4. Researching names on war memorials

Background: This lesson should be used in conjunction with War Memorials Trust's 'Researching names on war memorials' secondary helpsheet, and provides guidance on finding out about the people who are commemorated on your local war memorial so you can support your pupils in doing this. It will help if pupils have visited the war memorial before this lesson and know when and why it was erected. Further ideas can be found in War Memorials Trust's other secondary lesson plans and helpsheets. During this lesson pupils will work with a range of historical sources to develop their research and enquiry skills while building up a profile of the local men and women who died in or were affected by conflict.

Please remember that not all resources suggested may be available or suitable and teachers will need to assess this and gather appropriate material prior to the lesson. You may need more than one lesson to cover the suggested activities, or some could be set as homework.

Suitable for: Key Stages 3 and 4

Learning objectives: Pupils will learn:
- To use different primary sources to find information about people in the past
- To select relevant information and use it to build up a profile of a person

Learning outcomes: Pupils will be able to:
- Use a range of sources to effectively find and make deductions from information
- Select relevant information and use it to produce a profile of a person commemorated on that memorial

Resources: 'Researching names on war memorials' secondary helpsheet, computer access. Other resources will depend on the activities used during the lesson.

Introduction

- Pupils need to know what war memorials are and why and when they have been created, so teach the main points from War Memorials Trust's secondary lesson, 'What are war memorials?' If you have already taught this then a brief recap should be a sufficient introduction. If you have researched the history of the war memorial itself briefly recap this too.
- Pupils will need a list of the names on the war memorial, which can be obtained during a visit prior to this lesson. Such information is often also available on local Rolls of Honour or websites. If your local memorial does not list names there are suggestions for what to do in the next section.
- Give pupils the names and ask them what they could find out about the people and how they can find the information. Discuss possible sources and which ones to focus on to find out different types of information.

- You might want to encourage less able pupils in particular to record questions about 'their' casualty so that they can focus their research on finding these answers. You may want to provide some form of support for these pupils, such as an outline plan of which resources to use and a writing frame for recording what they find out.
- Consider how pupils will work together on research. Resources may be limited so it might make sense for groups to work together and combine their efforts. This will depend on the nature of the class and the facilities you have.
- Decide what you want the outcome of pupils' research to be. This could be a written biography of the person they research, an information leaflet to inform others, or a more creative outcome such as a display. Some further ideas are given in the 'Ideas for further work' section, below.

Suggested teaching points and activities

There are many sources that you can use to research names. Details of how to find them and the information they give is given in our 'Researching names on a war memorial' secondary helpsheet. Because the availability of sources will vary between schools it is impossible to give a complete lesson plan, so some general advice is given for using 'Basic' and 'Advanced' sources. You can use this to create your own lesson plan(s) according to your pupils' and school's requirements.

1. **Basic resources**
- **Commonwealth War Graves Commission database**: Demonstrate how to use this to find basic details of a casualty. The database is straightforward to use but ensure pupils understand these potential problems and how to overcome them:
    o Searching using too many fields increases the chance of making a mistake and no results being found. Start by searching using the casualty's surname and initials and gradually filter results by putting in more information.
    o It is likely you will get more than one result even after you have filtered results as much as possible. Teach pupils to work out which of the results is the right one. This may include looking at the 'Additional information' section on a casualty record and finding out where they lived, or ruling out those from a non-local regiment.
    o The database provides some key facts about the person, but this is an ideal opportunity to reinforce to pupils that one source is not usually sufficient for a historian to find all the required information.
    o If your local memorial does not list names, it is possible to reveal who some local casualties were by searching for a place name and seeing if it comes up under 'Additional information.' You can then use the other resources listed below to find further information about these names. This will not reveal all local casualties because such information is not listed for everyone but it provides a helpful starting point. You will also then need to cross reference the information you find with other sources to ensure accuracy.
- Pupils should record the information that they have found from the database and any other sources they use. The exact format of this will depend on how you want them to present their findings. For recording information from the CWGC website, War Memorials Trust's 'Researching people named on war memorials' activity sheet for youth groups could be used. This is available from the Youth Groups section of www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org.
- **Free BMD**: You can use this site to find out an approximate date of birth and, if applicable, marriage. The information here is more difficult to decipher and does not give precise dates

but can be useful for filling in gaps in information and introduces pupils to a different source type.

- o You may need to explain to pupils what these records are and why they were taken.
- o Model using the information you already know about a casualty to work out what the BMD could tell you (e.g. if you know a person's age and date of death you can find the record of their birth) and searching for this.
- o Discuss how to be sure that the records returned by your search are those of the person you are looking for – this may include ensuring they have searched the correct county or district.
- o Pupils should record the information in whatever way you have chosen bearing in mind what they will need to do with it in future lessons.

- **London Gazette**: You need to register for access and get pupils to log in during the lesson.
  - o You can then search for a casualty's name (you may need to model this as the site can be a little difficult to navigate at first, especially if pupils are unfamiliar with some of the terminology it uses) and find out about promotions or commissions they were awarded.
  - o Searching in this way can be laborious and some pupils may need assistance with it, but the results can add some interesting facts to your profile of a person.

- **Local information**: If someone locally is able to offer information about your local war memorial and/or the people named on it, consider how you want pupils to go about asking for and recording the information. It is a good idea to have questions prepared in advance. This would also be a useful opportunity to teach pupils about the value of oral histories and potential problems with them as a source of information. Additionally, many local communities now have websites that give information about local war memorials and the people they commemorate.

2. Advanced resources

- **Census returns and birth, marriage and death records:** If you choose to use one of the websites mentioned in the 'Researching names on war memorials' secondary helpsheet you will need to subscribe and get pupils to log on.
  - o Explain what the census and other records are and how/why they were (and still are) taken.
  - o Teach pupils how to search the website, interpret the records and infer information from what is given. We recommend that you try this out before the lesson and model with one of the names on the memorial so that you are sure that you are demonstrating with relevant sources.
  - o You should also show how to overcome any potential problems (for example being unable to find records – this can be due to a typing error when searching, or a less obvious reason such as a person moving away from an area they were born in and not showing up on the subsequent records for that area).
  - o Using these records helps pupils to develop their skills in handling historical data and 'piecing together' evidence to build up a broader picture.

- **Regimental records and Service/Medal records:** These records are available online (see War Memorials Trust's 'Researching names on war memorials' secondary helpsheet) so can be suitable for classroom use, but it may be more appropriate for you to give pupils the information and teach them how to use it.
  - o Discuss with pupils how to use the information in these records to build up their knowledge of 'their' casualty. In particular draw their attention to any additional notes

that were often written on records, as these can give some unusual insights that may not be obvious from the official records.
  o Explain to pupils the inconsistent nature of such records, due to the fact that many were destroyed and the level of detail of regimental diaries depended on conditions at the time, so may be less detailed at times.

Conclusion

At the end of the lesson/project it will be beneficial to draw together what you have done, review pupils' progress in the historical skills they have developed and used, and conclude by recapping why it is important to research and 'remember' the people named on your local war memorial (or commemorated by it if it lists no names).

Suggestions for differentiation and further work

The activities in this lesson plan are suggestions only and teachers will need to adapt the lesson to take account of local circumstances and the needs of their class, and extend it with further activities if necessary.

- You can turn this into an extended project. Pupils could present what they have found out in a variety of forms, combining the project with elements of the English and ICT curriculum. They could also present the information they have found to the wider community, such as younger pupils in your school or from a primary school.
- Family history is an increasingly popular subject for research and you may have pupils with relatives who served in the Armed Forces during a conflict whom they can research. We advise you to contact parents and carers if you are planning this and to be aware of any potentially sensitive issues that could arise.
- If you do this lesson as part of a unit that includes a visit to a battlefield or war cemetery overseas, you might be able to locate and visit the graves of some of those you have researched, if you are visiting an applicable place. This often really brings the issue to life for pupils, having 'got to know' the casualty first.
- An interesting extension for more able pupils is to look into how people were selected for inclusion on a war memorial and whether anyone was omitted from one that they might have been named on, or included on one without seeming to appear in other local records or casualty lists. Please be aware that there are no fixed rules about who is named on a war memorial – it was a local decision – and a name not appearing is not necessarily 'wrong.' Some reasons for omission might seem controversial by today's attitudes (for example, not including someone who was executed) but reasons for omission or inclusion can also be more straightforward – someone could simply have moved away from an area they previously had connections with and therefore not be included on that memorial despite being named in local census records, or even be named on both. People can also be named on a memorial if they survived, so might not appear in CWGC records but be on a memorial. Also, the family may not have put a name forward for inclusion. Pupils can be challenged to try to find out what happened to these people.