

Unentrenched: adding depth and diversity to teaching the trenches

Rationale

This resource has been produced with the intention of helping busy teachers to make quick tweaks to their First World War lessons in order to include more recent scholarship. Having had the benefit of weeks of First World War CPD through the Historical Association's Teacher Fellowship Programme, I have created this resource as a way of distilling its main themes in order to benefit the wider teaching community.

Throughout the programme, it became apparent to all of the participants that we wanted to make some changes to the way in which we teach the First World War in our classrooms – in some cases big overhauls, and in others minor tweaks, but for all of us it was obvious that our students would benefit if we took the time to look again at how we teach this history. Research by Dr Catriona Pennell (2016) shows that, in schools across England, the history of the First World War focuses primarily on the trenches of the Western Front, alongside the causation narrative of the start of the War. By focusing chiefly on the trenches of France and Belgium, there is a danger that our students will leave school not understanding the wider, global perspective of the War – not only in terms of the geography of it but also, vitally, in terms of the role played by imperial troops. I have worked with new researchers and established historians to suggest new ways of looking at trenches, to bring new material into the classroom and to ask new questions of this very 'entrenched' war. The main aim is for our students to understand that the First World War was more than just the mud, blood and death that we know about in the trenches of the Western Front. Soldiers experienced the War in many different ways and on a global scale.





Teacher guidance for using resource


In 2014, a report funded by the Art and Humanities Research Council was published about how the First World War is taught in the classroom through both history and English lessons. Many of the results of that report have formed the foundation of this work, and you can access the report here:

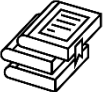
<http://ww1intheclassroom.exeter.ac.uk>


There has been a massive growth in research about the First World War over the past 20 years, and the resources attempt to cover these major changes in the ways in which we look at the War. The resources are all differently focused and give you a quick insight into these new areas of research, particularly the enormous contribution of 'cultural history' to our understanding of the war experience. Cultural history has opened up new source material and approaches to soldiers' experiences and how the war was fought. Historians are asking new questions about identity, consent and coercion, and the ways in which war *was* a cultural war – it was culture itself that enabled men to fight and survive, which brought these armies through long years of trial and the catastrophic industrial-scale slaughter.


Each topic follows the same format and each topic has been colour-coded for ease of identification and reference.

	Potential misconception
	Scholarship and further reading
	Suggested tweak
	Sources for use in the classroom

 New scholarship of the war is vast. Zotero's First World War Studies Bibliography, for instance, contains 16,780 items of relatively recent material. I have necessarily been selective, addressing several commonly taught themes or topics that can easily lead to misconceptions by students. These include who the soldiers were, how they coped, artistic responses, conscription and death rates.

 For ease of use, this resource has simplified subject areas in order to make it quick and easy for busy teachers to use. However, should you want to know more about any of the topics, look for this symbol for more information. In these sections, I have outlined the work of historians and included suggested reading or watching in some cases.

 For each topic I have suggested a 'tweak' that is quick and easy to use but will open up alternative perspectives or give the opportunity for further development or enquiry. These are in no way intended to be prescriptive but rather serve purely to highlight new research with potential classroom use.

 For each tweak I have included one or more sources to use as a starting point for further discussion or development. All can be used as a starter, and some could also be easily developed into a lesson.

Contextual information about the sources used across all topics (colour-coded to match topic resource)

<p>JFC Fuller evidence given in the Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock', 1922</p>	<p><i>The numbers of cases of men applying for shell-shock disability pensions – 114,600 – forced the government to set up an enquiry committee in 1920, which reported in 1922. The committee, composed of doctors, military officers and civil servants, heard evidence from 59 expert witnesses.</i></p> <p>Of particular note is the sentence 12 lines down, starting, 'I think what produces shell shock' as it describes the change over time for soldiers arriving from England. 'This fear very shortly wore off' – Alex Watson's (2008) research supports this: 'In order to survive the front both mentally and physically, soldiers thus had to learn to judge risk without being overwhelmed by it.' (p. 87)</p>
<p>Walter Ludwig's study into German soldiers' coping strategies</p>	<p><i>This was a piece of psychological research carried out during the War itself. Walter Ludwig was an infantry officer on the Western Front who had fought against British and French troops in the Vosges, the Argonne, the Somme and at Ypres. He conducted this research during two periods away from the front line. The data is limited with regard to ranks, religion and lengths of service.</i></p>
<p>Mike Mountain Horse's calfskins</p>	<p><i>Mike Mountain Horse grew up on the Blood Reserve in Fort Macleod, Atlanta, Canada, where he was taught much about the traditional tribal beliefs and customs of his people. The Blood tribe had been encouraged to denounce their traditional warrior culture but Mike's older brother Albert was encouraged into enlisting in 1914 by a local missionary. His brother's death in 1915, which was a consequence of his being gassed at Ypres, inspired Mike and his brother Joe to enlist to avenge their brother's death. In 1936, Mike wrote these stories in a collection called My People The Bloods, which was eventually published in the 1970s, long after his death. He also dictated his 'Great War Deeds' to his friend, Ambrose Two Chiefs, who painted it onto calfskin in the traditional style. The 'War Deeds' consists of 12 panels, each depicting a real event and ordered according to their importance to Mike. Mike received a Distinguished Conduct Medal for his service in the First World War.</i></p>
<p>'Queer comradeships made in war-time'</p>	<p><i>The War Illustrated was a British war magazine published in London by William Berry. It was first released on 22 August 1914, 18 days after the United Kingdom declared war on Germany, and regular issues continued throughout the First World War.</i></p> <p>The caption at the bottom for the soldier on a stretcher is worth looking at with students for its language about the Indian soldier – highlighting the usual gulf between white and Indian soldiers. This would work well in conjunction with the source on Slide 6 ('Statistics of the military effort of the British Empire during the Great War').</p>
<p>Statistics of the military effort of the British Empire during the Great War</p>	<p><i>This was published in 1922 and is available to view online: https://archive.org/details/statisticsofmili00grea/page/4</i></p> <p>This has been included not only to provide figures but also to explore with students how it is set out, highlighting the institutionalised racism at the time ('white enlistments', 'coloured troops', etc.).</p>

Postcard	<p><i>This is a good example of the fact that often the images on the postcards were about home itself. Postcards helped to maintain contact and enabled soldiers to ‘see’ home in their mind’s eye. Postcards such as this one also helped to remind them why they were fighting and what they were protecting.</i></p> <p>Students may pick out the idealised image of home at the top, making the soldier’s experience mean something and have value. It is also an interesting depiction of a trench and could be used to contrast with either students’ expectations or what they have already learnt. The choice of language is also worth noting, e.g. Blighty – more informal, familiar and comforting, again making it worth fighting for.</p>
Letter from Private Charles Green	<p><i>By 1917, over 8 million letters were being sent each week – an average of nearly one a day for each soldier based in France. Normal delivery time from the UK was two to three days, while mail from the Front was slower due to censorship, and was on average six days. The proximity of the Western Front obviously helped this speed; it was much harder for soldiers further afield. For example, on average it took mail from Australia 50 days to reach the Western Front. Mail to British troops in Gallipoli, Salonica or Mesopotamia could take months and often arrived out of sequence.</i></p> <p>Things to draw out: <u>gratitude for parcels</u> (helps to break up the monotony of rations, reminds them of home, reminds them that people are thinking of them, etc.); discussion of <u>weather</u> (‘normality’ of conversation, knowing that people at home had similar weather helped them feel closer); <u>general chat</u> about other people (trying to maintain a sense of normality, trying to not feel isolated/excluded). The students may note that there is no discussion of fighting, death or conditions in the trenches – why not? (Not just because of the official censor; letters were often self-censored because of the recipient not wanting to upset or worry them further. It was also an opportunity to forget about it for a moment.) How well do students think letters would have helped soldiers to maintain their sense of identity?</p>
Metropolitan Borough of Poplar’s Military Service Tribunal Register	<p><i>Due to their sensitive nature, most tribunal records were destroyed after the First World War; however, some local authorities, including the Metropolitan Borough of Poplar (which included Bow, Bromley and the Isle of Dogs), preserved the records. Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives has digitised and indexed the Poplar Military Service Tribunal Register, and it is available at:</i></p> <p>www.ideastore.co.uk/local-history-archives-online-poplar-military-service-tribunal-register</p>

Contextual information about the additional sources

‘Some mascots and trifles that have saved lives’, <i>The War Illustrated</i> , Feb 1915	<p><i>The War Illustrated was a British war magazine published in London by William Berry. It was first released on 22 August 1914, 18 days after the United Kingdom declared war on Germany, and regular issues continued throughout the First World War.</i></p> <p>The commonality of mascots is evident here and feeds into the psychological means of coping, as argued by Alex Watson. These mascots were an element of the superstitious belief that became a common feature of trench life.</p>
British Army form A2042: the field service postcard (FSPC)	<p><i>These were issued soon after the start of the War and were pre-printed in order to bypass the time-consuming censorship – this meant that messages could reach home in only a day or two. By 1917, 4,000 postal staff processed nearly nine million soldiers’ letters and postcards per week, with over 2,000 bags of mail being received from Britain. To help keep up morale, soldiers and their families could send postcards and letters (weighing less than 4oz) without any postage being paid.</i></p>

	<p>It is worth pointing out the top instruction (nothing is to be written on this side) – why do the students think that this was included? Why would the field service postcards be so popular? Would this type of postcard help them to feel connected to home? How well do students think that this would help a soldier to cope?</p>
<p>Map of Hohenzollern Redoubt</p>	<p>With this source, it is the names of some of the trenches that are of interest – for example, Inverness Trench, Sussex Trench, Lancashire Trench, Gordon Alley and Stansfield Road. By naming (or often renaming) their environment, it helped soldiers to feel like they had a small amount of control (in a situation in which they rarely had any), as well as maintaining their links with home. How well do students think that this would have helped soldiers to maintain their sense of identity?</p>
<p>Photo of soldier watering plants</p>	<p><i>The Edwardian love of gardening also pushed men to adorn trenches with flowers and, in some cases, influenced how units buried their dead. The Devonshire Regiment memorialised the sacrifices of its soldiers in the early days of the Battle of the Somme by planting Devonshire flora in the cemetery that they built at Mansell Copse.</i></p> <p>Students might comment on how surprising this photo is. They should spot the duckboards and sandbags identifying it as a trench; however, it contrasts significantly with other images of the trenches and perhaps with a lot of what they have learnt. Soldiers grew plants for a sense of normality and control and as a way of reminding them of home – to help them feel connected but also to remind them of why they were fighting. Questions might include: How common was it? How close to the front was it?</p>
<p>Photo of men playing football</p>	<p><i>It took quite a while for organised recreation to become possible. The strains of the War at the beginning and end of the conflict meant that this might have been very infrequent. Nevertheless, generally speaking, when possible such events took place throughout the year when men were behind the lines. It is important that the students realise that the men spent most of their time out of the trenches. During certain parts of the year, particularly if men were in rest areas, where camps would generally have a parade ground that was transformed into a pitch, they might have been a daily occurrence. There were competitions within battalions, where each company had a team. Battalions also had teams that competed in competitions at brigade, division or even army level. These were used as entertainment for the men, but were also an opportunity to nurture morale and encourage esprit de corps. It was not just football: there were also rugby games, athletic meets, mixed sports that combined military training, horse racing, etc. On top of sport, there were also travelling cinemas, and many divisions had their own theatre companies, named, for example, 'The Follies'. In Le Havre, one of the main ports of entry and a huge British base, there was even an annual vegetable show in 1917 and 1918.</i></p> <p>Students might comment on the numbers involved and the lack of clear teams or pitch – what does that tell us? That the formalities of the game were far less important than the playing and the pleasure to be gained from it.</p>
<p>Commemorative stone to conscientious objectors</p>	<p><i>This commemorative stone was placed in Tavistock Square, London in 1994 by the Peace Pledge Union to commemorate the struggle of conscientious objectors past and present.</i></p> <p>If possible, show the class the stone without telling them what it is. What do they think it might be? Who might it be about? When they know a bit more about conscription and conscientious objectors, ask them whether they think it is appropriate.</p>

References

Mountain Horse, M. (1979) *My People the Bloods* (edited by Hugh A. Dempsey), Calgary and Standoff: Glenbow-Alberta Institute and Blood Tribal Council

Pennell, C. (2016) 'Learning lessons from war? Inclusions and exclusions in teaching First World War history in English secondary schools' in *History & Memory*, 28, no. 1, pp. 36–70

Watson, A. (2008) *Enduring the Great War: combat, morale and collapse in the German and British armies, 1914–1918*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press