

Researching a war memorial



War Memorials Trust

There are two key aspects of war memorials that young people can research: the names recorded on it and the actual structure itself. Guidance on researching names on war memorials can be found in War Memorials Trust's 'Researching the names on a war memorial' primary helpsheet. This helpsheet is intended to provide guidance for teachers and leaders who are supporting pupils in researching the background history of a war memorial and its creation.

Why carry out research into the war memorial?

Researching a war memorial, particularly background information on when it was erected and how and by whom it was funded, can provide young people with an insight into community feeling during the aftermath of war, how people reacted to the experience of war and how a community worked to raise funds and make decisions. In addition to this, researching the background to a war memorial's creation can reveal decisions that were made about who should be named on it. Not only can this provide interesting information on community attitudes and beliefs at the time, it can also be useful to know the original intentions of those that created the memorial if names from more recent conflicts are to be added.

What could you find out?

- **Dates:** Various dates in the memorial's history can be traced. For example the dates the memorial was built and dedicated can often be found in contemporary newspaper records, and you may be able to find out when additional names and conflicts were added.
- **People:** You can find out who designed and built the memorial (this was often a local company), who attended the dedication service, who led the dedication service, who has responsibility for the memorial now and who contributed to the cost of building it.
- **Design and materials:** Examine the memorial and find out what material the main structure and components are made of. Try to find out why this particular design was chosen – is it significant to the community for some reason? For example, many war memorials depict a local crest or other symbol.
- **Inscription:** Look at the memorial and any inscriptions or other wording on it. Is there any evidence or local reason why these words were chosen? Like the design, some inscriptions may hold a particular meaning for a community; many memorials to Scout troops, for example, carry the Scout motto or Scouting tracking symbol meaning 'gone home.' Which conflicts and names are included on the memorial? Does the memorial still have a commemorative function today?
- **Location:** Look at whereabouts in the community the war memorial is located, and consider why this location was chosen – like the design, does it hold some significance for the community? For example, some memorials were placed on the spot where men signed up to go to war or on a place where they used to socialise before the war. Others occupy a prominent position within a town or overlook the place where those it commemorates came from.

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- **Ownership:** Ownership of war memorials can be difficult to establish for various reasons, but researching the memorial can reveal who was responsible for the war memorial when it was first built, and who is now responsible for its upkeep and maintenance. Further information about the issue of ownership can be found in War Memorials Trust's 'Ownership of war memorials' helpsheet, which can be found on our main website at www.warmemorials.org/a-z.
- **Maintenance:** Has any maintenance work been carried out or changes made to the memorial since it was first built? Why was this and has it changed the memorial in any way?

How to research your war memorial

As well as local books, internet articles and other research tools with which your pupils will be familiar, these sources of information will be useful when researching a war memorial:

- **Council records or church/school/company archives:** If a war memorial is located on public land, in a church or church grounds (or other place of worship), in a school or school grounds, or in the premises of a specific company or social group (e.g. Scouts or Cadets) then minutes from council, parochial church council, school governing body or company meetings may include further information about the war memorial and its creation. In addition, it may have been necessary to apply for permission to erect the war memorial (e.g. planning permission or a faculty from church authorities) and this maybe recorded. If research is being carried out by young people, they may need some support accessing these records.
- **Local newspaper:** If your local newspaper dates back to the time when the war memorial was built, it may well contain articles covering the fundraising and design for the memorial and the unveiling and dedication, including local dignitaries who were involved in these. Such articles are often extremely detailed and therefore useful to researchers.
- **Local archives/libraries/museums:** These may hold information about the war memorial itself, or have other artefacts that reveal information about the memorial (such as photographs with the memorial in). You may wish to ascertain what is held and arrange a visit if this would be beneficial to young people.
- **Imperial War Museum's War Memorials Archive:** The Archive aim to compile a comprehensive record of all war memorials in the UK, and it is worth checking their website (www.ukniwm.org.uk) to see if records about your war memorial are held.

What to do with your research

As is the case with research into the names on war memorials, when young people have completed their research consider how to help them present their findings. This might be to the rest of their school during an assembly, or to the local community (especially if local people have helped with the research) or by teaching a younger group (e.g. Cubs) about what they have done and why. This gives young people the chance to build stronger links with their community and develop valuable presentational skills. Research can also be added to the War Memorials Online website at www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk.

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