

Heritage School Case Study

Researching local First World War Memorials

Schools visited local war memorials and collected names. They used online research to build up a picture of the soldiers' lives and came together in a remembrance event.

Where: Charnwood Primary School, Bridge Junior School, Inglehurst Junior School, Shaftesbury Junior School in Leicester.

Who: Year 5 and 6 pupils

Each group visited a local war memorial. Two of the memorials were in the hall of the school; one was on the former site of their school and the other in a church next door. All featured men who had formerly attended the school and had lived locally.

The children worked in pairs to gather information about their chosen soldier from online sources including Census, Directories, Commonwealth War Grave material and used Google Street view to 'virtually' visit the houses where the soldier lived if they were still there. They also looked at pictures from Historic England to see what [Edwardian Life](#) was like. The children were then asked to write a first person biography of their soldier's life and use some of the online images to illustrate the biography in PowerPoint.

To conclude the project, the schools read out their biographies and showed their presentations at a remembrance event at Leicester Cathedral. The children also sang WW1 songs and read poems. Representatives of the different faiths in Leicester also read short excerpts from scripture about peace and other schools and members of the public were invited to attend.

Intended Outcomes:

- To develop enquiry and research skills
- To understand the significance of war memorials.
- To create a connection and empathy for ex-pupils who gave their lives.
- To bring children and adults from diverse backgrounds together.



What we did:

- Visited war memorials
- Conducted online research.
- Presented the research in a meaningful and empathetic way.
- Shared our work with other children, members of the public and faith representatives.

Challenges:

- Finding enough relevant data for certain soldiers. We chose unusual names and sometimes had to choose another name if the information was too difficult to find.
- For primary age children who had done little research in the past, help and supervision was needed. The activity worked best with groups of about 12 in the computer room.
- Finding faith representatives. We worked with inter-faith groups who provided contacts.
- To avoid offence, we referred to the event as an act of remembrance not a religious service.

Successes:

- “The service at the cathedral will remain in my psyche forever. So moving in a profound not nostalgic way. A celebration of life and memory.” Peter Driver, Head teacher of Bridge School
- The children learnt to work independently and produced writing of a very high quality which showed an emotional connection to the soldiers.
- One school has been asked to read their biography at Leicester City Remembrance Sunday.
- The confidence of the children grew and they felt proud about their achievements. The local dimension ensured that the project was purposeful and directly relevant to the children.

Resources and web links:

- [Commonwealth War Graves:Find War Dead](#) is a good place to start! Information about soldiers who died, including their battalion and regiment, when they died and how old they were, and where they are buried / memorialised
- [Ancestry Classroom](#) can be accessed by UK schools for free if you email the Ancestry Library Team - alt@ancestry.com
- Some regiments have their own websites, for example the [Royal Leicestershire Regiment](#)
- Search for your soldier on [Lives of the First World War](#) to see if there is already any information on there, then add any additional information you have found.

Next steps/extension activities:

- www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk War Memorials Online. A website created by War Memorials Trust in partnership with English Heritage. Log your war memorial and / or add additional information about it.
- If your memorial is not listed you could get it designated here: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/>