



BrightCulture

# LINCOLNSHIRE WOLDS CHURCHES FESTIVAL

Evaluation Report - November 2019





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an external evaluative review by Bright Culture of the Lincolnshire Wolds Churches Festival Project which ran from April – November 2019; led by the National Churches Trust and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project focuses on the churches and their communities in the district of East Lindsey in Lincolnshire. The project aimed to develop a new festival spanning over two weekends in September, create new interpretation sharing the history of churches and build volunteer skills in welcoming visitors from around the world into their churches. In the past eight months the project has:

Engaged  
**861**  
volunteers to take part in the festival



Welcomed  
**9,000**  
church visits during the festival.



Produced  
**100**  
new explorer packs and  
**1,500**  
treasure hunt spotter books for families

Trained **94**  
volunteers in Welcoming Visitors, Keeping Churches Open, Social Media, Opening up Churchyards, Telling Stories and Social History.

Created  
**11,000**  
church directories listing all the churches in the district, to be distributed over three years

Welcomed  
**50**  
school children into churches to trial treasure hunt spotter books



Opened up  
**140**  
churches during the **4** day festival over **2** weekends



Delivered a festival conference including training to  
**72**  
volunteers



Produced and distributed  
**12,000** flyers,  
**1,000** posters and  
**10,000** guidebooks to promote the festival

Delivered a successful online and social media campaign with  
**359**   Tweets,  
and a Facebook reach of  
**39,772** people

Awarded **7**  
bursaries worth over  
**£1,000**  
in total for churches to develop their own mini interpretation projects.



The project also extended the geographical area it covered. It emerged that a small group of around 18 coastal churches, some of which were in the most deprived communities in the area, were not included within the Wolds area – but just over the boundary. The team felt this omission was unfair. Invitations were sent to these churches and 14 participated. The festival was then renamed Lincolnshire Wolds and Coast Festival. The team felt this rebranding was important, not only to represent the coastal churches but to also, in marketing terms, attract a wider audience.

The Church Support Officer delivering the project has been overwhelmed not just by the number of churches in the district who signed up to this project, but their interest, enthusiasm and commitment to making

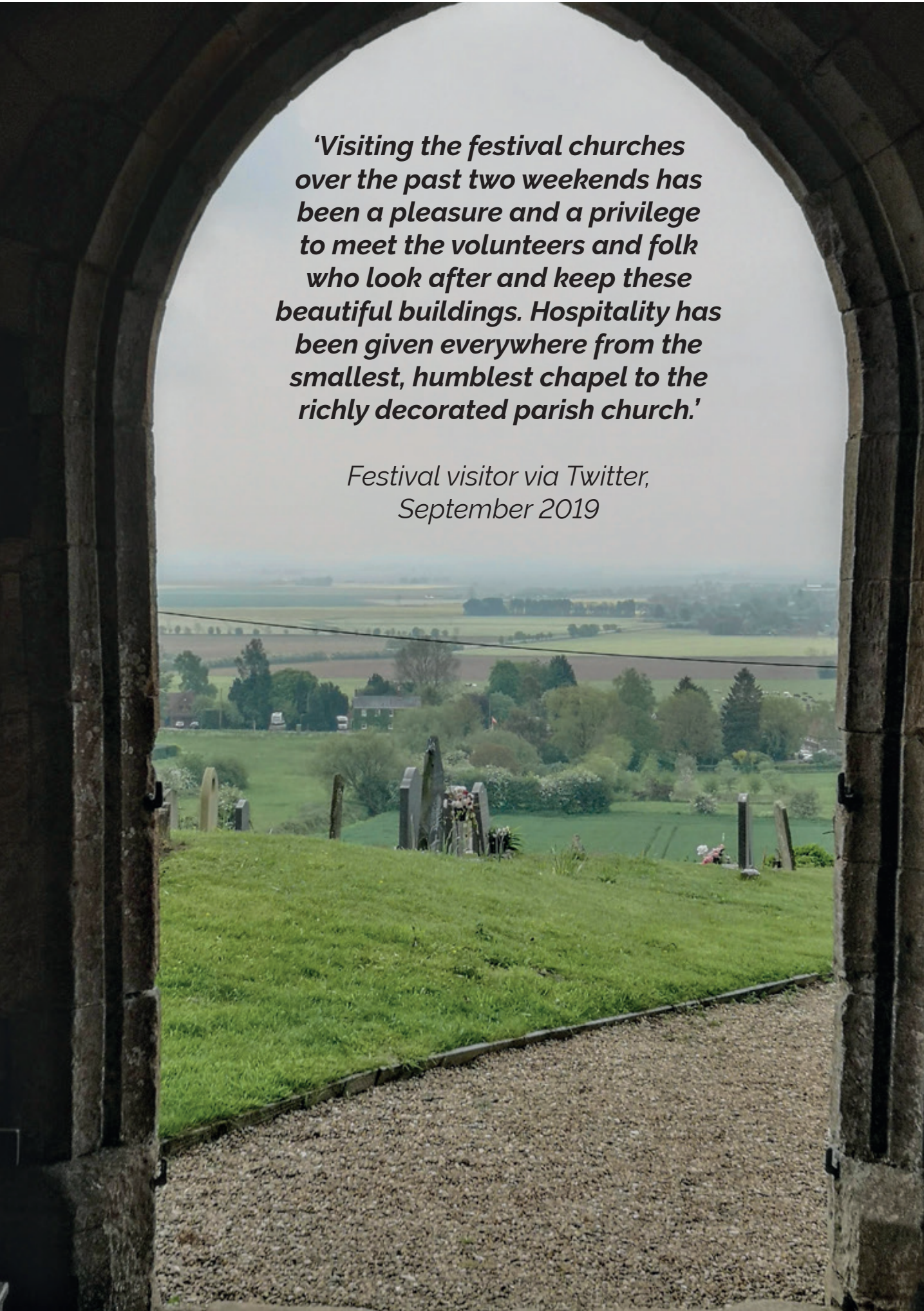
the festival a success. Whilst the team were confident volunteers would want to take part and visitors would come, the numbers have gone way beyond their expectations. All but one of the targets for the project have been over exceeded and the feedback demonstrates the sheer enthusiasm for the festival and associated training. Church teams who took part in the project felt a sense of inclusion and recognition that they had not felt previously. The platform the festival has provided churches with, has in no doubt inspired their teams to do more and open up their buildings to new audiences. As a result of this project, 7 new interpretation projects are currently being developed by confident church teams using their new skills and experience, building their resilience for their buildings for the future.





CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Methodology	7
Activities	10
Volunteer training	10
Marketing the festival	11
Church guidebooks and directories	12
Festival visitors	13
Explorer packs and treasure hunt	16
Schools	17
Bursaries	17
Conclusion	18
Successes	18
Challenges	18
Learning from this project	18
Resilience & next steps	19
Recommendations	20





- To engage 100 churches to open up during the festival, with 600 church volunteers taking part in the project.
- To deliver the festival over 2 weekends in September engaging 5000 visitors.
- To offer training to 150 volunteers in marketing and interpretation.
- To create new family activities, including an explorer pack and treasure hunt for each of the 100 churches taking part.
- To develop new marketing materials including 6000 guidebooks, posters and flyers and an online and social media campaign.
- To distribute bursaries to up to 25 churches to deliver mini interpretation projects.

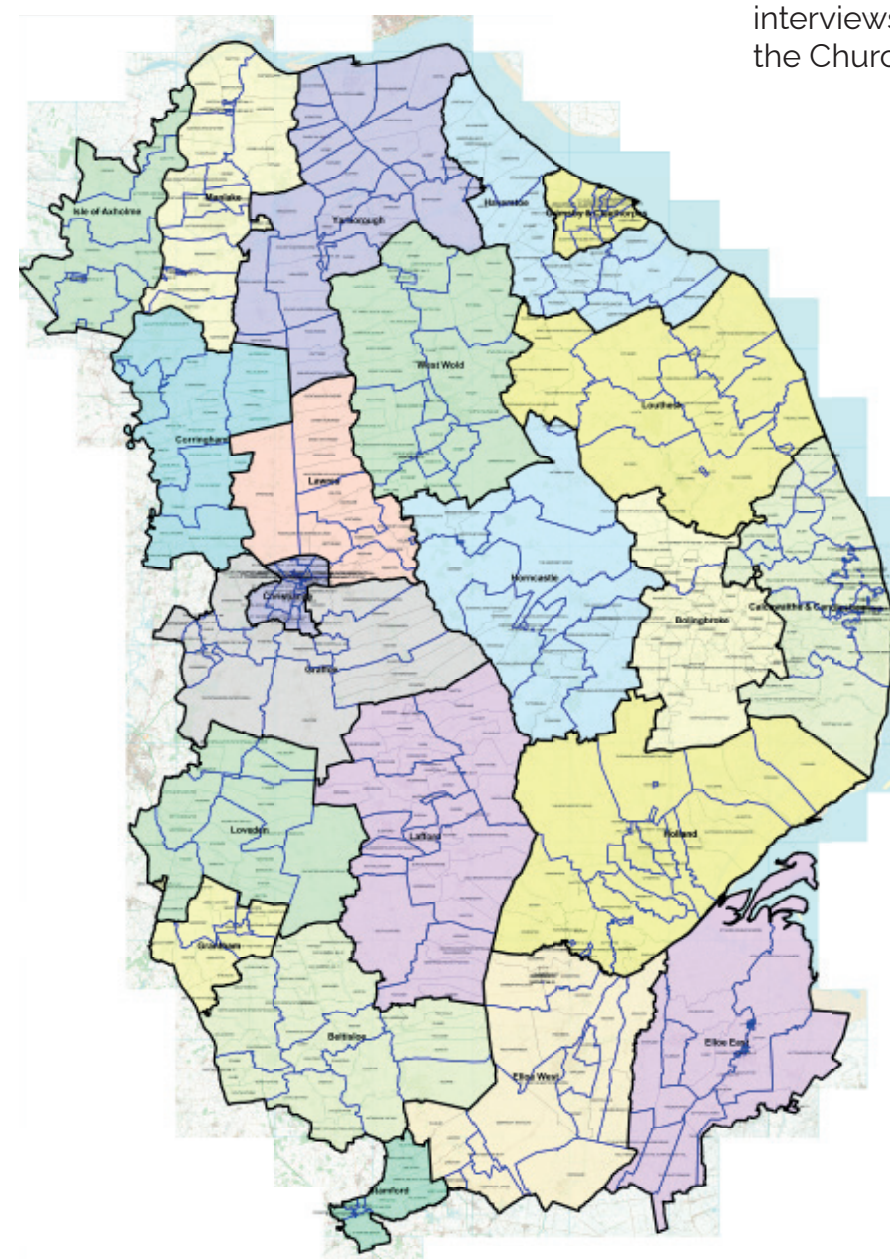
The Festival was supported by the National Churches Trust (NCT) (registered charity number 1119845) and managed by NCT Heritage Services Ltd (company registration 11194504). This project aimed to build on the learning and experience gained during the Great Interpretation Project delivered in 2018/19. This project, also supported by Lincolnshire County Council's Community Collaboration Fund and East Lindsey District Council (ELDC), aimed to replicate the success of the West Lindsey Churches Festival which has been running in the neighbouring district for 23 years. The aspiration is that this new festival will also become annual, with ELDC committing funding for a further two years. This project was about getting the festival off the ground with a huge promotional arm and up-skilling volunteers to encourage and enable them to take part but also to trial and share ideas with other church teams. The project has been delivered by the Church Support Officer, a post part funded by the project. The key audiences the project aimed to reach were:

- Volunteers; churchwardens, church welcomers, clergy, members of congregations and local people.
- Local people; those who volunteer, visit or use the church for community activities.
- Schools; who will be able to access the explorer packs and interpretation materials during visits to local churches.
- Visitors; who will find more churches open and accessible more of the time.
- New audiences: families will be encouraged to be involved in the project and become visitors via the treasure hunts and explorer packs.

Lisa Davenport of Arts & Heritage Consultancy Bright Culture was commissioned to deliver a summative evaluation of the project using data and information collected by the Church Support Officer over the 8 month delivery period of the project. Data and information analysed and used to inform this report includes:

- Church volunteer participant numbers.
- Church participating in festival numbers.
- Festival participant numbers.
- Festival participant surveys.
- Volunteer training surveys.
- Volunteer feedback forms.
- Online & social media data.
- Feedback from school groups.
- Bursary application forms

In addition to this data, Lisa has undertaken 1:1 interviews with three project participants and the Church Support Officer.

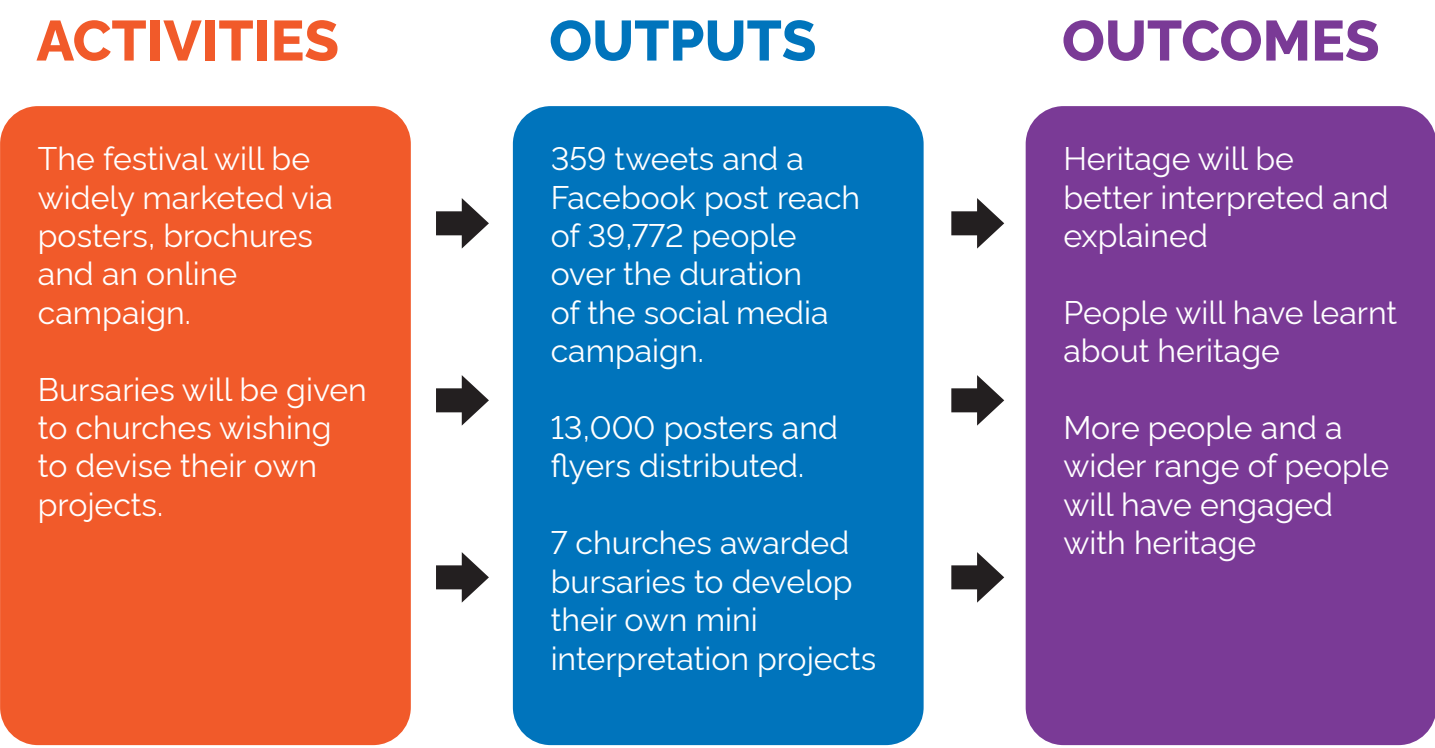


Map showing the East Lindsey district where the project took place.



Scamblesby pupils enjoying the Spotter Books.  
*Scamblesby Primary School*







# ACTIVITIES

## VOLUNTEER TRAINING

A key aim of this project was to provide volunteers with new skills and the confidence to take part in the festival. The training focussed on interpretation, marketing, presentation and opening up churches. The team delivered four sessions of training during the festival conference which was held in Louth in July 2019. The decision to deliver the training over one day instead of several responded to previous project evaluation where volunteers had found some of the travelling combined with pressure on time to get to numerous different sessions difficult. The conference training workshops, which attracted 72 volunteers, covered:

- Preparing for the festival.
- PR and promoting the festival.
- Welcoming visitors to your church.
- Keeping your church open.
- Opening up churchyards.
- Working with social media.

Speakers included; Push Creativity PR consultants, Lincolnshire Countryside Service, Diocese of Lincoln, National Churches Trust and Ecclesiastical Insurance. In addition to this, church volunteers were invited to a training session on churches and their social history. Originally this was to be delivered by Horncastle History and Heritage Society but they were unable to then deliver at the time of the project. The Church Support Officer organised instead, a session to be delivered by the Diocese of Lincoln which focused on how to interpret the church building, the communities and social histories around churches and how to communicate them.

This session attracted 22 volunteers. The training element of the project was the only one not to meet its 150 volunteer target (94 volunteers were trained in total) and this could be for a variety of reasons from volunteers not being available on the day to not being able to give up the time to attend. One volunteer suggests more people would attend if the training could be contained just in a morning.

***'Would welcome the free conference again. A follow up forum would be useful. Contained within a morning. Would get more people to attend.'***

***Conference attendee, 2019***

Feedback from the training sessions was gathered via a questionnaire and the results are generally positive, with 35 out of 48 respondents ticking that they had found the conference 'excellent'. Each workshop was also rated as 'excellent' by over 30 respondents. Suggestions for improving the conference next year included; softer seating, microphones, better parking directions and more toilets.

One respondent commented that they had been part of a church's festival before and it would have been good to have been able to share their experience. As most of the churches taking part in 2020 will have some experience it would be useful to build a session delivered by volunteers in next year's conference to share ideas and best practice.


***'Went to the conference at Louth where we learnt more about it - thought it was a brilliant idea. In the coast we are stuck out on a limb - lots of things happen in Lincoln and in Stamford area but not here. We were very keen.'***

***Conference attendee, 2019***

# MARKETING


The project produced a series of marketing materials both offline and online. This included 12,000 flyers and 1,000 posters which were distributed to all participating churches during the conference so they could promote locally, as well as via a distribution company who took them across the district and beyond. A press release featured in local press such as Horncastle News, Louth Leader and Lincs Life. There was a substantial online and social media campaign, supported by PR Consultancy, Push Creativity.

A new festival website [www.lincswoldsandcoastchurches.org](http://www.lincswoldsandcoastchurches.org) was developed and each partaking church given its own page including a picture, description and location details. New social media sites were also launched comprising of Twitter and Facebook pages. A three month online media campaign was devised and each church received one Facebook post and one tweet during this time. We have analysed the data and know that: the website had 21,754 visits in 16 months from June 2018 – September 2019 with 3608 page views in September (when the festival took place). We know that most traffic arrived at the festival website from Facebook, Google and Twitter (in that order, Facebook was significantly the biggest referring site). There were 95 referrals from the Lincoln Anglican website, so using other websites to promote the festival was worthwhile.



**Twitter statistics for the peak promotional period (1st August - 12 September - 43 days)**

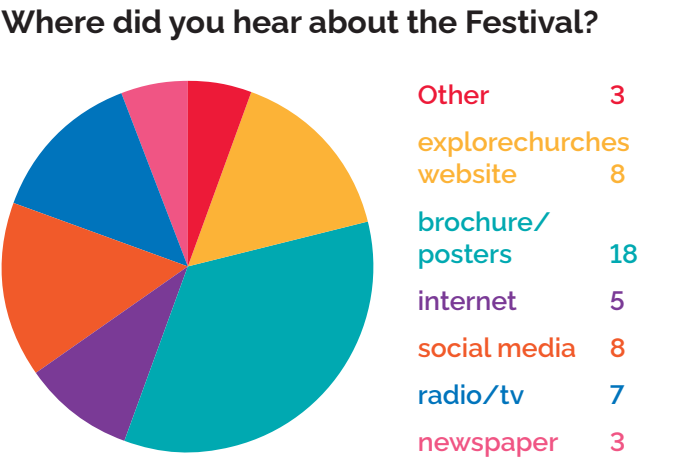
Tweets earned 133.3k impressions (3.1k per day)  
300 link clicks (7 per day)  
356 ReTweets (8 per day)  
915 Likes (21 per day)  
59 Replies (1 per day)  
1/6% Engagement Rate



**Facebook statistics from the (10 August – 11 September -33 days)**

Number of posts in this period 169  
Lifetime Post Total Reach – (the number of people who had your Page's post enter their screen): 39,772  
Lifetime Post Total Impressions – (the number of times your Page's post entered a person's screen): 59,039  
Shares: 192  
Likes: 2746  
Comments: 102

There were also three paid-for targeted Facebook adverts which had a positive response, in particular advert #2 which was a video to raise awareness of the festival which had a reach of 37,882 people interested in heritage and history with 61 people clicking the link and being directed to the website. Feedback forms which were completed by volunteers delivering the festival give us an impression of where people heard about the festival and we can see from the table that the brochures, flyers and posters were significantly the best marketing tool.



# CHURCH GUIDEBOOKS AND DIRECTORIES

The project planned to create a guidebook which would accompany the festival, a marketing tool which would promote each church and what it was offering over the weekend. The guidebooks were distributed to all churches taking part and available for visitors. In addition to the guidebooks, directories were also created and distributed to every festival church. These directories featured every church in the festival boundary and were meant to be used after the festival. The aim is for these directories to last for a three year period as a way of encouraging visitors over the weekend to return to the churches at other times of the year. They were offered to visitors with a suggested donation attached. In order to make the festival sustainable in the future the project team recognise that production costs of the brochures, flyers and posters need to be cut down, however, they also recognise that these are the most successful marketing tool. For the next festival, each church will pay a small membership fee which will support the cost of the production of marketing materials. It is anticipated that churches will receive donations from the distribution of the directories, which will cover the costs of their festival membership in future years.



# FESTIVAL VISITORS

The project anticipated that 5,000 people would attend the 2019 festival. This was based on the success of the Horncastle Churches festival and knowledge and understanding of the West Lindsey Churches Festival. Whilst there was plenty of guidance provided by the Church Support Officer, it was up to the church teams what they did during the festival. Some chose to keep it simple, making sure front doors were open and the church was presentable with freshly cut flowers. Others put on local history displays, art exhibitions, flower displays sponsored by local businesses, storytelling sessions and provided refreshments. Some churches had live music, bell ringing, organ playing and one put on a 'songs of praise' style singing event. It is difficult to know exact numbers of attendees as most churches do not have visitor counters. Volunteers made an estimate of numbers by using visitor book entries, which they transferred onto evaluation forms and this totalled at 5336 visitors. However, not every visitor signed the visitor book and only 60% of churches returned their feedback forms. In this case, it is reasonable to pro-rata up the numbers and estimate that there were approximately 9,000 visit during the festival. The feedback forms tell us that of the 9,000, many people visited more than one church. Visitor comments recorded by volunteers include:

- 'Beautiful and peaceful'*

*'Thanks for the festival'*

*'Very well kept church'*
- 'Lots of history'*

*'Wonderful displays by talented artists'*

*'Beautiful architecture'*
- 'Pleased we made the effort to come'*

*'Thank you for your lovely welcome'*

*'Your church really showcased what is possible'*

Whilst analysing the feedback forms in detail, as previously stated, there is a real mix in what churches offered and what volunteers were willing to do. There was surprise by some churches that others only unlocked their doors whereas they had put on lots of different activities. It is clear in some feedback that some volunteers felt under resourced to provide activities – but having seen the festival happen they have ideas for what they could do next year with more time to plan. There were also comments from some volunteers about churches competing for visitor's time during the festival. A workshop for volunteers about what others did in 2019 but also visiting habits from those attending would be worthwhile.



The team were overwhelmed that so many volunteers took part in the festival, 861 in total. The volunteers were given the opportunity to provide feedback which included:

*'We all felt very uplifted by the event and we would love to do it again.'*

*'Some people had a go at bell ringing and have now come back as bell ringing volunteers.'*

*'It's a learning curve and I think we may have had better data for evaluation if we were aware of what we should have taken note of earlier.'*

*'Most visitors had been to six or seven other churches in the day. As there were so many churches open visitor numbers were comparatively low as was the income generated over the weekend. However it was refreshing to host visitors who were so keenly interested in the church features.'*

*'Fantastic success. 200 people! Showcased to the community what we have here.'*

*'We have had such a wonderful response from visitors. The Spilsby Standard took photos and did a full page report. The Village Hall Committee supported us by providing refreshments.'*

*'Considering we had not done it before we were very happy with visitors numbers - people came from far and wide. The offer of food seemed to work very well and we think made people come.'*



Volunteers have also provided some helpful suggestions for improvements for the 2020 festival:

- Give more marketing brochures to larger town churches.
- Increase distribution of marketing materials via local groups.
- Send any resources/marketing materials well in advance.
- Try not to run festival during a weekend when other local events are on.

As this was the first festival and for many of the church teams, the first time they had taken part in this scale of event there has been a huge amount of learning and reflection on what works and where improvements could be made for next year's festival. Ideas include:

- Ensure visitor's book has space for visit comments.
- Organise an activity to encourage people to visit.
- Food/refreshments work very well in terms of encouraging visitors.



# EXPLORER PACKS AND TREASURE HUNT

The team supplied 100 of the churches with explorer packs and treasure hunt spotter sheets aimed at families visiting the churches. The explorer packs were in the form of an activity bag and had several different activities for families to do at the church together and the treasure hunt spotter books took families inside and outside the church hunting for different items. There was a small amount of feedback for both activities gathered by volunteers during the festival (12 returns). In total we know that 14 families used the explorer packs and treasure hunt spotter books but this is likely to be more. Feedback is minimal, some volunteers suggesting more helpers on the day would have helped promote and guide people to the activities, some were unsure of how to use them and required more guidance, some thought that it was a great resource for the church to have all year around not just the festival.



## SCHOOLS

Three schools from Scamblesby, New Leake and Hogsthorpe took part in the festival and were invited to put exhibitions of artwork up in the churches. Hogsthorpe and Scamblesby Primary Schools have also trialled the spotter books as are Stickford and Coningsby Primary Schools. Teachers are providing written feedback and the team will edit the books accordingly.

Some pictures from Scamblesby Primary School during their visit to the church can be seen here: [www.scamblesby.lincs.sch.uk/badgers-and-otters-church-spotters-exploration](http://www.scamblesby.lincs.sch.uk/badgers-and-otters-church-spotters-exploration)

## BURSARIES

As part of the project, up to 25 of the festival churches would be encouraged to apply for small bursaries to support interpretation projects to help their churches. A total of 7 churches have applied for the funding and been successful, these churches attended the communities and social histories training to help them develop their projects. These 7 applications all vary from each other and include; creating guidebooks on the history of their church and community, roller banners promoting treasures in the church, website development, leaflets, information boards. The bursaries express what a journey churches have come on: some not opening regularly to putting on a festival to now applying for funding to put improve their offer to visitors.



# CONCLUSION

## SUCCESSSES

Clearly the fact that 140 churches and 861 volunteers took part in the project demonstrates the need for an audience development project of this type in the area. The majority of the church teams wanted to be involved in the festival and put on a special event. The feedback from some churches displays the surprise and satisfaction church volunteers felt by how visitors reacted to their churches. The volunteers have realised that they have history and heritage that is of interest to others and are now looking at next steps. The Church Support Officer reports that there was no struggle to recruit the churches to be involved and 99% of the churches will take part in the festival next year as well as new churches. In fact 20 Methodist churches and 1 Roman Catholic church who felt unable to participate this year have already applied for the 2020 festival.

## CHALLENGES

The Church Support Officer reflects that the biggest challenge of the project was getting it started because of delays in accessing church contact details due to GDPR regulations. As the festival had already set the dates it was a huge amount of work to deliver in a shorter amount of time. More churches taking part meant more churches to support and provide time and resource to, which was challenging. Also the remoteness of some of the churches, the fact that the district is a large area geographically meant it took more time to visit and support church teams.

## LEARNING FROM THIS PROJECT

Key lessons learnt which will be used to inform future projects include:

- The need to be flexible with geographical boundaries and including additional churches if this is proved to be beneficial to the project, the communities and the visitors.
- Recognising that the churches vary hugely in resources, volunteers, skills and confidence, some will need much more help and support in planning/delivering their festival.
- A good nine months is needed for the Support Officer and the churches to plan and prepare for the festival.
- Some churches were not open – if they say in brochure they were open, they need to be.
- Refreshments and have-a-go activities encourage people to visit but also encourage visitors to dwell at the church and spend.
- Signage was an issue for some of the churches – some of the postcodes were incorrect on the marketing, these small errors will need to be corrected for the future.
- Some of the church teams were not comfortable evaluating the event/counting visitors which led to less returns than anticipated.

## RESILIENCE & NEXT STEPS

The project has taken substantial next steps in securing the future of the festival by:

- Creating a festival committee to oversee the festival for the next 5 years.
- Securing funding for two years from ELDC, Lincs Coastal BID Group and the Lincolnshire Methodist District.
- Setting the festival dates for 2020 and 2021 and informing the churches of these dates so they can start to plan early.
- Setting the date for a festival conference in 2020 – which will be another training opportunity.
- Building a partnership with the Methodist minister for Louth who could not put his churches in last year because of timing but he is now on the committee and has confirmed 20 of his churches will take part in 2020. Building the amount of Methodist churches taking part and ensuring the festival promotes all religious denominations.
- ELDC have created a churches section on their Love Lincs Wolds website and are featuring all the Wolds churches.





RECOMMENDATIONS

On evaluation of the material and evidence collected as part of this report the following recommendations for next steps are suggested:

Short term:

- Provide churches of reminders - possibly a newsletter, to remind them of the festival early in the year so they can begin planning.
- Ensure 2020 dates do not clash with other events in Lincolnshire.
- Provide feedback of the festival to volunteers, what churches did, how many people came, highlights etc.
- Encourage each church to have a visitor book on display with enough space for visitors to provide feedback.
- Continue to encourage churches to keep their doors unlocked during the day.

Medium-term:

- Consider extra support for churches who received the least visitors in 2019.
- Organise a training session in evaluation for volunteers as part of next year's conference, explaining how data gathered is used.
- As part of the conference include a reflection session where volunteers can share what they did at their church with other churches.
- Ensure any marketing/interpretation material is sent to the churches well in advance of the festival.
- Provide support with how to use any interpretation/marketing material.
- Develop a bookable coach tour which visits some of the churches who took part in the festival.

Long term:

- Explore the potential for church volunteers to support other volunteers from smaller churches in preparing for the festival.
- Consider replicating the project and rolling it out to other districts across the UK.
- Consider developing a project which focuses on building volunteer bases and increasing capacity at churches.

