

Operation Nightingale: Time Warriors

Operation Nightingale was established, by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) eleven years ago to give injured, wounded, or sick military personnel a way of easing back into civilian life as well as finding a new a sense of purpose. Time Warriors archaeological dig was the first project of Operation Nightingale which was published by two quite distinctly different groups – Wessex Archaeology and Salisbury Arts Centre. It was a collaboration of military, community, and heritage. Primarily a local engagement project targeted at local garrison communities it was an opportunity to team up with Operation Nightingale bridging the interest gap. Both groups collaborated in the managing and filming of the archaeological dig at Barrow Clump on Salisbury Plain and was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Whilst the dig itself was jointly run by Wessex Archaeology and Operation Nightingale and under the leadership of Richard Osgood, the Arts Centre was tasked with setting up a film crew made up of 14 to 18 year olds from Salisbury who were given professional training in filmmaking and then given the responsibility of filming, editing, reviewing, interviewing, and narrating the six week project.

The video began by panning the landscape of a clouded Salisbury Plain setting the scene for where the dig would take place, a blank canvas with a gentle classical piece complimenting the mood of the scene. The narrator set the context of the video by linking the Plains ancient history with its current use as the “home of the army,” the music then changed dramatically to upbeat rapid marching drumbeats cuing viewers into the main purpose of the video. The start and end of the videos were clearly defined; a truck rolling onsite with equipment being laid out ready, an indication of what was to come, and ending with diggers returning the soil back to its original state clearly indicating the end of the project and so the video. The core of the video was clearly structured too, beginning with Richard Osgood giving a brief explanation of how Operation Nightingale was started he project that was about to be undertaken. The next step was interviews with the veterans who were the reason behind Operation Nightingale, but at the same time the film scenes depicted aspects of the dig connecting the viewer with the project and the people involved. Some of the key finds are highlighted and clearly sectorised within the video making it easy to follow and understand. Within each sector details are given of the find and relating suppositions and histories with referrals to experts to assist in cleaning, identifying, and dating the object. What this does is gives the audience a good understanding of the dig process and how it has helped the veteran's find purpose, make friends, and do something meaningful.

The professional quality of the film is a credit to the youth who created it. They were part of the Project Florence initiative that was being led by the Salisbury Arts Centre. The Florence project, named in reaction to Operation Nightingale, as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund remit were to bring public awareness and inclusion to the local heritage site of Barrow Clump and to provide skills and opportunities for the local people. The range of skills acquired by the young people is evidenced by the quality of the film generated; an overall successful film that was informative, engaging, and entertaining which succeeded in conveying the full undertaking of the project in a short twenty five minute video even to the point of including an interview with Tony

Robinson who had come for a short visit with his crew from Time Team, the Channel 4 television series. The skilful combination of audio and visual was impressive from such a young film crew who created a vibrant engaging film that conveyed the project and its purpose with something for everyone. From the open day which allowed the local community of all ages to visit and engage with the project to consulting with experts on key finds which satisfies most interests. They captured the various stages of the dig keeping the audience engaged and well informed of the different aspects and processes of the dig whilst the narrator weaved the story keeping viewers apace with events. By highlighting key finds and following the process of discovery to identification the audience are left with a good understanding of what is involved. Throughout the dig there is consultation with experts who were able to assist and inform on the finds and offer advice and assistance to the volunteers. Key experts were from Wessex Archaeology, Devizes Museum and Leicester University

In the main, it was a well constructed video which was targeted for all age groups and a general audience. It came across as an awareness piece that informed on many levels – the audience were made aware of the reason behind the project which included the heritage site being destroyed by badgers, the need for injured military personnel to recover post injury, the local public awareness campaign on the endangered rich heritage site they live near, and a fun interactive open day which educated informed. A criticism would be the crew of Time Team who were onsite for a few days but did not seem to have much of a purpose within the context of the film other than perhaps a PR exercise for Time Team and exposure for Tony Robinson since what he had to say seemed moot; out of place and random. It may have been considered that it would add credibility and be good publicity to include them in the video but in my opinion, it did not add anything.

References

Salisbury Arts Centre (2012) *Operation Nightingale: Time Warriors*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcISHaaTHh0&t=155s> (Accessed: 8th February 2024)

Wessex Archaeology (2012) *Operation Nightingale: Time Warriors*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWTGbfyeZT4&t=16s> (Accessed 8th February 2024)