

INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR ON YOUR LOCALITY AT KEY STAGE 3

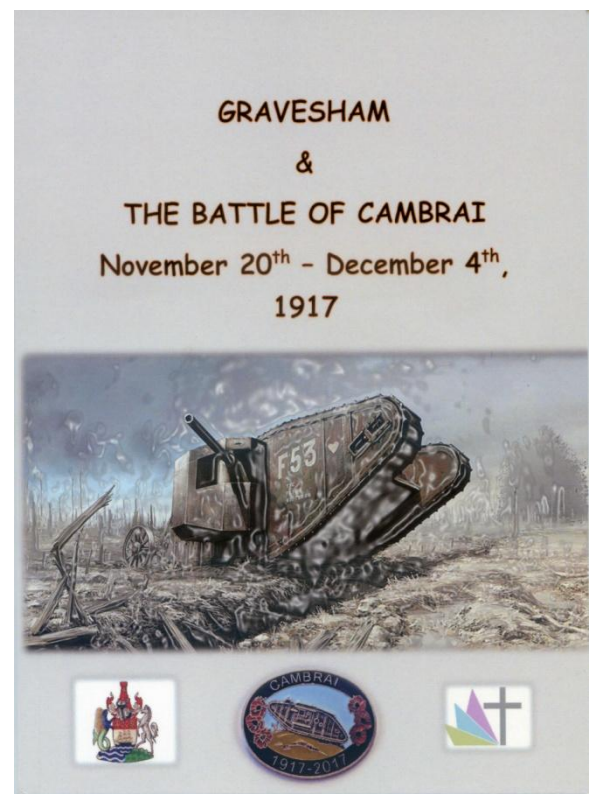
Andy Harmsworth and Colm Murphy

These materials are based upon a local history project, supported by the Ian Coulson Bursary, which was carried out at St John's Catholic Comprehensive School, Gravesend in 2017-8. Using the names on their local war memorial as a starting point, Year 9 students carried out research to produce biographies of soldiers from their local area who died in action during the First World War. With the help of local historians and surviving family members, they used a variety of sources including local newspapers, census returns and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website. A visit to the First World War battlefields and cemeteries was included as part of the project. The students' work culminated in the publication of the biographies on a website and in a commemorative book, 'Gravesham and the Battle of Cambrai, November 20 – December 4 1917'. The project was also subsequently expanded to include other neighbourhood schools.

This approach, which requires approximately 10 hours of lesson time, could be used as a stand-alone local History study or as part of a wider study of the First World War. The examples in this guidance relate to schools in north Kent but the approach can be used by any school in the country. Although the project was designed for KS3 students, this guidance can easily be adapted for younger or older pupils. It is divided into the following sections:

1. **Aims and objectives** (page 2)
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 - (a) **The Commonwealth War Graves Commission** (pages 5-6)
 - (b) **Investigating personal lives** (pages 7-8)
 - (c) **Involving the local community** (page 9)
 - (d) **Using the Ancestry website** (pages 9 –10)
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6. **Taking the investigation further** (page 13)

A student booklet and scheme of work are available as separate downloads.



The front cover of the commemorative booklet produced by students at St John's Catholic School

1. Aims and objectives:

For students to:

- find out about the impact of the First World War upon their locality
- carry out historical research using a variety of sources
- record and present information in appropriate ways
- improve their literacy
- develop their research and communication skills
- develop a personal understanding of remembrance

2. How to prepare your students for the enquiry:

During the investigation your students will need:

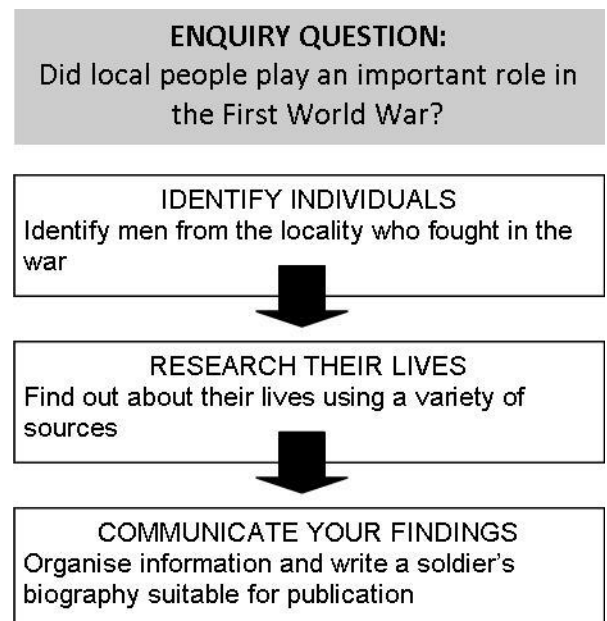
- a digital camera (a phone camera will be fine)
- a computer with internet access
- access to a printer and scanner
- writing materials
- a folder to store print-outs and their written work
- visits to their local war memorial and nearest main library

They will benefit from some prior knowledge about the First World War, especially conditions on the Western Front.

You could introduce the investigation by asking your students how we today can find out about the lives of people who lived 100 years ago. Allow them several minutes to brainstorm and discuss their ideas which might include sources such as letters, diaries, newspapers and photographs. Then narrow the focus to ask them how we can find out if any local people fought in the First World War. The subsequent discussion might (with some prompting) include war memorials, the starting point for the investigation.

You could also show your students video footage of a recent Remembrance Sunday ceremony which is held every year at the Cenotaph. Ask them to discuss its purpose and what, if anything, it means to them. Do they or anyone in their family mark remembrance in any way – such as wearing a poppy?

Before starting the investigation you could explain to your students its main stages; they are summarised in the diagram.



The outcome of this investigation is for students to use their research findings to write a soldier's biography. This will involve organising their findings and then drafting and checking their work. You might want to ask students which biographies they have read and then discuss what they think makes a good biography (this is a genre which they will have studied at Key Stage 2); they could draw up a checklist of characteristics of successful biographical writing to which they can refer later on. You may find it helpful to adapt some of the following advice for your students:

www.essaytigers.com/how-write-biography-essay

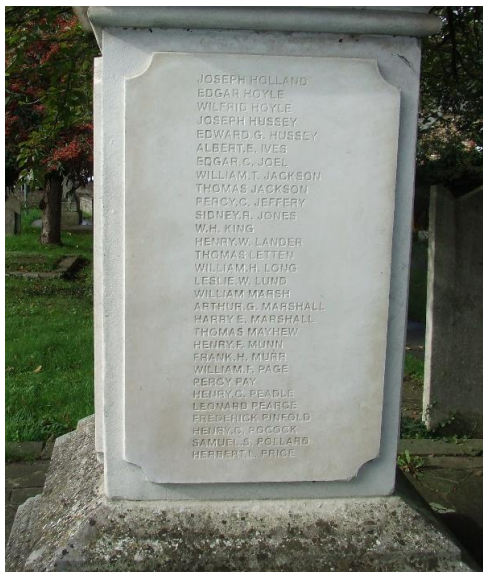
planningwithkids.com/wp-content/2012/06/PWK-How-to-write-a-Biography-v1.0.pdf

<https://tmked.com/product/writing-a-biography/>

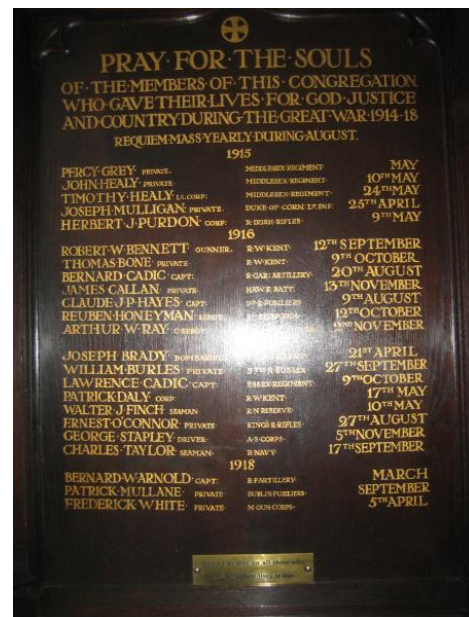
You could also at this stage show them what their completed biography will look like. This one was produced by students at St John's.

3. Using war memorials to identify individuals

The first stage of the investigation is for students to visit their local war memorial(s) in order to identify the names of local servicemen who died in action during the First World War. The number of war memorials to visit will depend on the size of the area you wish to cover. The pupils at St John's, for example, visited memorials in two local churches:



This memorial, at SS Peter & Paul, Milton-next-Gravesend, is in the grounds of the church.



This memorial, in the form of a wooden tablet, is inside St John's Catholic Church, Gravesend.

Bernard Francis Cadic Royal Garrison Artillery Service No. 4430, Captain

Bernard was born in 1894, the eldest son of Lieutenant Colonel Ludvic 'Louis' Stephen and Ellen Cadic of Manor House, Chalk. Ludovic was born in Guernsey in 1868. He served with the Royal Engineers and after an army career settled to civilian life, no doubt using the expertise gained in the army, as a manager in road contracting. Ellen hailed from Boston, Lincoln-shire and was a year older than her husband. The couple married in 1894 and had four children – Bernard, Lawrence, born in 1897, Agnes, born in 1905 and Oswald, born in 1910. Oswald, born on April 7th, would become an early aviation flyer – being awarded his Royal Aeronautical Club aviators' certificate on June 24th, 1934. He took his test in a Gipsy 1 at the Gravesend School of Flying. He would be tragically killed on May 1st, 1936. He is buried in the family grave in Gravesend Cemetery.



Bernard was educated at St Lawrence College, Ampleforth and University College, London. In 1911 he enlisted in the Kent (Gravesend) Territorial Royal Garrison Artillery being promoted Captain in 1915. After being wounded he returned to England for treatment. He died in hospital on August 20th, 1916 and is buried in Gravesend Cemetery. His death was as a result of a fall; at the time he was suffering from depression the consequence of his wounds, time at the front and influenza.

GR 26/8/16 [Andrew Marshall]



Terrible Fall at Fort Pitt.
YOUNG OFFICER'S SAD DEATH.
DEPRESSION AFTER INFLUENZA,
TRENCH FEVER, AND WOUNDS.

Students will need to know that not all of the information on war memorials is completely accurate. Sometimes the information was not copied accurately, sometimes it was transmitted by word of mouth. This will account for some inconsistencies which they may find later in their research. Note also that some servicemen are listed on more than one memorial.

4. Researching their lives

The next, and biggest, phase of the investigation is to use a variety of sources to find out as much as possible about the lives of the servicemen.

(a) The Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The best place to start is the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) website. It is free to use. The CWGC was first established in 1917 as the Imperial War Graves Commission to individually commemorate the British army soldiers who died in The Great War including those whose bodies were never recovered. Today it cares for cemeteries and memorials of 1.7 million people at 23,000 locations in more than 150 countries.

Students should use the database at the CWG website - <https://www.cwgc.org/find/find-war-dead> - to find out information about their servicemen which they can enter on their spreadsheet. They might find other material about him, such as a citation. There are video tutorials on how to use the site available here:

<https://www.cwgc.org/find/find-war-dead-and-cemeteries/how-to-search>

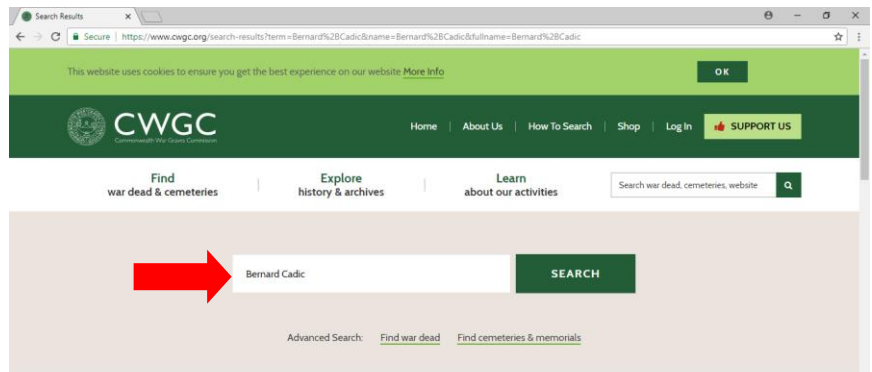
Students might find that some information is missing; the CWGC site is very comprehensive but not complete. When they have found details of their soldier they can download a commemorative certificate and a cemetery plan to see exactly where his grave is situated.

See the next page for student instructions.

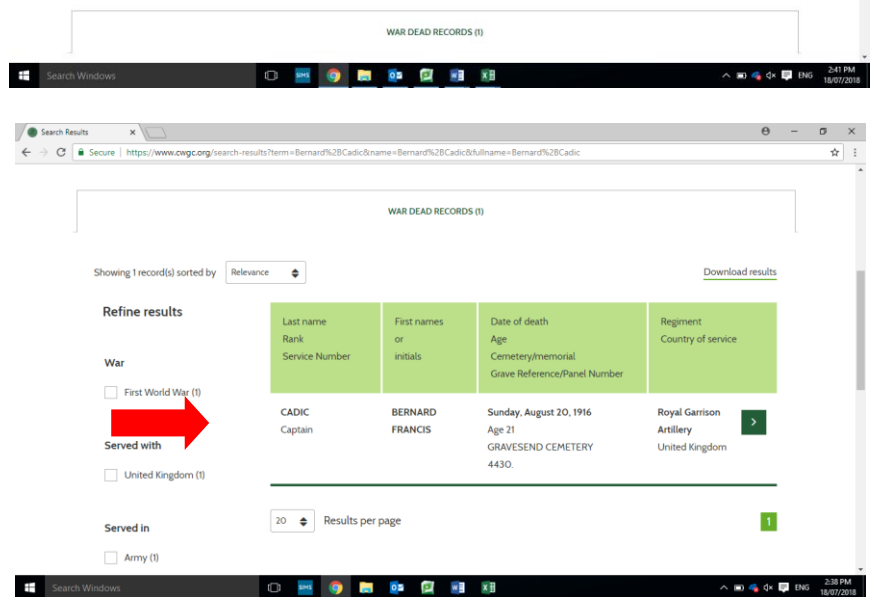
The image shows a screenshot of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) website homepage. The browser's address bar shows the URL <https://www.cwgc.org/>. The website has a green header with the CWGC logo and navigation links: Home, About Us, How To Search, Shop, Log In, and SUPPORT US. Below the header, there are three main navigation tabs: 'Find war dead & cemeteries', 'Explore history & archives', and 'Learn about our activities'. A red arrow points to the 'Find' tab. A search bar is located to the right of these tabs. The main content area features a large banner with the text 'COMMEMORATING THE FALLEN' and 'Is there someone or somewhere you are trying to find?'. Below this is a search bar with the placeholder text 'Search war dead, cemeteries, website' and a green 'SEARCH' button. At the bottom of the page, there is a 'FEATURED' section with several small image thumbnails. A text box on the left side of the screenshot says 'To get started click on the 'Find' tab'. Another text box at the bottom right says 'The home page of the CWGC website'.

Using the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website

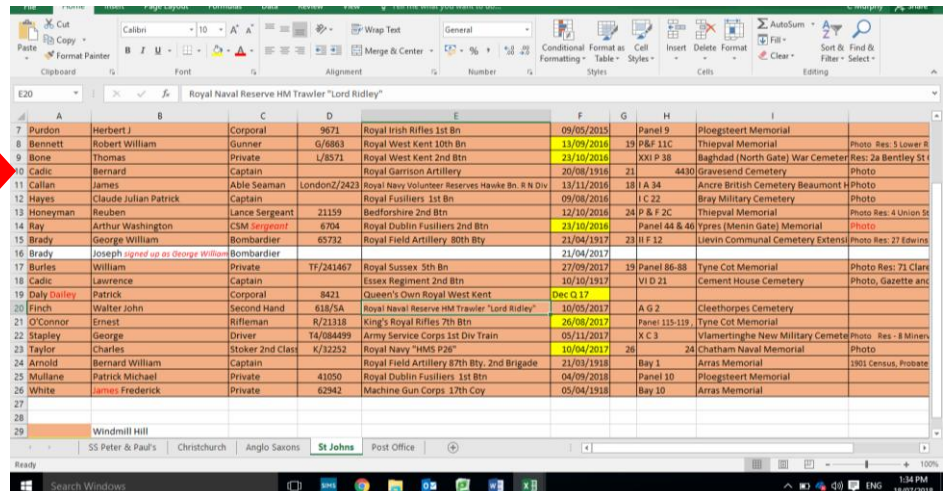
1. Enter the name of your serviceman:



2. Study the results:



3. Copy relevant information into the spreadsheet:



(b) Investigating personal lives

The next stages of the investigation are concerned with finding out about the personal life of the serviceman, using a variety of sources. Students could record the information they find on a 'Personal Information Sheet' like the one below.

Information Gathering Sheet – Personal Life	
CWGC site	
Name of soldier	
Rank	
Service Number	
Regiment/Battalion	
Date of death	
Age at death if known	
Where he is buried	
Ancestry records	
Father's name	
Occupation	
Where was he born?	
When was he born?	
Mother's name	
Mother's maiden name	
Occupation if any	
Where was she born?	
When was she born?	

Soldier			
Name		Year of birth	Place of birth
Brothers and sisters			
	Name	Year of birth	Place of birth
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
Is there a service record? What information can you get from it?			
Effects left to			
Any other information:			

Continue on a separate sheet if necessary

(c) Involving the local community

This project has great potential for getting the local community involved:

- Contact your Local History Society; they may have an expert on the First World War and the locality who would be willing to come into school to talk to, and perhaps work with, your students.
- Inform parents about the project in your school newsletter, including the names of the soldiers your students are researching. There may be descendants in the area who can provide further information including photographs.
- You could also write to town councillors to inform them about the project and see what help they might be able to provide.

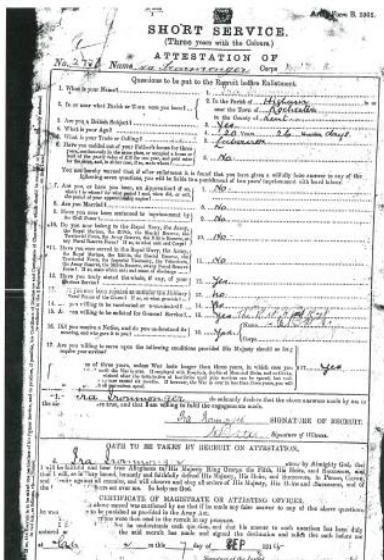
(d) Using the Ancestry website

Ancestry is a well known family history website: <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/> It is a subscription-based service but schools can apply for periods of free access. Note that you can make further use of this site when researching war diaries (see page 11). For further details contact the Ancestry Library Team well in advance (at least 7 working days): alt@ancestry.com

When your students have logged onto the site they should look up the **Military Service Records** (Pension Records) for their serviceman; they could be in any of the following sections:

- [UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919](#)
- [UK, Army Roll of Honour, 1939-1945](#)
- [UK, De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour, 1914-1924](#)
- [British Commonwealth War Graves Registers, 1914-18](#)
- [Ireland, Casualties of World War I, 1914-1922](#)
- [Great Britain, Royal Naval Division Casualties of The Great War, 1914-1924](#)
- [UK Naval Officer and Rating Service Records, 1802-1919](#)
- [British Army WWI Service Records, 1914-1920](#)
- [Pension Records](#)
- [Awards & Decorations of Honour](#)

This should provide them with information about his family, where he lived and where he enlisted which they can record on their Personal Information Sheet. It will also enable them to check the accuracy of the information they recorded on their spreadsheet.



The Attestation paper (a form completed upon enlistment) is usually the first page in the service / pension records.

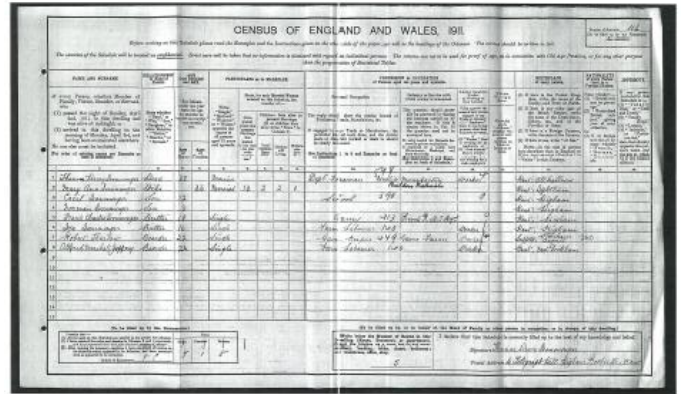
These records give the soldier's service details as well as his height, weight, chest size, complexion and colour of hair and eyes.

Next students should use the **census returns for 1901 and 1911** to find out more about the serviceman and his family background:

[U.K. Census Collection](#)

The census returns will provide information about his home address, family members, ages, marital status and occupations. By comparing information in the 1901 and 1911 surveys students might find changes in family circumstances. Again they should record relevant information on their Personal Information Sheet. They might find further useful information in these other parts of the site:

- [England and Wales, Birth, Marriage and Death Indexes, 1837-2005](#)
- [UK Parish Records](#)
- [Birth, Baptism & Christening](#)
- [Marriage & Divorce](#)
- [Death, Burial, Cemetery & Obituaries](#)



A page from the 1911 census

(e) Using the local library

The next part of the investigation is a visit to your local main library. You will need to arrange the visit beforehand and inform the librarian of the materials you would like to be made available for your students. You will probably use the Reference Section of the Library where students need to be aware that members of the public will be working and strict quiet needs to be observed. The material is usually stored on microfilm/microfiche – library staff will give instructions on how to use the facilities/reading machines.

Tell your students they will be looking through local newspapers to find the obituary or memorium of their serviceman. These were usually published within two or three weeks of a soldier being listed as dead or missing in action. They often include a photograph. When they find what they are looking for, they should ask for a print-out to take away and add relevant details to their Personal Information Sheet.



**Pte. R. Lewis (Gravesend),
London Regiment (Royal Fusiliers).
REPORTED MISSING.**
Mrs. R. Lewis, of 15, Alfred Road, Gravesend, will be grateful for any information relating to her son, Pte. Reginald Lewis, of the London Regiment (Royal Fusiliers), who has been missing since the "push" of August 16th. He is in his 21st year, proceeded to France in August, 1916, but returned in November with dysentery and shell shock. Recovering went back to France, in June. Before the war he was for about ten years engaged as a sorter at Gravesend Post Office, where he was held in high regard.

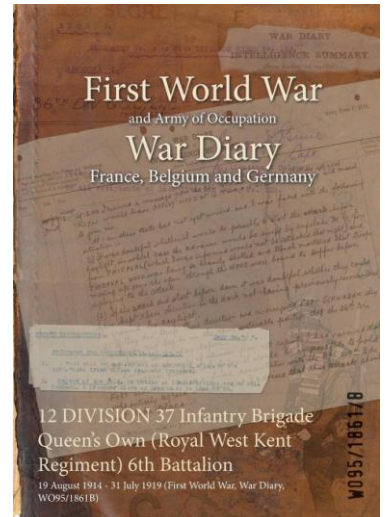
From the Gravesend Reporter, 20
September 1916

(f) Using War Diaries

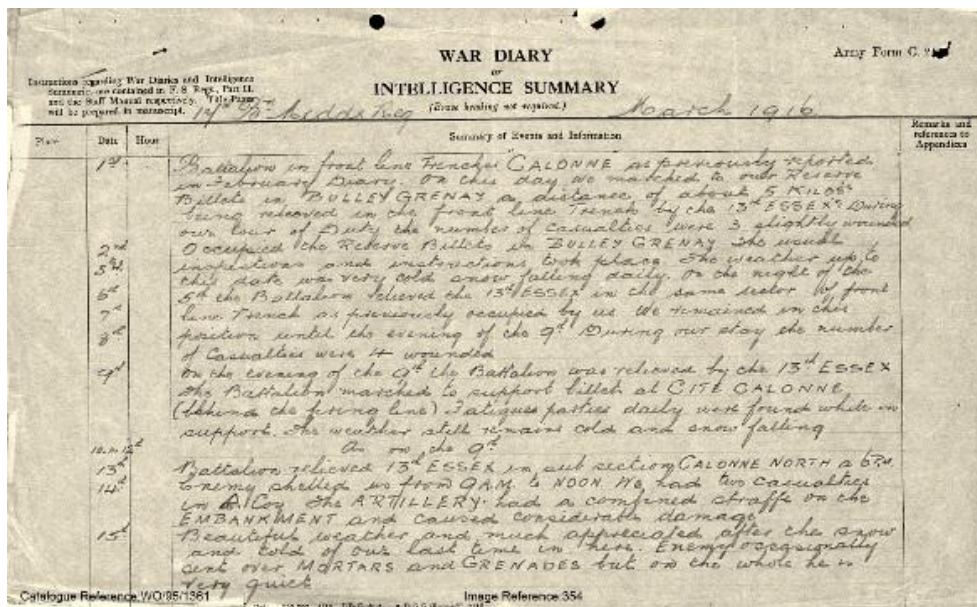
Every army unit on active service was required by law to keep a war diary. It was usually compiled on a monthly basis and would provide, for example, descriptions of life at the front and a record of the part the unit played in a battle, listing the number of men who went into action and the number of casualties. Sketches, messages and maps might also be included. War diaries were used by senior officers for intelligence about the enemy and for planning future operations. You can find out more information and advice about war diaries here:

<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/research/military-records/british-army-war-diary.htm>

Some war diaries have been published as books but many of them are now available online. In addition Histories of particular Regiments and Units are available.



The next stage of your students' investigation is to use a war diary to add further layers of detail to what they already know about their serviceman's life. They are **not** personal diaries and the war diary for their serviceman's battalion or brigade might not mention him by name but it will still provide useful background information about where he was based and military operations he was involved in. Students will need to know the name of their serviceman's battalion or brigade; if they only know the regiment they will probably have to search through the war diaries of all the battalions of that regiment. Again they should record any useful information they find on their Personal Information Sheet (which by now could have expanded to several sheets).



Students will find war diaries at the following sites:

- <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/> (see page 9)
- The National Archives, allows you to view low-resolution diaries online but currently (2018) charges £3.50 to download a printable pdf version :
- **Find my Past**, another subscription-based family history site : www.findmypast.co.uk
- **The Naval and Military Archive**, also subscription based: <http://www.nmarchive.com/search-the-war-diaries>

They should also carry out an internet search to see if any books about the History of their serviceman's regiment or brigade are available – either online or in printed form.

5. Writing the biography

Now is the time for students to gather their information together and write their biography. If you have not already done so, discuss with them the genre of biographical writing and what makes a good biography – otherwise remind them of the main results of their earlier discussion (see page 3).

Remind students of the advantages of using word-processing software and of the value of drafting, checking and redrafting their work. Provide them with an agreed set of ground rules for writing their biography, for example:

Ground rules for writing your biography:	
Content	Style
<p>The title should consist of :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the name of the serviceman his regiment or battalion his service number and rank <p>The text should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> personal details - where and when he was born, family background: parents and family, ages [date of birth] and occupations, family home, details of marriage and any children service - where and when he enlisted, dates of service and any injuries/wounds, battalion/regiment history death -where, when and how he died, where he is buried or commemorated on a memorial <p>Include one or two relevant images Write a caption for each image</p>	<p>Your biography should be written:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in the past tense in the third person in mainly chronological order in your own words; quotations should be clearly acknowledged with quotation marks in two or three paragraphs with a short introduction and a short conclusion using accurate historical information in a lively and interesting way to interest readers <p>Double check your spelling, punctuation and grammar</p>
	Presentation
	<p>Lay out your text, images and captions on one side of A4 using suitable fonts and font sizes, in an appropriate number of columns with images suitably positioned on the page.</p>

The final proof-reading should be carried out by an adult to check:

- it is written in a lively and interesting way to engage readers
- it is based on accurate historical information
- grammar, punctuation and spelling are accurate

Now your students' biographies can be published in a form of your choice, for example in a class booklet, a part of the school website or as a classroom or school display.

6. Taking the investigation further

There are several ways in which you could take this investigation further:

- discuss with your students whether their investigation has changed their attitude towards remembrance in any way, and if so why.
- during their research your students may well identify other lines of enquiry to pursue. At St John's, for example, students found out that several local soldiers were involved in the Battle of Cambrai in 1917, the first battle in which tanks were used on a large scale. Coincidentally, Gravesham is twinned with Cambrai and students were working at the time of the battle's centenary. Their subsequent research on the battle was included in their commemorative booklet.
- a visit to the First World War battlefields and cemeteries in Northern France and Belgium will provide students with an opportunity to visit the graves and memorials of the soldiers whose lives they have researched. This will provide added poignancy to their experience. Try to finish the day with the Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate in Ypres (Ieper), Belgium. This takes place at 8pm every evening and will provide a moving and memorable climax to their investigation. If you are going on an organised visit try to go with a firm which you have had personally recommended to you. The Royal British Legion website has further information about school visits and a range of learning resources to download:
<https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/remembrance/schools-learning/remembrance-travel-for-schools/>
- you could ask your students to share their findings with the rest of the school in an assembly and/or organise an exhibition and presentation for parents and other interested adults
- some of your students might be interested in sharing the results of their research with a local or national online site which is dedicated to preserving the memory of soldiers who fought during the First World War; for example 'Lives of the First World War', a project run by the Imperial War Museum:
<https://www.iwm.org.uk/projects-partnerships/lives-of-the-first-world-war>
- like St John's, you could share your expertise with other local schools and help their teachers organise their own investigations into the lives of soldiers from their locality.



Students from St John's find the names of soldiers they had researched on the Menin Gate during a visit to Ypres (Ieper) in 2017.