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Ever since Prime Minister David Cameron announced his plans for First World War commemorations, there has been great discussion in the media and between historians regarding if, how and when we should commemorate the centenary.

At the Imperial War Museums (IWM), we have been discussing commemorations since 2010. We established the First World War Centenary Partnership in the same year to encourage a programme of activities and events, developed at grass roots level.

The founding ambition for the partnership was that its members would collectively organise and present a vibrant, diverse and far-reaching programme to reflect how people want to remember, commemorate and debate the conflict in their own communities, in a way that is meaningful for them.

To date, more than 1,700 members from 36 countries have signed up to the partnership. This level of activity demonstrates that discussions about marking the centenary are not only taking place at governmental, academic and institutional levels but also in communities across the UK and beyond.

Conflict

The centenary also offers up opportunities to bring people together with local museums and cultural organisations to reflect upon the impact the conflict had upon the place they live and the residents of the time. There are already many fantastic examples of these relationships developing within local authorities.

Worcestershire County Council's Archive and Archaeology Service will work with museums across the county, and with Worcester City Council, Worcester Cathedral, University and the George Marshall Medical Museum, to tell the story of local people through a unique multi-venue gallery experience.

Essex County Council has developed the 'Now the last poppy has fallen' project, which will include a touring exhibition with a focus on the home front in Essex and encourage close working relationships between volunteers, museum staff, teachers, pupils and artists.

East Lothian Council will work with the John Grey Centre to develop temporary exhibitions with an emphasis on local participation during the war years and complementary education programmes for primary and secondary schools.

Local interest

These are just three examples of the many amazing local authority-led projects in the partnership that encourage cross-community working and engagement in response to the centenary. There are many more projects out there too: projects to discover and remember local 'Pals' battalions (men who had enlisted together with the promise that they would be able to serve alongside their friends, neighbours and work colleagues); to investigate local war memorials and places of local interest; to find out more about the role and experiences of colonial troops; and to digitise and share letters and diaries from family's collections.

The First World War centenary really matters to a huge number of people. It may be because of a personal and family connection, the effect the war had on their home town, how it changed our wider society or because of their beliefs about war and the importance of peace.

So far, 115 UK local authorities have joined the First World War Centenary Partnership. We hope that by the start of the official centenary commemorations on 4 August 2014, every local authority will be a member, actively representing and communicating the many events and discussions taking place with and for their local communities to commemorate this landmark anniversary.

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