

Your Community at War

A Guide for Schools



LIVING LEGACIES FROM PAST CONFLICT TO SHARED FUTURE
1914-18

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



This guide was first produced in 2010 by Lynda Abbott of The Hemel Hempstead School and Prof. Richard Grayson of Goldsmiths, University of London, and then revised by them in 2011. It has been updated in 2019 by Richard Grayson with advice from Leanne Williams (The Hemel Hempstead School) and Stephanie Tice (Bishop Thomas Grant School) to include developments and changes over the past decade, and to expand the material included on the First World War. It now reflects the fact that approaches first used for the 'Hemel at War' project have, since 2015, been adopted by Bishop Thomas Grant School, Streatham.

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Contents

Introduction: the Hemel at War and Streatham at War Projects.....	4
What students have said about ‘Hemel at War’	6
Getting started.....	7
Safeguarding and Child Protection	8
General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)	8
Pitfalls	9
Carrying out interviews.....	10
The website.....	12
Sources for the Home Front (in both world wars)	13
Sources for the First World War	14
Sources for the Second World War	19
Appendix 1: Informed Consent Form.....	21
Appendix 2: First World War biographies	23
Appendix 3: Second World War webpages/interviews.....	36
Appendix 4: Outline lesson plans	50

Introduction: the Hemel at War and Streatham at War Projects

The *Hemel at War* project was launched by The Hemel Hempstead School in 2008, supported by a former pupil of the school who is now Professor of Twentieth Century History at Goldsmiths, University of London, Prof. Richard Grayson.

The project's primary aim was to create, through recorded and transcribed interviews, an internet archive (www.hemelatwar.org) of memories of war which would otherwise be lost. Initially, this work was focused on the Second World War, but soon drew in other conflicts, up to the twenty-first century including Afghanistan and Iraq. As the First World War centenary approached, it was decided that work in school for 'Hemel at War' would shift its focus and over 2014-18 most of the additions to the website covered 1914-18. In 2015, Bishop Thomas Grant in Streatham adopted a similar approach, building in links established during the school's involvement in the Department for Education's Battlefield Tours Programme. Assistance from Richard Grayson was initially provided through his role in the 'Living Legacies 1914-18' centre based at Queen's University Belfast.

We want to start off by saying that nobody should be daunted by the scale of this work. Some of the things we have done can be achieved very quickly, easily and cheaply. Even a very basic version of what we have done would bring immense satisfaction and fantastic experiences for both students and staff. This publication is a guide to show what can be achieved if you have time to put in to it. But a very basic webpage is cheap. Many people have the skills and software to post content online and will do so for free.

Our material has been constructed primarily for local people, but we already have some evidence of it being put to use by academic researchers. We know that people as far afield as France, Australia, South Africa, Canada and the USA have used our material. In addition to creating an archive, the project has the following additional positive outcomes:

1. Students' knowledge and understanding of conflict are developed through engagement with those who have experienced it at first hand, and through examining first hand accounts of conflict. They are able to engage directly with the personal experiences of those who lived through conflicts and we believe that the local connections make this knowledge/understanding all the more tangible and relevant. Meanwhile, seemingly vast subjects such as the slaughter of the First World War can be understood through individual examples. This can have a particular effect on, for example, visits to First World War battlefields and cemeteries, where graves of local people or sites linked to local battalions can be visited.
2. Students develop their skills as historians in ways which can benefit their wider studies and university applications. In most cases, students are writing the first draft of history and they are always told that they are probably writing about an individual whose story has never been researched. We also make it clear that their work is being published online which gives them both voice and validation.
3. Schools can make a contribution to community cohesion. That can happen by publishing material on local history which is then used by local people. It can also happen, in relation to the Second World War and more recent conflicts by creating situations in which younger and older generations meet and talk in ways

- they would not otherwise do, which can help to challenge generational stereotypes. Furthermore, older people who might feel that their experiences are no longer of interest to society as a whole are able to see their lives recorded and given recognition.
4. The projects are partnerships between secondary and higher education which allows an academic researcher to apply some of his research skills for community purposes, and also gives students some engagement with the higher education sector.

We hope that readers of this guide will feel inspired to do some of what we have done, and perhaps even more, but don't feel that you have to do it all. It's also the kind of project that can be started, left for a while, and then returned to. With all the demands on teachers' time, that is probably how it is going to be if you start such a project – it certainly has been for us. Indeed, the maximum benefit will be obtained by working with successive year groups, so it is wise to plan to do a little bit each year so that as many students as possible can be engaged in it.

Our own projects are certainly ongoing and essentially involves one day a year in each of the two schools involved (though occasionally with an extra day). If you carry out a similar project and need help, we'd love to hear from you. We can be contacted by email at: hemelatwar@gmail.com

What students have said about ‘Hemel at War’

The Hemel at War project provided me with a chance to ensure that my interest and enjoyment of history contributed to the wider historical community. I also had the opportunity to examine original archives on the First World War at the Kew Public Record Office. Interviewing past veterans and prisoners of war allowed me to recreate their experiences, and, rather than read about the majority of soldiers’ lives and feel almost distanced from their suffering, I was able to fully connect with how life was.... Hemel at War also has meant that I have gained valuable skills as a historian in interviewing and talking to people, taking notes and then writing them up.

Sammi Rees

Hemel at War closes the gap between the ages. It shares and shows the experiences and knowledge of the older generation, in one place, from anywhere and at any time. It also gives the chance for young people to go and interview people, ask those questions, see reactions and hear the powerful stories. It can educate the younger generation; show them the past mistakes and the heroes of the past.

Matt Henton

Participating in the Hemel at War project is a great transitional step from history in the textbook to research in action. The experiences and memories we were able to assemble allow the sense of the personal to be attached to the dates and numbers that everyone is familiar with. Already some of those who we have been in touch with have passed away, highlighting just how important this project is to our understanding of the past.

Edward Gardner

Being part of the Hemel at War project was a truly rewarding experience. Personal accounts are something which students rarely get in today’s educational system – and this, I believe, is one of the most important things to come out of the project. The personal accounts of the men and women I interviewed were both informative and incredibly moving.... The memories of the people who actually experienced life during war are so important, yet, sadly, are often forgotten. Due to this project these memories, which would otherwise have been lost in a matter of years, have been preserved, and it feels so special to have been a part of a project that means so much to so many.

Zoe Farrell

It was a unique and truly enjoyable experience, that I probably will not have the chance to experience again. It is because of the unique nature of the project that I found myself enthralled by the stories that I heard, and to hear them from the primary source made it even more harrowing and amazing. The tales from the British Legion will stay with me, and I will struggle to forget the horrors the men and women went through, and their ability to talk about it with such ease. I feel the Hemel at War Project gave me an insight into the wars that will never be matched in showing me detail and the reality of both conflicts.

Alex Brook

Getting started

There are only a small number of basic requirements which need to be in place.

1. Appoint a co-ordinator who can have overall responsibility for the project. This will often be a history teacher, but the project could also be integrated into general studies or wider sixth form activities.
2. Arrange a website which can contain the material which is gathered. This could be part of an existing school website (as for Streatham at War: www.btq.ac/pages/streatham-at-war) or have a dedicated address (as for Hemel at War: www.hemelatwar.org). If resources allow, we suggest that a special address will help the project have a community reach which goes beyond the school. A short address will also help to advertise the project, especially to those who are less familiar with web addresses. A section on structuring the website is included later in this guide. A website does not need to be expensive. Registering an address will cost well under £100, and you may be able to find that all the web design can be done by a member of staff or a student. However, we had our site designed by a company and that was funded by the school in conjunction with the Parents' Association.
3. Recruit student volunteers to take part. For interviewing, we involved students from years 10 to 13. For work on the First World War, Year 9 and Year 12 students have been involved.
4. Ensure that all students are trained in carrying oral history interviews. This should include ethical issues and questions of data protection. A section on interviews is included later in this guide.
5. Make public requests for interviews. The two best places to start are your local newspaper(s) and your local branch of the Royal British Legion (RBL).
6. Locate sources which can be used for work on the First World War. Starting points are local newspapers and unit war diaries. Information on how to locate both are contained in the First World War section below.
7. Ensure that somebody (ideally more than one person) has the skills and time to update the website.

Safeguarding and Child Protection

Safeguarding and child protection will obviously be issues in aspects of work such as this and schools will need to carry out risk assessments and abide by national guidelines. Some points to bear in mind are:

- Parents need to be fully informed and give consent for their children to take part in activities. In the case of interviews they particularly need to know where their children will be and when they can be expected home.
- Transporting pupils to the homes of interviewees can be a problem. We have found that parents are often willing to help.
- We made a point of stressing the children should not attempt to make contacts themselves and arrange interviews without a responsible adult present.
- There is also an issue with elderly people worrying about who is coming to their home. We always let them know in advance the names of the interviewers and exactly when they will arrive and expect to leave.

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

GDPR came into effect in the UK in March 2019. It is vital that holding any data (for example gathered during interviews) is done in line with the regulations. Guidance is available from the Oral History Society at: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/data-protection/> [accessed 17 April 2019].

Pitfalls

Different projects will no doubt encounter different problems, but we flag ones we have faced so that anybody running a project can be forewarned and make contingency plans.

1. Time. As in so much else, this project takes time, especially interviews are involved. As we said in the introduction, a very basic site and project need not be very time consuming and can still be very rewarding. However, it is worth flagging here what the main time-consuming activities have been:
 - a) Dealing with the number of offers of help. You need to make sure that everybody who offers help receives a reply. There is nothing worse than offering help and then being ignored. At the very least, it is good practice to acknowledge, say that the project has been inundated with offers, and that it may take a couple of months before the offer can be followed up.
 - b) Arranging interviews. Taking students out of school to meet people is time-consuming, especially when interviews are done on a one-off basis. There are several ways round this. Your RBL branch may be able to host a session, perhaps for half a day, where students and interviewees meet at the RBL. Alternatively, you might be able to host a similar session at school. We also set a limit of about an hour for interviews. This reassures the interviewees, ensures that staff can get pupils home at a reasonable time and encourages the interviewee to get their main points across in good time. We have found that an hour is plenty of time to get the main story and it can be extended if both parties feel this is desirable. Despite these time issues, set against the demands on time is the fact that the interviews are the most enjoyable and rewarding part of the process.
 - c) Transcribing interviews. This is more time-consuming than most realise. Ensure that those who interview also have the responsibility for transcribing it, and set clear deadlines for that.
2. Website security. At an early stage, our website was hacked by a malicious group which we believe to have been based in Turkey. They were able to do this because our passwords were quite easy to guess and they did great damage to the site. Fortunately, our host had full backups, but it did take a significant amount of time to sort out, and the site was down for several days.
3. Verifying information. We had one case where an interviewee made statements about war service which we had no reason for disbelieving at the time but, after his death, were challenged by relatives. Where possible, ask interviewees if they can show documents and medals. This should not be done in any way that suggests doubt about what you have been told because that could create hostility. Rather it can be presented as part of wishing to obtain photographs for the website. So don't ask 'Can you prove that?' but 'Do you have any documents or medals we could photograph and use to illustrate your account?' If such items cannot be produced, and there is any reason for doubt, then caution can be exercised in using the material while further investigations are carried out. If at all possible, veterans can easily obtain their own record from the Ministry of Defence (see section 'Sources on Second World War' below). They may not realise this and may be very willing to obtain the record.

Carrying out interviews

Before any interview is carried out, the interviewee's 'informed consent' must be obtained. We sent a letter to each interviewee explaining the purpose of the project, exactly what will happen and the fact that the information they give will be in the public domain. They should give consent to this by completing a form along the lines of that contained in Appendix 1 of this guide. Further details of some of the issues around ensuring that research is ethical and legal, and on informed consent have been produced by the Oral History Society at: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/ethical-and-legal/> [accessed 17 April 2019].

Interviews were carried out using simple voice recorders but nowadays most mobile phones will have a suitable recording app. We then transferred the recordings to audio files and burned them onto CDs which were then archived, but now, this could be done by copying the file onto a memory stick. The full text of the interview never appears on the website so this is an important means of making sure that it is preserved in full. After transcribing, we have given interviewees the chance to read the text and make corrections to ensure, for example, that the spellings of names and places are correct

The fundamental principle of any oral history interview is that questions should not be leading. For example, if discussing with a veteran about how they felt going into battle it is not appropriate to say 'So you would have felt scared, what else were you thinking?', 'Presumably you felt scared?' or even 'Did you feel scared?' As far as possible, questions must not only avoid making assumptions, but must also avoid flagging certain possible answers above others. Consequently, an appropriate question about emotions on going into battle would simple be 'How did you feel?' or 'What were you thinking about?' If, for example, a veteran says that they felt 'excited' or 'exhilarated', or 'pleased to be getting at the enemy at last', one might follow that up with 'Was there anything else that you were feeling or thinking?' Only as a final question in such a discussion would it be appropriate to ask something like 'Did you feel frightened?' That would allow a very specific answer to a specific question after the points they remember have been drawn out without suggestion.

A particularly sensitive issue when interviewing veterans is their role in killing people. This can obviously be very traumatic for them to recall. Some veterans will talk about this, but many will not. We strongly advise not intending to ask questions such as 'Did you kill anyone?' or 'How many did you kill?' If a veteran begins to volunteer such information then it can be followed up on, but even then it needs to be done sensitively. So, for example, if a veteran refers to having killed someone, you might ask a question such as 'How did that happen?' which allows them to say as much as they wish to say and might be limited only to the general situation, rather than a specific question such as 'How did you kill them?'

One of the key points about veterans is that they quite often do not offer very basic details about where they were living or how they came to enlist, and they rarely say exactly what unit they served in. This can make it difficult to verify information and can also limit the use of the archive for historians. We have therefore developed a range of categories of information which can be compiled, in addition to questions which might be asked to allow scope for whatever information the veteran may wish to offer. The

answers could also, in time, be used to form a database of local veterans. Note that any data must be held and use in accordance with GDPR rules (see section above on this).

1. Full name
2. Date of birth
3. Address now
4. Address when enlisted
5. Address when leaving services
6. Address(es) during war (if not in services)
7. School or other educational institution attended and dates
8. Employer when joining up (or during war)
9. Nature of work at employer
10. Branch of service (army, navy, RAF, other)
11. Unit (to include regiment and battalion or other unit, ship, squadron or other - as specific as person can be)
12. Dates of service
13. Countries served in (and dates if possible)
14. Details of medals
15. Wounded? If so, where, when and how?
16. Time in military hospital? If so where?
17. Involvement in any community group in advance of enlistment (such as sports club, church, charity)

Of course, not all of those interviewed would be veterans. They might be, for example, people who were evacuees. For those, you might use questions such as:

1. Full name
2. Date of birth
3. Address now
4. Address evacuated from
5. Address(es) evacuate to
6. School or other educational institution attended and dates
7. Involvement in any community group while evacuated (such as sports club, church, charity)

The website

The Streatham at War website is simply one page as part of the wider school website: www.btg.ac/pages/streatham-at-war That is a very good option for many projects.

The Hemel at War website has a number of different sections. Our main address is www.hemelatwar.org which we deliberately kept simple.

The key pages for subject matter are 'World War One', 'World War Two' and 'Other Conflicts'. The first of these contains four sub-sections:

- The Western Front
- Those Who Died
- Year 9 Research
- Year 12 Research

'Other Conflicts' is arranged by decades with the most substantial material covering the 2000s and 2010s. The Second World War menu has eight dropdowns:

- The Home Front
- Women at War
- Bovingdon Airfield
- Evacuees
- The Hemel Hempstead School
- Overseas Battle Fronts
- Those Who Died
- VE Day

We have structured most of these sections on the principle that different people accessing it will want different amounts of information. Where we have carried out interviews, they will be included in the site in three levels of detail. The main page of each sub-section contains a short summary of each interview:

<http://www.hemelatwar.org/home%20front.html>

Such pages have been drafted partly with students in years 7 to 9 in mind.

A longer version of the same page is then available at:

<http://www.hemelatwar.org/WWIIHomeLong.html>

An interview transcription is then included in this form:

<http://www.hemelatwar.org/Text.html#HowardL>

Sources for the Home Front (in both world wars)

Pupils are usually interested in investigating the Home Front and in some respects this is an easier topic to tackle than the military issues because there is a wide range of source material close at hand. It is always worth starting by asking them to investigate their own family history and look for memorabilia. It is also easier to find people who lived through World War II as children simply because they are younger than those who fought.

For the First World War (and indeed many aspects of the Second World War), the key resource is likely to be a local newspaper. In many areas, these will have been weekly publications although sometimes there were daily or monthly. Local libraries will almost always have local papers from this period, but for the whole of the UK (and indeed for the period prior to partition, areas now in the Republic of Ireland) they are also all held at the British Library. There is the option of taking students to local libraries to use newspapers. However, these will tend to be on microfilm and working out how to use that can be very time-consuming. Microfilm can also be hard to read and it can be difficult for students to select suitable articles. Therefore, to make the best use of time, we recommend that teachers obtain copies of selected newspaper articles by visiting the library beforehand. In some cases, you will be able to obtain photocopies of articles. At the British Library, if the newspaper is issued as a hard copy, you can take photographs of it. If it is on microfilm, you can extract images and email them to yourself as a PDF. Staff are on hand to advise on what is permissible and how to do this.

For the Second World War, some of our most interesting interviews have been related to the Home Front with evacuees and ex-pupils who attended the school during the war years. In addition to this, rich sources of information can be found in:

- The local history section of the public library which will have secondary sources.
- Local History Societies.
- Larger shops and businesses often have an archive and some have detailed accounts and materials that can be used by schools.
- Museums, local archives and public records offices.
- Publicity in local newspapers often provides contacts.
- The Royal British Legion may well be able to put you in touch with people who experienced the Home Front, such as the spouses of veterans or those who served the armed forces in a civilian capacity such as maintaining the grounds at airfields.

Sources for the First World War

Records searchable by place

In constructing a picture of those from a locality who served in the First World War, there are five principal sources. First, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website contain data which can be searched by place and then downloaded. Go to: www.cwgc.org/find/find-war-dead, scroll down to the 'War' boxes and indicate 'First World War'. Then click on 'Additional information'. Add a place name in the box and then click the green search button. A search for Hemel (www.cwgc.org/find/find-war-dead/results?war=1&additional=Hemel) results in 204 records. Click on 'Download results' and this will result in a CSV file which you can open with spreadsheets such as Excel.

In order to ensure that as many records as possible for your area are found, you will need to think about how people described your area in the First World War period. For example, Apsley and Boxmoor which are now part of Hemel Hempstead, would have been seen as separate settlements at the time and so a simple search for 'Hemel Hempstead' will not always reveal them. Meanwhile, think about whether there are any common variations or misspellings relating to the name of your area. Note that this will not result in a list of all the dead from an area, simply the ones the CGWC have information on as being from that area.

Second, listings of all dead servicemen can be found in "Soldiers Died in the Great War" and "Officers Died in the Great War" which are published by the Naval and Military Press on CD-Rom¹. They are also available online (for a fee) at <http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=1543>. Although these records do not contain home addresses, they do contain searchable fields including information on place of birth, residence and enlistment.

Third, pensions and service records of non-commissioned officers and other ranks can now be searched by place of residence and/or birth. These are available through www.ancestry.co.uk. The site has records from the National Archives in Kew of those who were awarded (or applied for) a pension between 1914 and 1920 at <http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=1114>. Service records which survived the London Blitz in 1940 (around 25 per cent of records) are at <http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=1219>. There is a charge for viewing the original records unless the search is carried out at the National Archives.

Fourth, local newspapers contain different levels of information. These are all available at the British Library and many are available at local records offices and libraries. In many cases, local newspapers contained very detailed information and pictures of those serving, especially the killed or wounded. In searching for information on an individual, bear in mind that details often did not appear for some months after what we now know to be a date of death.

¹ <https://www.naval-military-press.com/product/soldiers-died-1914-19-cd-rom-version-2-5/> [accessed 17 April 2019].

Fifth, perhaps most obviously, local war memorials are an excellent source. They can usually be found in town centres or churches (usually the largest Anglican church), but can also be found in schools, workplaces and other public buildings such as specially built Memorial Halls.

In addition to these sources which cover the entire UK (and what is now the Republic of Ireland), there are some sources which relate to more specific areas. For example, for England, *The National Roll of Honour* covers:

- Bedford
- Birmingham
- Bradford
- Leeds
- London
- Luton and District
- Manchester
- Northampton
- Portsmouth
- Salford
- Southampton

Most of it can be accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk at www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/englandgreatwarrolls/

Ireland is well-served with several sources. *Ireland's Memorial Records* are now available online (for a fee) at: www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/irelandmemorial/ It is widely regarded as a problematic source as it claims to contain the names of 49,000 'Irishmen' who died in the war. However, estimates of the 'Irish dead' now go as low as 25,000, with most academics agreed on around 35,000. The problem with this listing of 49,000 is that it includes all those who died in Irish regiments (many of whom would have been transferred from English, Scottish or Welsh regiments), and does not include the many Irishmen who died in non-Irish units. However, it is still a valuable source. Meanwhile, there is also Irish soldiers' wills are available free at: soldierswills.nationalarchives.ie/search/sw/home.jsp The Census for Ireland in both 1901 and 1911 is free to use at: www.census.nationalarchives.ie/ and birth/death/marriage records for Ireland are free to use at: www.irishgenealogy.ie/en/

Individual records

The records listed above are all searchable on an individual basis. However, there are other records which are useful if an individual rather than a geographic location is being searched for.

For a soldier who died, an excellent source is the Commonwealth War Graves Commission site (www.cwgc.org) which allows free searching of records. This will always show where a soldier is buried or recorded on a memorial (if they have no known grave). There will sometimes be family information and there will always be a date of death and unit listed.

The starting point for records of all individual soldiers (the dead and survivors) is the National Archives at Kew: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk Their website contains a very useful guide at: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/first-world-war/ This describes the main sources available at Kew. The first place to go to find out about any individual who served in any branch of the armed forces is the individual medal rolls. These record both service and gallantry medals. For a charge, they can be viewed and downloaded at: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/medals.asp These rolls can also be viewed at <http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=1262> again for a charge.

To go further into the individual career of a soldier, the service and pension records at www.ancestry.co.uk discussed above are available. Those for officers are held mainly in the WO 339 category (but also some in WO 374) at Kew. None of these are available online, but all records have, in theory, survived.

For those who served in the army, a little more information can sometimes be found out about individuals in the medal roll for a regiment. In particular, while individual rolls always record a regiment, they often do not include a battalion, and that information is necessary in order to find out the day-to-day movements of a soldier. The regimental rolls often reveal this but are highly varied in their ease of use. They are sometimes alphabetical, sometimes arranged by battalion, and sometimes appear to be random. But useful information can sometimes be gleaned. So, if you can visit Kew, then you can search the index for the WO 329 category to look for the relevant regiment. This is primarily of use in establishing a battalion if that is not known.

Unit records

If you do establish a specific battalion for a soldier who served in the army, it is unlikely that even their individual record (if it has survived) will tell you much about their experiences. However, for each battalion of the British army, a very detailed record is likely to exist which will tell you about the day-to-day activities of their battalion. These are War Diaries and are all in the WO 95 category at Kew. Many are available to view online and download and you can check which ones are available at: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/war-diaries.asp There is a charge to download them remotely, but if you go to the National Archives, you can save files to a shared drive such as Google Drive and then access them away from the archive. The most detailed war diary for any one battalion will always be the one for that battalion, but there can often be useful information in the diary for the brigade and/or division in which that battalion served. If you are not clear which brigade or division a battalion was in, then a very useful guide is at: www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/ Clicking on the relevant regiment will tell you the information you need.

To see all the war diaries relating to one battalion you need not only to look at the records for the battalion but also the brigade and division in which the battalion served. Details of the structure of the British army and its formations can be found at: www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/order-of-battle-of-divisions/ and www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/definitions-of-units/the-basic-hierarchy-of-the-army/ Examples of the necessary records for two battalions are:

- 6th Connaught Rangers
- WO 95/1970: 6th Connaught Rangers

- WO 95/1969: 47 Brigade
- WO 95/1955 & 1956: 16th Division

9th Royal Irish Rifles:

- WO 95/2503: 9th Royal Irish Rifles
- WO 95/2502: 107 Brigade
- WO 95/2491 & 2492: 36th Division

Occasionally, notes of individual operations can be found outside WO 95, such as records of the 16th Division at Messines: WO 158/416: 16th Division Operations, 7-9 June 1917

Other records

Many other records exist on a very localised basis, far too numerous to mention. These might include regimental rolls of honour or church memorial records. Asking about these at museums, churches, local history societies and local records offices is the best way to start to find them, as well as searching for relevant terms on the internet. There are also many local memorial projects, sometimes web-based and sometimes involving published books. Much remains hidden in attics and drawers and one of the most rewarding parts of such a project can be encouraging people to go through long-forgotten papers and helping them to realise the significance and meaning of what they have in their possession.

One type of source which will have use in a very limited number of cases, but is incredibly helpful if it does exist, is the school magazine. Most current schools did not exist in 1914-18 but the large public schools generally did and they often produced detailed information on former pupils who were killed. For example, we found out from the CWGC site that one local person had attended Harrow School so we contacted the librarian at the school who was able to provide a contemporary biography and photograph (see Appendix 2 of this guide: Lieutenant Robert Masterman).

Visits

Many schools organise visits to battlefields and cemeteries in France and Belgium. Many communities will find that one of the cemeteries on or close to their visit contains a grave or memorial relating to a local person. All are likely to find that someone from their area is recorded among the nearly 35, names at Arras, nearly 35,000 at Tyne Cot, over 54,000 on the Menin Gate, or the more than 72,000 at Thiepval. These are all large memorials within reach of short trips from the UK.

The most detailed guide to the cemeteries on the Western Front has for many years been: *Before Endeavours Fade: Guide to the Battlefields of the First World War* by Rose E.B. Coombs. First published in 1976, it is regularly updated. To help with visits, 'Hemel at War' produced a guide to selected graves/memorials in the Somme area. This is available at: <http://www.hemelatwar.org/documents/SommeGuide.pdf> and could be adapted by schools using their own local information.

Telling an individual story

Using the WWI sources above could enable a student to build up a detailed picture of the life of a soldier. A possible project on an individual could include some or all of the following:

1. Start by finding a name on a local war memorial.
2. Use the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website to establish which unit the soldier was in and the date they died. Unit information can also be found on the medal rolls online or at Kew.
3. Look in a local newspaper to see if there is any family information and possibly a photo.
4. Try to access the individual records through www.ancestry.co.uk or at Kew.
5. Unit records such as battalion war diaries could be used to tell the story of roughly where the soldier had been and when.
6. Visit a grave or memorial and take a photograph for inclusion on the website.

Such work can lead to webpages such as these examples, which are linked from our WWI Roll of Honour (www.hemelatwar.org/thosewhodiedww1.html):

www.hemelatwar.org/1Herts31July1917.html

www.hemelatwar.org/Biggerstaff.html

www.hemelatwar.org/7Beds24Apr1918.html

www.hemelatwar.org/OdelIW.html

www.hemelatwar.org/QuartermassRA.html

www.btg.ac/pages/alec-scott-barthorpe

www.btg.ac/pages/herbert-arthur-ward

www.btg.ac/userfiles/Archive_General/Private_Cecil_George_Mathie.docx

Some of these biographies are included in Appendix 2 of this guide.

Sources for the Second World War

Official records

The most useful source is the Commonwealth War Graves Commission site (www.cwgc.org.uk) which covers WWII. Go to: www.cwgc.org/find/find-war-dead, scroll down to the 'War' boxes and indicate 'Second World War'. Then click on 'Additional information'. Add a place name in the box and then click the green search button. A search for Hemel (www.cwgc.org/find/find-war-dead/results?war=2&additional=Hemel) results in 130 records. Click on 'Download results' and this will result in a CSV file which you can open with spreadsheets such as Excel.

In order to ensure that as many records as possible for your area are found, you will need to think about how people described your area in the Second World War period. For example, Apsley and Boxmoor which are now part of Hemel Hempstead, would have been seen as separate settlements at the time and so a simple search for 'Hemel Hempstead' will not always reveal them. Meanwhile, think about whether there are any common variations or misspellings relating to the name of your area. Note that this will not result in a list of all the dead from an area, simply the ones the CGWC have information on as being from that area.

The main problem in locating information about those who served in the Second World War is that individual records are still closed. However, they can be accessed in full by the person concerned or their next-of-kin at: <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/WhatWeDo/Personnel/ServiceRecords/FurtherInformationAboutServiceRecordsHeldByMod.htm>

For deceased service personnel, anybody can obtain full information once 25 years has elapsed since their death. Details are at: <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/WhatWeDo/Personnel/ServiceRecords/MakingARequestForInformationHeldOnThePersonnelRecordsOfDeceasedServicePersonnel.htm> This link also contains information on how to obtain more limited information prior to the passing of 25 years.

However, there is still plenty that can be established about the movements of an individual by looking at unit records – just as one can do with records such as First World War battalion war diaries. The most useful records are held in the WO 166 category of records at the National Archives. A guide to WWII records at Kew has been produced by the National Archives and is available at: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/second-world-war/ 'Operations Record Books' for squadrons of the Royal Air Force are held (on microfilm) in the AIR 27 category of records at the National Archives.

Records of the Royal Navy are held in the ADM category of files at the National Archives. Material relating to specific ships is best found by searching for the name of the ship in the online catalogue at:

<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

Other records

As with the First World War, much can be established about local service in WWII though the names on local war memorials. Indeed, the memorial will often be the same memorial for the two wars. Similar use can be made of newspapers, churches records and items available at local museums.

Telling an individual story

The great difference between telling the story of a WWII soldier compared to someone from WWI is that it is still possible to hear the personal testimony of many who served.

However, despite the limitations caused by some records being closed, it is still possible to use a range of materials. A possible WWII project for individuals could include some or all of the following:

1. Start by finding a name on a local war memorial.
2. Use the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website to establish which unit the person was in and the date they died.
3. Look in a local newspaper to see if there is any family information and possibly a photo.
4. Use unit records such as battalion war diaries could be used to tell the story of roughly where the soldier had been and when.
5. Visit a grave or memorial and take a photograph for inclusion on the website.

Appendix 1

HEMEL AT WAR PROJECT

Informed consent form

Material gathered during this research may be published on a website, and possibly in printed publications, which will be available to all. We will not in any circumstances publish your address, but other information you tell us may be available for all to see. Please answer each statement concerning the collection and use of the research data.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study. Yes No

I have had my questions answered satisfactorily. Yes No

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without having to give an explanation. Yes No

I agree to the interview being audiotaped and to its contents (except my address) being published. Yes No

I agree to being identified in this interview and in any subsequent publications or use. Yes No

Name of interviewee (BLOCK CAPITALS):

Address (BLOCK CAPITALS):

Signature _____ Date _____

Feel free to contact us if you have any further questions.

Hemel at War
The Hemel Hempstead School
Heath Lane

Tel: 01442 390100
Fax: 01442 233706
Email: hemelatwar@gmail.com

Hemel Hempstead
HP1 1TX

Appendix 2: First World War biographies

Private 266041 Reginald Walter Ambrose

1st Hertfordshire Regiment

Killed in Action 31st July 1917

Son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Ambrose, of 16, Austins Place, Hemel Hempstead, Herts.

Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Panel 56.

Residence: Hemel Hempstead.

Enlisted: Hertford.

Private 267013 Frederick A. Leach

1st Hertfordshire Regiment

Killed in Action 31st July 1917

Son of Mr. and Mrs. F. A. Leach, of 107, Cotterells, Hemel Hempstead.

New Irish Farm Cemetery, XX. A. 19.

Residence: Hemel Hempstead.

Enlisted: Hertford.

Private 270757 Richard Frank Hoar

1st Hertfordshire Regiment

Killed in Action 31st July 1917

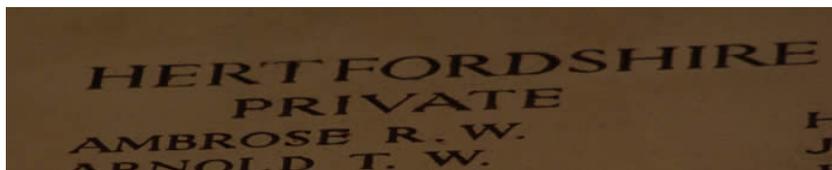
Son of Richard T. Hoar, of 10, Edmond's Place, Marlowes, Hemel Hempstead, Herts.

Track X Cemetery, E. 30.

Born: Apsley End.

Residence: Hemel Hempstead.

Enlisted: Hemel Hempstead.



Reginald Ambrose's name on the [Menin Gate](#)

(Photo: Richard Grayson, 1st April 2014.)



Frederick Leach's grave at New Irish Farm Cemetery

(Photo: Richard Grayson, 26th March 2018.)



Richard Hoar's grave at Track X Cemetery

(Photo: Richard Grayson, 28th March 2018.)

The attack was part of preparations for the Third Battle of Ypres under the command of Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig, who aimed to inflict major losses on the German army.

At 3.50am the battalion moved forward in four lines. Battalion moved forward after capturing enemy lines and moved east of the River Steenbeck. Up until this point, the casualties had been slight but as they proceeded towards the Langemarck line (the main objective) the casualty lists increased as a result of snipers and machine gun fire.

About halfway into the objective, a small group of soldiers came upon a German stronghold, capturing it and killing most of the German soldiers there.

The enemy wire was found to be incredibly thick, the battalion could not get through and suffered "exceptionally heavy" casualties as a result. From the left flank the Germans made a strong counter attack, this left 29 men dead, 5 missing but presumed dead, 132 missing, 68 wounded and missing, 223 wounded and 2 men died of wounds. A lot more men, who had been thought to have been missing or wounded would most likely be dead. As a result, 459 casualties occurred, this was nearly half the battalion. The three men we have studied were not named in the account but we presume they would have died in this catastrophic attack.

Source:

- 1st Hertfordshire Regiment War Diary, Catalogue Reference: WO 95/2590

By Charlotte Smith and Isabelle England
27th June 2017

Private 18718 Harry Biggerstaff
2nd Bedfordshire Regiment
Killed in Action 25th September 1915

Son of Fred and Fanny F. Biggerstaff, of Green End, Sarratt, Rickmansworth, Herts.
Loos Memorial, Panel 41.
Born: Hemel Hempstead.
Enlisted: Bedford.
Residence: Sarratt, Herts.

Private 4/7376 Frederick Cole
2nd Bedfordshire Regiment
Killed in Action 25th September 1915

Loos Memorial, Panel 41.
Born: Hemel Hempstead.
Enlisted: Hertford.
Residence: Hemel Hempstead.

At 12:05 am on the 25th of September 1915, the 2nd Bedfordshire Regiment - including Privates Harry Biggerstaff and Frederick Cole proceeded to their position of assembly at Noyelles, arriving at 3:35 am. They then proceeded at 6:05 am, moving by platoons at 200 x distance to Vermelles. By 11:30 am they had reached Chapel Alley. They then continued on a front of two companies in columns of platoons extended at 50 yards, with Hulluch Road on the right. A fair way ahead was the 20th Brigade, with the Wiltshire Regiment on the left of the battalion.

The Germans' first-line trench was moved across by the battalion without almost any casualties however, once advancement over the land behind the German front-line began, the battalion came under heavy rifle fire from the direction of the quarries and northern houses of Cite St Elie. Despite now suffering severely, the battalion continued to advance in rushes of small parties until gun trench was reached. Some died later on in the day due to wounds, with between two and three hundred ranks becoming casualties. Despite two platoons reaching 100 yards, they were forced to fall back after being unsupported in the front of gun trench. However once they had dug themselves in, the battalion remained in gun trench and by the afternoon were able to hold the gun pit north of the road, with all four machine guns being in the trench. They proceeded till dusk, where men of the 20th brigade who were in the trench were sorted out and reformed their brigade. By 7pm, the A and C companies were withdrawn from gun trench and subsequently began digging a support trench roughly 100 x to the rear of the initial trench position.

Closely followed by German soldiers, a group of men were seen coming down the Hulluch Road calling out, "don't shoot, we're the Gordons." Whilst this was happening, the Borders holding the gun trench south of the road began to retire. Immediately, a series of bombs rained down upon the gun trench, causing the men to leave in increasing numbers, with some falling back on the support trench where they slipped. Despite this, the company on the left of the B company stood firm and their two machine guns remained in action, with no attack. A heavy fire was brought to bear from the support trench, and shortly after a successful charge was organised. This saw multiple Germans being killed or taken prisoner, which included the artillery captain, who led the counter-attack. More soldiers were killed or wounded, whilst some of the left company suffered some casualties from the British's own shrapnel throughout the duration of the attack.

With two companies in the gun trench and two in the support trench, the rest of the night passed quietly, with few other casualties.

Source:

- 2nd Bedfordshire Regiment War Diary, Catalogue Reference: WO 95/1658

By Mel Heather, Faith Hancock and Tia Dabare
10th July 2018

Private 42029 Albert Charge
7th Bedfordshire Regiment
Killed in Action 24th April 1918

Son of Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Charge, of 91, Horsecroft Rd., Boxmoor, Herts
Crucifix Corner Cemetery, Villers-Bretonneux, I. C. 13
Born: Hemel Hempstead
Residence: Boxmoor
Enlisted: Bedford

Private 266649 Cecil W. Collings
7th Bedfordshire Regiment, formerly 5059 1st Hertfordshire Regiment
Killed in Action 24th April 1918

Son of Florence Lilian Collings of Nash Mills, Hemel Hempstead, Herts
Pozières Memorial, Panel 89
Born: Hertford
Residence: Hemel Hempstead
Enlisted: Hertford



Cecil Collings



Cecil Collings' name on the [Pozières Memorial](#)

(Photo: Richard Grayson, 2nd April 2019.)

Cecil W. Collings and Albert Charge both fought in the Bedfordshire Regiment in the 7th battalion. The 7th battalion served in France and Flanders from 1915 - May 1918, (when they were disbanded). Throughout this period the battalion achieved a well deserved reputation and were congratulated for serving with distinction.

Such distinction was notable in the Battle of the Avre, 24th April 1918, with the swift efficiency of the Allied troops in action at Villers-Bretonneux. German troops had taken control of the town, which is situated on high ground to the south of the Somme. However, that night and the following day Villers-Bretonneux was recaptured due to the counter-attack of two

Australian and one British brigade. The tactical achievements of Australian, French and British troops ensured Allied progress throughout France.

The first tactical manoeuvre of the Allied troops was demonstrated when they were 'ordered to stand at 4am'. Thus engaging the first attack at nightfall to gain an advantageous position for the assault. They moved 'up to line by stage during the day' which allowed them to take position just south of the 'Cachy'. In a different unit to the 7th battalion, tank corps were dispatched on the Cachy switch line, this was by the three British Mark IV tanks from the 1st Battalion. At this point, the 7th battalion was able to form a plan of attack to take place at 10 pm under the 'intensely dark' night. The advancement was formed with the British soldiers on the right with support from the 'Australians on the left'.

The Battle of the Avre saw the first battle of two tank forces as three British Mark IVs met the German A7Vs. However, this diary entry does not address the use of tanks, only describing the 'heavy machine gun fire' which held up the the battalion to their right for the first 1000 yards. Also, this was only described as 'slight opposition' to the battalion as they continued to move forward on the assault.

From this stage, the 'reserve Company' were ordered forward to reinforce the continuation of the assault. This is the first significant situation which could have caused the deaths of Albert Charge and Cecil W. Collings. Luckily for the 7th battalion, the German troops did not perform a flanking maneuver on the Allies 'two exposed flanks'. In order to prevent becoming vulnerable from the threat of a German maneuver, 'the left company of battalion was ordered to withdraw' hereby ensuring that they conformed with the line of the left battalion. Due to growing pressures of 'enemy opposition', the right flank 'remained exposed', which is the most likely position to which Cecil and Albert died.

This marked the end of the diary entry from the 24th April 1918. The assault continued into the 25th, where the Allies successfully recaptured Villers-Bretonneux. However, this came at a great cost with over 2,700 Australian casualties, over 9,500 British and about 3,500 French.

Sources:

- 8th Bedfordshire Regiment War Diary, catalogue reference WO 95/2043.
- <http://www.bedfordregiment.org.uk/>
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Villers-Bretonneux>

By Dorothy Harper and Emma Morley
27th June 2017

Additional note: in December 2018, the Hemel at War project was contacted by Cecil Collings' great-niece, Isabel Seymour. She provided the photo above and told us: 'The story I heard from my mother, his niece, was that he had originally joined up under age, his age had been discovered and he had been sent home. He re-enlisted after being handed white feathers when walking in the street.'

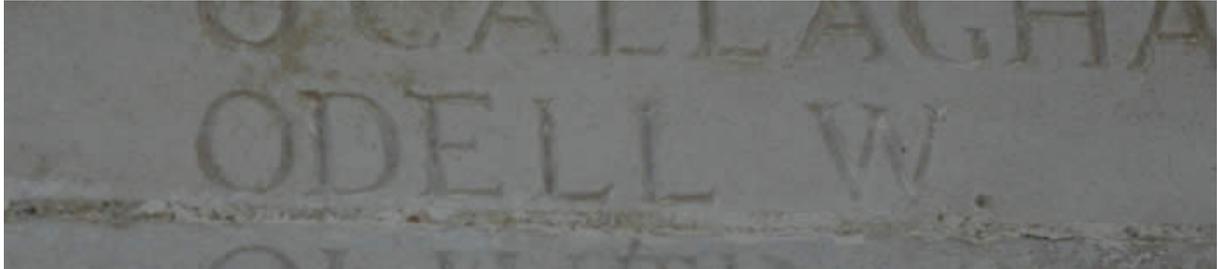
Private 19774 William Odell
6th Northamptonshire Regiment
Killed in Action 23rd March 1918

Son of William and Sarah Odell, of 102, High St., Hemel Hempstead; husband of Louisa Odell, of 82, High St., Hemel Hempstead, Herts.

Pozieres Memorial, Panel 55.

Born: Hemel Hempstead.

Enlisted: Watford.



William Odell's name on the [Pozieres Memorial](#)

(Photo: Richard Grayson, 27th March 2012.)

On 23rd March 1918, William Odell was killed in action; he was 33 years old. He served in the 6th Northamptonshire Regiment and had enlisted in Watford. He was born in Hemel Hempstead and was the son of Sarah and William Odell who lived at 102 High Street in Hemel Hempstead; he had lived with his wife, Louisa Odell, at 82 High Street Hemel Hempstead. His name appears on the Pozieres and Boxmoor Memorials.

The few months that led up to the end of World War One saw many desperate German advances try to take as much land as possible from the Allied forces. The military offensive began on the 21st May 1918 and was split into many battles from Lys (April), Aisne (June), Noyon-Montdidier (June) and Marne (July and August). The first phase was nicknamed Kaiserschlacht and is also known under the codename the Michael Offensive; it was launched against the British lines between Cambrai, St Quentin and La Fère, situated on the Somme battlefield. It was supposed to split the French and British Armies and prevent reinforcements getting through from the North. Initially successful, it captured lots of Allied land but due to exhaustion of the men and the destruction of many bridges and railways, the attack slowed down in a matter of days.

It is most likely that William Odell was killed in the Battle of St Quentin, a German-occupied town. The battle was on the 23rd and 24th March 1918. This battle included fighting around Mennessis and Faillouel on the 23rd - which is possibly when William Odell was killed. It is recorded that on these days, three companies of the Northamptonshire Regiment were at Montagne and Jussy Bridges in Remigny, with one Bedfordshire company. The Crozat Canal was held by Allied forces. It is on the outskirts of the French town St Quentin and was surrounded by the enemy very suddenly in the early morning and the British were unaware due to fog, therefore allowing the Germans to cross. Fortunately, due to good leadership, the British were able to fight back under Lieutenant Herring, whom is favourably mentioned in sources and won a Victoria Cross for his actions. He helped the men hold a counter-attack and recapture their position, as well as capturing 20 prisoners and six machine guns. He also held off many other attacks using a Lewis gun (a light manoeuvrable machine gun); therefore, the Northamptonshire Regiment is recognised as being very important to this battle.

The war diary states that, on the 21st March, the Battalion left Caillouel and moved into position, east of Jussy-Faillouel road. At 4pm, they moved forward to take over the switch line which had Ly-Fontaine on the right (where a quarry was being used for an army headquarters), and Gibercourt on the left. At 10:30pm they withdrew to the west of St

Quentin's canal at Montagne Bridge and took up position of a railway embankment. They had the 7th Bedford's on the right and the 11th Royal Fusiliers on the left.

On the 22nd of March, at 5:30am, Montagne Bridge was blown up using trench-mortar shells but it was only partially successful. All battalions had been given orders to destroy all canal bridges, but due to poor preparation, lack of supplies and poor positioning there was a distinct lack of damage to the bridges. The battalions' job was to prevent the Germans from crossing the canal. Unfortunately for them, due to the canal's position, machine guns were aimed at the Royal Fusiliers positions making movement difficult from 10am onwards. Throughout the afternoon, the battalion were bombed heavily by enemy aircraft. The enemy did try to cross the canal at 6pm and were successful, until a counter attack from B company pushed them back - and the Calvary started to arrive to reinforce them. The Battalions lines were checked so that they ran from the bridge to 200 yards south-east of the Montagne bridge.

On the 23rd of March 1918, the day that William Odell is recorded as being killed in action, the enemy attacked at 7:30am against both the Royal Fusiliers and the 7th Bedford's, pushing both flanks back. At 9:30am they held their positions at two bridges and continued to do so through heavy fighting, until they were ordered to withdraw to the railway embankment an hour later. Reinforcements of Strathcoma's Horse arrived - this was an armoured regiment of the Canadian army- but after seeing the new German positions as the Germans had crossed the bridge, they were withdrawn. At midday, the Battalion withdrew to Bois- des- Frieres, but they were shelled violently by the enemy who fired from Remigny and attacked from the west of Faillouel. Some of the soldiers were captured and taken as prisoners of war, including Lieutenant Herring, when they tried to retake positions; due to heavy machine gun fire and lack of communication, the men struggled to survive. At 3pm the Battalion withdrew through Villequier-Aumont and marched onto billets (sleeping quarters) at Caillouel.

It is believed that only around 200 Northamptonshire's, 200 Bedfordshire's and 26 Fusiliers survived, which means that it is possible that around 200 men at least died, if not up to 400, including William Odell.

Sources:

- 6th Northamptonshire Regiment War Diary, Catalogue Reference: WO 95/2044
- <http://www.greatwar.co.uk/battles/index.htm>
- <http://www.enfield.gov.uk/news/article/887/famous-five-s-heroism-the-pride-of-enfield>
- <http://www.dacorumheritage.org.uk/first-world-war-database/hemel-hempstead-soldiers-details/hemel-hempstead-war-memorial-3/>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Michael#Battle_of_St._Quentin.2C_21.E2.80.9323_March
- <http://www.rascrctassociation.co.uk/herring.html>
- <http://www.salhs.org.uk/folders/Memorium/page19.html>
- <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- <http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Hertfordshire/KingsLangley.html>
- <http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Hertfordshire/Boxmoor.html>
- <http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Hertfordshire/ApsleyJohnDickinson.html>
- <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=DZo7AwAAQBAJ&pg=PT111&lpg=PT111&dq=montagne+bridge+battle+1918&source=bl&ots=wKWKyog-1S&sig=Vg-1NLq4QGifCXDOQdrHVB5srpg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewiWx-CToevUAhUIBcAKHSOODrIQ6AEIUzAM#v=onepage&q=montagne%20bridge%20battle%201918&f=false>
- https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=sXy-BAAAQBAJ&pg=PA131&lpg=PA131&dq=montagne+bridge+battle+1918&source=bl&ots=DqX7iHxdWX&sig=ETj42m61ENAHzMxWeVa-Ry_KYvk&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewiWx-

- [CToevUAhUIBcAKHSOODrIQ6AEIvIAN#v=onepage&q=montagne%20bridge%20battle%201918&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=un--BAAAQBAJ&pg=PA475&lpg=PA475&dq=montagne+bridge+battle+1918&source=bl&ots=ONuw58LqZd&sig=zhAs0GNIRGALGptybmRHAzwXUQ4&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiWx-CToevUAhUIBcAKHSOODrIQ6AEIvIAN#v=onepage&q=montagne%20bridge%20battle%201918&f=false)
- <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=un--BAAAQBAJ&pg=PA475&lpg=PA475&dq=montagne+bridge+battle+1918&source=bl&ots=ONuw58LqZd&sig=zhAs0GNIRGALGptybmRHAzwXUQ4&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiWx-CToevUAhUIBcAKHSOODrIQ6AEIvIAN#v=onepage&q=montagne%20bridge%20battle%201918&f=false>
- <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?/topic/65077-6th-bn-nothamptonshire-regiment/>
- https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1B57_VTQrA5ZHA5QjhGX3dSQXc/view?ts=595243ca – war diaries

By Eleanor Clark
27th June 2017

Corporal 16427 Robert Alfred Quartermass

7th Bedfordshire Regiment

Killed in Action 28th September 1916

Son of John and Henrietta Quartermass, of Bods End Farm, Hemel Hempstead; husband of Mary Louisa Quartermass, of 56, High St., Berkhamsted, Herts.

Thiepval Memorial, Pier and Face 2 C.

Born: Hemel Hempstead

Enlisted: Hertford

Residence: Berkhamsted

Robert Alfred Quartermass was born in Hemel Hempstead, but lived on Berkhamsted High Street at No.56. His parents were John and Henrietta Quartermass and he had five siblings. In 1913, he married Mary Louisa Foskett.

Quartermass was part of the 7th Bedfordshires in the 18th Division and in September 1916 he took part in the Battle of Thiepval Ridge. The division was to attack the Schwaben Redoubt (a roughly triangular set of trench systems which had all-round defences, medical facilities and a maze of subterranean tunnels) at 1:00pm on the 28th of September.

From this day, until the 6th of October, the Schwaben Redoubt was repeatedly attacked by the 18th Division units and their systematic uphill advance met with early success, however this was halted by enemy machine gun fire. The Division occupied the southern and western sides of the Redoubt and by the end of the battle had taken most of the ridge line, but failed to take the northwest side.

However, success came on the 14th of October 1916 when the Cambridge Regiment managed to capture the redoubt by 11:00pm. Quartermass was killed in action during the initial attack on the 28th of September 1916. He was only married for 3 years.

Sources:

- 7th Bedfordshires War Diary, Catalogue Reference: WO 95/2043
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capture_of_Schwaben_Redoubt#Battle

- <http://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-united-kingdom-records-in-census-land-and-surveys>
- <http://www.cwgc.org/somme/content.asp?id=97&menu=sub>



Quartermass's name on the [Thiepval Memorial](#)

(Photo: Richard Grayson, 27th March 2012.)

By Tara Hancock & Bryn Holmes
24th June 2016

Lieutenant Robert Masterman

19th Lancashire Fusiliers

Killed in Action 1st July 1916

Son of the late Henry Chauncy Masterman and Alice May Masterman, of Rough Down, Boxmoor, Herts

Thiepval Memorial: Pier and Face 3 C and 3 D.



(Photo courtesy of Harrow School Library)

Robert Chauncy Masterman was born on 23rd January 1896 and enlisted as a Private in the Bedfordshire Regiment about a month after war broke out. His personal records show that he was relatively tall for the time at just under six feet, with dark hair and brown eyes.

After initial training he was sent first to the regiment's 7th battalion, and then the 6th, both of which were in England. When he had enlisted he was still at school, preparing for university entrance, but he had served in his school's Officer Training Corps (OTC). His school was Harrow, the famous public school, which would have meant that he came from a wealthy family. His background and his time in the OTC meant that he was soon picked out as being a potential officer. During his training he applied for university, winning a scholarship to Hertford College, Oxford, which would have been taken up after the war.

On being made a Lieutenant he joined the 9th Royal Lancashire Fusiliers which left Liverpool aboard a ship on 5th July 1915, headed for the Gallipoli Peninsula on the coast of Turkey where Britain was fighting the Turkish army. The battalion arrived there on 6th August 1915. Conditions were very tough there, with many men falling ill, and after nearly two months Masterman's time at Gallipoli was cut short as he caught dysentery, which led to serious diarrhoea. He was sent back to England on 3rd October 1915 on a ship called the *Carisbrook Castle*. The sea voyage lasted just over three weeks. Masterman was in hospital in Oxford until January 1916 when he was fit enough to join another battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers, the 19th, which had been in France for two months. [Source: National Archives, Kew, WO 339/14147 File on Lt. R.C. Masterman; Harrow School Magazine.]

On 1st July 1916, the 19th Lancashire Fusiliers were part of the advance on the Somme, in the area of Authille Wood, close to Thiepval. When they arrived in the wood they heard from another battalion (1st Dorsets) which had been in an earlier stage of the attack, that British losses were heavy, but there was no question of turning back. As the battalion left the wood they came under heavy German machine gun fire. On reaching the first line of German trench taken by the British they found that it was so crowded with men who had tried to advance earlier that it could take no more soldiers. They sent a message back to the Brigade headquarters and were told simply to wait and not to send any more men forwards. Masterman had already been killed in this initial advance.

The battalion held its position until being sent back behind the lines for rest later in the evening of 1st July. Of the 20 officers and 577 men who had gone into battle in the morning, about half were casualties of whom two officers and 38 men were dead. The battalion war diary noted, "Throughout the operation the Battalion behaved with the greatest steadiness, and the advance was carried out without hesitation on the part of the men - in spite of the intense artillery and machine gun enfilade fire." [Source: National Archives, Kew, WO 95/2394, War Diary of 19th Lancashire Fusiliers.]

Masterman's Captain sent a letter home to his sister which said, "He was killed when leading his men to attack the enemy trenches. The ground we had to cross was swept by heavy machine gun fire and I am sorry to say that your brother was hit just before he got up to the enemy's wire. He led his men with great dash and was such a brave fellow. He had not been with us long, but during that short time he had become most popular with us all." [Source: Harrow School Magazine.]

Lieutenant ALEC SCOTT BARTHORPE
London Regiment (London Scottish) "D" Coy. 1st/14th Battalion
Wounded in Action 19th April 1918 and died of wounds 25th April 1918
Son of Mr. and Mrs. S. John Barthorpe
DAINVILLE BRITISH CEMETERY, Pas de Calais, France
Residence: Streatham, London

The London Scottish was a volunteer infantry regiment of the British Army. During the First World War the regiment raised three battalions, with the 1st/14th Battalion serving on the Western Front.

On 25th April 1918, Lieutenant Alec Scott Barthorpe of the 1st/14th London Scottish regiment died from wounds, believed to have occurred during the allied assault of enemy trenches on 19th April 1918, due to no known activity of the regiment taking place on 25th April 1918. However it is uncertain at what point Lieutenant Alec Scott received his injuries.

The assault on the 19th April 1918 took place in France and was a planned advance. It was decided that "zero hour" would be at 4:30am because this was the beginning of the light. It was seen that "The enemy had not erected wire and there were no visible obstacles to an attack across the open". The Zero Hour chosen was fortunate because "about that time a driving shower of hailstones descended for a few minutes. It obscured the view, prevented the noise of our advance being heard by the enemy and probably caused several of his sentries and the majority of his garrison to seek the comfort of their shelters". This meant that the enemy were "taken by surprise". It may be possible that during the assault comrades "firing from the high ground at about a.2.d.20.80" wounded Lieutenant Alec Scott who then "died afterwards in hospital". It was 2nd Lieutenant Bennett who "reached the objective first". One sentry was killed and the others taken prisoner along with a German Sergeant Major being taken prisoner. Enemy parties periodically made attacks on the bombing blocks of the British, but these were "half-hearted and easily repulsed". However "During the period of consolidation there was considerable movement across the open and in shallow trenches by our men and enemy snipers and M.Gs. were extremely active. It was at this juncture that most of our casualties occurred; until then our casualties had only been six wounded". Lieutenant Alec Scott may also have suffered his wounds during these attacks of the enemy.

Capt. White undertook an operation to capture a "pillbox at 7.20pm". He began his operation by a bombing attack to drive back the enemy and advance his bombing block. His party advanced along the trench, "preceded by a barrage of strokes mortars and rifle grenades". Enemy appeared in considerable strength but were pushed back for a short distance. A "Green light sent up by enemy" brought heavy artillery fire on 2nd Lt. Bennett's block and the junction of the two trenches. Withdrawal by the enemy was only momentary and an "immediate counter-attack was carried out along the trench and on both sides across the open". The parties came under heavy machine gun fire from both flanks and were compelled to withdraw, suffering casualties. A withdrawal from "Brigade H.Q was received at 7.40pm" and was carried out in an orderly manner through the Fusiliers area and completed by 10.30pm. "Total casualties incurred were 5 killed, 32 wounded and 1 wounded and missing." It could also be possible that Lieutenant Alec Scott incurred his injuries from the enemy counter-attack to the operation of capturing the pillbox along with him also being the "1 wounded and missing" soldier, and he wasn't confirmed dead until the 25th April 1918 due to him being "missing".

Sources:

1st/14th London Regiment (London Scottish) War Diary

www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/79939/BARTHORPE,%20ALEC%20SCOTT
londonsscottishregt.org/index.php?id=127

By Patrick, Year 12

Herbert Arthur Ward
Service Country: United Kingdom
Date of death: 30/04/1916
Cemetery: Cabaret-Rouge British Cemetery, Souchez, II. A. 6.
Age of death: 20
Cause: Killed in action
Service number: 3198
Rank: Rifleman
Unit: 1st/6th Battalion
Regiment: London Regiment (City of London Rifles)

A few days before the day of Herbert Arthur Ward's death, men of the 6th London Regiment were occupying the front trenches when they were faced with the enemies bombarding their headquarters and communication trenches with "shrapnel" along with the use of active trench mortars throughout the day. The enemies' airplane flew over the front trenches causing guns to fire on it causing it to come down behind the German trenches within minutes. However, following a heavy exchange of trench mortars rifle grenades and artillery, the enemy "exploded two mines on the front of the centre sub section at 7pm", which resulted in two large craters. The crater was immediately seized and consolidated and the enemy were working on the far end of the craters and patrols were seen approaching towards the British front line. The next day was used to strengthen the defences by wiring intervals between craters. The re-trenchment and an additional Lewis gun made it seem difficult for the enemy to attack with success.

However, 30th April 1916 arrived and German activity increased. It was 6:45pm when the Germans made their move. They exploded two mines close together under the centre of the line held by the battalion. Over 40 men were killed as a result of this explosion. The front trench was no longer recognisable and there were four large craters to be defended.

From this information, it can therefore be assumed that Herbert Arthur Ward's unpredictable death on the 30th April 1916, was due to the chaotic and turbulent action in the trenches.

Sources:

www.everymanremembered.org/profiles/soldier/584370/

The National Archives: War Diary WO 95/2729/2

By Wiktoria and Ashta, Year 12

Private Cecil George Mathie
East Surrey Regiment, 9th Battalion
Service Number 24046
Killed in action, 21st Mar 1918
Age at death: 31
Son of Mr. and Mrs. W. Mathie, of 51, Nimrod Rd., Streatham; husband of Gertrude Mathie, of 21, Credenhill St., Mitcham Lane, Streatham, London
Commemorated on Pozieres Memorial

Cecil George Mathie served in the 9th Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment and was killed in action, at the age of 31, on the 21st of March 1918. The battalion was stationed in Vermand, in Northern France, when on the 21st of March, according to the war diary, enemy bombardment began at 4.30AM. The battalion is said to have "stood to", preparing for further action. Within "preliminary bombardment", the camp was said to have received only 'slight attention'. This included the hitting of transport lines, resulting in the "wounding and killing of

a few men and horses". It is unclear whether Mathie was killed as a part of this attack, or in later bombardments that morning. At 7.30 AM, the "hut where the signallers were living" was also hit and this killed six and wounded two. Therefore, Mathie could have been killed in either of these two bombardments.

Despite these bombardments, the battalion that Mathie was a part of moved forward to "man the ridge between Villecholles and Maissemy", where they were at the front line of the Villecholes' defence. It was here that the battalion's commander, Lieutenant Colonel L.J Le Fleming was killed by a sniper bullet in the head, and Major C. A. Clark M.C took control.

At the end of the war diary, unlike in most, there is a list of those killed in action, followed by those who were wounded and those missing. Cecil George Mathie was not mentioned in any of these but according to the Pozieres Memorial in Somme, France, he did die, serving in the 9th Battalion on the 21st of March 1918. It may be notable that he is commemorated on panel 44 and 45, and so does not have a grave. Thus, it is possible that his body was not identified. This, alongside his omission from the list of those killed, may mean that his death was not immediately recognised and so was not listed at the end.

Sources:

<https://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/1585320/mathie,-cecil-george/>

National Archives: 9th East Surrey Regiment War Diary, WO 95/2215/1

By Libby and Emily, Year 12

Appendix 3: Second World War webpages/interviews

Ken Blake



Ken Blake: Summary version

Ken Blake served in the 4th Battalion of the Royal East Kent Regiment at Dunkirk. He told us how only one quarter of his battalion of 800 managed to get away. Later, he served in Malta, and was part of 234 Commando Brigade in North Africa. At one point, a ship he was on hit a mine. He said, "Hundreds of the lads were drowned but I had had a tip that there were lots of mines in the sea and it was safest to stay at the stern of the boat so I survived. Later in the war, he was a Prisoner of War in Germany and was very ill with tuberculosis.

Ken Blake: Longer version

Dunkirk

Ken Blake was in action from very early in the war, in France, as part of the 4th Battalion of the Royal East Kent Regiment. This was part of the BEF (British Expeditionary Force) which was sent as part of the effort to hold back the advancing German army. As the British army fought the Germans, it was eventually forced back to the beaches at Dunkirk. Here, they waited for ships to rescue them to take them back to England. But some soldiers had to defend those on the beaches. Ken Blake was one of those and says:

My squad was one of the last out of France. As the troops came into Dunkirk some were appointed to the defensive shield round the outer perimeter of Dunkirk and I was one of them. This was to allow the troops to escape from the beaches. When the signal came for us to leave it was too late to get on the boats and we were told to get out the best way we could. We decided to go up the coast and came across a Renault car. We managed to get it going and all piled in. We finally escaped from the port of Le Havre on the last destroyer leaving occupied France. Only a quarter out of the 800 in my battalion got away.

Malta

Having escaped from France, Ken Blake was sent to Malta. It was crucial for the Allies to hold this island as it helped them to control shipping in the Mediterranean. Ken Blake had a job servicing Spitfires and received the George Cross.

Aegean Islands

After serving in Malta, Ken became part of 234 Commando Brigade in North Africa. They had a target of capturing the Aegean Islands just off the coast of Turkey. Ken says that he was on HMS Eclipse on the way there when it hit a mine which blew up the front end of the ship. He remembers,

Hundreds of the lads were drowned but I had had a tip that there were lots of mines in the sea and it was safest to stay at the stern of the boat so I survived. I took my heavy clothing off, climbed onto the railings and managed to get hold of a cork life belt. There was a young fellow sitting on the railings and he was screaming. He'd been blinded by the blast and I could do nothing for him. That haunts me even today. In those circumstances the golden rule is every man for himself; so I jumped. I didn't realise it was 60 feet above the water. I hit the sea with a wallop. There were hundreds and hundreds of lads around me badly burned. The whole sea was on fire. I had a bit of common sense and realised I had to get out of there as quick as I could so I swam and swam for 5 hours and was finally picked up just as dawn was breaking. I was in hospital for a bit and then rejoined my own unit.

Prisoner of War (PoW)

When he was next in action, Ken was captured by the Germans and put on a ship headed for Athens with other PoWs. He eventually reached a prison camp in Leipzig. He describes this as a hard labour camp, which meant that prisoners had to carry out very hard work, often lifting or digging, with little food and rest. The work involved tasks that the Germans needed done to help their war effort. In such a situation, many men decided to try to escape. Ken decided to do this with four others. The men chose their moment carefully:

It was a terrible night and the German guards didn't like standing out in the pouring rain. We got under the wire and made a run for it. The objective was to make it to the American 8th Army at Gera which was south of Leipzig. We travelled only at night sleeping during the day. Half way, we lost one of the fellows. He was so ill we had to leave him. We were almost at the end of our tethers. We had no food and our clothes were in rags, but then we came to a road and saw an American tank. A couple of G.I.s [American soldiers] came racing out thinking we were Germans so we put our hands up and started shouting that we were British POWs. They took us in charge. I was in a terrible state. I had tuberculosis and weighed 3½ stone. They were so kind to us. They moved us to another American base and I was flown straight back to England.

Ken took a long time to recover from his experiences. He says that it was only when he met a girl called Ruby, whom he married within three months of meeting her, that he was nursed back to full health.

Ken Blake: Transcript

Interviewed by Alex Brook.

"I was in the army for 8 years and 256 days.

"I joined the Territorial Army with 7 comrades on the 1st March 1938 because my local army barracks had a very good billiard table and bar. When war was declared me and my comrades were alarmed because we had joined up mainly to play billiards!

"In 1939 I was sent to France with the BEF (British Expeditionary Force) as part of the 4th Battalion of the Royal East Kent Regiment to hold back the advancing German forces. It was the first battalion to land in France. The battle raged through France until we came to the episode of Dunkirk. My squad was one of the last out of France. As the troops came into Dunkirk some were appointed to the defensive shield round the outer perimeter of Dunkirk and I was one of them. This was to allow the troops to escape from the beaches. When the signal came for us to leave it was too late to get on the boats and we were told to get out the best way we could. We decided to go up the coast and came across a Renault car. We managed to get it going and all piled in. We finally escaped from the port of Le Havre on the last destroyer leaving occupied France. Only a quarter out of the 800 in my battalion got away.

"When I came home there was no stopping. We were re-trained and re-equipped and were then sent to Malta where I was part of the defence of the island during the siege. If we had lost Malta we would have lost control of the whole of the Mediterranean. It was a wonderful combined effort by the navy, army and air force. I had a job servicing Spitfires. For my efforts during this campaign I received the Maltese George Cross. The George Cross is the highest medal in the land except for the Victoria Cross.

"The Battle of Malta was over and we moved on again to North Africa where, to my surprise, I became part of Sir Winston Churchill's 234 commando brigade. Our objective was to capture the Aegean Islands just off the coast of Turkey. I was on HMS Eclipse on the way to the Aegean Islands when it struck a mine and the front end of the ship was blown up. Hundreds of the lads were drowned but I had had a tip that there were lots of mines in the sea and it was safest to stay at the stern of the boat so I survived. I took my heavy clothing off, climbed onto the railings and managed to get hold of a cork life belt. There was a young fellow sitting on the railings and he was screaming. He'd been blinded by the blast and I could do nothing for him. That haunts me even today. In those circumstances the golden rule is every man for himself; so I jumped. I didn't realise it was 60 feet above the water. I hit the sea with a wallop. There were hundreds and hundreds of lads around me badly burned. The whole sea was on fire. I had a bit of common sense and realised I had to get out of there as quick as I could so I swam and swam for 5 hours and was finally picked up just as dawn was breaking. I was in hospital for a bit and then rejoined my own unit.

"A powerful battle took place and I was captured by a German commando and put on a ship bound for Athens. From there we were loaded onto a cattle truck and transported right across Europe to Germany and a hard labour camp in Leipzig. On that journey, 3,000 of the lads died.

"I survived the labour camp right through to the end of the war. At this point myself and 4 of my comrades decided to escape. It was a terrible night and the German guards didn't like standing out in the pouring rain. We got under the wire and made a run for it. The objective was to make it to the American 8th Army at Gera which was south of Leipzig. We travelled only at night sleeping during the day. Half way, we lost one of the fellows. He was so ill we had to leave him. We were almost at the end of our tethers. We had no food and our clothes were in rags, but then we came to a road and saw an American tank. A couple of G.I.s came racing out thinking we were Germans so we put our hands up and started shouting that we were British POWs. They took us in charge. I was in a terrible state. I had tuberculosis and weighed 3½ stone. They were so kind to us. They moved us to another American base and I was flown straight back to England.

"On arrival in England I was placed immediately into an army hospital to recover. However I did not. My injuries and experiences, such as the labour camp, were severe and preventing a

full recovery. So the doctors decided to take a sample from my lung to investigate why. When they did this they found diesel oil from the boat that sunk in the bottom of my lung! After intensive treatment I made a recovery back to full health. I had 8 years in hospital altogether.

"I was discharged from the forces in Dover Castle in Kent, and was given a pension of £2 a week to live on, so I came home but was still very ill. After a few days my mother suggested that I go and visit relations in London, so I did. I went and stayed with them for a few days and whilst I was there I met a girl called Ruby. Ruby worked in Sainsbury's and everybody knew her. Within 3 months of meeting her we were married. She cared for me and got me back to full health."

Lance Corporal Robert Duke
6th Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment
21st June 1944

**Son of Charley Frederick and Annie Roberta Duke; husband of Joyce Ethel Duke, of
Bushey Heath, Hertfordshire
Tilly-sur-Seulles War Cemetery, XI. B. 12**

Robert Duke: Summary version



Bob Duke as a child and in his army uniform

Robert was known as Bob. He was born in 1923 and died in Normandy on 21st June 1944. His widow, Joyce, was interviewed by Zoe Farrell and Sophie Horwood in 2010. She remembered, "In no way did he want to go into the services. His father had had a very bad experience in the First World War and could not work after the age of 45 because of his wounds. But then there was the call up for the big push on D-Day and he was drafted into the Herts and Beds Regiment. He took his Latin and Italian books with him to continue his studies but they were soon returned home! We discovered that Bob had been transferred to the [6th battalion of the] Duke of Wellington's Regiment on 20th June 1944 on a draft of reinforcements. He travelled during the night in a landing craft to France and at first light on the 21st the regiment suffered heavy casualties from enemy fire some distance away. He must have died at this point.... Instead of having that lovely boy, I have a medal. It was an absolute waste of

a life. We had been married less than 6 months. It was also a very sad thing for his parents. Bob was an only child.”

Robert Duke: Longer version

Robert Duke was known as Bob. He was born in 1923 and died in Normandy on 21st June 1944. His widow, Joyce, was interviewed by Zoe Farrell and Sophie Horwood in 2010.

At Hemel Hempstead Grammar School

Mrs Duke remembered,

Bob joined Hemel Hempstead Grammar School as a fee paying student [prior to Grammar Schools becoming free from 1944]. His parents wanted him to go to a co-ed school and most grammar schools at this time were single sex so he went to Hemel despite the fact that he lived in Bushey Heath. His father worked in the ticket office of Bushey and Oxhey station. He loved cycling so his main method of getting to school was by bicycle. He had grandparents in Kings Langley and sometimes stayed with them. Bob was a very gentle person. Everything about him was lovely and he was handsome as well! He had rosy cheeks, a fair complexion and dark, curly, unruly hair.

Mrs Duke continued,

He very much enjoyed his time at the school and stayed on an extra year because he did not matriculate (reach a required standard in 5 subjects) at the first attempt. However, when he left he continued his education and studied to be a surveyor.

Called up

Mrs Duke said:

His studies reserved him from call up for 3 years. In no way did he want to go into the services. His father had had a very bad experience in the First World War and could not work after the age of 45 because of his wounds. But then there was the call up for the big push on D-Day and he was drafted into the Herts and Beds Regiment. He took his Latin and Italian books with him to continue his studies but they were soon returned home! He was bothered about his cycle being left at home and I was in charge of looking after it. I had to oil the gear chain and clean it so it would be alright for when he came back.

He very soon became a corporal and hoped to take a commission. He told us not to worry about him. The army badly wanted infantry men and they were faced with problems at the Falaise Gap in Normandy following the D-Day landings. Then letters home ceased and the War Office did not communicate or even know what was happening.

Death

Mrs Duke told us:

We were so lucky to find out what had happened to Bob through a school boy friend of his called Len Lee who went to Normandy in 1945 and discovered his grave. We would never have known otherwise. We kept writing to the War Office but they didn't know where he was.

We discovered that Bob had been transferred to the [6th battalion of the] Duke of Wellington's Regiment on 20th June 1944 on a draft of reinforcements. He travelled during the night in a landing craft to France and at first light on the 21st the regiment suffered heavy casualties from enemy fire some distance away. He must have died at this point. To be killed in such a way when he had just arrived seemed so inhuman and impersonal.

Sophie and Zoe carried out research at the National Archives in Kew and found the following entries in the War Diary for the 6th Duke of Wellington's Regiment:

20th June 1944 pm - First reinforcements arrive in strength off[ice]rs 10; O[ther] r[ank]s 180

21st June 5.35 - H[eav]y concentration of 21cm rocket projectiles in B[attalio]n area.

a.m. Issues of equ[ipmen]t and arms began,
9.15 - Memorial service held in grounds of Chateau Bronay

Robert probably died during the bombardment on 21st. However, his death is not recorded in the war diary and it is also possible that he died on this date from wounds gained during a previous attack.



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

The Queen and I offer you our
heartfelt sympathy in your great
sorrow.

We pray that your country's
gratitude for a life so nobly given
in its service may bring you some
measure of consolation.

George R.I

The letter Mrs Duke received from the King

Remembrance

Mrs Duke has visited her late husband's grave every year from 1945 until 2008 when she was not well enough to go. She told us,

Bob was put in a temporary cemetery in the woods in the grounds of a chateau at Brouay between Bayeux and Caen. When we received the telegram I knew it was wrong because he wasn't in the Duke of Wellington's so that gave us hope but then there was a letter from the King and Queen. Instead of having that lovely boy, I have a medal. It was an absolute waste of a life. We had been married less than 6 months. It was also a very sad thing for his parents. Bob was an only child. In the early days after the war we visited the chateau and became friends with the Baron and Baroness The owners of the chateau said his grave could stay where it was if that was what we wanted and that would have been our choice but eventually the War Graves Commission insisted that he be moved to Tilly-sur-Seulles.



Bob's grave in the grounds of the chateau at Brouay, taken by his friend Len Lee in 1945. Bob's grave is the one on the left of the picture.

Hylda Maslen



Hylda Maslen's WAAF Flight. Hylda is in the centre row, second from the left.

Hylda Maslen: Summary version

Hylda Maslen was a telephonist in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF). She told us:

It was quite a big job. Actually, it was a very busy switchboard I was on, taking all these calls. It was very interesting. I didn't go overseas because you had to have permission to go overseas and I was underage. My parents wouldn't let me. My brother was out there and he said no. I chose the WAAFs because my brother Bill was in the RAF.

Hylda Maslen: Longer version

Hylda Maslen was a telephonist in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF). She told us:

It was quite a big job. Actually, it was a very busy switchboard I was on, taking all these calls. It was very interesting. I didn't go overseas because you had to have permission to go overseas and I was underage. My parents wouldn't let me. My brother was out there and he said no. I chose the WAAFs because my brother Bill was in the RAF.

Hylda was 18 when she volunteered, and she did that rather than be called compulsorily. She said that she knew she "had to go in the forces or into munitions or something but I wanted to go in and get the job I wanted." Hylda has fond memories of camp life:

...the atmosphere was great there. You had some good times at the camp. We went to the cinema – it was good times really. Then the Americans came over and we had dances and invites when they let us out.

If there had been an invasion, it would have been important to make it as difficult for the Germans to maintain communications across the country. That would mean destroying the telephone systems. Hylda remembers:

We were threatened once that there would be an invasion. I was at the switchboard. We had to break all the machinery up and destroy everything. I thought, "What if I do that and it's a false alarm?" So I didn't. It was a bit scary.

Hylida Maslen: Transcript

Interviewed by Fiona Wright, Edward Gardiner and Sarah Kay at the British Legion, Hemel Hempstead November 2008.

Hylida - I was a telephonist in the WAAF*. It was quite a big job. Actually, it was a very busy switchboard I was on, taking all these calls. It was very interesting. I didn't go overseas because you had to have permission to go overseas and I was underage. My parents wouldn't let me. My brother was out there and he said no. I chose the WAAFs because my brother Bill was in the RAF. He became a flight lieutenant in the end.

Fiona - How old were you?

Hylida - I was 18 when I went in. I volunteered because I knew I had to go in the forces or into munitions or something but I wanted to go in and get the job I wanted. I was in 3 camps really. I was in Harrogate for my telephonist training and then I was sent to Melksham in Wiltshire where I met my husband Maurice.

Maurice - Yes, she used to pass along this path with this other girl and I used to look out of the window with a pint mug and say, "Bring us back some tea Taffy". And that's how it all started.

Hylida - Yes, they called me Taffy because I was Welsh.

Fiona - But at that point you weren't married?

Maurice - No, no! In fact it wasn't until I was on the troopship to India (it used to take a month to get to India from Liverpool in those days) that I thought I might not see her again so I wrote to my mother and we got engaged by proxy.

Hylida - I had an engagement ring on and everyone said, "how did you manage to get engaged?" Marvellous!

Maurice - We were married in 1947. I was still in uniform.

Hylida - We did the same square - what we call square bashing** for 6 weeks, the same as the men you see. We were in wooden billets. How many people were there in each one, Maurice, 8, 10?

Maurice - No. More than that; more like 30 - about 15 in each side - we had that in ours. You had it soft, didn't you? You used to get pyjamas. We didn't.

Hylida - We had sheets. You didn't.

Maurice - No, we didn't have sheets, we only had blankets.

Hylida - Everybody was so friendly and they'd do anything for anyone, it was great: the atmosphere was great there. You had some good times at the camp. We went to the cinema - it was good times really. Then the Americans came over and we had dances and invites when they let us out.

Maurice - You had a pass didn't you?

Hylida - Yes, it's to say you'd come in at a certain time. Fiona - How long were you allowed out for?

Hylida - 23.59 at the latest and of course, if you were out and the police stopped you, you had to show your pass. The only time you'd get away with it was during an air raid. It was funny because on the RAF camp we were out in the country and of course there were no air-raid shelters out there because we weren't expecting it. The first time I went into one, it was when I came up to London for the weekend from my camp and I got in an air-raid shelter. It was the first time, with all this going on and it was the first time I'd been in an air-raid shelter. One thing you did learn was discipline though, which was good. You couldn't, say, like they do at work now, take a "sicky". If you were sick you had to go on sick parade.

Hylida - Women were plotting the course taken by planes, which was a responsible job. I

mean, they all had responsible jobs but they all needed one another, and as I say I was on the switchboard.

Fiona - So where was the switchboard that you worked on? Hylde - It was in the headquarters of the RAF in Melksham. Oh yes, it was a busy time and it was quite stressful. You could only do so long on there. One girl had a funny turn once. She pulled all the plugs out, and I had to go on and try and reconnect her. They were exciting times

Edward - When you were working there did you ever get anyone important ringing up? Anyone famous?

Hylde - If ever anyone rang you had to give a number. Like I'd say, "Melksham 321" and then she'd say, "Is that the RAF camp?" You'd say, "I'm sorry, it's Melksham 321". You didn't dare say it was the RAF camp because everything was high security. We'd field all sorts of important calls from Fighter Command or something, or we'd put him through on a hotline, which means it wouldn't go through any other kind of operator and we knew it was something important. And I had to ring the Royal Arthur once where Prince Philip was.

Hylde - We were threatened once that there would be an invasion. I was at the switchboard. We had to break all the machinery up and destroy everything. I thought, "What if I do that and it's a false alarm?" So I didn't. It was a bit scary. Then it (the war) stopped. It had been going on for 6 years and everybody went mad. No-one could believe it, that the war was over. They were bashing frying pans, banging and shouting - it was great.

Fiona - So was that VE Day?

Hylde - That was the first one, because of course, it still carried on.***' The next day it was back to normal as if nothing had happened.

Edward - I was just looking at your medals. What are they for?

Hylde - I've got the Veteran's Badge and the War Medal.

* WAAF - Women's Auxiliary Air Force

** square bashing - marching and learning to follow orders.

*** The war in the Far East continued until VJ Day in August 1945.

Flight Lieutenant Brian Slade DFC

Royal Air Force, 83 Squadron

Killed in Action 24th August 1943

Son of Horace Bernard and Emily Caroline Slade, of Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire

Berlin 1939-1945 War Cemetery Coll. grave 8. D. 22-27

Brian Slade: Summary version

Brian Slade was a former pupil of Hemel Hempstead Grammar School who served as a pilot in the Royal Air Force. He trained at RAF Halton and was promoted quickly to become a Flight Commander in 83 Squadron. He was killed on his 59th operation when his Lancaster was hit by flak over Berlin on 24th August 1943. He was only 19 years old. He was remembered as a daring and outgoing person. There is a story, not confirmed, that on one occasion he flew a Wellington bomber in a tight, low circuit around the pointed spire of St Mary's church in Hemel Hempstead to say "hello" to his parents and sister who lived close-by.



Brian Slade at school



Brian Slade's grave in Berlin

Brian Slade: Longer version

Training

Brian Slade (full name Ivor Charles Brian Slade) was a pupil at Hemel Hempstead School when war broke out. A contemporary, D.R.S. Collier remembers, "Brian, not a big chap but a clever little footballer, sat his School Certificate examination in 1940 and that year, at the age of 16, left school. Immediately – without his parents' permission – falsified his age as being 18 and volunteered for flying duties with the Royal Air Force."

He became a pilot in the RAF. His first posting was at RAF Halton near Tring, where the pilots became known as "the Halton Brats". D.R.S. Collier remembered, "There is a story, not confirmed, that on one occasion he flew a Wellington bomber in a tight, low circuit around the pointed spire of St Mary's church in Hemel Hempstead to say "hello" to his parents and sister who lived close-by."

Brian Slade was a bright and intelligent young man and quickly gained promotion to become a Flight Commander in 83 Squadron, which was part of No 8 Group Pathfinder Force, based at Operation Wyton. The job of a pathfinder was to pinpoint targets and mark them with flares to indicate where bombers should drop their loads.

As a pilot

Peter Hodgson, an ex-pupil at Hemel Hempstead Grammar School knew Brian. He supplied the following information:

Some years ago Joan and I attended a local lecture on the Peenemünde raid [17/18 August 1943]. The first slide that came up showed Group Captain Searby and his two (un-named) flight commanders. We immediately recognized Brian as one of them. I also wrote to Walter Thompson who served with Brian and told him what I remembered of Brian from his school days. He replied that he did not know that Brian was a Halton 'brat' as the apprentices were known, but went on to say that that would have explained his closeness to Searby, also a 'brat'.

The following is an extract from the book *Lancaster to Berlin* (1985) by Walter R. Thompson DFC & Bar, where Thompson remembered:

Slade ... always sang the loudest, drank the most and told the funniest jokes on the nights out. I think too that he was loved by most of the WAAFs for he was another who refused to obey the non fraternisation rule.

He also wrote of a night out in Cambridge with Slade when they came across:

Clark Gable, a gunner with a nearby Fortress Squadron, with his foot up on a brass rail of a pub near King's Parade, his hat bent correctly at the peak and olive green trench coat turned up at the collar; we were impressed to find a movie star who actually flew on operations, he flew about 5 of them and of course was not alone.

Death

Brian Slade's was a most tragic death because he was killed on the 59th operation out of the 60 he had volunteered to do. He had undertaken a double tour of duty rather than the 30 flights that were the norm. His plane was hit by flack over Berlin on 24th August 1943 and exploded. James Moss from Hemel Hempstead School studied the operations book for Brian's squadron on microfilm at the National Archives in Kew in 2010. It shows that Brian was based at RAF Wyton and had only spent a few months with Lancaster "A". The record states simply that he took part in a bombing raid over Berlin and did not return. The planes involved in this raid began their flight at 20.21 hours and the last one to return arrived back at 3.27 am.

Walter Thompson recalled in his book:

Brian was a good friend and I felt his loss keenly.... We called Brian "The Boy Slade" because he was our youngest pilot... It was probably Slade whom we saw hit as we entered Berlin because we saw an aircraft far to the north of us, coned in searchlights; it blew up in a shower of red Target Indicators. This, after the long flight across Germany, and after we reached the bomb - run I couldn't understand what this aircraft was doing so far north of track. He should have seen Brandenburg on his H2S [radar system used by the RAF], but perhaps it was not working. Slade, having once attacked Berlin on three engines, would have gone on without an H2S.

In his book, *The Berlin Raids* (1988), Martin Middlebrook wrote:

Another Pathfinder loss was Flight Lieutenant Brian Slade, DFC, a courageous young pilot known on 83 Squadron as "The Boy Slade", who had set himself the task of flying the "double Pathfinder tour" of 60 consecutive operations. He died flying his 59th, just starting his

Jean Stevens

Jean Stevens: Summary version

Jean Stevens was Jean Baxter when she started at Hemel School in September 1939. She remembers the war bringing new pupils from across Europe:

There were many refugees from Austria, Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia in the school. One girl had long hair, despite the school rule that hair should not touch the collar of your blouse. She was gently asked to wear it shorter but she said that her father, who had been left behind in Germany wanted her to have long hair. She was allowed to keep it long but wear it tied back in a bow. The staff were very understanding and sympathetic.

Jean Stevens: Longer version

Jean Stevens was Jean Baxter when she started at Hemel School in September 1939. She remembers how the outbreak of war made an immediate impact on the school:

The start of school was postponed for 3 weeks that year whilst the girls' cycle sheds were made into an air raid shelter. Sticky tape was criss-crossed over the windows to prevent damage in case of a bomb blast. Parents were concerned that the school might be a target for bombing as the tower was painted white and stood out so it was painted grey. We had to carry a gas mask in a box and a box of rations in case we were kept at school for any length of time. Mine contained nuts, raisins and chocolate.

With many materials in great shortage during the war, school life could be affected in the most basic ways:

Paper was rationed and we had a rough book to do some of our work. We went through it with pencil first and then with ink. When it was full you had to take it to the school secretary who signed and stamped it before you could get another. If there was even a quarter page that was unused you had to take it back.

Jean Stevens also remembers new pupils from across Europe:

There were many refugees from Austria, Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia in the school. One girl had long hair, despite the school rule that hair should not touch the collar of your blouse. She was gently asked to wear it shorter but she said that her father, who had been left behind in Germany wanted her to have long hair. She was allowed to keep it long but wear it tied back in a bow. The staff were very understanding and sympathetic.

Jean Stevens: Transcript

Interviewed by Polly Taylor and Harriet Bullock.

Mrs Stevens first went to Hemel Hempstead Grammar School in September 1939 just as the war began.

"The start of school was postponed for 3 weeks that year whilst the girls' cycle sheds were made into an air raid shelter. Sticky tape was criss-crossed over the windows to prevent damage in case of a bomb blast. Parents were concerned that the school might be a target for bombing as the tower was painted white and stood out so it was painted grey. We had to carry a gas mask in a box and a box of rations in case we were kept at school for any length of time. Mine contained nuts, raisins and chocolate.

"Paper was rationed and we had a rough book to do some of our work. We went through it with pencil first and then with ink. When it was full you had to take it to the school secretary who signed and stamped it before you could get another. If there was even a quarter page that was unused you had to take it back.

"There were no after school activities because we had to get home before the blackout and air raids started.

"The number of pupils at the school increased due to the war. Many of these new children had suffered traumatic experiences and must have found it difficult to adjust to life in England.

"There were many refugees from Austria, Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia in the school. One girl had long hair, despite the school rule that hair should not touch the collar of your blouse. She was gently asked to wear it shorter but she said that her father, who had been left

behind in Germany wanted her to have long hair. She was allowed to keep it long but wear it tied back in a bow. The staff were very understanding and sympathetic.

"Another refugee pupil, a boy from Poland irritated the French teacher by standing up, clicking his heels and bowing when she spoke to him. One day she snapped. "For goodness sake sit down boy". She was immediately remorseful when she realised that this was his way of showing respect and said to the rest of the class, "If you had half the good manners that he has you would get on much better". Many of these children remained in Britain after the war ended.

"St Ignatius College, a Roman Catholic Boys' School, was evacuated to Hemel Hempstead and had their lessons in our school. We did not see them during the day but did get to know some of them after school. They were billeted with local families and had their own teachers."

Some of the staff were also badly affected by the war.

"Our French teacher had friends in Paris and had lived there for a while. One day she said, "Would you take out a book, I'm sorry I can't teach you today. The Germans have just entered Paris". We had such feeling for her that we read in silence for 45 minutes."

Home life also changed.

"We had to be very careful with food because of rationing. We had a "pig club" in our road. We saved vegetable peelings and other waste food that was used to fatten a pig. When the pig was killed everyone got a share of the meat.

"Our road had a group of people responsible for fire watching. My mother did it and managed to read the whole of "Gone With The Wind" whilst doing it. The person on duty had a notebook, a stirrup pump, a bucket and a whistle. You signed the book to say that you had done your duty and transported the equipment to the next person on the rota. We did not have an air raid shelter as my mother was terrified of spiders. At first we sat in the hall on deck chairs but after a while put mattresses downstairs on the floor in the best room* and slept there. We could hear the bombers overhead. I sometimes woke up and saw my mother sitting on the end of the bed just watching. Parents had a terrific responsibility".

Despite all the difficulties at school and at home Mrs Stevens feels that she had a happy childhood.

"I particularly remember that each classroom had a painting in it from a particular era and this helped you to learn a lot about art. In spite of all the problems we had a very good education. We were taught well and learned a lot."

*A room that was often better furnished than other rooms in the house and was used on special occasions.

Appendix 4: Outline lesson plans

None of our work has been done in standard lessons. Rather, we have taken students out of classes for half a day so that they can do substantial pieces of work. Below are two summaries of how we have structured activities for Year 9 and Year 12 groups, using different types of material.

Year 9/10

Aim: To understand a wide range of perspectives on the First World War through examining objects and then producing a piece of writing about a local newspaper article from the 1914-18 period for publication on a website.			
Number of students: up to 30 working in pairs or threes.		Resources: set of First World War objects; newspaper articles either printed or as files in a shared area; computer terminals.	
Time	Task	Student activity	Staff activity
Prior to lesson			<p>Obtain examples of newspaper articles from a local library or archive, or from the British Library. Copies (one per pair of students) can be provided either as hard copy prints or as PDFs or image file on a shared area.</p> <p>Obtain varied objects linked to aspect of the First World War and/or commemoration of it. This could include: poppies, souvenirs of visits, photographs, documents, items of uniform, shrapnel, non-live bullets, or any other item with a First World War link. Consider buying a set of wooden items made in different religious (and secular) symbols to consider the diverse and multicultural nature both of the British military in 1914-18 and commemoration today: https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/ways-to-give/support-us-while-you-shop/poppy-products/poppies-by-donation/ The object analysis form included on page 55 below can be used.</p>
Start of lesson	Introduction of starter activity: aim is to get students thinking about different aspects of the war.	Listening.	Explaining that students should look at items in twos or threes and ask 'What do they tell us about the First World War and/or how it is remembered?' Students are given items which are then rotated around groups (of 5-6

			students) so that they see each item for 3-4 minutes. They take notes on what they think.
2 minutes	Starter activity	Look at items and discuss with each other. Students should see at least three sets of items, but need not see all sets.	Ensuring students are on task and might prompt thinking with questions as groups work. Teacher rotates sets of items every 3-4 minutes.
40 minutes		Feedback to class on their thoughts.	Might ask questions of feedback.
50 minutes	Students move to computer terminals and are given newspaper articles.	Move to terminals.	Directing student movement.
52 minutes	Students look at: http://www.hemelatwar.org/ear-9-research.html and read examples to see how other students have examined newspaper articles and written pieces about them.	Reading	Assisting with finding website if necessary and ensures students are reading articles.
57 minutes	Students are given newspaper articles as hard copies or pointed to the, in a shared area.	Taking articles from teacher or finding in shared area.	Provide articles.
59 minutes		Listening.	Explaining that students should read articles and write a piece similar to those seen on website.
1h minutes	Students reading newspaper articles and writing a piece of their own (in pairs or threes).	Reading/writing.	Keeping students on task and answering questions.
2h	Students complete task and email writing to teacher.	Emailing to teacher.	Closing lesson
Extension	If students complete their writing, encourage them to enhance their piece by searching online for relevant material. Ensure that they cite any online sources used. Students can also be given an addition article to use.		
Homework	Students can complete task for homework.		
Breaks	We have often held the sessions either side of a break and that has often come as students have read the newspaper article and started to think about what to write when they return.		

Extra output	This task could be used for the specific purpose of producing pop-up banner stands for an exhibition. Year 9s at Bishop Thomas Grant School have done this, and material previously produced by the school's Year 12s was also included.		
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Year 12

Aim: To understand a wide range of perspectives on the First World War through examining objects and then producing a piece of writing based on a unit war diary from the British army in 1914-18 for publication on a website.			
Number of students: up to 20 working in pairs or threes.		Resources: set of First World War objects; war diaries either printed or as files in a shared area; computer terminals.	
Time	Task	Student activity	Staff activity
Prior to lesson			<p>Identify local people who died in the war using CWGC resources (see p. 14 above on how to do this).</p> <p>Obtain war diaries from the National Archives. These should be for units and dates relating to local deaths identified using CWGC resources. Copies (one per pair of students) can be provided either as hard copy prints or as PDFs or image file on a shared area.</p> <p>Obtain varied items linked to aspect of the First World War and/or commemoration of it. This could include: poppies, souvenirs of visits, photographs, documents, items of uniform, shrapnel, non-live bullets, or any other item with a First World War link. Consider buying a set of wooden items made in different religious (and secular) symbols to consider the diverse and multicultural nature both of the British military in 1914-18 and commemoration today: https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/ways-to-give/support-us-while-you-shop/poppy-products/poppies-by-donation/</p>

			The object analysis form included on page 55 below can be used.
Start of lesson	Introduction of starter activity: aim is to get students thinking about different aspects of the war.	Listening.	Explaining that students should look at items in twos or threes and ask 'What do they tell us about the First World War and/or how it is remembered?' Students are given items which are then rotated around groups (of 3-4 students) so that they see each item for 3-4 minutes. They take notes on what they think.
2 minutes	Starter activity	Look at items and discuss with each other. Students should see at least three sets of items, but need not see all sets.	Ensuring students are on task and might prompt thinking with questions for groups as they work. Teacher rotates sets of items every 3-4 minutes.
20 minutes		Feedback to class on their thoughts.	Might ask questions of feedback.
30 minutes	Students move to computer terminals and are given war diaries.	Move to terminals.	Directing student movement.
32 minutes	Students look at: http://www.hemelatwar.org/year-12-research.html and read examples to see how other students have examined war diaries and written pieces about them.	Reading	Assisting with finding website if necessary and ensures students are reading articles.
37 minutes	Students are given war diaries as hard copies or pointed to the, in a shared area.	Taking war diaries from teacher or finding in shared area.	Provide war diaries.
39 minutes		Listening.	Explain that students should read war diaries locating the relevant date and write a piece similar to those seen on website.
40 minutes	Students reading war diaries and writing a piece of their own (in pairs or threes). In many cases it will be easiest if they first write a transcription of the diary entry.	Reading/writing.	Keeping students on task and answering questions. Help with transcribing might be necessary.
2 hours	Students complete task and email writing to teacher.	Emailing to teacher.	Closing lesson
Extension	If students complete their writing, encourage them to		

	enhance their piece by searching online for relevant material. Ensure that they cite any online sources used. This has often involved material from www.longlongtrail.co.uk or the CWGC site. They also often look up relevant addresses on Google maps.		
Homework	Students can complete task for homework.		
Breaks	We have often held the sessions either side of a break and that has often come as students have read the war diary and started to think about what to write when they return.		
Extra output	Once a significant amount of material has been gathered you could consider producing pop-up banner stands for an exhibition. Year 12s at The Hemel Hempstead School have done this and instructions to students are included below. In their exhibition, they included material produced over several years by both Year 9s and Year 12s.		

First World War objects investigation

What is it?	What would it have been used for?	What does it tell you about the First World War?	What questions do you have about this object?

Producing an exhibition

As an additional activity in 2019, Year 12 students at The Hemel Hempstead School produced an exhibition using material already gathered for Hemel at War. The guidance given to them was as below. The work was done in February to April 2019, with the banners completed and produced in June 2019 for exhibition in school later that month and into July, with plans being made for subsequent exhibitions in other places.

Briefing on 'Hemel at War' Exhibition Project

Background

The 'Hemel at War' project has been selected to represent the East of England in the national 'Young People Learning Hub on World War One', run by the University of Nottingham. The work you produce will be included in the WW1 engage website 'Community Legacies of the Digital Centenary' giving other young people the opportunity to explore and learn about these topics.

The project

The project is to produce an exhibition using First World War material gathered over the past decade on www.hemelatwar.org. The exhibition will be in the form of 'banner stands' which are approximately six feet high such as these:



The stands will be displayed in school and at other local venues. Your task is:

1. Go to: www.hemelatwar.org
2. Look at the pages under the 'World War One' menu, in particular 'Year 9 Research' and 'Year 12 Research'. Year 9s wrote about items from the *Gazette* in 1914-18. Year 12s have written biographical pieces on individuals. Do also look at the 'Those Who Died' list (we will probably include this whole list on one

- of the banners) and the home page as both contain links to other material sent in by local people.
3. Select the pieces you think would be best in an exhibition on banner stands. Think about gathering a range of different types of stories and try to include some which have photographs. In the first instance, choose twelve Year 9 pieces and twelve Year 12, and any which interest you from the home page or 'Those Who Died' page. Copy the URLs for the pages you have chosen and put them in a Word file.
 4. In the same file, write a summary (max. one page of A4) of what the pieces tell us about the First World War as it affected Hemel Hempstead and its people.
 5. Email your files to Mrs Williams. The text will then be put into a design for banner stands, with the stands sent back to school about six weeks later.

END