

Why are Sussex war memorials important?



Background: This lesson uses some of the war memorials in East and West Sussex to explore the historical importance of war memorials and their emotional significance to communities, both when they were created and now, and the resulting impact of vandalism and other damage to war memorials. The memorials that form the focus for the lesson are

- a peace garden in Patcham, Brighton, which has in the past experienced acts of vandalism including theft
- the civic war memorial on Chapel Road, Worthing, which has suffered from graffiti on more than one occasion
- Linch war memorial which was damaged as a result of a storm

Suitable for: Upper Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3

Learning objective: Pupils will learn:

- Why war memorials were important to communities in the past
- Why memorials continue to be important to communities today
- Some of the problems facing war memorials in Sussex today and what can be done

Learning outcomes: Pupils will be able to:

- Explain why we have memorials and why they are important
- Understand some of the problems facing war memorials today
- Give clear opinions about the importance of war memorials today and listen to the opinions of others

Resources:

- case study sheets on [Patcham Peace Garden](#), [Chapel Road, Worthing](#) and [Linch](#) war memorials, including photographs
- teachers' helpsheets from www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org for background information

Introduction:

What are war memorials?

- Before focusing on specific war memorials it is important that pupils have an overall understanding of what war memorials are, why we have them and when most of them were created. This will provide context for their ongoing importance
- There is guidance on teaching this in other lessons from War Memorials Trust, especially in the '[What are war memorials?](#)' primary and secondary lessons and in War Memorials Trust's helpsheets for [primary](#) and [secondary](#) teachers
- Younger pupils may have some knowledge of World War I and II. It is sufficient to explain that the majority (two thirds) of the war memorials in the UK were created after World War I

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- While it is true that around two-thirds of the UK's memorials commemorate World War I, you may want to point out to older pupils that many were created before this in response to the Boer War and other earlier conflicts. However, World War I was a turning point which led to many more memorials than there were previously. The aftermath of World War I also remains the biggest wave of commemoration ever seen in the UK

Suggested teaching points and activities:

Why were war memorials important when they were first created?

- Having established that many war memorials were created after World War I, discuss why this happened and why community based memorials were so important to many at the time. The main points to ensure pupils understand are:
 - The scale and impact of World War I and the way in which it effected the wider population in comparison to previous wars
 - The number of casualties of World War I was unprecedented. There was a strong call from many communities across the UK for war memorials to act as a permanent reminder and as a mark of respect for those who had paid the ultimate sacrifice. It may be useful to highlight the fact that many have inscriptions calling for future generations – like your pupils - to continue to remember
 - The government did not allow the bodies of the fallen to be repatriated (brought back home) and many casualties were missing and never found. This meant that for most families who lost relatives there was no funeral and no grave to act as a focal point for their grief. War memorials provided this focal point, a place where they could go to remember lost loved ones and, often, the only place where their relative's name was recorded
- You may wish to incorporate work that really helps pupils to gain an understanding of this. For example, you could show pupils photographs of battlefield cemeteries to illustrate the numbers of casualties or, if you know the proportion of the local population that went to war, you could illustrate this by counting out the equivalent numbers of pupils
 - **A local example you could use is Wadhurst, East Sussex.** The inscription on the village war memorial cross within the memorial garden notes that 114 men from Wadhurst gave their lives during World War I (photographs of the memorial can be found at www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/189136). The fallen are also recorded on tablets in St Peter and St Paul's Church (photographs can be found at www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/222173). More recent figures indicate 149 men were lost. At the start of World War I the village had a population of around 3,500 which was split into 864 households. During the war 649 men (a fifth of the population) were on active service. Approximately one in every five men who left Wadhurst to fight did not return. Sunday 9th May 1915 was a particularly devastating day for the village as 25 local men were killed in 10 minutes at the Battle of Aubers Ridge. Drama techniques may also help to explore community feeling at the time.

Why are war memorials important today?

- Having established why large numbers of war memorials were created after World War I, remind pupils that the war began over 100 years ago. Younger pupils may benefit from a timeline or other strategy to help them understand how much time this is

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- Ask pupils if, with the passing of this amount of time, they think the importance of war memorials has lessened
- After discussing pupils' opinions explain that many people feel war memorials are still as important as ever. Their function may have changed over time: we don't directly remember the things and people commemorated but they help us learn about them, show respect for those that were involved and are a link to important events in the past. Some people within the community or further afield may still have relatives recorded on them so for some there is still a very personal importance
- Also the local war memorial is often the only record of those in a particular community who served or were lost in a particular war. If the war memorial is not taken care of or lost, this information can be very difficult to recover and may even be lost forever

Damage to Sussex's war memorials

- Explain that despite the importance of war memorials they can be a target for theft, particularly metal theft, and vandalism. They can also suffer problems due to their age and lack of maintenance. Show pictures of Chapel Road war memorial, Worthing to draw attention to the graffiti which was spray painted on to the memorial, partially covering the names
- Pupils should explore their reactions to this and discuss what they think of the fact that this has happened to the memorial. Their opinions may vary and raise interesting points
- You could also explore why pupils think war memorials are vandalised in this way especially with the commemorations of the centenary of World War I being so current
- Show pictures of Patcham Peace Gardens to highlight the threat posed by theft. Paving slabs from the garden were dug up and stolen. Some were left stacked up and it is thought the thieves intended to return for these at a later date
- Get pupils to think about the different groups within the community, such as those related to the people commemorated on the memorial, veterans of the wars commemorated and other residents in the community, their reaction to the vandalism and the impact it has (or did have) on them
- You could also show images of Linch war memorial which was severely damaged during a storm by a falling tree so that pupils understand not all problems related to war memorials are caused by deliberate damage

Other war memorials

- At this stage explain some of wider context of these issues. Theft has historically been a problem for war memorials, with metal theft being a particular issue in recent years
- Explain how these issues are dealt with and what pupils can do to help
 - For older pupils in particular this could be a way of getting them involved in a community project
 - War Memorials Online which aims to record information about war memorials and help ensure they are kept in good condition for future generations. There is further information about these projects and other activities that pupils can do to help care for local war memorials at www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/youth-groups/projects. You could extend this lesson to incorporate some work around these projects if suitable
 - [In Memoriam 2014](#) which is offering free SmartWater to war memorial custodians to deter theft from their war memorials. The local community can apply for free SmartWater to mark their war memorial

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Conclusion:

- Sum up the key points of discussion about why war memorials like the Patcham Peace Gardens, Worthing war memorial and Linch war memorial were and are important and the impact problems like vandalism and storms can have
- If you are teaching this lesson during the centenary of World War I, or during another anniversary period, highlight this to pupils. Explain that the passing World War I and II from living memory means it is even more important that war memorials are cared for and the people they commemorate remembered. War memorials can be the only record of the names of people from a community who were involved in the war and so damage to, or loss of, these can lead to this important information being lost. Encourage pupils to consider the historical and emotional significance of war memorials and to make an effort to look after them

Support/extension:

The activities in this lesson plan are suggestions only and teachers will need to adapt the lesson to take account of the needs of their class.

- It may be appropriate to have adult support for some pupils when they are exploring the reasons for memorials being important to a community, to focus their discussions and help them understand the feelings involved. Cards with 'emotions' words and pictures may help with the selection of appropriate responses
- More able pupils could have the opportunity to prepare a more formal presentation of the reasons for people wanting a memorial, or research the background to the creation of a particular memorial in the local area. They could be given the task of presenting to the class, in role as someone raising support for a war memorial, the reasons why one is wanted by the community
- Consider if you have any young people with personal connections to active service personnel

Ideas for further work:

There are many opportunities to extend this lesson and link it with other areas of the curriculum:

- Literacy: The issues covered in the lesson provide a context for persuasive writing. Pupils could demonstrate their knowledge by writing an article for a local paper or letters to the community, explaining why war memorials continue to be important and why we should look after them
- Citizenship: It would be possible for older pupils to use news reports of thefts and vandalism to examine how the media presents information and to analyse statistics related to war memorial theft and vandalism. War Memorials Trust's main website, www.warmemorials.org/news, contains various news releases some of which relate to vandalism and theft from war memorials
- RE: the idea of the importance of war memorials to a community can be linked to their role in the ritual of Remembrance, which is explored further for younger in War Memorials Trust's primary lesson, '[What is Remembrance?](#)' and older pupils in our secondary lesson, '[Changes to war memorials and Remembrance](#)' and the idea that, for many bereaved families, the war memorial replaced a gravestone and a funeral service. War memorials can be used when researching the meaning of these rites of passage

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