

Researching people named on war memorials



War Memorials Trust

On this sheet you will learn:

- How to use advanced sources to research the names on war memorials.

Types of sources

This sheet explains the more **complicated** sources available for researching names on war memorials. More **basic** sources are outlined in the version of this sheet for younger children. There is no reason why you cannot use these sources too – they are an excellent **starting** point for your research – but older children may also want to extend their research beyond this. You may want to use this sheet in conjunction with the ‘Researching people named on war memorials’ information sheet for younger children, available at www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/youth-groups/general/7-10.

While these sources are more complicated, the information they reveal is worth the effort. Basic resources provide an **overview** of a person’s personal details and are an excellent starting point. Talking to local people, as suggested on the information sheet for younger children, also provides fascinating **insights** into life at the time. However, digging deeper into a person’s background using the resources suggested here can reveal much more and helps you **‘get to know’** them as a real person rather than just a name, making the war memorial seem so much more **personally important**.

Census, birth, marriage and death records

The **census** is carried out every ten years and records information about everyone occupying a place of residence on the date it was done. This includes full name, age, year and place of birth, occupation and relationship to others in the household. It can therefore be used to provide a

‘snapshot’ of a family and their circumstances on that date. **Comparing** a census with the one preceding or following it also helps you see how those circumstances and the family unit change over time. From information about, for example, the size of a family and their occupations you can **infer** various other facts about their lives.

Parish records record every birth, marriage and death that takes place and can be used to fill in a person’s background details and those of their immediate family.

These sources reveal additional information about a person, their family and home life prior to and, if applicable, after the war (remember many war memorials list those who served and survived as well as those killed). Parish registers and census returns for a locality are usually **available** on **microfilm** at local or county record offices. There are also websites that allow you to access this information **online**. These are easier to use because the records are **transcribed** and are easier to access and search than those held in record offices, but do require a fee or the use of bought ‘credits’ (although access is often free in libraries). Details are given at www.learnaboutwarmemorials.com/links.

Museums, libraries and archives

Local **museums** and **libraries** can also provide information about those named on a war memorial. Libraries often have a **local history** section and past editions of local **newspapers**, which gave lots of detail about war memorial **unveilings**. Local newspapers from the time of the memorial’s creation often also provide detailed information on the **background** to the memorial (e.g. who designed it and sat on the committee overseeing its creation) and obituaries for those it commemorates.

Museums may have information or exhibitions about the local area during the

war or those that fought, and this can be a useful source of information if your area has a well known story from the time of the war. Some places have local **websites** which may include a section about the war memorial, or even entire sites dedicated to telling the story of local regiments. It is also worth considering **school** or **company records** if the memorial commemorates people from that school or workplace – **school log books**, for example, often noted former pupils and staff who had died in wars and this information can add to your profile of the person.

London Gazette

The London Gazette is an official journal of record of the British government. It contains notices of **commissions** in the Armed Forces and the **promotion** of officers. The Gazette's website (www.london-gazette.co.uk) can be browsed by anyone. Records can be downloaded and key words searched for, and registered users are able to search the complete archives, including the Ministry of Defence supplement.

Regimental records

Many regiments kept **diaries** of their actions during wartime and these were often used to produce regimental **histories** which may be of use. Using these does require you to know which regiment the person you are researching belonged to. If this is not listed on the war memorial you can usually find it from other sources like the Commonwealth War Graves Commission database.

Service records and medal cards

After the First World War the War Office kept every soldier's **service record**. Many were lost during bombing in the Second World War so may not be available for the person you are researching, but if they are then they can give information about an individual provided you have their basic details. These records can be viewed via www.ancestry.co.uk for subscribed users of this website, or on **microfilm** for free in

person at the National Archives at Kew.

Records of **medals** issued were also kept and were not damaged by bombing. Medal Index Cards can be viewed on **microfiche** at the National Archives if a download is paid for. Scans of the cards are also available for subscribed users of www.ancestry.co.uk.

Using these sources

Most of the **online** resources suggested here are searchable with basic information and are fairly **straightforward** to use. The main difficulty with some is that they can be quite laborious to search – some names will return lots of results on the census websites, for example, and you have to use other facts to work out which is the **correct** one. Other sources may require you to **visit** places such as a record office.

When you have **completed** your research look at what you have found out and put it together to make up a profile of the person you are researching. Think about what to do with your research – you could **present** it to your group or members of the local **community**, create a **display** for a library or put the information on our **Showcase** at www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/youth-groups, so that others can see it. You can upload documents, photographs and a written account of what you did.

Notes for leaders

This sheet encourages children to explore some of the more complex research sources that are available. With so much information now available online it is easier than ever to find out about past generations and we hope that young people will find this rewarding. However, some will need support accessing these sources and interpreting what they find. We have produced helpsheets for primary and secondary teachers to support them in teaching the use of these sources, which you may find helpful when guiding young people through their research. If further advice is required please contact learning@warmemorials.org.