

# Remembering Resistance

A Century of Women's Protest in the North of England

Lancaster University  
March 2020

## Evaluation report

"I don't think of myself as an activist. I belittled what I did, so this project has made me stop and realise that what I have done is of value and part of who I am."

Remembering Resistance oral history participant

## 1 INTRODUCTION

**Over the last 18 months, a community of people has grown around the Remembering Resistance project.** United by a shared commitment to capturing, celebrating and sharing the rich history of women's activism in the North of England, this community of volunteers, community groups, museums, libraries, and heritage organisations have produced the most complete picture of women's protest in the region to date.

**We have toured the North of England, holding 13 events in Durham, Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Newcastle, and engaged thousands of people with the project.** Our volunteers have carried out over 100 oral histories with women activists, whilst our team has catalogued nearly 400 protest events. Our exhibition – Empowering Women, Empower Women – attracted over 1600 visitors to Museums Sheffield where we showcased 16 women's movements active over the last century, bringing together hundreds of objects and stories, many of which had never previously been on display.

**Through collaboration with 12 cultural organisations, six community groups, 28 volunteers, and dozens of school children, there is now a permanent record of women's activism.** The Remembering Resistance website hosts an easy-to-use, visually attractive archive of oral histories and protest maps, as well as a virtual museum hosting all the material that was on display at our exhibition. It also hosts a timeline of women's activism, a catalogue of collections about women's activism, and resources to inspire others to learn more about how women have fought for change.

**The profile of Remembering Resistance continues to attract public and media interest, and we have exciting plans to scale-up and evolve the project.** We have already secured funding for four follow-on projects with partnerships that developed through the project, all of which involve our volunteers. In this way, we are continuing to honour the legacy of women activists made possible by the generous support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.



**“The most rewarding part was meeting and re-meeting so many marvellous women and remembering just how much has been done by so many women at so many levels, in so many places, and on so many issues.... One thing I will take away is how important recording women's history is for so many different reasons.”**

**Remember Resistance volunteer**

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

In 1918, after decades of protest, all men and some women got the vote. To mark the centenary of this milestone in women's rights, Remembering Resistance wanted to bring to life the last 100 years of women's involvement in protests in the North of England. The aim was that through a programme of public engagement events and activities recording this aspect of our heritage, the project would develop a rich picture of when, where, and why women have fought for change. Working with volunteers, the project would map the last century of protest by charting the routes that protests took, and the strategies protesters used, as well as collating artefacts associated with protest movements. One of the project aims was to gather oral histories and archival accounts of protest actors, past and present and share these through events, an exhibition and digital resources.

**The project wanted to create a permanent archive of material and resources, cataloguing and celebrating women's involvement in political change to inspire future generations. This would be developed and created with communities across the North of England.**

### *Background*

Contemporary protest movements, such as #metoo, Time's Up, and the Women's Marches, demonstrate that women continue to mobilise for political change. Yet, women are often overlooked in the history of protest and political activism. We recognised that capturing this aspect of our heritage was vital. Without a record of women's activism, the history of women's involvement in protest would be eroded. Since 1918, many of the women involved in activism have died, and their stories have been lost. It was therefore imperative that we captured the memories and experiences of those still able to share them by bringing together existing records so they could be preserved for future generations.

We also felt that the project would be a valuable way of engaging people in contemporary politics. Many areas in the North of England experience low levels of youth participation in politics. We believed that enabling communities to learn about the history of women's involvement in activism, and demonstrating the importance of political engagement, was vital in stimulating active citizenship. By working with volunteers to uncover the events that took place in particular local communities, Remembering Resistance wanted to inspire people to connect with their history. By seeking out less well-represented places where resistance has happened in an effort to identify the most significant sites for women's protest in the North of England, the project wanted to motivate, in particular, young people to learn about their own area's history of activism.

In order to achieve the above, our approved purposes through the grant were:-

- Recruit a project co-ordinator, PhD students and an Advisory Board to support and deliver the project.
- Hold project launch events in Manchester and Sheffield.
- Recruit 20-25 citizen researchers and provide oral history, archive and desk-based research training.
- Collect approximately 100 oral history interviews of women's activism.

- Identify and catalogue existing oral histories, artefacts and photographs relating to protest stories.
- Catalogue and map the last 100 years of protest events in the North of England in which women have played a prominent role.
- Hold 10 days of community-based 'pop-up' events across four sites in Manchester and Sheffield.
- Carry out school visits across the four 'pop-up' sites to share research and co-design ideas for Heritage-in-a-Box learning resource.
- Create exhibits of ten oral histories for display.
- Hold a 5-day exhibition at Museums Sheffield.
- Create a website to display project information.

### Management structure of the project

The project was led by Lancaster University under two Project Leaders, Dr Sarah Marsden and Dr Christopher Boyko, both of whom have extensive experience in project management and community engagement. The day-to-day management of the project was undertaken by Claire Selby, an experienced professional in the management of volunteer, heritage and arts projects. Claire was responsible for the recruitment and support of the crucial volunteer team who carried out the oral history interviews and desk-based research. In addition, a voluntary Advisory Board met throughout the course of the project contributing their expertise in heritage, arts, community engagement and activism.



## 3 PROJECT OUTCOMES: HERITAGE, COMMUNITY, PEOPLE

This section of the report summarises the main outcomes to arise from the Project in terms of the impact made to heritage, people and communities. This section draws on data from Project team evaluation, including surveys with the team and volunteers, email correspondence, social media and media articles, and data from a variety of sources including surveys with visitors to events and the final exhibition.

### HERITAGE

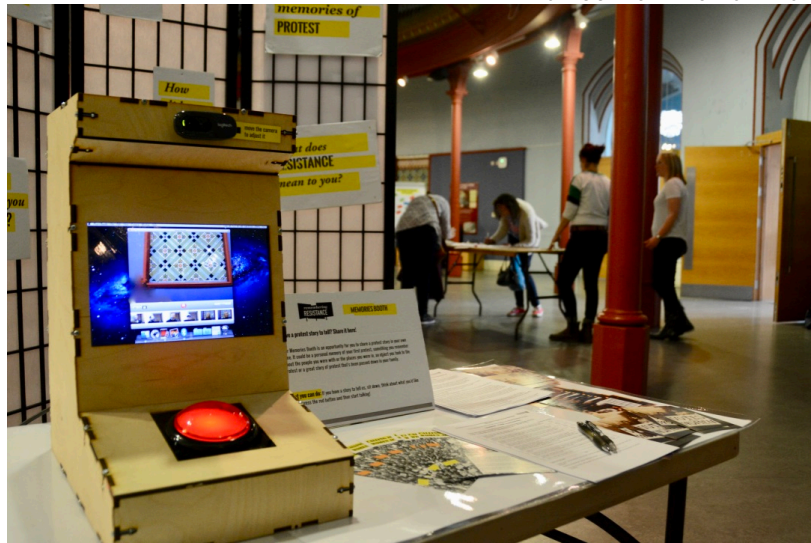
Working with local communities, museums, and organisations, the project wanted to develop a full account of women's involvement in protest movements to ensure the story of women and protest would not be lost, including identifying and preserving artefacts and collecting oral histories.

Through the project's work, we:-

- Collated and displayed **125 objects** relating to women's activism, initially at the exhibition at Museums Sheffield and now on the Remembering Resistance virtual museum. Many of these were conserved for the exhibition and were digitised for the first time.
- Collected **104 oral histories** with women involved in activism across the North of England
- Researched and collated **395 protests** into a database, with **16 in-depth case studies**
- Created a **website** for people to learn more about the history of women's involvement in protest through a virtual museum, an interactive map of protest routes and sites across the North of England and an interactive timeline where a full catalogue of protests was represented. The website has, on average, 500 unique visitors each week.

#### *"What worked well and why?"*

The oral histories were collected using a **citizen science model**, collaborating with volunteers. This went incredibly well, mainly due to the enthusiasm of the volunteers and a real belief in the ethos of the project, which was clearly instilled in their initial training and all communication with them. The volunteers also found this a positive experience with many benefits including a sense of connection with the women they spoke to, an increase in their confidence, as well as enabling them to learn about what women had done in the region. The surveys we carried out showed that it was a great experience for both the volunteers and the women involved. The project had an incredibly good response to the initial call for participants and exceeded the target of 100 oral histories with ease; we could have collected more given more time and resource.



Remembering Resistance event, Leeds.

**“Many thanks to all of you, too, for all your work on this inspirational project and giving more women a voice. It has been great to be a part of it”**

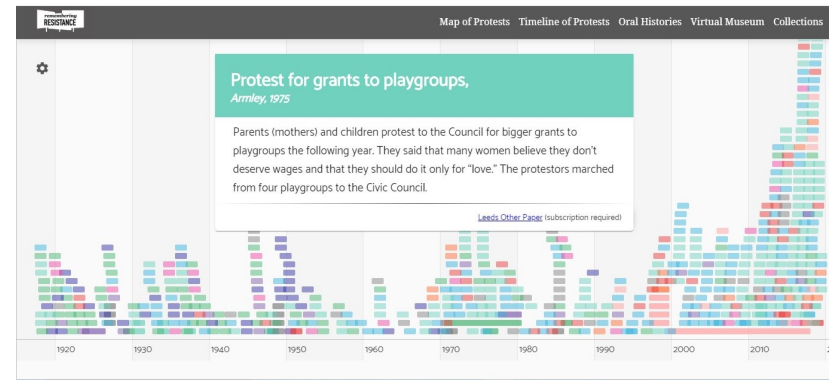
**Remembering Resistance oral history participant**

The means of **collecting the protest event data** had to be adapted, as this was not as appealing for most of the volunteers, although this was still helpful learning for the project. Employing PhD students to do this work meant we could collect all the protest data, using a consistent, thorough and precise approach to the data collection process. This still proved a positive outcome, as the project adapted its approach and managed to gather the most comprehensive overview of women’s protests currently available. Through this work, we have been able to present this data through an interactive map and timeline that will enable others to explore activism in their local area.

With regard to **objects**, the idea of photographing all the objects collected for the exhibition to go onto the virtual museum worked well and enabled an increase in the visibility of items that would not otherwise be accessible. The project also acted as a broker in certain cases, liaising between public collections and participants to make sure significant items in private collections were not lost.

The project recruited and worked with an experienced and responsive **website designer** although more resource for this would have been beneficial. The online aspects of the project have, as a result, worked well: the functionality and utility of the virtual museum,

map, timeline and oral histories is strong, and will enable anyone interested to use them and learn more about women’s activism in the North of England.



Timeline of Protests on Remembering Resistance website.

### **“What didn’t work well and why?”**

The **management of collecting oral histories** was very time-consuming to organise and process all the related data, especially as it covered such a wide, geographic area. In terms of the **diversity of participants**, this was not well-reflected of those in activism in general, as we worked with people who approached the project, rather than being more proactive in our approach to participants.

In a similar way to the oral history data, the **processing of the data** around protest was more complicated than anticipated, and we needed a more realistic expectation of what was possible, given the resources we had. The data was difficult to collect, due to needing absolute consistency for the backend of the website; this was something we could have perhaps anticipated and with which we could have been more proactive. **Accessibility to data** was also a challenge. Working within a university that had access to databases which, for licensing reasons, were not available for volunteers was frustrating and was one of the reasons we needed to use PhD students for this role. There were also limits to the sources used for data collections, including a lack of digitisation of media within certain time periods and places.



Remembering Resistance volunteer training, Lancaster University.

With regard to **collecting objects**, it would have been beneficial to have stronger relationships with partners, such as museums and galleries, before the project started, so we were aware of their collecting policies, for example, and could have made stronger connections to these through the project's work. Collecting and photographing objects from individuals proved hard to organise, and would need more careful consideration of how this may happen for a future project. For the exhibition, objects took time to source and collect, and costs for couriering these needed including in the budget.



Objects on display for Remembering Resistance exhibition, Museums Sheffield.

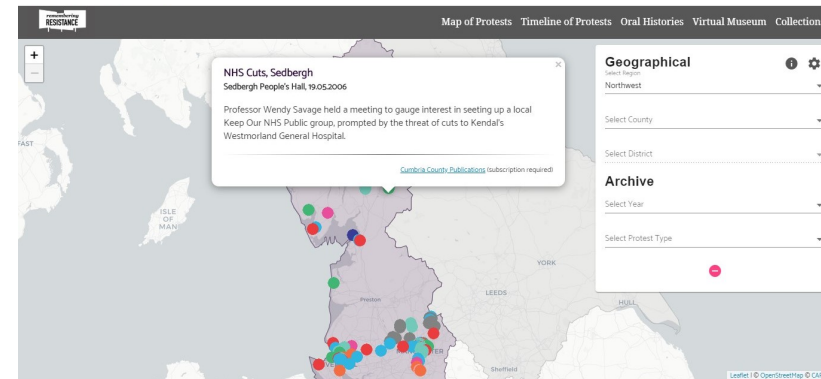
"Thank you for giving me the opportunity to take part in the project. It's a wonderful way to document and highlight the role of women challenging and changing things through activism."

Oral history participant

The **creation of the website** involved lots of complex data, including information about the time and place where protests took place, which is hard to represent in visual format; this should have been anticipated in order to channel greater resource to this aspect of the project.



In-depth case study on Remembering Resistance website.



Map of Protests on Remembering Resistance website.

## COMMUNITIES

Remembering Resistance wanted to focus on communities located near significant, but less well-known sites of resistance, including areas that were politically disengaged and deprived. The project wanted to ensure that a much wider range of people engaged in this aspect of our heritage to make them aware of women's activism in their area and the possibilities for change.

Through the project's work, we:-

- Facilitated **13 events** across the North of England, often in conjunction with local community groups, where people could both learn about women's activism in their own area and contribute their own stories, including participatory mapping of protests;
- Coordinated **2 guided walks** in Manchester and Sheffield with guides to interpret the local area for participants so they could learn where and why protesters marched;
- Held **2 visits** with young people at Grange Technology College in Bradford and with Sheffield Young Carers Action Group to help support the development of the Heritage-in-a-Box kit;
- Had **1617 people visit our exhibition** of artefacts, stories and experiences collected through the project, which was held in October 2019 at Museums Sheffield;
- Created partnerships with **12 cultural organisations and 6 local, community groups**.



Remembering Resistance guided walks, Manchester.

### ***“What worked well and why?”***

We **achieved and exceeded our core objectives** with respect to the number of events carried out by the project and through the creation of the exhibition.

**Working with local partner and community groups**, both for holding the events and for the project in general, worked incredibly well. The project formed strong links with a number of organisations across the North of England including the Women's Banner Group in Durham,

Feminist Archive North in Leeds, Global Link in Lancaster and Sheffield Feminist Archive. Events that were held in conjunction with those groups proved the most successful. Those who attended the events provided positive feedback, especially when there was an offer, such as a talk accompanying the activities. As stated in one feedback form, the best part was:-

**“The talks and discussion – really insightful. Reminded me of so much creative activism. Was heart-warming.”**

**Remembering Resistance event participant**

The **creation of the Protest in a Box resource**, which was co-designed with young people's groups and schools, also proved successful. The co-design process meant that the audiences for the resource were integral to its creation and development, so the young people could really engage with the material:-

**“[The experience was] Awesome! The kids have thrived”**

**Remembering Resistance Protest-in-a-Box workshop group leader**



Heritage-in-a-Box workshop with young people, Bradford.

The **exhibition** had incredibly positive feedback and, according to one of Museums Sheffield's lead exhibition and display curators, a very high footfall for the space. Many of the visitors commented about how inspired and empowered they felt through the exhibition, as shown through the large number of comments recorded through visitor surveys about the great experiences they had (see Appendix 3). A number of women whose activism was represented in the exhibition visited and were visibly moved by this experience:-

**“It’s very emotional to see your life and your friend’s lives in an exhibition because, while you were being an activist and being part of the campaign, you just get on on a daily basis and just do it. Actually, to take a step back and look at it in the context of so many fantastic campaigns, and so many strong and amazing and empowered women, it’s quite overwhelming.”**

**Remembering Resistance exhibition attendee whose activism was represented**

#### **“What didn’t work well and why?”**

It proved hard to **access more deprived areas**. The project relied on cultural institutions, which tended to be located in city or town centres, and access to those areas that are considered politically disengaged was challenging. Many of the audiences who came to the events were those already interested in the topic in some way; therefore, we did not reach out as much to those who were / are politically disengaged.

The **exhibition and events both needed more publicity**, although every effort was made to arrange this (see section below on media). Feedback on the exhibition especially was that it needed to be on for longer and touring to other parts of the North to allow greater access to its content.



“Wall of Women” for Remembering Resistance exhibition, Museums Sheffield.

## PEOPLE

Remembering Resistance wanted to ensure that communities were involved in the development and creation of the resources and work from the project. Citizen researchers developed skills in oral history and research, as well as experienced the satisfaction of engaging with an issue of contemporary and historical importance in innovative and fun ways. Working with local communities living near historical sites of resistance meant that many more people learnt about this aspect of their heritage and engaged in the political history of their area.

Through the project’s work:-

- We trained **28 Citizen Researchers** in oral history and research skills
- Volunteered contributed **164 days or 1230 hours**

#### **“What worked well and why?”**

**Community engagement** worked well across the project. Good relations were developed with a wide range of people from activist groups to community organisations, and arts and heritage bodies. All the organisations with which we worked were wholly positive about their experiences, speaking about the importance of the project and how much they enjoyed working with the team. As a result, we have continued to develop these relationships. One example is our work with Global Link, a charity in Lancaster that runs the Documenting Dissent project. Through our links on a small event, we are now working together on a much larger project funded through an Economic and Social Research Council Impact Acceleration Account grant. The material from both projects is being brought together to inspire political engagement and community activism through creative means.

In addition, another **3 follow-on projects**, successfully funded through different bodies, has proved the immense value of the networks created and the material collected on the project. Working with volunteers was one of the most successful parts of the project – all those who provided feedback commented on their overall enjoyment of the project especially the oral history interviewing:

**“The most rewarding part for me was the oral history interviews hearing women’s really inspiring and sometimes deeply personal stories and knowing that we were helping to preserve these stories was the most rewarding.”**

**Remembering Resistance volunteer**

The **management of the volunteer team** was also successful and was critical to their continued engagement with the project, especially through the organisation of continued contact points, such as workshops and meet ups. The volunteer team felt a real sense of ownership of the project and developed skills and confidence as a result:

“Meeting and working with a brilliant supportive team – staff and volunteers – and getting the chance to be really engage with the material and be involved in lots of aspects of the project. It has also given me knowledge and inspiration to pull together a successful bid for an oral history project in **my own area**.  
And I’ve been very grateful for the support on that.”

**Remembering Resistance volunteer**

The project as a whole was very **co-developed, receptive, flexible and agile** to any needs or issues which were raised. The team were very responsive and open, and this was a critical part of the working process. People across a number of communities in the North of England, from Durham to Yorkshire, Lancashire and Greater Manchester, were involved in the development process of the project including designing outcomes such as the exhibition and the virtual museum.



Remembering Resistance volunteer training, Lancaster University.

### “What didn’t work well and why?”

As the volunteer team was based across the North of England, **managing their continued engagement in the project** proved a challenge and more resource for face-to-face meet-ups would have proved beneficial.

As mentioned before, it was **harder to access communities in more deprived areas** and this is learning to take forward to any future project.



Remembering Resistance pop-up event, Salford.



## 4 QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE FEEDBACK

### Quantitative Feedback

Number of events held across the North of England	13
Visitors to events	370
Visitors to the exhibition at Museums Sheffield	1617
Number of citizen researchers	28
Volunteer hours contributed	164 days or 1230 hours
Unique visitors to the website	500 per week
Number of oral histories	104
Number of school children worked with	34
Number of protests collected / researched	395
Objects collated and displayed	125
Sign-ups to our mailing list	103
Twitter followers	494
Community organisations engaged with	6
Cultural institutions partnered with	12
Media reach	10 million

### Qualitative feedback

The different data sources referred to in this report are outlined below and can be found in the appendices to this report: -

*Exhibition survey: Interviewer led-surveys that took place across the 9 days of the exhibition - sample of 50*

*Volunteer survey: Survey sent out to volunteers via email. Sample 7*

*Visitor survey to events: Sample 5*

*Survey with oral history participants: Sample of*

*Evaluation of workshops for Protest in a Box: Sample 2*

*In-depth interviews with project team: Sample 3*

## 5 PROJECT PROFILE AND PUBLICITY

The project was officially launched in October of 2019, with a media campaign including appearances by members of the project team on Radio 4's Woman's Hour and local BBC stations including BBC Manchester as well as in print media. This led to a large amount of interest and, subsequently, a number of participants signing up to be interviewed for the project.

Throughout the project, we have continued to feature in media sources, showcasing our activities and inviting people to contribute. Articles about the project have been featured in a variety of online and traditional media sources, including another appearance on Woman's Hour and a number of double page articles in local newspapers, such as the Sheffield Star.

Estimates from the University's Press Office suggest the project had a media reach of over 10 million people.

We have also had a large social media presence with almost 500 twitter followers and a newsletter, which was sent to over 100 people.



Remembering Resistance exhibition, Museums Sheffield.

## 6 CONCLUSION

### *Overall, what do you think worked well and why?*

**We gathered a huge amount of information, data and stories in a very short space of time and at very little expense**, offering very good value for money. This information would not have been collected unless the project had been carried out; as a result, many women's voices and experiences would not have been captured but for the project. This is now freely accessible to everyone who wishes to use it.

**We have made much more visible women's activism over the last 100 years** within the confines of the resource available. We were responsive to the needs of places, including as Durham, Lancashire and Leeds, which were not initially included in the project, and the project has covered a much wider scope than initially suggested.

**The co-development of the project was a huge success.** A community of people has grown around the project, and a large number of relationships established because of the commitment to co-development and orienting the project around shared values. The volunteers especially became very involved and felt real ownership of the project. Many have continued to stay in contact and work on other projects with the team.

**Organisations with whom we worked in partnership to deliver events and collect material also experienced the value of remaining in contact with us.** As a result of these networks, there have been four follow-on projects, ranging from workshops to develop the impact of the material collected, to a creative partnership with a development education charity.

**The dynamic and flexible nature of the project** meant we could take opportunities as they emerged, for example, to run events or develop collaborations. This became critical to the success of the project.

### *Overall, what didn't work well and why?*

**Working across the North of England when based in one location** in the North West was challenging across all fronts, including data collection and managing relationships with partners and volunteers.

**The timescales were too ambitious**, particularly being aware of university processes and how long relationships can take to grow trust.

**Access to more deprived communities**, with less politically engaged people, proved a real challenge. Although our community engagement methods worked well, we worked with many people who already had a similar vision to the project, and those who engaged with our activities often already had an interest in activism or women's history.

### *What are the key things that the organisation has learnt?*

- Being realistic about timescales for all aspects of the work to ensure there is enough capacity and resource for all aims and objectives
- Having values for the project embedded at the start and making those you work with aware of these values
- Working with local groups and organisations is critical for the success of the project, and giving enough time and resource to build these relationships is key
- Being flexible and responsive to those you work with is also critical so they feel ownership of the work they do and their commitment to the project is ongoing
- Having a project team with the necessary skills and approaches is crucial to the success of the project
- Being aware of the outputs for the project at the beginning and what needs to be in-place throughout to achieve this is necessary for success

### *On reflection what would you do differently next time?*

- Give longer for the whole process
- Allow more time and resource to broker relationships with partners and build trust
- Have partners on board able to broker relationships into deprived communities
- Be more proactive in approaching participants to allow greater diversity across the project

"Uplifting to see what women have done to bring about awareness and change that benefits everyone in the end."

"I noticed a number of items which reminded me of campaigns I'd been involved in – just a good nudge to continue the fight for women's rights!"

"I will take away a renewed spring in my step as I am off to the People's Vote demo in London on Sat 19<sup>th</sup> October. This exhibition has quite re-energised me!  
Thank you all."

Remembering Resistance exhibition attendees, Museums Sheffield.