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**Everyday Objects  
Transformed by  
the Conflict**

**Evaluation of Process  
of Everyday Objects Transformed  
by the Conflict Exhibition**



# **Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict**

## **Evaluation of Process of Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict Exhibition**

September 2013



Report Editor – Bryony Flanagan (Green Hat Consulting)



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To be ordered directly from  
Healing Through Remembering  
Alexander House, 17a Ormeau Avenue, Belfast  
Tel: +44 28 9023 8844 Email: [info@healingthroughremembering.org](mailto:info@healingthroughremembering.org)  
Reports can also be downloaded from [www.healingthroughremembering.org](http://www.healingthroughremembering.org)

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## INTRODUCTION

This report sets out to tell the story of the origins, context, development process and display of Healing Through Remembering's Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict exhibition.

The purpose of the evaluation was to document the whole process from initial inception through to final interaction with the public, capturing the discussions, key issues, challenges and contributions that the project has made to the work of Healing Through Remembering and the wider discussion on dealing with the legacy of the past as it relates to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland.

Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict brings together many views and experiences of the recent conflict. The exhibition reveals diverse stories through a range of loaned objects and their accompanying labels, all written in the words of those who own them.

Conversations about the challenges involved in staging a shared exhibition on the conflict and how best to develop a process that would allow such an event to take place have been as important to this project as the exhibition itself. Regular conversations took place between Healing Through Remembering members and collectors to explore the issues which arose. Indeed, this is a project which has taken more than 7 years to come to fruition. The staging of Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict is the culmination of years of discussions, debate and exploration of the issues of what a multi-perspective exhibition might look and feel like. It simply could not have taken place without this long development process. There were more than 64 Sub Group and six Collectors Group meetings, involving thousands of volunteer hours.

The exhibition does not aim to agree on one single version of history but instead lets people from various backgrounds speak for themselves. Objects such as a bin lid used as a street communication tool and means of protest in nationalist areas, a bullet proof clipboard used by the security forces, as well as a matchbox with a well-known unionist slogan 'Ulster says No' printed on its cover are examples of the range of diverse objects on loan for this exhibition.

Exhibition objects and their labels revealed stories of resistance, peace, anxiety, loss, violence, humour, commemoration and hope. The exhibition invited viewers to explore their own life's experiences and to understand and appreciate different beliefs and perspectives of the conflict, it is not just for those who lived through the experiences depicted. In conjunction with the exhibition there were also workshops and facilitated talks to explore the issues raised.

In summary, the *Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict* project aimed to:

- Provide a platform in which diverse voices & experiences of the conflict could be heard
- Present a unique multi-perspective exhibition
- Create a network of communication between collections & collectors
- Generate interest in the collections to which the objects belong
- Inform the debate on a Living Memorial Museum and dealing with the past

The project was primarily funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Awards for All and the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience. Additional support came from the Enkalon Foundation, Bombardier and Belfast City Council. This project is supported by the PEACE III Programme managed for the Special EU Programmes Body by the Community Relations Council/Pobal Consortium.

## CONTEXT

### Living Memorial Sub Group

Healing Through Remembering (HTR) has five Sub Groups, each one of which explores an area recommended for debate in the Healing Through Remembering Report of 2002. One of which is the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group which examines the idea of establishing a permanent living memorial museum. The Living Memorial Museum would serve as a dynamic memorial to all those affected by the conflict and keep the memories of the past alive. It will also provide a diverse chronicle of the history of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, increase public awareness of the impact of the conflict, disseminate information and provide educational opportunities ensuring lessons are learned for the future.

The other Sub Groups are:

- Storytelling
- Day of Reflection
- Truth Recovery & Acknowledgement
- Network of Remembering & Commemoration Projects

### Artefacts Audit

In 2006 and as part of the Living Memorial Museum's work, HTR commissioned Dr Kris Brown (through a joint Fellowship Post with the Institute of Irish Studies at Queen's University) to undertake an audit of artefacts related to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland.

Initial discussions around issues regarding a Living Memorial Museum quickly highlighted the fact that there was no overall record of what items of historical significance existed, who owned them or where they were to be found. Over the two year project, Kris Brown identified and audited 424,393 items, way exceeding the Sub Group's initial expectations. These items were held in 79 collections in both the public, community and private realm. In what was seen as highly significant at the time, all 79 collectors agreed to be included in the printed report of the audit.

The audit provides an on-going way of promoting and encouraging discussion of ways of dealing with the past. As well as the printed report summarising the artefacts and the collections they belong to, every single artefact is catalogued through an online database hosted by the CAIN (Conflict Archive on the Internet) web service which contains information and source material on the Troubles and politics in Northern Ireland from 1968 to the present. CAIN is part of INCORE (International Conflict Research Institute) and the University of Ulster. The audit can be found at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/htr/> or [www.healingthroughremembering.org/artefactsdatabase](http://www.healingthroughremembering.org/artefactsdatabase)

Healing Through Remembering published the *Artefacts Audit: A report of the material culture of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland* in April 2008.

### Open Call for Ideas for a Living Memorial Museum

In July 2006, Healing Through Remembering launched an 'Open Call for Ideas' for a Living Memorial Museum of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. This was a total open call with no prerequisites to entry, questions to be answered, criteria to be addressed or no economic or political targets to be met. The call was open from July to September 2006 and on behalf of the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group, Louise Purbrick undertook to study, collate and present the responses.

The report *Without Walls* was published in November 2007. It does not draw conclusions on either the process or submitted ideas. It does, however, identify eight common themes around which there was a good degree of consensus, if not agreement. This included a multiple perspective museum, an intentionally unfinished memorial and a museum as a people's project using people's own words, experiences and interpretations.

### Berlin study visit

In 2010, a small group of individual members, staff and volunteers of Healing Through Remembering went to Berlin to gain insight into remembering a conflicted past, within an international context. The members who went were also members of the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group. The study visit was funded by PEACE III and the International Coalition for Sites of Conscience, and involved a key link with the House of Wannsee Conference (the place where the implementation of 'The Final Solution' was discussed).

Members of the group visited more than 16 sites including the former Stasi prison, site of Hitler's bunker, Berlin Wall Memorial & Documentation Centre, Jewish Museum and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. Their experiences are shared in the publication *Belfast to Berlin: Lessons in remembering conflict*, published by HTR in Autumn 2011.

### Ulster Museum

When HTR began their work on artefacts from the conflict, they were shocked to discover that there was nothing else like it in the public domain. After the start of this process, the Ulster Museum created an exhibition about the conflict which was intended to be temporary until a permanent exhibition was designed to coincide with the reopening after the major renovation which took place from 2006 to late 2009. It was understood that this permanent exhibition was going to include artefacts and would be colourful and interactive.

The plans seemed to have changed somewhere during the renovation process and following the reopening of the Ulster Museum, an exhibition called 'The Troubles' is now on display. This comprises black & white photographs and interpretation panels. The museum says this "Troubles Gallery" remains a work in progress.

### Maze / Long Kesh

A Masterplan and Implementation Strategy for the Maze / Long Kesh site was published by the Office of the First Minister & Deputy First Minister in May 2006. This plan includes an International Centre for Conflict Transformation based on the listed prison buildings and structures retained on the site.

There has been public and political discussion on whether this centre would include some kind of a museum about the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. HTR recognise that there will always be a debate around a 'Museum of the Conflict', where it is located, what is contained within it, who is responsible for it, and how it relates to what is already out there. It is part of its organisational role to contribute to this discussion, ensure that any gaps in terms of representation of different voices & perspectives are identified and plugged, and challenge (where appropriate) institutional thinking.

### International Coalition of Sites of Conscience

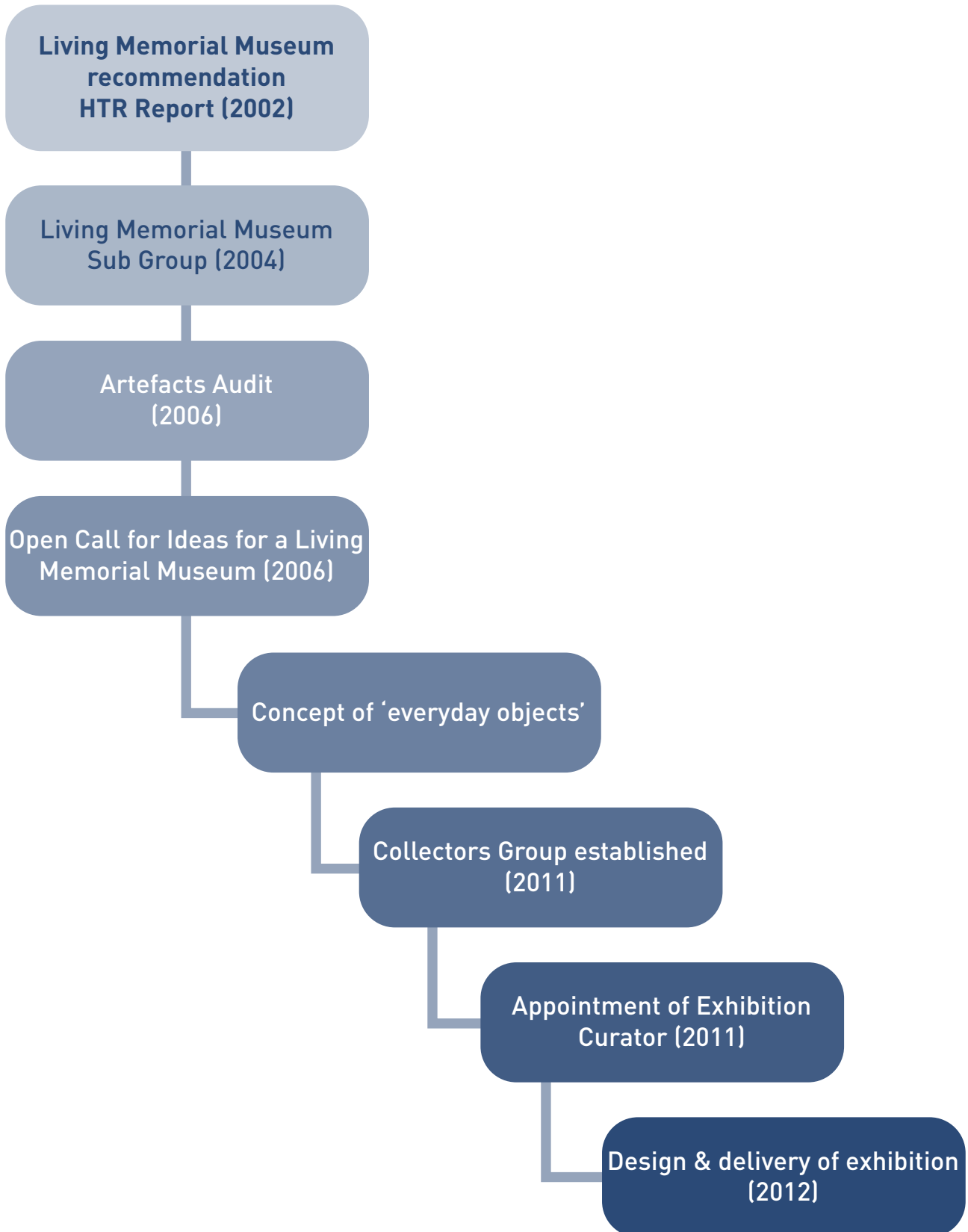
The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) is a worldwide network of Sites of Conscience – historic sites specifically dedicated to remembering past struggles for justice and addressing their contemporary legacies. The Coalition is currently made up of 17 Accredited Sites of Conscience and nearly 300 Individual and Institutional Members from around the world.

Healing Through Remembering, Diversity Challenges and the Museum of Free Derry are all members of ICSC (in fact, 3 of the 4 UK / Irish members). A good working relationship between HTR and ICSC has been established and includes individual organisational links eg with the Gernika Peace Museum.



## TIMELINE

The long-term developmental nature of this project cannot be emphasised enough and it is important to recognise that the exhibition is the product of a decade of conversations, which have constantly evolved, emerged and been refined. The timeline below illustrates the delivery of a touring exhibition being just one aspect of the process.



### EVALUATION PROCESS

In October 2011, Green Hat were appointed as project evaluators for the *Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict* project, through a tendering process of the Consultants Database. Two members of the team, Bryony Flanagan and Janie Crone, undertook the work. Green Hat was a Delivery Partner for *Whatever You Say, Say Something* and Bryony has also worked on the Day of Reflection.

The evaluation methodology was agreed in consultation with HTR and included the following:

- Review of project documentation
- Semi-structured interviews with 12 collectors
- Evaluation discussions with collectors
- Evaluation discussion with Living Memorial Museum Sub Group
- Evaluation discussion with HTR Board
- Facilitated discussions with HTR's Everyday Objects project working group
- Interviews with Exhibition Co-Ordinator / Curator & Facilitator
- Discussions with HTR staff & members
- Informal interviews with exhibition visitors
- Attendance at Preview Exhibition
- Attendance at two exhibition launch events
- Collection of anecdotal evidence through 'fly-on-the-wall' visits to exhibition locations
- Comment cards at exhibitions & collections of electronic comments through online survey
- Data capture activities

Wherever possible, interviews and discussions were undertaken face-to-face.

Evaluation activities ran throughout the duration of the project and were completed in October 2012.

“HTR weren't awarded the funding because they were the best people to put on the exhibition. They were given the funding because they were the best people to ask the questions.”

## EXHIBITION CONCEPT

Discussions around HTR presenting an exhibition evolved from discussions about a Living Memorial Museum, an open call for ideas and the audit of conflict related artefacts held in public and private collections. A temporary exhibition was seen as a first stage in further exploring the issues around a permanent museum in whatever shape such a thing might take. The staggering number of artefacts identified through the audit presented an opportunity for HTR to create something which connected collectors and their objects, generated further discussion and acted as a hub linking the 79 collections.

HTR felt it imperative that the collections retained the integrity of their own voices and sat comfortably within the organisation's ethos of bottom-up, community owned and led practice.

### “Our understanding of history told through objects is very interesting”

The concept of everyday objects came out of a discussion at a Living Memorial Museum Sub Group meeting where the question 'what is a weapon?' was posed. A brick was given as an example and it was noted that it was a more 'interesting' artefact than a gun. The group explored why this was seen as more interesting and this led to a discussion about the transformation of 'everyday' objects into things with a relevance &/or association with the conflict e.g. bin lids (protests & alerting people of the arrival of security forces), plastic lunch boxes (improvised devices), milk bottles (petrol bombs) and others.

There was a huge amount of discussion around the definition of what constituted an 'everyday' object, including whether the object had to have a specific use of its own outside of the conflict. HTR and the Living Memorial Sub Group did actually agree on a definition but the collectors later expanded it again.

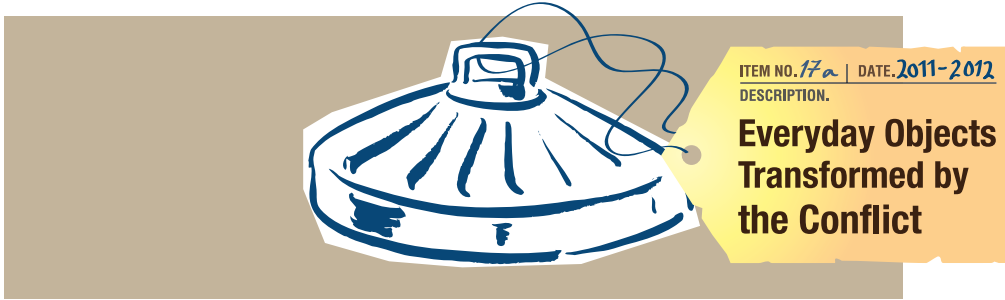
### “There is something magical about everyday objects and what you can do with that.”

Discussions included the concept of tangible objects versus online experience and the objects cited as examples of the impact were invariably ordinary 'everyday' objects. The notion of the 'ordinary transformed' suited the overall concept and ordinary objects became the central theme.

The name of the exhibition was met with a lot of enthusiasm by both collectors and HTR Board members. A couple of individual comments demonstrate this enthusiasm:

“A genius concept – quite personal and relevant– grounding everyday objects and everyday people.”

“The concept was a stunning idea making people face everyday objects that they had forgotten how they were used or maybe did not realise how the use was changed in conflict. It enabled people to reflect on things that you accept in conflict and now face it in a different way through the exhibition. The impact is subtle and dramatic.”



The exhibition needed to create an emotional response and a mechanism needed to be provided for people to articulate that response. Where there were workshops, the facilitated discussions provided this opportunity. For other visitors, labels were provided for people to make comments, responses, observations and feedback. The display of the labels also created a natural space for people to congregate within the exhibition space and provided an item of interest in themselves. The significance of the label is what led HTR to choose it as the exhibition logo. Of course, across the whole of Northern Ireland, the labels that we choose for ourselves and others is loaded with significance.

There are very few examples worldwide of conflict-related multiple perspective exhibitions / museums. This area is worthy of further research including identifying whether Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict is a potential model.

“I’m a real fan of what we’ve ended up with.”

### DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

It is clear that the long, at time painstakingly slow, process was absolutely key to the success of this project. It is a rarity that such long-time projects come to fruition, let alone those which – like *Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict* – were organic and did not have a clear vision of the final output at the outset.

An important aspect of the process was considered to be the regular discussions between collectors from varied backgrounds with differing cultural outlooks and this was the catalyst for growing ideas and concepts. In addition, the collectors meetings brought together a huge wealth of experience and expertise from across different artefacts contexts e.g. statutory body & professional collections through to 'stuff in a box in the attic'. It has undoubtedly challenged thinking for some of 'what is a museum'.

Collectors felt that the process used a holistic approach that was inclusive, relaxed, collaborative and egalitarian. HTR were very encouraging and facilitated people to speak up ensuring that every part was discussed and criteria agreed. Many felt well supported by HTR staff with trust built up in the relationships such that the potential for open and honest discussion and exchange of ideas was made possible. It was, for many, a very different approach to the way many had perhaps expected or would normally have operated, i.e. much more organic and consensual. The discussion process was similar to storytelling in so much as it was creating an ethical conversation with different and multiple perspectives and allowing them just 'to be', not publically challenged or questioned.

**“This was a very positive & exciting process.”**

There was enormous value in meeting other collectors and there was considerable interest and learning from hearing stories from different perspectives of the conflict. Many collectors found it interesting to hear what triggered private collectors to start collecting objects and material from the conflict, and there was some surprise of the extent of material held by private individual collectors.

On one hand people felt that the lack of speed in the process enabled time to build relationships with each other and enable people to become more confident about presenting ideas and objects. Others felt that the process was too slow and wanted to see things happen faster, but were aware that people needed to take things at their own speed and if something needed to be discussed it was discussed. The 'slowness' is an integral part of HTR's style and ethos and essential to ensure that details and challenges are fully worked through. Personal learning and development for some private collectors has been an unplanned outcome

It was felt overall to be a very rewarding process and most of the collectors expressed a desire to stay involved in some capacity. This process has provided organisational learning for HTR, particularly its staff. The skills and knowledge around designing, delivering and touring an exhibition have been gained on a steep learning curve.

**“The process of collectors coming together (regardless of what they did) was a real achievement. It has created a space for discussion.”**

With the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group having spent years discussing the concepts there was a challenge in enabling an inclusive and equal process involving the collectors and ensuring agreements for ideas and proposals were given back to the collectors and not just adopted during the meetings by those in attendance.

The enthusiasm of the Sub Group and the time constraints of the funding could have resulted in its members' ideas being pushed through, but advance discussions were held to ensure that did not happen.

The challenge for some collectors was how to be involved in the process with the certainty that anything could not be manipulated or interpreted in ways that were not appropriate or there was not agreement about. For the private collectors, there was an added challenge of being 'exposed' by items of great personal and sentimental value, and so there was an emotional risk as well. Engaging with the process required them to share these objects, which others (the public, HTR members, other collectors & institutions) may make judgements about, both in terms of their objects or themselves. However, *Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict* also created a rare opportunity for the private collectors to be part of something bigger; that is not just a network of other collectors but a large project reaching members of the public, schools and community groups with significant potential for future development.

HTR found that the collectors' expectations were varied across the spectrum both in terms of individuals involved, and the organisations and institutions. In addition, their expectations were difficult to predict. The organisational & institutional collectors were working in specific fields with organisational policies, best practice guidelines and a complex operating environment.

Because of geographical distance, work commitments and individual levels of interest, many collectors could not attend steering group meetings. The challenge for HTR was how to ensure that there was an input by collectors representative of background, collection types and geographical spread, together with the challenge of how to keep the collectors on board and engaged. HTR circulated notes from collectors meetings and this, along with regular letter and email communications with the collectors, ensured that – should they want to be – all collectors were fully up to speed with the process and its outputs and outcomes, even if they could not physically attend meetings.

A process which had at its end a physical product (aside from reports) is unusual for HTR. In this regard, it has parallels with the Day of Reflection. Interestingly, both final 'products' evolved out of an organic process where the vision around the type of event was clear in concept but lacking in any structure or form.

The nature of the organic developmental process was very challenging for the Curator, as the control over the process had to be relinquished to the collectors group. Normally it is the curator's job to design and develop an exhibition concept and product, and so *Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict* provided genuine professional challenges outside of the normal way of working. Each element of the process raised new questions which needed to be answered through consultation and discussion. The Curator had to work through these with the collectors group, which impacted on the time available to implement decisions. It is the evaluators' opinion that the selection of Triona White-Hamilton as Curator of this exhibition was a very important element in the success of the project. She brought not just vital curatorial skills but a sensitivity, attitude and ethos compatible with HTR's own and a clear ability to work with uncertainty.

The longevity and complexity of the process involved in developing *Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict* from pre-concept context through to final product perhaps indicates where we, as a society, currently are; that is, having organic and multiple-perspective discussions rather than finding and pursuing an agreed, shared narrative.

## GATHERING & SELECTION OF OBJECTS

In the selection of objects HTR and the collectors group had to balance a number of key considerations:

- 1 Willingness of the collector to loan the artefact
- 2 That the object had an 'everyday' use outside of the conflict
- 3 That the totality of objects represents the full spectrum of perspectives in Northern Ireland (i.e. Protestant / Unionist / Loyalist & Catholic / Nationalist / Republican, as well as security forces and victims & survivors)
- 4 That the totality of objects represented different aspects of the conflict
- 5 Availability of artefacts on loan
- 6 Ability to transport items to Belfast (time, cost & security / safety of items)
- 7 Size, scale, environmental & security considerations of artefacts

As a result of the above considerations, some items whilst identified as being ideal for the exhibition could not be selected e.g. large match stick model of Ardglass Presbyterian Church which was located in England and would have needed to have been hand-delivered to Belfast.

The decision about which objects collectors offered for selection was guided by HTR's recommendations of the most appropriate objects, but was ultimately the collectors choice based on a range of factors (including availability, security, profile etc.). In the case of private collectors, this was often a deeply personal decision. Several collectors told the evaluators that they were not sure whether they thought that all the objects that ended up in the exhibition were 'everyday' (however interesting) e.g. the RUC clipboard.

There were discussions around objects which did not fit into display cases or which were inappropriate to be displayed in cases. In some cases, reproductions were used where this was appropriate and the quality of the item was not compromised e.g. photographs (the Ardglass Presbyterian Church being one) and posters.

Finally, it was also recognised that whilst a 'core' selection of objects could be made, ultimately the practical considerations of each venue would - to a greater or lesser extent - dictate what items were displayed.

It was interesting that most of the issues raised around the selection of objects and their presentation was made by exhibition and/or education professionals. A number of them raised issues which had affected their internal decision-making process which often involved balancing the need for objects to be interesting, stimulating and challenging with the need to be sensitive.

For example one organisational collection had an article from a magazine mocking Bobby Sands and the NI Records Office had numerous notes hand-written by GPs attending murder scenes detailing fatal injuries and other graphic details. These were often scrawled on the back of whatever doctors found to hand (e.g. envelopes). Whilst clearly everyday objects, there were seen as being too personal and capable of causing deep hurt and/or offence.

HTR has a policy of not showing images relating to any deaths so that displays and reports have no danger of a reader or viewer suddenly seeing the scene of the death of a loved one. This also impacted on the selection of items and elements of items (e.g. the television news items).

### Exhibition standards

The Curator was able to provide professional advice about principles, good & best practice in the standard of presentation, protection, security and access to and of objects. A balance had to be struck between these professional standards and HTR's own principles. The Curator identified that there was considerable overlap but no conflict between HTR's Code of Ethics, International Council of Museums and the Museums Association (UK) Guidelines. The collectors agreed an Adoption of Statement which agreed to work to the three codes of conduct.

The adoption of professional guidelines also provided a challenge in trying to balance access to the objects and exhibition in local communities. For example, the requirement that the venue must be within a five minute response time from a fire station (thus ruling out many rural venues). HTR had to strike an appropriate balance between basic security, environmental and presentational requirements in line with professional guidelines and the desire of HTR to present the exhibition outside of gallery venues and in the heart of local communities. The two were not always compatible.

### Object labels

In order to retain the collector-led approach to the exhibition and the need to ensure a multi-perspective rather than sanitised exhibition, it was agreed that the labels for all objects would be written by the owners or collectors themselves. HTR provided no guidelines to the collectors for the labels, except imposing a 60 word limit. Spelling but not grammar errors were pointed out to collectors and the correct spelling suggested. Exhibition panels explained that the owners of the objects had provided their own labels. This explained to exhibition visitors why there was a very individual feel to the labels and why there were some inconsistencies across the labelling. The individual labelling did give power to a variety of voices through the collectors and created differing emotional responses to the exhibition.

This approach is highly unusual in professional practice (indeed in sharp contrast to the uniformity and standardisation of mainstream museum labelling) and raised a range of interesting issues which contributed to the process discussions. An example of the discussions is that one person raised an issue in which the label description appeared to contradict an image. A girl in a photograph was described as being 'traumatised' by the label author. In the photograph she was smiling, and this person observed that she didn't appear to be traumatised. However, these objects were 'just presented' rather than having a context, history and full explanation given and their interpretation was left with the viewer. It was both a strength and challenge of the Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict exhibition that individuals could view the objects from their own perspective without any influence, guidance or direction. No 'back story' of any image or artefact was presented.

### Display of objects

There were practical considerations on how objects would be grouped, particularly where there might be multiple objects in one case. There was careful consideration by HTR and the Curator around how objects were grouped and the normal curatorial decisions such as displaying items together by their similarity, theme, timeline, size and aesthetic appeal.

The contentious nature of this exhibition raised questions about what objects could be presented together in the same case or even proximity. There was considerable discussion about the displaying of exhibits from different collections. As well as this, the Curator had to take into account causing potential offence, distress or hurt to either the collectors &/or exhibition audience by the placing of certain objects next to others. For example, would there be issues displaying an object from a police or regimental collection next to a political prison object from a private collection? The process for agreeing this was critical. HTR could anticipate possible reactions from members of the public and it was generally accepted that issues raised by members of the public might be raised and that it was impossible to satisfy all of these.

There was an internal discussion about potential issues that might arise where objects were presented in a case with others (e.g. collectors &/or public objections to adjacent artefacts). Several collectors remarked that their objects were sitting next to items that they had never imagined they would. The only consultations around the display of objects was with the venues over technical and space issues.

### Ownership

The consent and voluntary nature of this project in line with HTR's own principles was very important. All objects were temporarily loaned on a voluntary basis and it was made clear that the objects could be removed from the exhibition either temporarily or permanently at any time and for any reason.

It was notable that many of the collectors did not set a maximum time for the loan of their objects and HTR were humbled by the trust and responsibility given to them by the collectors, whether private individuals or national institutions.

HTR did consider that potentially items may be offered, particularly from private collections, which may have had some link to a particular event for which legal investigations had not yet begun, e.g. by the Historical Enquiries Team. This issue did not arise.

Finally, there were challenges around ensuring that objects presented did not appear to 'encourage' anyone to replicate them e.g. coffee jar bombs. This issue came up only once, in Clones, where several school



children wrote comments which reflected an excitement about the milk bottle [petrol bomb]. HTR spoke immediately and directly to the school and the issue was dealt with quickly, fully and to the school's satisfaction. In fact, the school were pleased that HTR had raised it with them and HTR understand that they spoke to the young people who had attended the workshop.

### Gaps

The Curator along with HTR undertook an analysis of gaps as a rounded collection of objects. These gaps included artefacts representing the rural experience, items relating to the Republic of Ireland and generally there were fewer artefacts both from and representing the Protestant / Unionist / Loyalist community. Through the Artefact Audit, HTR were able to target specific collectors to address some of these gaps, so it proved itself an invaluable resource. At the collectors meetings, it was also agreed that some of these gaps could not be fully addressed. For example, there was consensus around the difficulties of showing the rural experience during the conflict.

With hindsight, it was noted that there was no reference to 'the Disappeared' and that this was an omission.

As often seems the case with other areas of dealing with the past, the Republican community were more likely to actively engage and contribute objects. The Loyalist community were less likely to engage and the former and current security forces even less likely.

The exhibition in its current form was not very accessible to anyone with a visual impairment; and in the context of dealing with the past, some victims and survivors may therefore feel particularly excluded.

Future developments may want to consider non-visual aspects of the conflict such as smells and sound e.g. helicopter, burning, smoke / bomb damage, Saracen doors slamming. These are all very evocative and would add to the overall experience making such an exhibition multi-sensory. There are examples of conflict-related multi-sensory exhibitions such as one at the Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres, Belgium where trench warfare is recreated, along with mock mustard gas and a Wilfred Owen poem being read aloud.

### Signage

The Curator designed two information panels for the exhibition. As with so many aspects of this project, there was a delicate balance to be struck with the information. Sufficient information needed to be provided to explain the multi-perspective nature of the exhibition, the self-labelling and the aims of the exhibition. However, HTR had to avoid 'over-presenting' the exhibition to ensure that conversations were created not guided.

There were also conversations about the title of the exhibition which needed some explanation. Apart from the clarification of 'everyday', clarity needed to be given to the word 'conflict' to identify which conflict the exhibition was referring to.

The use of 'light touch' interpretation and signage for the exhibition was part of the learning from the Berlin study visit where most museums, exhibitions and other sites provided minimum information for visitors rather than trying to influence.

### Catalogue

The inclusion of an exhibition catalogue was part of the adoption of professional standards. However it also brought a number of other benefits. It was a way to increase accessibility to the exhibition and the objects by those not able to physically attend the exhibition. It presented a lasting and tangible record of the exhibition and its objects. It allowed objects, that for whatever reason, could not be presented in a venue to be seen by the audience and it is a resource for discussion and future conversations in itself.

HTR always documents its projects, research and other activities, and the presentation of the exhibition through a catalogue is a continuation of this. The catalogue can also be cross-referenced with the online Artefacts Audit (see Context section above).

### Additional objects

Items for the *Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict* exhibition were selected from the 79 collections identified in the HTR Audit of Artefacts. However, as the process gathered momentum, its profile was raised and others joined in the discussions, HTR needed to develop a policy of how to respond to offers of additional items being offered for the exhibition. This has yet to be achieved. The nature of the project meant that HTR were unable to respond to offers of additional objects as the agreed process was to present objects identified from within the Artefacts Audit.

There was a query over what to do if the host venue wanted to add items (particularly those of local interest) to the exhibition during its stay in their venue. It had previously been agreed that the venue could not visit organisations who had donated objects to the exhibition so the inclusion of objects by a host venue seemed, on the one hand, unfair to the collectors but, on the other hand, it seemed a shame to exclude new and interesting objects.

By not including additional artefacts, the same exhibition toured to each venue (with a few exceptions, e.g. Rita Duffy's installation *Veil* didn't travel to Clones Library as there was insufficient space for it). This was extremely advantageous in terms of analysing responses to the artefacts by different people in different places and venues. Had the objects been different in each place, it would have been harder to make comparisons and draw any conclusions from the general public's response to the exhibition.

## EXHIBITION & VENUES

### Preview exhibition

The process of selecting objects for the exhibition was done by the Curator and HTR, in discussion with the collectors.

The Curator recommended presenting a preview exhibition to the collectors and an invited audience for several weeks to hone various aspects of the presentation and give HTR some initial feedback. The preview exhibition enabled collectors to get a feel for the kinds of objects they might include and the confidence to choose the most interesting and relevant items from their collections.

It was agreed to provide three exhibition cases: one with one object, one with several objects from one collection and one with multiple perspectives. This preview exhibition was presented at HTR for two weeks from 14th November 2011.

There were challenges for HTR as some people did not understand that the preview was essentially a pilot exhibition and were surprised there were such few objects. There was also concern that the press might interpret the preview exhibition as 'is this it?!'. There was a clear need to sell the preview exhibition as a taster project building on the artefacts audit and collectors list.

### Selection of venues

Following on from above, there was a balance to be struck between geographical location of venues, urban versus rural, both sides of the border, suitable venues from a professional standards point of view, available venues and also those who had expressed an interest. This was hugely challenging for the Curator and not a normal aspect of a curatorial role. It was felt important that the venues were not the "usual suspects" and were in "unexpected places" to extend the reach of the exhibition.

In the interests of fairness, perceived or otherwise, and not being seen as a self-serving exhibition, it was agreed that the exhibition would not visit any of the collectors' own venues e.g. the Ulster Museum or the Linen Hall Library.

A call for interested venues was put out through social media (Twitter & Facebook), local authorities and community and voluntary network organisations such as NICVA and Town Centre Managers. The collectors were also asked for suggestions, as were HTR consultants involved with the project. They suggested many other sites, and particularly more public places, such as shopping centres, public buildings and meeting places.

Whilst perhaps broadening access, public venues threw up additional challenges of security of the objects, supervision and running workshops in public spaces.

The Curator contacted over 80 potential venues. A shortlist of 16 venues, which all met the curatorial criteria, was presented to the collectors to select final venues.

There were extensive discussions with venue owners with regard to their role in the management of the exhibition, space restrictions, technical and other practical issues together with publicity. There was a need for more background work to be done with venues that are non-exhibiting venues. There is a consideration that museums and exhibition spaces are better placed regarding facilities such as high curatorial standards, invigilation, education officers, etc.

The split site of the exhibition in Belfast was described as being both "inspired" and "challenging". The split venue in Belfast created some challenges in that not everyone visited both venues (and so only saw half the exhibition). The curator and HTR were extremely careful to split the objects in a way that would maintain the integrity of the exhibition.

It was felt by collectors and the public that the physical journey between the Falls Road and the Shankill Road had a great value in itself. An example of this is that during one of the trails between the two Belfast venues, one participant said "this is the first time I have ever visited the Falls Road and because it was a Healing Through Remembering organised event, it made me feel more comfortable about visiting the area".

At the end of the process, HTR identified a need to develop a policy to respond to requests for hosting the exhibition – this has still not been resolved (largely a funding issue).

There were a number of unplanned outcomes for the venues. An example of a successful one is that the Good Relations Unit at Omagh District Council are now going to use the exhibition and its process to develop their own more localised version of the exhibition.

It is worth noting here that the Director of HTR said that the only thing she would change about the project was “to have had more money to go to more places, for longer and to engage with more people”.

### Locations, venues & dates of exhibition

The exhibition was staged in five different locations – Derry / Londonderry, Ballymoney, Clones (Co Monaghan), Omagh and Belfast, with the Belfast exhibition being divided between two locations, one on the Shankill Road and one on the Falls Road and linked by a Connection Trail that also passed relevant sites of the conflict such as murals, commemoration plaques, and sites where people died.

- First Derry Presbyterian Church, Derry / Londonderry  
6 – 28 March 2012; Monday - Friday 10.00 a.m – 4.00 p.m
- Bell's Architects, Ballymoney  
12 April – 25 May 2012; Monday - Friday 10.00 a.m – 4.00 p.m, late night Thursday openings on Thursday 19th April, 3 May and 17 May, 6.30 p.m – 8.30 p.m.
- Clones Library, Co Monaghan  
5 - 28 June 2012; Monday 11.00 a.m – 8.00 p.m, Tues - Fri 10.00 a.m – 5.00 p.m
- Strule Arts Centre, Omagh  
6 - 21 July 2012; Monday - Saturday 10.00 a.m – 5.30 p.m
- St Mary's College, Falls Road & Spectrum Centre, Shankill Road  
2 - 11 August 2012 (the exhibition was divided between these 2 locations linked by a 'connection trail')

Each venue was responsible for their own publicity with the support of HTR. Publicity undertaken included press releases in local papers, paper and electronic mailing to the venues' own lists, posters, flyers and word of mouth through HTR's members, consultants and contacts. The time at each venue was very limited (around three weeks per venue) and HTR felt that by the time the marketing for each event was really kicking in the exhibition was moving to the next venue. This is perhaps due to HTR's inexperience of exhibitions and temporary 'product' show, but also its use of non-traditional venues (except the Strule) which were not experienced in the marketing of temporary events.

### Exhibition Visitors

The intended audience for the *Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict* exhibition was the general public. There was the belief that the exhibition has the potential to contribute towards the healing process. If the exhibition had been based on 'guns and bombs' it was felt that it may have been more challenging but not as accessible to as many people.

The exhibition was hosted in local communities and this was reflected in the choice of venues. This made it accessible to as wide a range of people as possible, but the nature of the exhibition also made it very interesting to an 'external' audience (i.e. from outside the local, Northern Irish communities).

It was fairly predictable that the highest number of visitors came from Northern Ireland given that all but one of the venues was in Northern Ireland and the focus of the exhibition was events that had mostly taken place in Northern Ireland. If it is felt important to have a wider audience then there needs to be a consideration about how to engage with other individuals, groups and communities.

There were a number of comments that it was difficult for young people to engage with the exhibition as they have little or no lived experience, and so were lacking in background information and knowledge. Some visitors felt that the exhibition was “possibly more for people who lived through the troubles as children and younger people, unless they are studying history, are much less aware of the Troubles”. This person thought that people who have lived through “the trouble years” would not really want children to be involved. This provides a challenge about raising awareness of the value of dealing with the past through vehicles such as the *Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict* exhibition for those with little or no lived experience. Conversely, children and young people provided a captive audience for those now studying the conflict as history and this was demonstrated in Clones in particular by the number of children undertaking workshops.

The visitor figures were as follows:

**Venue Numbers**

First Derry Presbyterian Church, Derry / Londonderry	600
Bell’s Architects, Ballymoney	60
Clones Library, Co Monaghan	2,000
Strule Arts Centre, Omagh	300
St Mary’s College, Falls Road & Spectrum Centre, Shankill Road	301 210
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,471</b>

There were a total of 3,471 visitors to the exhibition coming mainly from Northern Ireland but also from England, America, Austria, Germany and Sri Lanka.

The figures from the Clones venue seem extraordinarily high, even given that there were a number of workshops. The population of the town is only around 2,500 and the numbers are more than 3 times those who attended in the two major centres of population in NI (i.e. Belfast & Derry). However, as there was no standardised way of counting numbers by the venues there is no way of verifying the accuracy.

**Workshops**

Facilitated workshops were offered to all venues as an opportunity to discuss and explore not only the artefacts in the exhibition, but people’s reactions to them and views on a permanent living memorial museum.

Following a procurement process, a consultant was appointed to produce workshop resources to accompany the exhibition. The recruitment process specifically requested an individual who had experience of developing training materials for community groups and knowledge of the school curriculum in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Workshops were developed for adults and for children in different age groups. Workshops were developed on a number of topics: ‘Women & the Conflict’, ‘Territory & Division’, ‘The Power of Words’ and ‘Life Went On’. A number of the existing HTR workshop facilitators were then trained in the delivery of these workshops.

There were nine workshop sessions in total; six of which took place at Clones Library, one at the Strule Arts Centre (Omagh) and the other two in Ballymoney. They involved a total of 157 people. Organisations which undertook workshops were:

- Ballymoney Rotary Club
- WAVE Trauma
- St Tiernach's Primary School (Clones)
- South Armagh Rural Women's Network
- Irish County Women's Association (Clones branch)
- St Comghall's Primary School (Clones)
- Youth Adult Leadership Programme FOCUS

The workshops were facilitated by Healing Through Remembering consultants. Participants in the workshops included people from rural communities and from both sides of the border.

### Connection Trail & Belfast venues

The Belfast stage of the exhibition was split over two venues, each in an area with a strong single identity – Spectrum Centre on the Shankill Road and St Mary's College on the Falls Road. Exhibition visitors needed to go to both sites to see *Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict* in its entirety.

The venues were linked by a walking Connection Trail and guides, led by trained HTR guides, once daily from each venue. The trail did not involve visiting buildings, places or other sites relating to the conflict, but rather pointing them out and giving a very brief amount of (factual) information about them. After seeing the second part of the exhibition, the guides facilitated a short workshop to discuss what people had seen and how it had made them feel.

There were lots of positive comments about the split site exhibition and the trail lent itself to the concept of 'everyday' with ordinary buildings taking on a special significance as a result of the conflict (e.g. police station, pub where a shooting took place, houses with protective shutters).

An accompanying leaflet about the trail including a map was produced by HTR in consultation with EPIC and Coiste (political ex-prisoner support groups who individually and jointly run political tours of the Falls and Shankill area). It is fair to say that this involved considerably more work than was originally envisaged and involved significant research. The map shows murals, plaques / memorials, sites and fatal incidents directly on the trail route. HTR's research unearthed a number of inaccuracies around some of these fatal incidents from long-established and well-respected sources.

Additionally, HTR were able to make a number of observations about the plaques and memorials marking fatal incidents on the route. Republican commemorations are usually at the place where the death occurred; security forces in a garden or place away from where the death occurred; and civilians (where there have been a number of deaths at the same time) tend to be commemorated at a garden on the site of the incident.

Whilst there was great interest in the trail itself, it was designed only as a vehicle to connect the venues not as an activity in itself. After visiting both exhibitions and undertaking the trail, many people did not have the energy to undertake a workshop and some felt that they had discussed as much as they wanted to, with some very significant conversations taking place en route.

In addition, the Connections Trail made people think about how they moved around the city. For example, one person commented that they would never have taken the bus from certain part of the city because of potential issues arising from having to interact with people either at the bus stop, the driver or other passengers. As a result this person walked around the city to avoid this contact, a habit which continues today.

The trails involved a total number of 81 people although it not possible to know who may have done the trail independently using the leaflet and map rather than as part of an organised group. These numbers are included in the exhibition figures above.

### Visitor feedback

The overall feedback from the exhibition was extremely positive. Feedback was gathered in several different forms:

- Evaluation forms
- Comment labels
- Feedback via venue staff & volunteers
- Anecdotal & empirical evidence

It was generally felt that the mix of objects was very interesting and the variety and type of objects – artefacts, photos & multi-media objects - worked very well. The public felt that there was a good balance of objects from different sections of the community and also a good balance between the more unique items and more everyday ones.

Rita Duffy's piece 'Veil' was singled out for the most comments by the general public and many people found it very emotive. Unfortunately due to a lack of space, it was not available for the Clones exhibition. The Relatives for Justice Quilt also received a significant number of comments by the public.

Comments were made by some members of the public that they would have liked to have seen more objects with a local significance and in local contexts included in the exhibition. An example was to show how objects, such as the civil rights badges in the exhibition in Derry / Londonderry, tied into events that happened in that city. There are, of course, practical implications in this in terms of evolving and changing curation, and this consideration for the future needs to be balanced with the benefits of a single exhibition that the whole community can respond to. There may also be some overlap with existing museums e.g. Museum of Free Derry and the Siege Museum in Derry / Londonderry.

Some people clearly found the exhibition upsetting and emotionally challenging. However, despite the difficult emotions these people remarked that the exhibition had been interesting and worthwhile, even though it had surfaced emotions. HTR were well aware that this exhibition may cause this reaction in some people as this was a conflict-related project and a sanitised version of a violent period of history was never an option. People generally accepted that an exhibition of the conflict is complex but a story that "does need to be told". There was a very positive response from victims & survivors, who found it very challenging and very hard, but in a non-critical way.

There were more personal memories and reflections by the public at the Omagh exhibition, which perhaps reflects the more diverse attendance as a result of very proactive promotion by the Good Relations Officer.

**“This will add to their [the public's] sense of whether they feel their stories are being told.”**

The exhibition was described as “stunningly powerful” and made people reflect on how much their daily lives had been changed by the conflict and have continued to change since. People who saw the exhibition included those directly impacted by violence and those who believe they were never impacted. The comments received demonstrated the public's reflection on how, during the conflict and since, the 'ordinary' has become 'extraordinary' and how the abnormal became normal.

For some people the objects and stories were new to them and this was demonstrated by comments from young people. In Clones, there were several comments from boys about how the petrol bomb [milk bottle] was “cool” and how they were “going home to make a few”. These comments were only discovered by library staff several days after they had been left. HTR contacted the school (see above) and implemented a policy of checking all comments left on a daily basis to avoid any future similar incidents. Whilst the comment label was removed from public display, it was kept by HTR.

Some comments (particularly from children) indicated a misunderstanding or misinformation about history. This illustrates a need for multi-perspective educational initiatives.

People commented that much more could and should have been displayed. The challenges of a touring exhibition are the constraints on resources – financial, human, transport and venue accessibility and size (see below). It may be possible to grow the exhibition.

“The usual suspects will come and see this exhibition. That is, those who are interested in the journey and involved in other processes”

It is felt that the exhibition has the potential to impact on anyone seeing it and to do it in different ways but particularly through the educational and workshop elements of the exhibition. There was some disappointment expressed about how much “genuine discussion” took place and it was considered that there was a need to be more proactive in engaging groups through the workshops. It was agreed that this was only possible if the exhibition was in a longer term venue for a year.

There is a dilemma in that there are many requests from within Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, England and other parts of the world for the exhibition and there is a very strong feeling that the exhibition should be seen by as many people as possible and a travelling exhibition is the way to do this. However, there is also strong feelings around having a more static permanent exhibition. It is felt that the exhibition would have a greater impact by staying in one place for longer, combining it with workshops, discussions, talks and enabling people to have time to absorb, reflect, discuss and debate. This would allow the creation of a deeper individual and collective response.

Given the significance and challenges around language when discussing the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, it is a surprise that it was not raised by more visitors. Two visitors felt that the words ‘Security Forces’ was a “charged description”. The challenge of language will always present itself, particularly when there are many label authors using their own words. These comments were, however, made by a tiny number of people out of the thousands who attended.

The lack of a narrative for the exhibition was a huge strength of the exhibition and genuinely allowed people to make up their own minds, take their own perspectives and draw their own conclusions. The lack of a narrative was also a challenge for anyone not familiar with the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, e.g. tourists and young people. In an educational context, with no narrative, the question has to be asked as to who ‘fills in the blanks’. Is this the teachers’ responsibility or should HTR develop an educational resource?



## SUMMARY AND THE FUTURE

Undertaking this exhibition is, in some ways, a departure for HTR. The process of designing, programming and touring an exhibition is far from natural territory and something there was little or no in-house experience of. In this respect it was risky and challenging. However, the purpose of the exhibition – that as a tool for discussion – was exactly what HTR aimed to and managed to achieve through this project. It progressed the debate on a living memorial museum and learnt many lessons on developing an inclusive, sensitive and principled process towards an exhibition.

The delivery of *Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict* was the culmination of nearly a decade's worth of discussions. It had been more than seven years in the making. It has proved a valuable way of illustrating who HTR are and what they do. It has also provided a steep learning curve whilst also developing new internal skills and capacity. There has also been huge voluntary effort involved in making this project happen.

It is difficult to know how to progress this project and the whole process has raised so many more questions on everything from ethics to practical considerations. HTR has had to walk a delicate line between tensions in so many aspects of this exhibition:

- Community versus Curatorial process
- Everyday objects versus significant objects
- Permanent versus temporary locations
- Process versus product
- Lived experience versus next generation
- Touring versus static exhibition

These tensions will continue to a lesser or greater extent and will continue to raise further complex questions.

So where do we go from here?

There is very strong encouragement and support from within HTR to carry on the debate about a permanent Living Memorial Museum. Many are keen to build on the exhibition in whatever form that takes. Options proposed to date include a constantly touring exhibition with changing themes or emphasis; a virtual museum (i.e. current artefacts from the exhibition in an on-line format); commissioned curator; or an annual themed curated exhibition. The thousands of artefacts identified through the audit alone offer a huge range of options.

There is some a view that a static exhibition has more potential to give a focal point to discussions on a living memorial museum, maintain momentum and keep the conversations going.

The challenge is, as the Board sees it, funding, organisation and curation. The Community Relations Council, Arts Council of Northern Ireland and DCAL (Department of Culture Arts and Leisure) were all seen as potential funders for future development.

Then there is the question of the artefacts yet to be formally identified and recorded throughout Northern Ireland and beyond. Throughout the exhibition period, people visiting talked about objects they had in their attic or in a drawer somewhere. This included photographs, letters, prison art, political literature, event memorabilia and other items. Is it for HTR to search out and expand the database or for another organisation to now take this role on? If HTR remain the lead organisation, how do they deal with what is found, both in information terms and in practical storage?

There are many internal voices that feel there is great value in taking the exhibition to other places and particularly those that were impacted by the conflict, such as Dublin, the Border Counties, London and Warrington. Indeed there is some encouragement to take the exhibition to other places linked to the International Sites of Conscience including Brazil and Guernica. There are a number of issues about the exhibition touring further afield. There is some anxiety about loaning objects at greater geographical distances; there is the issue of whether control of the exhibition by HTR will be lessened including how it is marketed and presented and who is targeted; there are issues about who pays for the exhibition and whether this will conflict with HTR's policy of not charging for service; finally, there are issues about who will manage the exhibition and how it will be financed.

A way needs to be found to continue to support the network of collectors that has been formed through this project. It is recognised that the collectors group are a valuable resource and consideration must be given on how to keep them engaged. The private collectors in particular (who do not belong to professional museum and/or curatorial networks) felt validated by this process and many had a visible sense of pride in their objects being included in the exhibition. For the statutory organisations, working with HTR has given them an alternative view of their items, as well as a more consultative and collaborative way of working. They appear to have enjoyed being part of the debate.

*Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict* is one of a small number of multi-perspective exhibitions globally. There is some merit in HTR considering the idea of HTR undertaking some research on conflict-related multiple perspective exhibitions, perhaps in collaboration or partnership with ICSC.

Finally, this evaluation report represents an opportunity to share the learning from the development and exhibition process with a wider audience, with the aim of contributing further towards the debate on a living memorial museum on the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. HTR need to agree on its role in progressing these discussions and who it will engage with going forward.





**Contact Details**

Healing Through Remembering  
Alexander House  
17a Ormeau Avenue  
Belfast BT2 8HD

Tel: +44 (0)28 9023 8844

Fax: +44 (0)28 9023 9944

Email: [info@healingthroughremembering.org](mailto:info@healingthroughremembering.org)

Web: [www.healingthroughremembering.org](http://www.healingthroughremembering.org)

