexibility in terms of being able to sit and talk to people rather than having a fixed schedule of activities. In care settings, staff would also already have an established relationship with residents, which should make it easier to initiate life story work as a 'new' facilitator would probably have to spend time establishing a rapport and building trust before being able to elicit any stories [behaviour]. However, although existing relationships should be helpful, it was acknowledged that it can be tricky to start conversations around life story when faced with a blank page. Having some prompts could be useful, but the facilitator would need to have the skills to tailor these on an individual basis.

In a group setting

Although potentially tricky to use in terms of recording multiple life stories, the LSHW platform was found to be a useful resource in a group setting, albeit in a slightly different way. During a session on life stories where there were different discussions taking place, it was recognised that one person in the group lived in the same area that 'the face of the life story project' had talked about in one of their short promotional videos. Although links to the videos are not on the LSHW platform the facilitator was aware of them and so could link them into their session [meaning/value, orientation]:

"that was that was sort of his area. He talked a lot about that. So I was able then to say 'Ohh actually I've got a video' and and yeah, we watched that."

"to be able to watch someone else's story, [...] the YouTube clip that, that was really good. That's nice"

Where group sessions had taken place in care homes or settings where care staff were present, it was observed that:

"they liked the idea of the, the platform and, and the resources that they could use"

Consequently, the facilitator has sent details of LSHW to the care home activity coordinators to encourage them to use it with the groups in the future.

Engagement

Following on from previous comments, it was found that there was more engagement in life story work when used with groups in care homes or support settings, potentially because they could appreciate the importance of it more than people who were still living independently at home [spirituality].

One interesting point that was observed in Herefordshire – where there are strong links with the armed forces – is that some people are less willing or able to engage

with the LSHW platform or life story more generally as they have signed the Official Secrets Act. Recounting stories from their past goes against their previous training. While this was an unforeseen problem when trying to engage people in life story work and promoting the LSHW platform, it is an important factor that anyone looking to implement LSHW in Herefordshire would need to bear in mind.

People were liked different aspects of the LSHW platform as it enabled them to engage with it in a variety of ways. For example, it was appreciated that you could keep coming back to your life story book and add little pieces at a time, rather than having to do it all in one go. This made it quite flexible as people could pop back and add bits as they thought of them [behaviour].

The ability to print the life story book was good, especially as when you talk to people about using the LSHW platform to create a life story 'book' they tend to have an expectation that there will be a physical copy for them to hold and look through at the end of it. This is particularly useful for people who may be less comfortable using technology, as they can be supported to create their life story book – or someone else can create it on their behalf online – but they can have a tangible output [perception].

The Life Story Packs were also felt to be useful as they can also be printed to provide images that can be passed around, but having more topics or themes would be beneficial. This was particularly the case when there were no Packs available relating to Herefordshire until fairly recently.

The ability to use different media was also a beneficial, if not widely known, way of engaging with the LSHW platform. One particular example relates to a group in a semi-independent living scheme who have been working on their life stories. They initially began by object handling and have been capturing short audio recordings, and as their work continues the LSHW platform will be introduced with the recordings and additional information being uploaded in due course to create a final online life story book [perception]. This gradual approach appears to be working well as starting straight with the technology aspect and doing it all online would probably have been too much, and potentially overwhelming, for the group involved. Getting their information into the LSHW platform is still the end goal, but the ability to use different media to capture that information as part of a longer process has been beneficial.

The sharing function within LSHW has broadened engagement as it enables relatives in different locations to still be involved in life stories, but it can be a challenge as it depends on the user knowing the relevant information or email address. It was also commented that it can be difficult to have conversations about what permissions to

give people when setting up the sharing, as users may not necessarily understand some of the more technical aspects.

The above points were supported by the LSHW findings, which saw that respondents had used a variety of the features within the platform (Figure 18) and one respondent had also added audio clips to their life story.

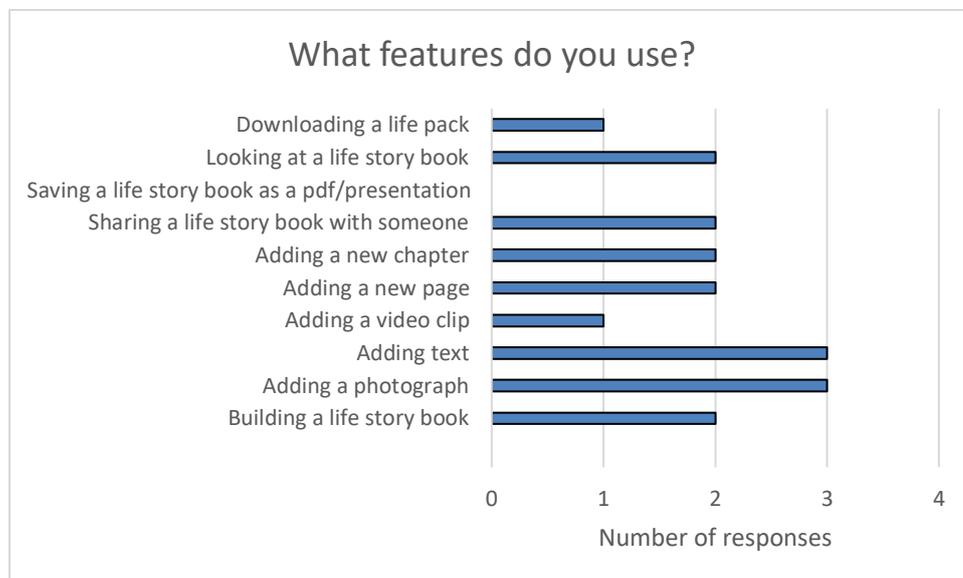


Figure 18: Features used within the LSHW platform

Impact

As mentioned previously, the LSHW can help to initiate conversations and prompt people to start thinking about life stories, with the online life story book being the end goal. Depending on the situation, it can take time to make someone feel comfortable before they start opening up and sharing their stories, but being part of those conversations can be a cathartic process [emotion]. Having someone take the time and interest in your life story through these conversations also shows people that they matter, and they are valued by others. For some people, it may be the first time that they have ever been asked about different aspects of their lives [meaning/value]. The LSHW also provides the opportunity for people to capture their own stories in their own words, which can be powerful [spirituality].

Life story conversations have been found to generate a lot of stories which help carers – both professional carers and family carers – learn more about the individuals they are supporting. Indeed, two survey respondents said *“I talked to dad and found out stories he hadn't shared”* and *“I've had stories from dad I didn't know”*, with one also reflecting *“I'd have liked one with mum. It's an important resource”*. Two survey respondents also indicated that after sharing their life story book with someone else it has prompted conversations. They can also prompt wider

conversations which may be broader than life stories, but still provide valuable information for all involved.

People who have used the LSHW platform said that it was useful in terms of *“reminding me of my young days”* [memory] and helping them to *“see what changed since my young days”* [orientation]. It was also noted that beyond a personal impact, the platform also enabled people to be part of something bigger as you can *“see what others think about Worc[ester]”* [culture/sociality]. Of the three survey respondents who answered the specific questions, two felt that using the LSHW platform had helped to increase knowledge about where they live and helped them to feel more socially connected, while only one felt that it had helped them to feel more connected to their community. One respondent had visited other websites after using LSHW while another had visited places, presumably prompted by the reminiscence activities that had taken place [behaviour].

An additional impact relating to LSHW comes from the life story work taking place in semi-independent living scheme. While sessions are held once a week, one person has found the process of creating their life story so enjoyable and engaging that they are doing extra writing of their own accord outside of the sessions.

Future potential

Practical improvements

In terms of the future, there were a couple of practical elements that may be worth investigating to help improve the user experience. There was mention of issues uploading photographs, with no obvious reason for this, i.e. file size not excessive, stable internet connection. While it is difficult to know how to address this without further information, and difficult to rule out user error, it is recognised that this could be off-putting for users and could potentially discourage facilitators from using this functionality when supporting others [behaviour]. Having a simple feedback loop within the LSHW platform could help to identify issues and ultimately improve the user experience.

When people had successfully used photos, it was suggested that being able to adjust layout would be appreciated, for example *“allow for scrapbook like arrangements of photos [and text]”*. Being able to add more photos was also mentioned.

One survey respondent commented that they would like something to indicate progress, but it is recognised that this could be difficult to implement as different life story books could be different lengths depending on individual preferences.

It was also reported that there is a limit of ten sections within a life story book, but it was unclear if this referred to ten chapters per book or ten pages per chapter. While this might be acceptable if a person is creating their own book, it raised difficulties for people supporting others or creating a book on their behalf. They were faced with the issue of having to edit bits out, and without further feedback from the individual they were left to decide which were the most important and relevant bits to keep. Making people aware of any limitations before they begin creating a life story book could help to manage expectations and make the process easier.

More awareness of different features

To help encourage more people to use the LSHW platform it was reported that it would be useful to have completed examples available on there to help people see what a life story book could look like. A group facilitator has found that creating their own life story book has been beneficial as it not only gave them experience of using the platform but provided them with something that they can show to others to help them understand what they are talking about.

It was also mentioned that it would be good to have quotes on the website from other people to say what they got out of using the LSHW platform. Including links to the existing short videos created with the 'face of life stories' would help people to engage more with the platform.

While there is a link to a demo video on using the LSHW platform and a link to a help guide, these are right at the bottom of the website and easy to miss. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that it was mentioned that having a short training video that shows people how to use the platform would be useful. Making these resources more obvious by having them higher up the page and closer to the section which encourages you to create your life story could be beneficial, as could creating a new short video that goes through the key elements of LSHW and making that prominent on the website.

Another element of the LSHW platform that could benefit from more awareness is the ability to use, and upload, different types of media such as audio and video files. While videos are mentioned in the life story descriptions, it is easy to view the website and assume that it primarily focused on photos and images. For some people different media options could be a big selling point, but at present it is not widely known about. One survey respondent who did know about using different media commented that *"I'd like to put larger audio clips into books"*.

Expanding the range of Life Story Packs

There was recognition that although things have improved recently, the range of Life Story Packs would benefit from being expanded (*"you don't have many"*),

particularly in terms of those relating to Herefordshire as currently “*they aren't areas of interest for us*”. One idea was to have a Life Story Pack around the armed forces as this is an important element of Herefordshire life. It was also suggested that there are a lot of existing heritage resources that could easily tie in with Life Story Packs, such as photo collections held by museums. This could be a useful angle to explore as a ‘quick win’, both in terms of creating new Life Story Packs and providing heritage organisations with an opportunity to improve their digital content as discussed previously regarding KYPW.

Promotional angles

The evaluation has heard how the LSHW platform is gaining traction in terms of being used in care settings, as part of outreach work, within heritage and museum offerings, and with schools. It is therefore suggested that efforts to promote LSHW to these groups by identifying different angles specific to each group could help to encourage engagement. For example, it could be the Life Story Packs angle that may be of most interest to heritage groups and museums.

Similarly, with schools it could be a case of identifying how LSHW complements and supports the curriculum. This could result in additional Life Story Packs or could involve using the LSHW platform itself. As part of the evaluation, it was seen that some schools already carry out work to encourage students to ‘interview’ grandparents and report on what they find out. This is essentially life story work, so it seems like an obvious step to use the LSHW platform as a means of providing a structure for an interview and capturing the information, while also promoting technology skills by it being online and offering the opportunity to use different types of media.

Summary of evaluation findings

The following summarises the findings from the evaluation under the ten dimensions that provided the overarching framework for the qualitative data.

Behaviour (how you act): using the platforms needs engagement from individuals as they have to feel comfortable and willing to share their stories and join in conversations. While some people use the platforms on their own, facilitators can often be key to engagement by tailoring activities to meet the needs and interests of different groups. They can also influence how the platforms are introduced and viewed by others, and reduce the impact of potential obstacles that might otherwise discourage people from engage (e.g. registration process, IT skills). It has been seen that people are taking action as a result of using the platforms, such as visiting places, contacting others and continuing activities outside of group sessions, so the platforms are influencing behaviour.

Body (physical presence in a place, belonging): the platforms are being used by individuals, but they have also been used successfully within group activities. These can physically bring people together in the same location, or can unite people online around a common purpose. While the platforms focus on heritage and reminiscence activities, they can also support people 'in the moment' and respond to where they are now, such as looking at maps and images in response to things that come up in conversation. Physical presence is also impacted with people visiting places as a result of using KYPW.

Emotion (how you feel): being part of conversations and social activities revolving around the platforms is an enjoyable experience for most people, especially when you feel valued and see that people are taking an interest in what you have to say. While reminiscence and life story work are often associated with dementia, the heritage aspect and wider cultural perspective can help to reframe the importance of engaging with such activities, making them less scary for people with dementia as they are not seen as a reminder of potential memory loss.

Attention (points of focus): the platforms themselves provide a focal point for activities as well as the impetus to instigate conversation. They also provide ideas for the conversation topics through their content. The platforms are flexible enough to be used in different ways by different groups, with each having their own focus. For example, as a consumer (viewing and responding to the content, starting your own life story), creator (adding to the community layer, creating Life Story Packs), and facilitator (basing activities around the platforms). The platforms can also be the focus of teaching to help heritage professionals learn how to engage with different audiences.

Perception (engaging senses): at first glance online resources may seem to rely on visual content, but the two platforms engage a range of senses. Images and life story books can be printed, providing tangible, tactile resources; audio and video clips can be recorded and uploaded or linked to both platforms; sessions using the platforms lend themselves to object-handling activities, and can evoke memories of smells and tastes.

Memory (recognition of places): the maps, photos, Life Story Packs and additional information within the platforms themselves encourage reminiscence, helping to trigger memories as people identify with the content. KYPW works particularly well for people who are from or familiar with the Worcester area as they are more likely to know what the various images relate to. The wider conversations resulting from engagement with the platforms also prompt memories beyond the immediate topic, especially in group situations where people can bounce ideas off of each other.

Orientation (knowing how things link together or relate to each other): the KYPW maps in particular enable users of all ages to see and appreciate how areas evolve over time, with the photos enhancing the experience. People are also able to relate images and information, including those provided in the Life Story Packs, back to their own experiences even if they are not from the same area as they can make connections with similar places from their past. Additionally, by sharing life stories or being involved in conversations as part of the life story process can help carers learn more about individuals and understand how previous experiences can have an impact on present behaviour.

Spirituality (ideas, significance): while the platforms may provide initial content to prompt conversations, the conversations themselves are an opportunity for people to share their experiences and interpretations. In particular, the LSHW platform allows people to capture their stories in their own words, either in writing or as audio clips. Within KYPW it was interesting to see that images from living memory can have more significance than historical images, as people found them easier to engage with. The platforms are viewed as important and relevant resources to a range of sectors (e.g. care, heritage, education) as well as being useful at an individual or family level.

Meaning/value (linking back to what is important to you): by providing opportunities for conversation and giving people space to work on their life stories, the platforms are allowing people to be heard, share what is important to them as individuals, and see that they are valued by others. At a more practical level, the KYPW maps enable people to focus on areas that mean something to those involved, whether than is looking at where a family member used to live or the area around a school.

Culture/sociality (awareness of being part of something, social values): the platforms work well with group activities, and the conversations that take place help to show different perspectives that go beyond the individual. Using the platforms with schools can also help them see how they link with their local communities and wider society, especially if they involve intergenerational work. Even when the platforms are used by individuals, there are opportunities to be part of a bigger picture, such as sharing a life story, or uploading content to a KYPW community layer to help others. While both platforms are of interest at an individual level, they also have an important role to play within the wider social and cultural landscape.

Additionally, although engagement of people affected by dementia was limited to some extent, the evaluation indicates that the two platforms align with the dementia friendly community principles.

- **People** – the LSHW platform enables people to tell their life stories in their own words, so when working with people with dementia they would very much be at the heart of this process. Additionally, the contents of the two platforms make it possible to respond to things that come up in conversation and shape those conversations around the interests of the individuals.
- **Communities** – the flexibility of the platforms enable people with dementia to engage in a way that is appropriate and comfortable for them from both a physical and social perspective, whether that is on their own, one-to-one, or as part of a group. The media styles available can also support individuals and promote engagement in different ways according to personal preferences.
- **Organisations** – using the platforms to show heritage groups how to engage with different groups (such as people with dementia) in an appropriate, tailored way promotes the development of dementia friendly approaches and strategies. Additionally, rather than focusing on dementia and capturing life stories before memories are lost, the ability to frame activities around how they relate to heritage and social relevance can be a more considerate way to promote engagement.
- **Partnerships** – as seen previously, connections are already being formed between different groups and sectors, and interest in helping to create further content indicates a collective approach that will benefit everyone.

Conclusions and recommendations

This evaluation has identified that KYPW and LSHW are both flexible and versatile platforms that can be used in a variety of ways by and with different audiences. They are suitable for use by individuals, on a one-to-one basis and as part of larger groups, either as the main focus or as a supporting resource. The platforms support use in bitesize chunks when appropriate, acting as an ongoing resource that users can dip into at any point, or longer periods depending on the audience and user preferences, enabling them to be tailored to different situations. Users can also adapt their role when engaging with the platforms, acting as a creator, consumer or facilitator, as they are applicable at all stages of the overall engagement process rather than just being an end product.

The two platforms help to instigate and develop conversations and activities, promoting reminiscence and triggering memories. Consequently, people are given the opportunity to share their stories, and everyone is valued as an individual with their own experiences.

A 'sense of place' is greatest where both physical and social stimuli have been elicited, and the KYPW and LSHW platforms combine these two aspects as they encourage both physical and social engagement. Although they are both online platforms, they tend to be used in-person in group settings or at least on a one-to-one basis and can involve different forms of media that engage the senses through photos, maps, Life Story Packs, video clips, audio clips etc.

It was also found that people were able to engage with the heritage resources within the platforms, especially when they related to a person's local area or events from within living memory. Current use of the platforms indicates that they are important resources for use in schools as a means of encouraging children to learn more about their local area – and how their school relates to it – and how places have changed over time.

Sharing experiences and stories is generally an enjoyable activity, and having resources available with the platforms helps to provide a common topic of discussion that enables everyone to be involved. Additionally, people using the platform as 'creators' enjoyed being able to share their own knowledge for the benefit of others, contributing to their own sense of wellbeing.

The platforms, and the discussions and activities that take place around them, help people to learn about others which in turn can form and strengthen connections. They can also give people the opportunity to share stories that they may not have been asked about before. In some cases this can, for example, translate into having a

better understanding of an individual in order to improve the care provided to them, while in other cases it can help children engage with older generations. It was also found that using the two platforms was encouraging people to explore and connect with their communities, with some people reporting that they had visited places as a result of engaging with the platforms.

The KYPW and LSHW platforms are relevant and important not just for individuals but also for different sectors within the community such as care, education and heritage. They are particularly important for the heritage sector as the platforms offer opportunities to share digital resources with wider audiences and provide structured – but flexible – ways to engage with different audiences.

From a dementia perspective, the heritage aspect can be used to help promote the platforms in terms of their wider social and cultural relevance. This can make engagement a more positive experience as people can feel part of a bigger initiative beyond themselves, instead of focusing on the reminiscence angle and how they may relate to a person's potential memory loss. The platforms are also conducive with ad-hoc conversations which can support people with dementia 'in the moment' and put them at the heart of a conversation.

The evaluation also found that there was a lot of untapped potential relating to the KYPW and LSHW platforms which could broaden their use in the future. Suggestions for addressing this are provided in the following recommendations, along with ways to support and improve existing engagement.

Recommendations

Using the KYPW and LSHW platforms:

- Before using either platform with anyone, you should ensure that you know how to use it yourself to minimise any potential issues that could affect the wider experience (e.g. registration, availability of relevant resources)
- Before starting an activity, you should make sure that you are in an appropriate setting (considering privacy, comfort, connectivity etc.) and have time to dedicate to it that will enable you to build relationships and make people feel valued.
- Consider how you approach people and 'frame' the context in which you are planning to engage them with the platforms.
- Group activities need to have a skilled facilitator who can adapt the platforms to meet the needs of the group. They also need to be given time to prepare to make sure that the platforms and their resources match the activity and are relevant to the specific audience.
- Make users aware of any limitations with the platforms to help manage expectations, e.g. size of photos or audio files, number of pages/chapters.

Increase coverage, range and content:

- It should be seen whether it is possible to expand KYPW to cover the whole of Worcestershire, and if it can be replicated for Herefordshire as there appears to be interest in these areas.
- Explore options for additional KYPW community layers that cover wider aspects of society and culture.
- The number of Life Story Packs available within LSHW should be increased, especially those relevant to Herefordshire. One particular area of interest to consider is the Armed Forces.
- If there are projects looking at adding new content (e.g. Changing Face of Worcester), the initial focus should be on images and information relating to living memory rather than historical content.
- Engage different groups or organisations to help add new content, such as schools and heritage groups/museums adding to the community layer or developing Life Story Packs. This should not just focus on photos and images but should also include other information such as facts about buildings and places as there seems to be an appetite for this.

Promotion of the platforms:

- Efforts should be made to make people more aware of different aspects of the platforms such as:
 - The ability to add/upload and access different types of media content.
 - Opportunities to contribute to the content and help enhance what is already available.
 - The ability to share and print life story books, as well as Life Story Packs.
- Consider creating short video clips to show how to use the platforms, or making existing videos more obvious. Additionally, having quotes from users could help people to see the benefits that the platforms offer.
- For the LSHW platform, direct people to example life story books to help them understand what is possible.
- Consider creating small flyers or cards containing key information that can be left with groups to encourage use of the platforms outside of formalised sessions.
- Promotion of the platforms should be tailored to specific audiences and focus on elements that would be important to them. Particular focus should be paid to promoting the platforms as:
 - Education resources to support history, geography and humanities lessons, not just in terms of being used by students, but also how students could contribute content to the KYPW community layer

(especially modern day content to act as reference points or comparison with older images) and developing LSHW Life Story Packs.

- Resources that heritage groups/museums can use to improve their digital content provision, again through the community layer and Life Story Packs, or as tailored activities to engage with different audiences including people with dementia.
- Other avenues to explore could include how to promote the platforms specifically to the care sector and working out what additional content may make them more relevant to tourism (particularly the KYPW platform), such as having modern comparisons in the community layer.

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Appendix 1 – Literature review: Heritage and wellbeing interventions

Background

There has been sustained interest in making use of heritage to promote health and wellbeing for more than a decade. Internationally, the Council of Europe's (COE) Faro Convention Action Plan (COE, 2016) outlines cultural heritage as a resource that can be used to help improve the wellbeing of individuals, echoing the same body's Narmur declaration (COE, 2015) which states that heritage should contribute to people's wellbeing, and promote public wellbeing in general. In the UK one major catalyst has been the Health and Social Care Act 2012 (Department of Health, 2012), which sparked reforms towards more preventative, multi-agency approaches to health and social care delivery involving a broader range of sectors, institutions and organisations within society – including the heritage sector. However, even prior to this, the Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) Council (now abolished, with its functions today covered by Arts Council England and the National Archives) recognised in its 2010 Outcomes Framework that heritage organisations could play a significant role in contributing to adult health and wellbeing (MLA, 2010).

While broadly speaking the heritage sector may have always been concerned with improving people's quality of life through education and access to cultural history, today it is more proactive and inclusive in this task than ever: its remit has shifted from simply preserving, maintaining and presenting historical artefacts, archives and places, to delivering a range of schemes to promote community access to and involvement with them. Historic England now formally recognises its role in bringing communities together and supporting active participation with a range of benefits for people in the key goals of its 2021 strategy (Historic England, 2021). It aims to prioritise support for people with mental health needs, those who are lonely or socially isolated, disadvantaged younger people and *“older people, especially those who are coping with age-related challenges or reduction in their capacity to thrive.”* (Historic England, 2022). Historic England is also now proactive in exploring the use of heritage sites, activities and resources for social prescribing, though this is still a developing area (SQW, 2020). Furthermore, a report on Heritage, Health and Wellbeing by the Heritage Alliance – a coalition of 150 independent heritage organisations across the UK – noted a *“huge amount of work already going on”* regarding wellbeing among its member organisations and suggested *“wellbeing should be at the heart of the strategy of heritage organisations as we rebuild the sector after COVID-19”*. Among its conclusions were that heritage is well placed to

help individuals otherwise at risk of exclusion from mainstream society (Heritage Alliance, 2020).

This builds upon previous work. A 2014 report by Historic England (Fujiwara et al., 2014) estimated that the wellbeing value gained through engagements with cultural heritage were equivalent to £1,646 per person per year, and measures relating to the benefit of heritage to society have been included within the body's annual the Heritage Counts report since 2016 (for the most recent, see Historic England 2020). Age UK has also recognised that engagement with cultural activities (including heritage) makes a significant contribution to people's overall wellbeing when compared to other factors (Age UK, 2017) and other initiatives in the heritage sector have worked to include and support those who are vulnerable or often excluded, including people who live with dementia (Camic and Chatterjee, 2013; Chatterjee and Noble, 2013).

Heritage resources, whether in the form of venues, objects or other artefacts have been found to provide *"opportunities for positive social interactions, calming experiences, learning and acquisition of new skills, leading to increased self-esteem, sense of identity, inspiration and opportunities for meaning making, in addition to reduced social isolation and decreased anxiety."* (Thomson et al., 2018). There are multiple ways in which individuals can benefit from engagement with heritage, and multiple ways in which this can have a positive impact upon wellbeing. Wood (2007) and Silverman (2010) identified a range of possible benefits including: Fostering a sense of connection and belonging; building relationships; relaxation and sanctuary; stimulation and engagement with meaningful activities; using and improving skills and knowledge; fostering a sense of achievement; encouraging introspection and life review; and providing opportunities for support, health education and public health advocacy. Which of these is most prominent depends upon the type of activity or intervention undertaken, but all have been borne out to some degree by subsequent practice over the past decade. A review for Historic England identified six key areas in which heritage could help wellbeing: heritage as process (e.g. volunteering); heritage as participation (e.g. visiting); heritage as mechanism (e.g. sharing); heritage as healing (e.g. therapy); heritage as place (e.g. belonging); and heritage as environment (e.g. experiencing) (Reilly et al., 2018; Monckton and Reilly, 2019).

With regards to belonging, prior work by English Heritage/Historic England suggests engagement with the past through heritage assets can create a sense of pride, place and community (English Heritage, 2014; Graham, Mason and Newman, 2009; Wineinger, 2011) as well as being a source of identity, character and distinctiveness (Historic England, 2016). This echoes the notion that 'civic memory' is important to the sense of citizenship that the people living a community have, as outlined by political scientist Richard Dagger. The notion of civic memory refers to *"the*

recollection of the events, characters, and developments which make up the history of one's city or town... a shared recollection of a city's past, of its accomplishments and failures, which both reflects and generates a sense of civic identity. When there is no widely shared recollection of this sort - when only a few of a city's inhabitants have more than a nodding acquaintance with its past - then we may say that civic memory has been lost." (Dagger, 1981). Without civic memory, citizens are much less likely to feel a sense of identification, belonging, connectedness, pride and responsibility with and to the community in which they live. An English Heritage-commissioned review also recognised the potential that having a 'sense of place' has in boosting wellbeing, good health and civil engagement, via pride in a place, exploration of the past to support shared values and citizenship, and promoting active engagement and social interactions (Graham, Mason and Newman, 2009). Hence boosting civic memory, or access to it, via engaging with specifically local, community heritage, can foster a sense of connectedness and belonging for vulnerable groups that may be marginalised and isolated in society. In addition, access to autobiographical memory, which can be a key factor in emotional wellbeing and identity, is neurologically strongly tied to physical places and spaces (Lengen and Kistemann, 2012), meaning that finding ways to evoke the heritage of the local community environment and landscape, inhabited by people through their personal history, could be a powerful tool in aiding memory, identity and wellbeing, for example through life story work with people affected by dementia.

Types of work involving heritage and wellbeing

Museum-based initiatives

An acknowledged strength of museums, galleries and heritage sites is that they can offer non-clinical, non-stigmatizing, stimulating environments in which people can explore their emotions and history. At the most basic level, improving access to heritage venues, including initiatives to reach out and engage groups who may otherwise struggle to attend, are now commonplace across the heritage sector. This could, for example, include forming links with dementia support groups who can visit for days out; or hosting special days or sessions for vulnerable people who are too often excluded. However, despite the growing interest in this kind of work, a 2019 review of research into dementia-friendly heritage settings (Sharma and Lee, 2019) found a "*dearth in the literature*" related to the impact of the physical environment and how it can be understood and suitably adapted to support the wellbeing of those living with dementia, perhaps as a result of the argument that some heritage cannot be adapted, or that there are limited financial resources to do so. Regardless of this, according to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, there were more than 600 museum-based programmes targeting health and wellbeing outcomes in 2017 alone, a figure that is likely to have grown since

(APPGAHW, 2017), notwithstanding some disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic, however, brought into sharper focus the multi-faceted benefits heritage sites can offer. Heritage sites were seen as *“social spaces where people feel safe”* during the pandemic and there is evidence people attach greater importance to them following the lifting of restrictions (Sofaer, 2021), with visits resulting in a significant increase in wellbeing for visitors regardless of whether they explicitly value the historic environment or not.

In the past decade, pioneering venues have instigated a range of targeted programmes and activities of support for specific groups. Examples include National Museums Liverpool’s ‘House of Memories’ programme. This uses access to museum resources and in-house expertise in guided reminiscence to raise awareness and train carers of people living with dementia. The model has since spread to other museums in other parts of England (Salford, Leicester and London) and is being developed to launch in museums across Wales. Benefits after a single day session were found to be an increase in knowledge, confidence and self-worth for carers, as well as connection with other support services, and an improvement in mood and responsiveness to the environment for those with dementia after using the House of Memories app (Ganga, Whelan & Wilson, 2017). In response to the pandemic, there is also now a ‘House of Memories On the Road’ 30-metre square mobile museum, able to travel around neighbourhoods in settings such as care homes, community centres or supermarket car parks. The House of Memories programme as a whole has been recognised as valuable *“boundary spanning”* initiative to help tackle loneliness, isolation and social and digital exclusion, with the potential for use in social prescribing (Wilson, 2022). National Museums Liverpool also run dementia-friendly guided ‘memory walks’ at the Museum of Liverpool, and ‘Meet Me at the Museum’ drop-in social events every month, for older visitors to see the collections while sharing memories and company. Research into regular museum visit sessions sustained over a period of time has found they can promote positive outcomes for older adults at risk of social exclusion *“by improving positive emotion... through creative processes involving new learning and acquisition of skills, and the formation of social capital through co-productivity, exchange of ideas, and enhanced sense of community and belonging.”* (Thomson, 2018)

The University of Oxford’s Gardens Libraries and Museums (GLAM) body has likewise been supporting social-prescribing-style initiatives for some time, working in partnership with Oxford’s Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine to develop recommendations regarding social prescribing (Turk et al., 2020; Tierney and Mahtani, 2022). The Museum of Oxford has been running ‘Memory Lane’ reminiscence sessions since 2010, in which the emphasis is on sharing oral history. Among the most valued aspects of this were the ability to forge social connections with others and play a part in preserving history, demonstrating reminiscence is not

always simply about helping a single individual's cognition, but also helping that individual to become involved with others and offer something in return (Hamblin, 2016). GLAM also run 'Meet Me at the Museum' programmes at both the Ashmolean and Pitt Rivers Museums, and offer free hands-on workshops and programmes, with real museum objects, for adult community groups. Work by Thomson, Ander and colleagues (Ander et al., 2013a; 2013b; Thomson et al., 2011; 2012a; 2012b; Thomson and Chatterjee, 2016) has focussed upon such use of museum objects in outreach work, for example taking objects into health and social care settings to be handled and talked about (with participants ranging from cancer patients and patients in a general hospital ward, to mental health services users and neurological rehabilitation clients, to those in acute elderly care settings) and found increased participation and positive mood/decreased negative mood across the board, likely through novel stimulation and distraction from their illness and environment. However, they also found interaction with the objects could prompt the retrieval of memories and previous knowledge beyond the tactile encounter itself, suggesting a possible role for the use of general (as opposed to personal) objects for life story and reminiscence work.

Regarding people living with dementia specifically, Historic Royal Palaces has published 'Rethinking heritage: A guide to help make your site more dementia-friendly' (Klug, *et al.*, 2017) which makes a case for dementia-friendly heritage. It provides guidance on working in partnership with support services and people affected by dementia, as well as providing venue programming for people living with dementia and those that care for them, while overcoming obstacles to accessibility. This follows the success of Historic Royal Palaces' own Sensory Palaces project, which involves historical story-telling sessions using a range of multi-sensory materials and resources, based at the body's famous historical properties such as Hampton Court Palace and Kew Palace. Participants were found to benefit in three ways: Overall enjoyment and engagement with (creative) activity; learning about the past and its connections with themselves and each other; and the opportunity to explore and think about the space and its history. It also allowed for participants to reflect on their own personal histories and put their current experience into a wider perspective (Innes et al., 2018). Site access challenges, while present, were not as much of a physical barrier as anticipated, with the promotion of inclusion, enjoyment and learning in an environment perceived as a 'special place' key to the project's value and success (Innes et al, 2021).

Some of these initiatives have much in common with initiatives in the wider culture sector. A lot of interest was sparked around the turn of the previous decade in the role art galleries could play in providing similar schemes to boost inclusion, health and wellbeing (Eckelaar, Camic and Springham, 2012; Roberts, Camic and Springham, 2011; Rosenberg, 2009; Shaer et al., 2008) for example at London's Tate

Britain or New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). There are likely to be similar mechanisms at work, especially regarding elements such as stimulation and engagement in meaningful activity; social inclusion and the forging social connections; encouraging introspection, emotional engagement and life review; and the providing of further opportunities for support. However, while there can clearly be a great deal of overlap between the arts and heritage, this is not necessarily the case: for example art therapy sessions or an access-to-art initiative need not involve heritage at all, so caution should be taken that the two are not regarded as synonymous. There are likely distinct benefits to using each as a way to support wellbeing, so what elements are used and how needs to be considered.

Living museums, heritage landscape and active participation

Interaction with heritage need not be passive and need not be indoors. "*Living museums*", where place-based activity of different time periods is recreated, can offer opportunities for people to get involved that activity. A pilot at Beamish Museum, the Living Museum of the North (a large open-air museum in County Durham covering life from the 1820s to 1940s), involved older men living with dementia, cognitive impairment and functional illness. It focused upon active and meaningful participation, the revisiting of lost skills and the use of traditional tools to carry out tasks at its immersive Orchard Cottage venue, reporting an "*undeniable*" positive impact upon their health, wellbeing and self-confidence (Kindleysides and Biglands, 2015). Hansen (2016) likewise found improvements to the "*confidence, social skills and senses of wellbeing*" of visitors with a variety of mental health issues to the Jamtli museum in Ostर्सund, Sweden, which includes agricultural activities and chores to do in an area recreating a 19th century farm. Going one step further outdoors, the Human Henge project aimed to make use of the UK's ancient landscape in ten-day facilitated programme where participants with mental health problems came together to learn and explore sites and monuments of Neolithic and Bronze Age, within the World Heritage Site of Stonehenge and Avebury in Wiltshire. Activities included speaking with experts, handling artefacts, making crafts, writing blogs, taking photographs, telling stories and singing, with improved social and community connection for those taking part reported as a result (Darvill et al., 2019; Heaslip, 2020).

While the above has concentrated on the accessing and use of museums, artefacts and other heritage resources by people, there is another category of heritage-focussed activity that can have a significant impact on wellbeing: playing an active role in a heritage project or community. Power and Smyth (2016) highlight community-based heritage conservation as an activity likely to appeal to older people, who are more likely to have strong connections with their local place but also more vulnerable to social isolation. Hence such community activity could have significant benefits for health and wellbeing, including opportunity for

intergenerational connection. Such work can involve research of *“events, stories or moments linked with local places, including political movements, past professions, or local historical figures, as well as physical places themselves, such as walking trails, and cemeteries. It implicitly involves developing a closer relationship with one's local area and is potentially open to everyone, regardless of locality... It also typically involves the creation of cultural ‘products’ to conserve such heritage such as voice recordings of oral histories, poster exhibitions, heritage trails maps, books and murals.”* (Power and Smyth, 2016). This activity evokes Dagger’s notion of an increased sense of citizenship through civic memory; indeed, Power and Smyth found *“people can develop much stronger, long-lasting connections with their communities through the heritage conservation work”* with positive experiences *“such as passion, curiosity, delight, accomplishment, pride, reciprocity, and growth. Moreover, these positive affects appeared to have contributed to wider experiences of belonging, engagement, and social wellbeing, with each tied to place overtly.”*

Such active participation in heritage projects can take various forms. One example is the Heritage Pathfinder initiative which saw a range of heritage-related projects taken to people living with dementia at Leominster Meeting Centre as a form of meaningful, engaging and empowering activity for attendees, as they were enabled to help shape and direct those projects themselves, based on their own needs and interests (Leominster Meeting Centre, 2021). Wellbeing as a result of active participation can also be in the form of volunteering. The University of Lincoln’s Heritage at Risk and Wellbeing report (Lewis et al., 2021) found a range of wellbeing outcomes for volunteers on Heritage at Risk projects, including increased sense of purpose, achievement, identity and belonging, developing skills and knowledge, connecting with others and keeping physically active among other benefits, with the potential for heritage projects to support and promote such benefits to volunteers with planning. Early findings from small scale studies suggest people can also experience wellbeing benefits from participating in heritage activity digitally, something which has seen a greater focus since the pandemic. In response to lockdown restrictions, Wessex Archaeology piloted ‘Lost and Found: Treasures in the Archive’, a five-week online course where a small group of participants could remotely select artefacts to create an interactive digital museum exhibition, which was found to help build social connections, promote learning and boosting confidence in participants across different demographic groups (Historic England, 2022). Elsewhere, users of Historic England’s ‘Enrich the List’ tool (relaunched in 2021) – where members of the public can add photos, stories and other content to the entries for historical sites on the National Heritage List for England – reported a sense of accomplishment and purpose from their participation, which also encouraged them to broaden their experience of heritage sites (Historic England, 2022).

Similar positive effects on wellbeing have been found in those engaging in amateur archaeology through metal detecting. Dobat et al. (2020) found that veterans suffering from PTSD and depression found involvement with heritage via this hobby had significant benefits related to the mental, sensory, physical and social experience of metal detecting, specifically increased peace of mind, enjoyment of outdoor life and exercise, silent companionship, the “*thrill of history*” and improved self-esteem. Hence the benefits of taking a more active role in heritage work, and creating a kind of community with like-minded others, should also be borne in mind as a way to improve wellbeing. An example of this being taken forward is York’s Archaeology on Prescription programme, now being piloted by York Archaeology Trust as a form of social prescribing (York Archaeology, 2023).

Reminiscence, life review and life story work

Some of the initiatives outlined above have involved elements of reminiscence and life review. Reminiscence and life story work are often recommended for people with dementia (Dementia UK, 2022; SCIE, 2020) as a way of encouraging communication and helping to find out more about individuals to improve care. However, these terms are not standardised and interventions can vary quite markedly. The origins of these approaches are traced to Butler’s work on ‘life review’ (Butler, 1963) as a form of psychotherapy for older people, involving a reflective process of looking back over one’s life and experiences to promote a sense of integrity and adjustment, strengthening identity and psychological stability. This concept was developed in the 1970s and 80s for use in dementia care, as ‘Reminiscence Therapy’ (RT) (Kiernan 1979; Norris 1986). Since it has taken diverse forms. While all forms involve discussion of past experiences, events, activities, people and places (with the aid of prompts such as photographs, recordings and meaningful objects) this can vary between more intensive individual life story/review work, looking at the chronology of someone’s life with memory triggers specific to them, and less structured (even free-form) ‘simple’ reminiscence, that may take place either individually or as part of a group. The use of archived objects, recordings and paraphernalia is common, as is the creation of a personal ‘memory box’ of items. Today digital storage and presentation of photographs and recordings (music or video clips) is widely used (Subramaniam and Woods, 2010). Reminiscence and life story/review work has been shown to help older people with depressed mood (Bohlmeijer, Smit and Cuijpers, 2003; Pinguart, Duberstein and Lyness, 2007) including those living in long-term care (Zhang et al., 2015) and in palliative care (Keall, Clayton and Butow, 2015), as well as preventing depression (Pot et al., 2010), improving life satisfaction (Bohlmeijer et al., 2007) and helping adjustment to dementia (Subramaniam and Woods, 2012).

However, because of the diverse settings, applications and (often informal) practices involved, evaluation of such interventions is often poor and evidence uneven, a

situation some researchers are today attempting to rectify by creating one standardised measures and benchmarks (Rubin, Parrish & Miyawaki, 2019). Recent systematic reviews by Gil et al. (2018) and Woods et al. (2019) both found that while RT was shown to improve cognitive function, it was less clear if there was a significant effect on improving mood, despite older studies suggesting this. Woods et al. (2019) found effects “*were inconsistent, often small in size and can differ considerably across settings*” with evidence for an improvement in quality of life strongest for those in care homes, while evidence for improvement to mood was most promising for individual RT. A systematic review of ‘dyadic’ reminiscence and life review (i.e. involving both older adults needing support and those that care for them), by Ingersoll-Dayton et al. (2019), concluded it was unrealistic to expect substantial improvements over time for people living with dementia, and “*in the moment*” observations might be a more meaningful and sensitive measure of the effects of such interventions. A systematic review and meta-analysis by Saragih et al. (2022) found overall, RT appeared to be effective in increasing cognitive functions and quality of life and decreasing depression and neuropsychiatric symptoms, but standardisation of the therapy was necessary for future studies to conclude more.

Regarding life story work specifically, this usually takes the form of family members and staff working with a person with dementia to gather and review life events and build a personal biography. As well as the above-mentioned benefits it can help people to communicate, and help family members, carers and staff to better understand them and their needs. It often involves the creation of life story books, collages, memory boxes or personal profile documents (e.g. This is me); in more recent years this has included using digital applications to create digital life story archives and DVDs. A recent systematic review (Elfrink et al., 2018) found that most studies involving life story work still involved physical books however, created over an average of six individual sessions in care settings. Qualitative evidence showing that life story books successfully trigger memories and improve interactions is common, but large studies looking for quantitative effects under controlled conditions are still lacking so far. Positive quantitative effects have nevertheless been found on autobiographical memory, depression, quality of relationships with informal caregivers and attitudes and knowledge of formal caregivers.

Recent studies on digital life story work have found additional benefits, such as enjoyment involved in helping to create a life story ‘movie’ complete with multimedia elements such as music, which some participants found very important and enjoyable (Subramaniam and Woods, 2016; O’Philbin, Woods & Windle, 2020); in one study (Subramaniam and Woods, 2016) staff did not find the process burdensome, but in another (O’Philbin, Woods & Windle, 2020) limited ICT skills were cited as a frequent barrier to people with dementia and some caregivers. In that study extra benefits of a digital format were found in the easy removal of

material that provoked a negative response, and the incorporation of external material, for example from internet resources, in addition to or instead of personal materials, if not available. It was also found that if used in a group context, people tended to use the digital application socially, to share moments and events, but also tended not to learn how to use it for its intended purpose as a result – whereas those using it in an individual one-to-one context learn to use it in a more sophisticated way (O’Philbin, Woods & Windle, 2020). A discrete choice experiment survey on what users might most value in digital life story applications found that both people with dementia and care givers preferred to use it in an individual intervention setting, though people with dementia said they would also use it to share memories with family and friends. Caregivers said they most wanted a low-price device that was simple to use with an additional follow-up session in using it (O’Philbin, Woods & Holmes, 2020).

Discussion: relevance to Worcester Life Stories

Worcester Life Stories has the potential to bring together multiple beneficial elements of the work outlined above. Most saliently, it will bring together personal life story work with actual community heritage, which is not as common as might be assumed. As outlined above, much life story work tends to focus on using personal paraphernalia belonging to the individual, with perhaps some shared cultural artefacts such as music or objects from a particular era. However, with the possible exception of reminiscence involving local sports clubs, materials are not often tied specifically to the local environment. A strength of Worcester Life Stories is that it will make extensive use of local archives through the Know Your Place database to add a rich set of place-specific local history resources to add to the materials available for life story work. Having such a wealth of resources readily available is rare in life story work. The digital nature of Worcester Life Stories will make this material immediately and easily accessible, without the need to physically visit an archive to “*dig out*” relevant items. It should also be noted that following the COVID-19 pandemic, digital ways to engage virtually with heritage and the community have become all the more valuable (Historic England, 2020), not least to vulnerable populations.

On the other end of the heritage and wellbeing scale, many of the place-based museum initiatives outlined above make extensive use of heritage, but heritage that is not necessarily local or, if it is, that dates back beyond the lifetimes of the individuals engaging with it. As such, their engagement is more about having a novel and stimulating learning experience rather than triggering memories from their own past. This has its advantages, but is not the same as directly connecting a person’s own memory and experiences with the history of their community and environment – something Worcester Life Stories will be able to do more directly and powerfully,

with the aim of boosting that sense of place, identity and civic memory outlined earlier in this review (e.g. Dagger, 1981; Graham, Mason and Newman, 2009).

Given the extra connection with the local community and environment that Worcester Life Stories embodies, there may also be wider benefits for those using it than simply aiding memory. Through engaging with shared history, the project has the potential to help people connect to others and become involved in sharing their own local knowledge and experiences: with those immediately around them (as with other life story work) but also perhaps with others using the Know Your Place database. There is the potential for Worcester Life Stories users to contribute their memories and artefacts to that database, adding further to “civic memory” and their own sense of community participation, integration and self-worth, with the wellbeing benefits that is known to bring.

Overall, there is an ever growing and developing range of activity around using heritage to reach out and help improve the wellbeing of individuals in the community, which the Worcester Life Stories project will be a welcome and innovative addition to. There is little equivalent being done that brings together personal reminiscence with local heritage in the well-integrated way Worcester Life Stories is proposing. Hopefully this intervention can capitalise on many of different benefits outlined in this review.

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