

Festival of Social science: Family lives over time

EVENT REPORT

This event was held on the 29th of October 2011, in Leeds City Art Gallery, and was a free day long exhibition, with a family history workshop component (also free, one hour in duration).

Aim of event:

The event aimed to showcase the five years of research that has been undertaken by the Timescapes Initiative about the dynamics of family life. The research project, 'Timescapes' (funded by the Economic and Social Research Council), has explored how family and personal lives are worked out over time and across the generations. Researchers from five universities across England, Wales and Scotland have been 'walking alongside' people from all walks of life and all ages, to document how their lives unfold and to understand these changes from the perspectives of the people themselves. In this way, Timescapes attempts to turn 'snap shots' of social life into a movie, complete with personal narratives, photos, videos and sound recordings. These rich accounts have been gathered together to form the Timescapes Archive, a resource of data for the use of future researchers and social historians.

The public event as part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science, aimed to exhibit the rich accounts of young people, parents, grandparents and the oldest generation gathered as part of the Timescapes research programme. The exhibition also included materials from the Mass Observation Archive. Based in Sussex, this is a rich historical archive that has been documenting the ordinary everyday lives of people across the UK since before World War Two. Bringing accounts together across these two archives illustrated the possibilities for enriching our understanding of changing family lives from both a biographical and historical perspective.

The Timescapes event explored the value of social history, explaining how peoples' memories are important to understanding society and how the public can help in social research. Attendees of the exhibition had the opportunity to contribute their own memories, displayed on a 'memory wall,' for people to see what social research is about, and to be part of research too. Leaflets and further information about family lives, both in terms of social research and family history were also available for the public to give them further details about the topic. Policy briefing papers for each project were also displayed. These helped to disseminate the research more widely within the public domain.

Attendance:

Over the day (10.30-4.30) approximately 200 people attended the event. There was an even split between male and female attendees, and of the overall total, 20 were children (all of which were accompanied). The family history workshop was attended by 10 participants, most of which had pre-booked before the event. The audience was predominantly general public, although some researchers/academics also attended and spoke with the team about the project, showing its appeal to both the general and specialist audience.

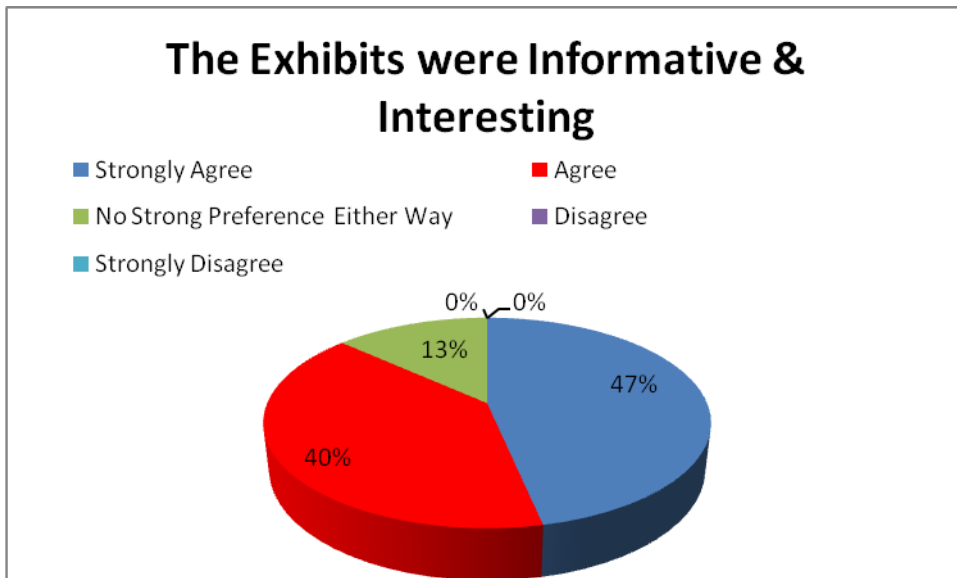
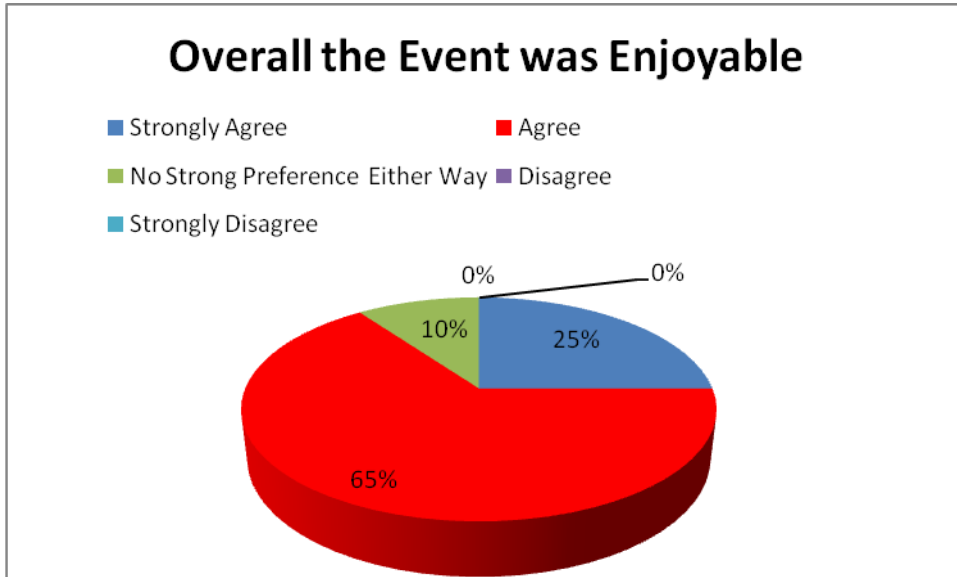


Feedback:

The evaluation forms revealed positive feedback about the event, including very positive comments, some of which included;

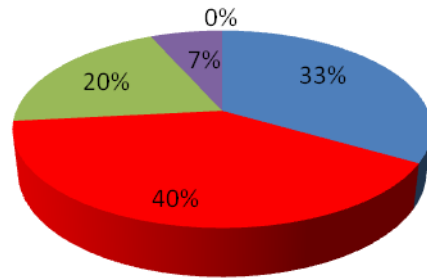
- “Great project- fascinating and multifaceted revelations”
- “Keep this kind of exhibition going!”

A breakdown of the quantitative feedback is included within the pie charts below:



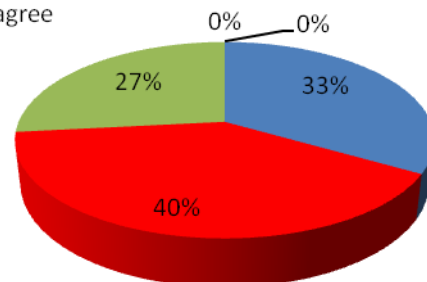
The Exhibition Increased my Knowledge of the Social Sciences and Archiving

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree
■ No Strong Preference Either Way ■ Disagree
■ Strongly Disagree



The Exhibition Offered a New Insight into Family Lives Over Time

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree
■ No Strong Preference Either Way ■ Disagree
■ Strongly Disagree



Things people suggested they liked about the exhibition:

- That it was “interactive, researchers present and available to chat with”
- The “simple way that things were put across”
- A number of people commented on the visuals and the way the material was displayed
- Telling people about their lives

Some people suggested they would have liked to have seen even more family history information, that they could have spent longer reading the material, and that the exhibition could have been even bigger, all of which is very positive.



Summary:

A positive event which engaged with a public audience, enabling local people to see more of the work that goes on within a local university. The event engaged interactively with the public, offering them the chance to share their memories for the research, as well as offering them an opportunity to take part in a free workshop about family history research. The involvement of partners, such as the Mass Observation Archive and a local family historian, gave breadth and diversity to the event. The memories shared by attendees at the exhibition will be archived within the Timescapes archive, and the exhibition boards will also be archived in the public area of the archive, giving them future impact via this output.

