

C19 National Foresight Group Intelligence Briefing 23: Supporting the UK with Memorialisation of our Collective Experience and Reflections of the Covid-19

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Context

The UK is quickly approaching its twelve-month anniversary of when the country was placed into its first Covid-19 national lockdown back in March. Since then, and potentially many months prior to this, thousands of lives have been sadly and tragically lost to this virus, which has not only swept through our country but most of the world to varying extents. Many families were unable to see their loved ones at this time, and to say their final goodbyes. Media coverage was assimilating the virus to a war-like situation. With the official death toll (ONS) already exceeding 50k (at least nine months into the pandemic) and still on the rise, which is in close reach/proximity to the numbers of UK civilians lost in the eight months Blitz during WWII, it seems apt that we, as a country, would want to memorialise and pay tribute to our deceased family, friends, colleagues, neighbours, and patients, in similar way(s) to the ways in which we mark other experiences of major loss within our communities. This paper sets out the principles for consideration to frame memorialisation *ahead of this first major milestone of the pandemic*, a milestone experienced by everyone across the UK.

What does memorialisation mean to individuals and society as a whole, and its importance?

Memorialisation (including marking anniversaries and permanent memorials) is now considered by society as a quintessential human right of all people, a behavioural and emotional need/right allowing us to process our grief, mourn and to preserve memories of those that we have lost over many years to come. The ways in which we memorialise, grieve and the period of time that it takes to fully process our loss(es) varies from individual to individual, although there are often overlaps in terms of the ritual acts being undertaken. Some for example, consider, '[Permanent memorials, in a public place where anyone can visit at any time without imposition to others and without interruptions to themselves ... the best option for all.](#)', whilst others would choose to celebrate the lives of those that have now been lost by coming together as a community in a more inclusive and jovial way. Either way, '*... failing to acknowledge or address this properly including collectively as a country] may have negative, even generational, consequences for restoring longer term social cohesion and community. Indeed remembrance, reflection and review will be fundamental to the success of societal rebuilding and recovery efforts from the pandemic'* (Dr Anne Eyre, *Sociologist/Disaster Memorialisation*). Therefore, the principle is likely to be strongly supported, indeed expected among individuals and our communities, as has been shown in calls for national memorialisation already.

The challenges are ultimately going to be centred around **balancing these differing rites and rituals, being mindful and sensitive of our multi-national, multi-religious, intersectionality groups, as well as how the impacts of the virus have affected**

communities disproportionately, and the inclusion of devolved nations. Given these sensitivities, and in order to recognise the inequitable impact of Covid-19 and the community response shown by the public across the UK, it is essential that any decision-making body have **authentic representation from those who can share and vocalise the perspectives of those groups disproportionately impacted upon by Covid-19, be it emotionally, culturally and/or socially economically.** The decision-making body should engage in a **process of co-designing memorialisation steered by groups from across communities to ensure collective/national memorialisation the memorial is inclusive, wholesome and meaningful.**

Planning for this needs to be considered and started now, due to the short timeline we have remaining for introducing and rolling-out the UK's memorialisation plans if the first national lockdown date (23 March 2020) is to be a significant anniversary date we use to begin to remember, reflect and review the individual and community impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK, in 2021 and in subsequent years to come (approximately four months away until 23 March 2021).

Other complexities that will require further thought and consideration include:

- Whether we, as a country, celebrate those that have survived Covid, albeit with severe long-term symptoms, and the impact and implications of this
- Whether or not we include a celebration of frontline services and key workers who have worked so hard during this time with marks of respect, such as rainbows or claps.
- Who we decide to commemorate as victims of the pandemic in terms of those dying of the disease, those who die with the virus and other more indirect deaths from the pandemic such as reduced healthcare. These inclusion and exclusion criteria should be principled and agreed in advance in consultation with survivors and family groups. There are also a number of resources and learning from the Grenfell Towers incident, in terms of memorialisation and remembrance, which could be drawn upon and applied to the Covid memorialisation process.

What could memorialisation/remembrance look like in the UK?

There are many memorialisation options available to the UK worthy of a national tribute which have been tried and tested in the past and present which have proven successful; as well as, options that could be undertaken at a local level to supplement an agreed national approach. All of these options complement people being able to physically and socially mix, although most of them could be customised and tailored around compliance with Covid-19 restrictions or concurrent events, such as severe flooding, or terrorism. These include:

Memorialisation Options	Opportunities	Negatives
Charity Events		
Charity event(s) to raise money for victims of long-Covid, financial hardship etc.: e.g. Concerts, fun runs, challenges, bake-offs.	<p>A great deal of money can be raised from charitable donations when members of the public set about doing challenges for a good cause. For example, Captain Tom Moore raised more than £32m in donations for the NHS by doing lengths of his garden at the grand age of 100.</p> <p>Events are a good way of bringing people together for a common cause/purpose.</p>	<p>Individuals do not necessarily have the financial means at the moment to contribute towards charitable events. Due to the impacts of Covid, some people do not have disposal income to support others even if they wish to.</p> <p>Some would argue that these types of events are more impactful when people can come together, although alternative modes are achievable and digital and social media technologies can help with creating a virtual platform equivalent.</p>
Processions		
Candlelit vigil processions	<p>A recent example of this was a procession from St Thomas Hospital to Downing Street to remember NHS staff who died amid Covid-19, this type of event created a sense of belonging.</p>	<p>Processions are more impactful when people can socially and physically mix. Depending on the severity of the lockdown restrictions, a physically distanced option may be possible but would be complex if different regions of the UK were locked down to varying degrees.</p>
Trinkets/Keepsakes		
Rainbows and/or yellow ribbons in home and business windows.	<p>Symbolic way of paying tribute, and can be undertaken during a lockdown and during periods of mixing.</p> <p>Promotes societal and community cohesion, and shared memories.</p> <p>For some that are more sceptical of Covid and are frustrated by society not being able to resume 'normal' life as we knew it, may be more tolerant of this type of memorialisation act because it is more subtle and is a personal (home/businesses) choice.</p>	<p>Could be perceived as a tokenistic gesture of remembering the impacts of Covid given the significant number of lives directly and indirectly lost. As well as those that have been left with debilitating long-term Covid health impacts, and those that placed others' needs at the forefront and/or parallel to their own and their families' needs.</p>
Memorials		
<p>Engraved plaques and flagstone bricks, and/or Rollcalls on digital boards and on online platforms,</p> <p>Bespoke memorial gardens/parks, crematoriums and sacred spaces/places of worship.</p>	<p>Memorials are a fair and transparent way of encapsulating and memorialising all UK citizens that have passed away from Covid and/or Covid related illnesses, and can be achieved virtually or physically.</p> <p>A number of online memorials have already been set-up on national and local news sites e.g. BBC's randomised tributes and photos webpage, and there are many examples of memorial plaques and spaces, including 0911 in New York, UK war memorials across the country, and the 'White Garden' at Kensington Palace, a floral tribute to Princess Diana following her death.</p> <p>National Trust and English Heritage sites and alike have been able to remain open during lockdown restrictions, so visitors should still be able to pay their respects at a Covid related memorial, although this would need careful planning in terms of crowd management, particularly as many bereaved have been unable to publicly express their grief at the time of death due to physical distancing restrictions. A nationally recognised memorial may signify a way to recognise the grief.</p> <p>Some people are offering ways to commemorate (Memorial to Covid 19 Key Workers The Memorials National Memorial Arboretum (thenma.org.uk)). Whilst its inclusion criteria means 'we could not accept a memorial for those who have lost their lives to this terrible disease, it is our belief that the service and sacrifice of our NHS and our key workers could be recognised with a memorial within our grounds. We will, therefore, when appropriate, advise Her Majesty's Government of the demand we have experienced with regards to a permanent memorial within our grounds, and liaise with the correct department on how progress can be made'.</p>	<p>The downside of plaques is that we do not truly yet know the extent to which lives have been lost due to Covid and/or Covid related deaths, the toll today is 50k and is still rising, so it may be problematic identifying a suitably sized space at this stage given the current and possible future waves. Presently, there is no one area of the country that is synonymous with the pandemic originating or ending and therefore, it would be challenging to identify a national memorial garden/sacred area which would mean something to everyone. Furthermore, it may be challenging procuring this volume of plaques/flag stones and having them engraved within the timeline if we, as a country, were to identify the first national lockdown as the anniversary. Moreover, deciding upon which deceased members should appear in the memorials is challenging given some may distinguish the list as being the 50k plus people with Covid documented on their death certificate, whilst others may feel those who died from long-Covid should be included, along with those who died as a possible consequence of restricted health care during the pandemic. This would require the establishment of a robust criterion, a mechanism for applying/appealing, and a decision-making panel.</p> <p>Some outlets may unintentionally alienate individuals and communities because they are not considered to be inclusive of all of UK's society.</p> <p>Due to the visibility and openness of these sites there is the potential for them to be defaced and damaged, further harming family members, loved ones, Covid survivors or those who wish to pay their respects.</p>
Annual National Public Remembrance Day		
The first UK national lockdown on 23 rd March 2020 could signify a date for a Public/Bank Holiday	<p>Memorialisation and the acts of memorialisation mean different things to different people depending on their beliefs, Covid-19 experiences and memories. A Public Remembrance Day will enable individuals and communities to have dedicated time to reflect, pay their respects and to celebrate those that survived Covid and those that worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to save lives in order to preserve memories, no matter where they are in the world on that given day.</p> <p>All of the devolved areas of the UK were impacted upon by the first Government imposed national lockdown on the 23 March 2020, thus a sensible choice of date for a Public Remembrance Day, particularly given the world is still establishing when the pandemic evolved.</p> <p>Can be instigated and rolled out quickly by the Government compared with other options.</p>	<p>This would have a financial impact on businesses and trading, an area that has been impacted upon already due to Covid and therefore, may appear insensitive and inappropriate.</p>

	For some that are more sceptical of Covid and are frustrated by society not being able to resume 'normal' life as we knew it, may be more tolerant of this type of memorialisation act which allows flexibility. This flexibility would enable individuals and communities to organise some of these other methods.	
Two-minutes National Silence		
The first UK national lockdown on 23 rd March 2020 could signify a date for a two-minute national silence.	<p>A mechanism for marking the events of Covid giving individuals and communities an opportunity to pay their respects and to preserve the memories of their loved ones, friends and colleagues.</p> <p>Would have less of a financial impact on businesses and trading than repetitively giving everyone the day off like a public/bank holiday would.</p>	Not all of our UK citizens would be able to undertake a two-minute silence to pay their respects, for example frontline staff and key workers on duty at this time are likely to be tending to patients and therefore, would struggle to take part. This would be a significant issue given these groups are arguably the most affected by the virus in terms of witnessing suffering and death on a large-scale.
Bell ringing/Military fire salute		
The first UK national lockdown on 23 rd March 2020 could signify a date for bell ringing and/or a military fire salute to take place at locations around the country.	<p>The ringing of bells transcends and is pertinent to a number of areas of life:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> '... the reverberation of bells is a mark of solemnity, respect, remembrance or celebration.. The ringing of bells is often used to symbolize peace and freedom.' In some religions the '... bell itself can also be a holy object; ... , it represents the illusory and immaterial world due to the brief and fleeting sound it produces. Hung from a cord, the bell symbolizes the human soul suspended between heaven and earth.' <p>The ringing of bells could be put in motion at one set place in the country and then transmitted to other areas by television and/or radio or they could be rung (or in some religious places without bells, a suitable audible mark of memorialisation could be sounded) at various religious and non-religious places across the country. This option could be coordinated in parallel with one of the other memorialisation options, such as a procession or a two-minute silence.</p>	A military fire salute may be less suitable for an occasion like this due to the link with war and the military style of marking occasions. This was a civilian event which happened in the UK, not as part of foreign policy or peace keeping.
Book of condolences suitable for all beliefs		
Online and/or tangible books of condolences	<p>Traditional method for paying tribute to deceased persons, it is a fair and transparent way of encapsulating and memorialising all UK citizens that have passed away from Covid and/or Covid related illnesses, and can be achieved virtually and/or by attending a dedicated place to sign a tangible book of condolences, either at one set place in the country or dotted across the country which could then be pooled together to create one book.</p> <p>An online version would better enable family and friends and colleagues from across the world to post their messages too, and is more equipped to showcase images of the deceased.</p>	<p>Some outlets may unintentionally alienate individuals and communities because they are not considered to be inclusive of all demographics of UK's society. For example, St Paul's cathedral in London, a Christian place of worship, in association with HRH The Prince of Wales, launched an online book of condolences (called 'Remember Me') for those who have lost their lives to coronavirus and were living in the UK.</p> <p>Again, similar to the memorial plaques/flag stones, it may be deemed necessary to set a criterion for posting a tribute or writing a message; however, this should be discouraged where possible. The 'Remember Me' online book of condolences, for example, states that <i>'Only one entry can be made for each person, so do use this as an opportunity to speak with family or friends before leaving a memorial'</i> - Families and friendship groups are complex and so this could result in unnecessary tensions at a time of grief.</p>
Monuments		
Statues of key personnel or an object in a different form attributed to a significant UK citizen (e.g. Olympic winners having gold letterboxes dedicated to them). This could be a scientist that has developed a vaccine, a memorial at hospitals for deceased staff and patients, for example.	Statues have been a contentious worldwide topic over the years, but have been a traditional way of remembering a key point in time and/or a significant individual. The installation does not necessarily need to be undertaken at a set point in time to mark an anniversary, particularly as deciding on the subject matter and the commissioning of a statue may take longer.	Deciding on the key personnel and where to install the monument is going to be challenging so may require a panel of people to either decide on the public's behalf about what a fitting tribute would be or to be the recipient and judges of an open call for ideas.
Shared learning, raising awareness		
Museums could hold online and/or physical exhibitions to capture (memorialise) this significant and traumatic time in history, to share lessons that have been learnt, to celebrate the country's collective response to Covid-19, and to remember those we have lost. Televised documentaries would also provide a platform for this too.	The likelihood is that museum exhibitions and TV documentaries would be organic and would evolve over time throughout the remaining lifecycle of the pandemic and beyond. For example, Channel 5's recent documentary on 'The Great Plague' , of 1665 (otherwise known as the black death, or bubonic plague), followed scientists and historians sharing their insights into how they believe the plague was transmitted (not by rodents).	

Points and Principles for consideration

Some of these options will require a longer lead time in terms of planning and organisation to make them a successful and purposeful act of remembrance, such as memorials, monuments and events. Whereas, an Annual National Public Remembrance Day, for instance, could be enacted by royal proclamation on the advice of **Government Ministers** and therefore, could potentially be expedited and rolled out across the UK, including the devolved nations, more promptly.

- Any decision-making body should develop an inclusive approach, balancing the rites and rituals, being mindful and sensitive of our multi-national, multi-religious, intersectionality of groups, and the ways in which the impacts of the virus has disproportionately impacted on some groups. The body should also include devolved nations. The membership of the body should recognise the inequitable impact of Covid-19 and have authentic representation from those who can represent the perspectives of those groups disproportionately impacted upon by Covid-19.
- The process should be one of co-design with representative groups from across a broad spectrum of communities to ensure the memorial is inclusive, to facilitate a collective experience of remembering.
- In choosing and determining the best memorialisation approach(es) to take, who/which stakeholder groups will be designated the power? Will this be the House of Commons and the Queen, or not-for-profit organisations (NGOs), such as quasi committees, like the British Legion and Local Authorities and Resilience Forums? If a new group is to be established, which sectors, demographics and agencies should be represented? Do existing modes of market research intelligence, and academia, need to be revisited and drawn upon in order to make reliable and effective decisions for a wide-scale audience? Has foresight been given to the scenario of another pandemic in future years and how, if anything, that may affect the choices that are being made on this occasion?
- Should the National approach be remembrance orientated and/or a celebration of those that have lost their lives due to Covid or have survived the virus? Should we, as a country, also celebrate our frontline staff and key workers at this time, that worked tirelessly during this prolonged period? How is a decision going to be made about which deceased UK citizens should appear in the national memorialisation? For instance, is it just those victims that have Covid documented on their death certificate, or those who have developed long-Covid, and should those that have died from illnesses having not sought diagnose and treatment during the pandemic be included?
- How will the plans be formulated, who will coordinate these and how will the plans be communicated in a timely manner to all UK citizens, so they are aware of the organiser's national remembrance approach(es), which should promote a sense of trust and reassurance? Should the organiser also acknowledge some of the Covid-19 related memorialisation approaches that have already been taken

by various news outlets, places of worship, charities, etc and signpost UK citizens to them to support with creating community cohesion and a shared processing of grief?

- Who/which stakeholder groups are going to take responsibility for ensuring that the country, individuals and communities have been respectful of our multi-national, multi-religious, intersectionality groups, and devolved nations' rites and rituals in the decision-making process?

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is not intended to provide answers or to offer solutions with regards to a Covid related memorialisation for the UK, but instead it is meant to set out the initial considerations and points of discussion(s), to facilitate the consideration of the memorialisation of Covid-19 in the UK.