The aim of the project is to involve the people of Sunderland in the creation of a body of art work to be made at various venues throughout the city by teaching them to Paint A Poppy.

On August 4 this year, it was exactly 100 years since the start of World War One. To commemorate this, I led a workshop to “carpet” the bandstand in Roker Park with a ground frieze of poppies. The workshop was based on the sacrifice of those who gave their lives during The Great War. My intention is to allow young people a chance to reflect on the lives of these young men who should be as relevant and revered today as they were 100 years ago.                                                                                                                                                                                 The background to the project is that, in November 2010, I organised two charity walks called ‘The Sunderland Half Marathon’ which raised money for the Brothers in Arms group to help build a wall of remembrance in Mowbray Park.  I also founded the ‘St. Aidan’s Remembrance Service’: a tribute to a former student named Nathan Cuthbertson, who was tragically killed in Afghanistan.  I liaised with Mr and Mrs Cuthbertson and created a multimedia tribute to Nathan and two other students, Tony Carr and Dennis Donnini, who were also sadly killed while servicing their country. The memorial service was universally acclaimed and featured as the lead story on that evening’s BBC Look North, as well as receiving coverage on local radio. The assemblies were commended by BBC reporters, the Director of Education and, more importantly, by Mr and Mrs Cuthbertson themselves.  The impact on our students was enormous; they researched using documents from the local library and even wrote several poems inspired by the soldiers who gave their lives in the war.  One Year 8 student, Freddie Jones, produced an opening ‘Poppy’ PowerPoint whilst other students were involved in readings and had their interviews broadcast on the BBC’s ‘Look North’. It also helped to humanise these brave men, lifting their names off the record pages and giving them a recognisable tangible identity.  Our students could identify with them, bringing their sacrifice firmly into mind.

The Remembrance Services still continue annually and have led to other related events, such as Holocaust survivors delivering speeches to the school community while this year’s service will feature the work of Paint A Poppy artists.

My interest in commemorating the soldiers of Sunderland has grown and I have collected more names from parish records, war memorials and the Sunderland Antiquarian society.  I am currently working with various groups to create a lasting tribute to the fallen by asking people to paint a poppy.