# 3. Researching a local war memorial

**Background:** This lesson focuses on researching a war memorial's background history and finding out why certain elements of it were chosen and how it came into being. It is a useful follow up to War Memorials Trust's secondary lesson, 'Visiting a war memorial,' and can answer some of the questions that pupils may have raised during that lesson. This lesson also complements our 'Researching names on war memorials' secondary lesson, which focuses on researching the names of those commemorated and would be a suitable follow up to this lesson. Both lessons teach pupils how to use and interpret a range of historical data and documents to find out about a significant aspect of their local history.

**Suitable for:** Key Stages 3 and 4

**Learning objectives:** Pupils will learn:
- To use historical artefacts and documents to find out about a specific event in the past, and to draw sensible conclusions from them
- When and why a local war memorial was created and unveiled and who was involved in these events

**Learning outcomes:** Pupils will be able to:
- Accurately obtain information from a range of historical sources, use these to infer information and say what their significance is
- Explain what they have found out about the war memorial's history and what this tells us about the community at the time

**Resources:** Access to computers and local history sources – exact resources will depend on the activities chosen. Photographs of a war memorial, especially close ups of inscriptions, computer access.

## Introduction

- If you have previously visited a war memorial recap what pupils saw and found out from the visit, especially any questions they raised about it which can only be answered through further research. If you have not yet visited a war memorial with the class then if possible look at photographs of it now and discuss what can be learned from it and its inscriptions, as well as what the memorial itself does not tell us.
- Discuss what they could find out about the memorial now and where they might find this information (see War Memorials Trust's 'Researching a war memorial' secondary helpsheet for more information on what to find out and where to find it).
- Pupils are likely to suggest finding out about the people named on the memorial. This is covered in War Memorials Trust's 'Researching names on war memorials' secondary lesson.
- You may want to get pupils to record what they know about the memorial and what they still need to find out. Less able pupils may benefit from support with this.

- Introduce the context for the research – how are pupils going to record and present their information?

**Suggested teaching points and activities**

- Establish how pupils will research the war memorial. This will involve a discussion of the resources to be used as well as who is going to be carrying out the research. You may want each pupil to carry out their own individual research or pupils can work in groups researching a different aspect each and feeding back to each other. You chosen method will depend on the nature of your class and the memorial, as well as the availability of resources. You may also want to consider splitting the research tasks to give more able pupils something challenging to investigate and less able pupils a more achievable task.
- Teach pupils about the different sources of information about the war memorial that are available (advice on this is given in War Memorials Trust's 'Researching a war memorial' secondary helpsheet) and how to use them. Please note that because each war memorial is unique it is impossible to give precise guidance about what resources are available, but we hope that the helpsheet is a useful starting point. Gathering suitable resources may require you to do some preparation before the lesson and investigate what is available in your locality.
- Remember that there is often a surprising amount of information given on a war memorial itself – many inscriptions detail who was responsible for creating the memorial and how money was raised. This can be a useful way of teaching or recapping how to interpret such language.
- It is also important to remember that some information, such as why the memorial is located where it is, can be obtained from looking at the wider context of the area. Wider local history that is not necessarily related to the memorial might tell you why it was placed there, and using the war memorial as the starting point for a wider study can be a useful focus for the teaching of local history, especially around the First World War centenary.
- Give pupils time to use the resources available to research and find the answers to the questions they have. You may need more than one lesson for this.

**Conclusion**

- Draw together and review what pupils have found out and the work that they have produced to showcase this.
- Discuss with pupils what their findings tell them about the community at the time of the war memorial's creation. War memorials are an expression of that community's feelings at the time and often the design and inscriptions reveal some of those feelings by showing symbols and words of grief, relief, or celebration. This can relate to Citizenship work on community dynamics.

**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 the needs of their class, and extend it with further work if necessary.

- Having learned about the war memorial's background, pupils can now find out more about the people that it commemorates. There is further advice on this given in War Memorials Trust's 'Researching the names on a war memorial' secondary helpsheet and 'Researching names on a war memorial' secondary lesson plan.
- By the end of this lesson pupils should have a good idea about what motivated communities to create war memorials and use certain design elements. This knowledge can lead to a lesson on designing their own memorial taking into account what design features are suitable. Further information is given in War Memorials Trust's 'War memorial designs' secondary lesson plan.