

Learning the Lessons of War

On the 21st of September, 1914, The Times Newspaper published Laurence Binyon's poem *The Fallen*. His words 'We will remember them' took on a life of their own as family, friends, comrades and communities sought to make real the memory of the individual sacrifice that had been made in the Great War.

Keeping those memories alive is the mission of organisations such as our own Western Front Association (*perpetuating the memory, courage and comradeship of those, on all sides, who served their country in France and Flanders*ⁱ) and the British Legion (*safeguarding the welfare, interests and memory of those who have served*ⁱⁱ)

All recognise that to safeguard and perpetuate these memories working with and informing young people is essential. Indeed this is one of the main aims behind The Friends of Lochnagar websiteⁱⁱⁱ. "The Friends have been encouraged by the profound mature statements left by so many students in the visitors book at the site of the Lochnagar Crater. One of the reasons for the creation of this website is to make available to teachers and students basic information on what happened on this sector of the Somme Battlefield on July 1st 1916. Over recent years, there has been an increasing number of visits to Lochnagar Crater by schools and these are set to continue in the near future. No doubt the inclusion of the study of the First World War in the syllabi of many of the secondary schools has brought about this trend."

At Key Stage 3, for pupils in Years 7 to 9 (the 'old' 1st, 2nd and 3rd year of secondary school) the National Curriculum^{iv} provides guidance for a World Study After 1900 that can include specifically the 'Western Front in the First World War'. A visit to the National Curriculum website will give a flavour of what is taught within this unit of study. "In this unit pupils learn about the main conflicts of the twentieth century by identifying key ideas and themes and making links and connections, particularly between the First World War, the Second World War and the Cold War. The unit focuses on the widespread impact of these conflicts through the examination of specific events, the personal experiences of individuals and a wide range of visual and written sources."

At Key Stage 4, for pupils in Years 10 and 11 who take history as an option choice, many schools are increasingly choosing Modern World History as the GCSE area of study. Schools have a choice of examination boards^v and their individual websites provide details of the taught syllabus^{vi}. My own school follows AQA Modern World History, History B, which allows pupil coursework to be based entirely upon an examination of primary source material about the Western Front.^{vii}

Once History Departments have selected their syllabus, they may well look to the Internet for help in the delivery of classroom lessons.

The Spartacus Educational website^{viii}, the work of John Simkin, boasts a wealth of primary and secondary source material that no school classroom or library could hope to replicate. It is a very easy site to navigate through and the different topics on offer range

from a detailed chronology section through to specialist areas of study including the war at sea, on the home front and in the air.

A visit to the literature section gives you some idea of the material on offer here. Authors include Remarque, Junger, Kipling, Wells, Masefield, Chesterton, Housman, Newbolt, Bennett, Galsworthy and Forster. Journalists such as Ernest Swinton, Valentine Williams and Ernest Poole are represented as well as the famous and the less well known war poets. Newspaper reports including the Times, the Mirror and the German Kladderadatsch are to be found. And there are even a range of online lessons.

Speaking to John Simkin, it comes as something of a surprise to learn that the vast majority of 'surfers' who access the site do so from abroad and it is just as well to remember the international context in which the Internet operates.

A Virtual Museum, a Teachers' Guide to the Great War and Popular Culture^{ix} originates in America. The aim of the site is to explore those areas of Great War study that are commonly neglected in schools. "Most textbooks cover the diplomatic and military history of World War I well enough, but few give more than slight coverage to the cultural literary and artistic records of the war. Texts usually contain only a few photographs to illustrate the war, a few quotations from the literature and journals available, and possibly an example of the art produced at that time. This virtual museum is meant to bring to the interested entrant the resources now available on the World Wide Web. Not only are extensive photographic, artistic and literary resources available, but also this museum can access the audio resources of speeches and music. It is hoped that these electronic artifacts and information resources will augment classroom and textbook learning and pique the interests of students to examine the history from a more personal aspect."

Within the UK there are a number individual teachers who have led the way in the production of online resources for teaching.

Mr Field's School History^x site is stunning in its design and range of material, including resources related to a study of the First World War. R J Tar is a full-time teacher of history and politics at Wolverhampton Grammar School and is responsible for www.activehistory.co.uk^{xi}.

"I first began to use the Internet in my second year of teaching (1998), and quickly became aware of the potential it offered not only for research but also for interactive learning. Within a few months I had got a basic website up and running, and since then I have focused on creating interactive, online resources for teachers and students which can be used to 'spice up' traditional schemes of work or used as stand-alone units. I have created about 50 or so such activities which are freely available to anyone visiting the site."

The Danum School History Department Website^{xii} is a joy to explore and my own Tideway Community School site at www.fallenheroes.co.uk^{xiii} shows the kind of research

that is possible within school. No description of such sites should leave out that of the Simon Langton School^{xiv} website from Canterbury.

An important part of any study of the Great War is the experience of visiting the sites that pupils first encounter as words on the page of a textbook. Passmores School in Essex gives a good pupil account of a visit to the Menin Gate on its school website.^{xv} “The ceremony was particularly emotional because of the silence, the relevance to some of the party and because Passmores School was invited to lead the tribute. Headteacher Peter Jarman read the exhortation, flanked by two members of the school party, Stefan Henley and Eleanor Lilley, who then laid a wreath on behalf of the school. The group also led the one minute silence.”

Headteacher Peter Jarman said "I think that the solemnity of the occasion and the formality of the Last Post being played along with a crowd of around 2,000 people were factors that combined to bring home the enormity of the number of soldiers who lost their lives in the Ypres Salient. I felt that the visit was well worth while, was very educational and also ensured that many young people will remember our dead for many years. Involvement in the Last Post Ceremony was a great honour for the school. I was very pleased with the attitude and maturity of our students from Passmores. To use familiar words, I hope that our young students - and many others - will learn from this experience and from the courage of the many soldiers involved in the World Wars and develop their own courage to spend their lives in making a better world for others."

A diary extract from a pupil of Theale Green School makes for interesting reading.^{xvi} *“The graves were really sad, because some of the people were only a bit older than us and had died for us. It made you feel thankful too because if it weren’t for them, we would be under the rule of another country.”*

The Moulsham School^{xvii} website gives a good justification for such visits. “The visits to the trenches and the role play, in groups, carried out by the students as they carry out their studies of the region and its history ensure that they form a real appreciation of life in those times.”

For those schools or pupils unable to participate in a foreign visit, the web offers access to a good range of European and UK based museums including l’Historial in Peronne^{xviii}, In Flanders Fields in Ypres^{xix}, the Museum of the Shelters in Albert^{xx}, as well as our own Tank Museum^{xxi} at Bovington and Imperial War Museum^{xxii} in London.

ENDS

Jim Fanning 22/9/01

1500 words

ⁱ <http://www.westernfront.co.uk>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/welcome.cfm>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.friendsoflochnagar.co.uk>

^{iv} <http://www.nc.uk.net/home.html>

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- ^v http://www.s-cool.co.uk/teacher_boards.asp
- ^{vi} <http://www.aqa.org.uk>
- ^{vii} <http://www.fallenheroes.co.uk>
- ^{viii} <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWW.htm>
- ^{ix} <http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/wwivm/wwivmtg.htm>
- ^x <http://www.schoolhistory.co.uk/>
- ^{xi} <http://www.wgshistory.com/>
- ^{xii} <http://www.tdys00505.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/>
- ^{xiii} <http://www.fallenheroes.co.uk/>
- ^{xiv} http://www.members.xoom.com/slbs_mem
- ^{xv} <http://www.passmores.essex.sch.uk/school%20trips/ypres-may2001/ypres.htm>
- ^{xvi} <http://www.thealegreen.berks.sch.uk/news.htm#Ypres '98>
- ^{xvii} <http://www.moulsham-sec.essex.sch.uk/Pupil/Battle/Battle.htm>
- ^{xviii} <http://www.historial.org/>
- ^{xix} <http://www.inflandersfields.be/>
- ^{xx} <http://www.somme-1916.org/>
- ^{xxi} <http://www.tankmuseum.co.uk/education.html>
- ^{xxii} <http://www.iwm.org.uk/>