



Category: Issues, Crisis or Reputational Management

Company: Durham University

Entry title: Reburying the Scottish soldiers – an ethical challenge

Explanation of issue/crisis and objectives:

Following completion of a four-year research project into the remains of Seventeenth Century Scottish soldiers discovered on Durham University land in 2013, planning began for their reburial in Durham.

The project had already gained widespread interest and engagement in regional, national and global media and with key stakeholders. The University faced the challenge of planning, delivering, and communicating the reburial in a way that respected the ethical and legal complexities surrounding our role as custodians of the remains of historical prisoners of war.

The communications strategy had these ethical considerations at its core; we were especially mindful that the bones were remains of real men, whose beliefs and values we could not assume to know. Additionally, descendants of some of the survivors of that time were strongly engaged in the story and therefore had to be considered.

Our overall objective was to maintain stakeholder engagement in the reburial and secure their positive reaction to it.

Supporting aims were to:

- Demonstrate the University's commitment to partnership working;
- Engage stakeholders in the planning of the reburial;
- Highlight how research informs public understanding of the lives of the Scottish soldiers and the design of the reburial;
- Retain and enhance wider public interest in the project.

Research, planning and strategy:

Reburial of historic human remains, especially those of prisoners of war, is morally and ethically sensitive.

The reburial communications aimed to ensure the narrative focused on the story of soldiers who had lost their lives and were due a dignified burial, rather than reinterment of an abstract collection of human remains. Debates about where the remains should be reburied (Durham or Scotland) had been resolved some time before through widespread stakeholder consultation and communication.

The campaign was informed by reflection on the PR theory and best practice including the CIPR Code of Conduct and ethics decision tree. An integrated multi-channel engagement and communications approach was used, drawing on established PR approaches. This included Dozier, Grunig & Grunig's 'mixed motive' model, to help develop collaborative, two-way symmetrical communications where possible, with the purpose of maintaining mutual understanding and respect between Durham and its stakeholders.

Detailed stakeholder analysis and engagement were undertaken, building on work started in earlier stages of the project.

Seventeenth Century burial traditions and international best practice regarding the reinterment of historical remains were also researched.

Tactics and their implementation, including creativity and innovation:

Campaign tactics included:

- Release of 3D facial reconstruction of one of the Scottish soldiers (December 2018), to act as a catalyst to engage people in the 'real life' stories of the soldiers;
- Participation in filming for an episode of Who Do You Think You Are USA (aired in May 2018) detailing actor Jon Cryer's ancestral link to the Scottish soldiers;
- Engagement with stakeholders throughout the reburial planning, including consultation on the wording for the epitaph;
- Close working with senior figures from Church of Scotland and Scottish Episcopal Church to develop an ecumenical and respectful service;
- Inclusion of Seventeenth Century burial practices in the service design including readings and psalms;
- Inviting all stakeholders to attend the reburial and to meet the research team;
- Development of videos about the reburial and of the event itself for stakeholders unable to attend in person (particularly those in the USA);
- Respectful and sensitive multimedia messaging and scheduling on Durham's owned channels;
- Proactive engagement with media who had followed the story since 2013.

Demonstrate how negative impacts were avoided, positives achieved and improvements made:

The risk of negative stakeholder reaction, which would jeopardise established relationships, was avoided by:

- Engaging stakeholders throughout the planning process;
- Undertaking research during the development of the reburial service to provide a clear rationale for the choices made;
- Ensuring the reburial was open and inclusive to all.

Possible negative stakeholder reaction to media attendance at the reburial was managed by:

- Clearly stating that media would be at the event in all communications with stakeholders;
- Careful management of media on the day, with ethical guidelines on what they could and could not film, to ensure a respectful service for attendees.

Achievements included:

- Positive stakeholder feedback throughout, including high attendance levels at the reburial service;
- Strong engagement with materials on Durham's owned channels and via the mass media.

Measurement and evaluation:

A key indicator of success was stakeholder opinion - over 60 stakeholders from around the UK attended the reburial.

Examples of feedback received include:

"I want to say how beautifully you all managed this difficult and emotional reburial, and how much I appreciate the fullest of efforts you made."

"Thank you all so very much for all that has been done to care for and respectfully put these men in a proper burial ground for their eternal rest."

"The ceremony was very moving. I'm very pleased that it can be seen in its entirety online. It's a piece of history."

"What a job you have all done for those soldiers and the nation as a whole. You all must take great credit and be proud of the way you have conducted this whole final chapter in British history."

The facial reconstruction and the reburial both received extensive TV, print and online coverage, in both England and Scotland. Coverage of the reburial focused on the design of

the service and what the research has revealed about the lives of the soldiers, reflecting the wider campaign objectives.

Overall the campaign received strong engagement on social media with a combined reach of over 33,000 between December 2017 and May 2018, with over 1,330 engagements. YouTube videos achieved over 3,000 views.

Budget and cost effectiveness:

With the exception of videography, all activities were delivered in-house and cost neutral.

Videography and distribution of still and moving images was undertaken by North News and Pictures.

Total campaign cost: £1,210.20