



Echoes of Holloway Prison: Evaluation Report, Executive Summary

Holloway Prison has been an important landmark in Islington for over 100 years. Until summer 2016 it was the largest women's prison in Britain. Many well-known prisoners have passed through its doors, and the prison has become notorious in the public imagination, but there are diverse voices which remain unknown and unrecorded.

The *Echoes of Holloway Prison* project aimed to save the stories of this highly significant place before they were lost forever following the closure.

The project was led by Islington Museum from February 2018 to June 2019, in collaboration with Holloway Prison Stories and Middlesex University, and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The project focussed on three elements; collecting, engagement, and legacy. Objects, photographs and oral histories were collected to reflect the history and heritage of the prison. An exhibition, talks, workshops, seminars, family activities, heritage CPDs and other events connected people to the stories and voices of Holloway Prison. Finally, work to secure the project legacy including website, podcasts, learning pack and continued community engagement was vital to ensure the nationally significant work undertaken during the project would be accessible for all in future.

Engagement with volunteers, the local community, the community connected with Holloway Prison, former prisoners and prison support charities was fundamental to shaping this project and without them it could not have happened.

Learning from the project continues to be shared through professional heritage networks

Project Aims:

- To collect the story of Holloway Prison, following its closure, through objects, oral histories and creative outputs
- To build an active community of engaged volunteers to collaborate on the project on oral histories, exhibition development, film-making and engagement. Including both local community members and former prisoners.
- To engage with multiple different groups including ex-prisoners, prison officers, 'civilian' workers, charities, local people and our volunteers to capture the story of the prison
- To interpret the history and promote learning about Holloway Prison through an exhibition and ongoing public engagement including workshops, talks, walks, film screenings, youth programme, family activities and participation in partnership events.
- To work with an artist to develop other forms of engagement around the prison, its stories and the voices collected in the oral history.
- To ensure a legacy to the project through a leaflet, pop-up exhibition, website including online exhibition and downloadable audio and a learning pack.
- To develop public understanding of women in prison and Holloway Prison and to challenge people's attitudes through human stories

Key Project Outputs:

- engaged 8498 members of the public
- worked with 66 volunteers across the project including ex-prisoners, people who have worked at the prison, local people and the wider public (target was 25)
- 348.5 days contributed by volunteers (target was 104)
- 29 individuals trained throughout the project (target was 25) – see 6.1.4 for training areas
- 29 full length oral history interviews conducted and collected (target was 15-20)
- 3 films exploring the history of Holloway Prison, the impact of the closure and people's day-to-day experience of the prison were produced and collected
- 6 songs and a booklet of poetry produced by resident artist relating to the oral histories and photographs from inside the prison

- 203 objects and paper ephemera collected during the project
- a programme of 77 events including talks, seminars, workshops and a concert
- a temporary exhibition of new objects, archival collections and loans which ran from July to October 2018
- a pop-up exhibition, booklet, website-based interpretation including audio and learning pack
- a women's former prisoner sharing group established in Islington
- 2 CPD events, inclusion in Museum Development North West's contemporary collecting toolkit, presentations at the Social History Curator's Group conference (2018), Museum Development South West (2019), Museum Ideas conference (2019), British Museum National Programmes Conference (2019).

Key Project Outcomes:

- The project was hugely successful in identifying, collecting and sharing the hidden histories of Holloway Prison otherwise at risk of disappearing. Stories of Holloway were captured through a diverse network of people and organisations linked to the prison and shared widely through an exhibition, activity programme, online engagement and personal connections.
- The volunteers, a fundamental part of the project team, reported that the project had a significant impact on them. They felt valued, developed skills and empathy as they learnt more about the prison and became advocates for the women's stories. Embedding diverse volunteer perspectives within the project process ensured the project told a more nuanced story from behind Holloway's walls.
- Exhibition visitors, event participants and others involved in the project found the activities, oral histories, objects and ephemera brought the history and stories of the prison, the prisoners and the prison workers to life. The stories of women held at the prison made their experience real and personal rather than abstract, creating empathy with individuals and broadening visitors' perspectives. People engaging with the project enjoyed the opportunity to better understand and learn about a complex hidden history.
- The project offered a wide range of access points into the difficult narratives of women held at the prison, from exhibition and oral histories, to workshops and seminars, to film showings and concerts of original music inspired by the stories. This allowed a diverse group of event participants to engage with a challenging subject.
- The input of former prisoners was crucial to the project. Engagement was not possible as initially planned but the project was flexible in responding to individual needs and ensuring that their voices were represented across the project. Several participants described the project as 'healing', giving a space for their views to be heard. Individual former prisoners developed the confidence and skills during the project to lead ongoing initiatives for fellow former prisoners.
- The project allowed the local community insight into a formerly closed space. The museum became a healing space in which those with connections to the prison could meet and reflect on the story of Holloway and its impact on their lives.
- Organisational learning from this project has been significant. This included insights into the power of locally focussed stories with oral history at its heart, the benefits of building a strong integrated project team and how ongoing evaluation contributes to a project's success. The museum now has a greater capacity to take on projects covering sensitive topics with vulnerable groups. Project Manager, Roz Currie, was shortlisted for the Museum Association 'Radical Changemaker' Award, autumn 2018 for her work leading this project.