

CONNECTINGHISTORIES

Guide

How to Give a Heritage Talk

If you are a 'research officer' working on a heritage project like *Connecting Histories*, people will naturally want to know more about the work you are doing. For instance, the research for 'Birmingham Antislavery' provoked lots of enquiries and resulted in several talks in different settings: a university, a community library, a Quaker meeting house. Giving a 'talk' is a skill in itself and takes time and effort to prepare. Here are just some factors to take into consideration.

Outcomes

- Direct dissemination of knowledge to a wider audience.
- Personal engagement with communities/heritage forums/schools etc.

Strengths

- Leads to a vital increase of personal contacts with people.
- Advertises your projects aims, intentions and achievements.
- Improves individual communication skills.
- Huge opportunity to engage in a learning dialogue with others.

Weaknesses

- Time factor - it can be easy to agree to give a talk, but it takes time to properly organise and prepare yourself for the day.
- Public speaking can be a stressful challenge for the first time. But 'nerves' will improve with practice!

Tips for others

- Every audience will have a different set of expectations. Find out who your audience will be and tailor your language and content to their context.
- If possible, do not try to script every word you will say. This will bore any audience. Create a series of detailed but easily readable note cards that hold the key points you are making.
- Talk to people on a human level. If you are an academic do not rely on giving an overly technical paper to engage with broad public/community/heritage audience.
- Illustrate your talk with 'power-point', but do not too heavily on technology!
- If you are discussing an earlier period of history (ie. 18th century industrialists in Birmingham', always make it relevant to today.
- Until you are well practiced in giving a public talk, resist the temptation to 'wing' the presentation. Practice your talk before hand and make sure you have a clear structure for your ideas!

Compiled by Dr Andy Green, June 2007

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