

Teachers' guide: The Battle of the Somme and Pals Battalions resources



These resources have been developed to coincide with the centenary of the Battle of the Somme in 2016. While an overview of key facts about the battle is provided for pupils, the key aim of these resources is to teach the impact of the battle on local communities, particularly in areas that raised Pals Battalions that ended up on the Somme, rather than different interpretations of the battle and its military achievements. These materials may be particularly helpful for teachers planning to fulfil the local history requirements of the National Curriculum.

These resources consist of:

- An overview of the Battle of the Somme for pupils
- An overview of the Pals Battalions for pupils
- A PowerPoint showing some photographs and key information about various war memorials in areas that raised Pals Battalions who served on the Somme
- Specific resources about the Chorley Pals Company (part of the Accrington Pals Battalion) including an overview of the company's service, biographical information and information about war memorials to the Chorley Pals.

The resources relating to the Chorley Pals have been produced with support from the Chorley Pals Memorial Project. They provide more detail about the men of that Company and their wartime service and can be used by local schools to add more depth to a local study. They can also, however, be used by schools in places other than Chorley that also raised a Pals Battalion. The materials provided here can give ideas for the type of research that could be undertaken about any local battalion and memorials to it. We hope these materials are a useful guide for schools undertaking this.

There are many resources from other organisations that focus on wider aspects of the battle and on other Pals Battalions. WMT's resources may be useful in conjunction with these to form part of a wider study of the battle, how it was fought and its impact and legacy. The websites for other organisations that may be useful can be found at www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/links.

Learning objectives

Through these resources pupils will:

- Know what Pals Battalions were and why they developed
- Develop an understanding of the impact of the Battle of the Somme on local communities

Suggested activities

The ideas suggested on the following pages are designed to give support to teachers developing lessons about the Battle of the Somme and commemorating its centenary. These ideas can be used alone, to form either a single lesson or a series of lessons, or incorporated into a wider scheme of work. They may be particularly suitable for fulfilling the local history requirements of the National Curriculum.

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1. The start of the war and Pals Battalions

Examine the ideas behind Pals Battalions and how and why they were encouraged. A pupil information sheet is provided which gives an overview of this. Look at why there was a huge effort to recruit to the army in 1914 (WMT's Kent-focused resources about Lord Kitchener may be useful for this) and how the Pals Battalions contributed to the numbers required. Emphasise that the Pals were a particular feature of northern cities and that they encouraged recruitment of groups of men that already knew each other. Do pupils think they were a good idea? Discuss the arguments in favour of and against them. Various contemporary sources such as photographs and accounts from those who joined up are available and could be used in this activity.

2. The Battle of the Somme

Using WMT's pupil information sheets about the battle and the Chorley Pals, and other resources, teach pupils about the events of Battle of the Somme by tracking the experiences of one of the Pals Battalions that fought there. What were the battalion's objectives? What was their involvement in the first day of the battle and beyond? How many casualties did they suffer? What was the impact of this? This can be combined with other resources that give more detail on the strategy and events of the battle so that pupils develop a good overall knowledge of it.

3. Pals Battalion study

Focus on a specific Pals Battalion that fought at the Somme for a more detailed study of the people involved. Ideally this would be a battalion from your local area but if that does not apply to you school this study can also be a good way of teaching research skills and the personal aspect of the battle. WMT has provided some case study resources about the Chorley Pals which could be used, or you may use these as a guide to pupils carrying out their own more advanced research:

- Pupils could research those that fought, where they came from and their lives before the war. WMT's 'Researching the names on war memorials' resources provide guidance on researching those who were involved in World War I and there are many sources and websites that give information about specific battalions. By researching the personal lives of those involved pupils can really begin to understand the impact of the battle on their local communities.
- The Battle of the Somme was a key event of World War I and one of the most costly in terms of casualties. Many of the Pals Battalions covered by these resources suffered heavy casualties during the battle. Their experiences can be used to as part of your teaching about the wider impact of the battle on the direction of the war, particularly when looking at interpretations of the achievements of the campaign versus the human cost.

4. Remembering the Pals Battalions

Following the war, many war memorials were erected to remember those who died. A number of these memorials commemorate the Pals Battalions, either specifically or as part of the town's wider commemoration. The Oak Hill Park memorial for example, in Accrington, lists the names of the Accrington Pals, 584 out of 720 of whom were killed during the opening day of the battle. A further activity which could span a number of lessons would therefore be to investigate some of these memorials. Tasks could include:

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- Visiting the memorial to record its condition and adding this information to War Memorials Online (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk; see WMT's 'Assessing the condition of war memorials' resources for further guidance). Pupils could play an active part in ensuring the memorial's conservation.
- Evaluate the design of the memorial and what it could reveal about community feeling at the time. Is it a large, elaborate memorial or a smaller, simple design? Does it show a realistic depiction of the war (e.g. depictions of soldiers) or more abstract designs? Does it use other symbolism such as allegorical figures, traditional mourning symbols? Does it portray sorrow and mourning or optimism and hope for the future?
- Researching the history of the memorial itself – for example when it was erected, who unveiled it, how the community raised funds for it, how the design and location were chosen. Is the memorial listed – if not and it is freestanding pupils could apply for it to be listed.

5. Sharing your work

These resources focus on the local and personal impact of one of the biggest and bloodiest battles of the war and are intended to be used around the centenary of the Somme in July 2016. It may therefore be useful, and poignant, to share your work with the local community – on your school's website, as part of a local exhibition or through a commemorative event.

Projects can also be shared more widely by adding them to WMT's learning showcase: www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/secondary/showcase. We are always keen to hear from schools that have used our materials or done war memorial projects of their own, so do get in touch!

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