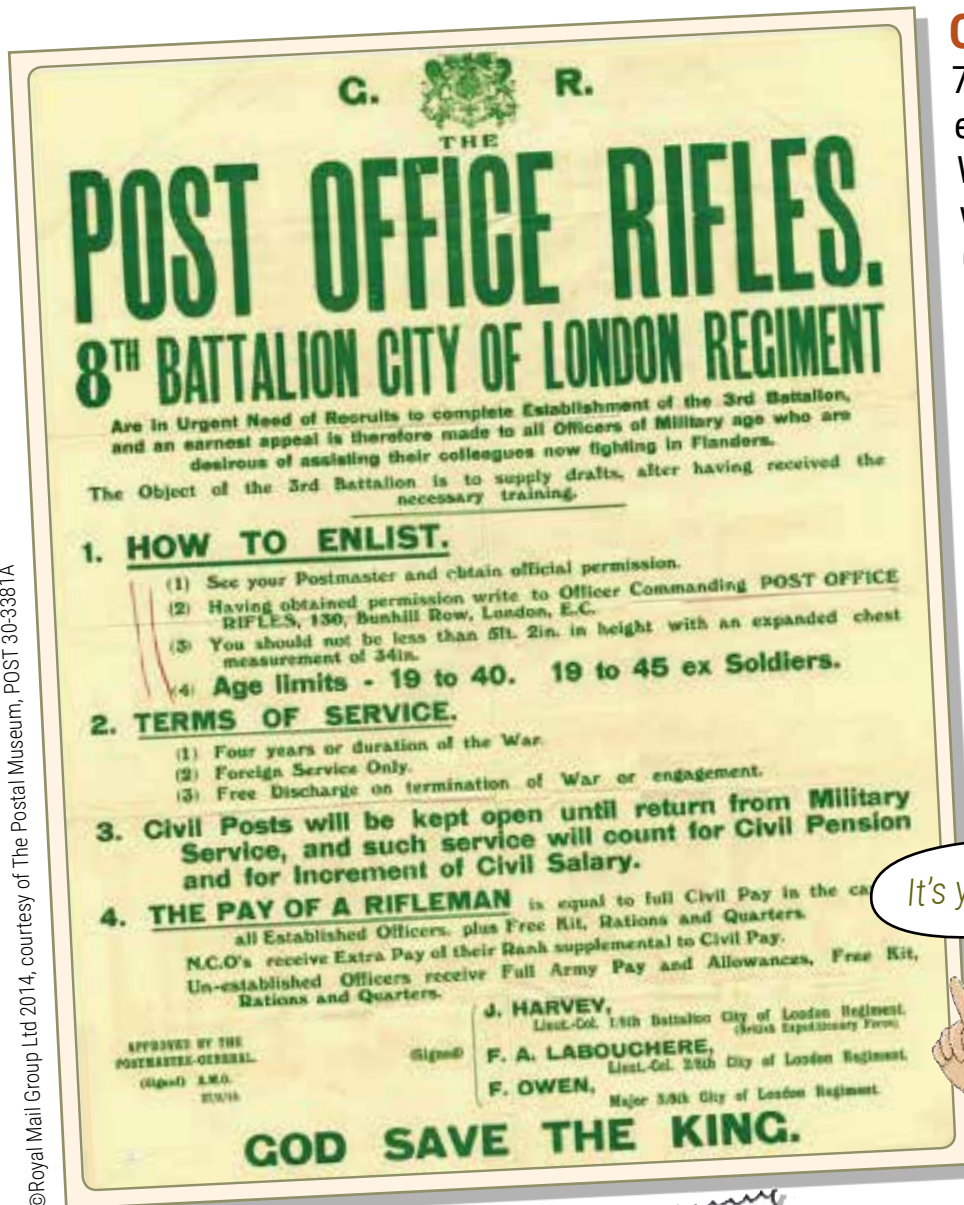


# THE POST OFFICE RIFLES

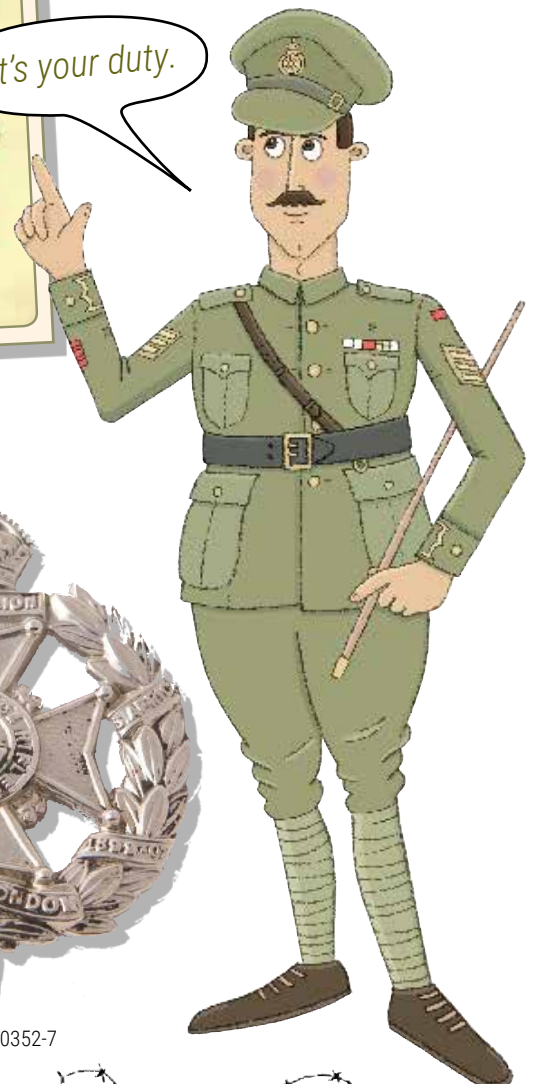
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## Off to war

75,000 General Post Office employees fought in the First World War including 12,000 workers who served in the General Post Office's own regiment, the Post Office Rifles (PORs).

Postal employees also joined the Army Postal Service (APS). The APS travelled with the British Army through all campaigns including the Dardenelles, Egypt, Palestine, Salonika (modern Thessaloniki), East Africa, Italy and North Russia.



## ▲ A recruitment poster for the PORs

## 'Britain Needs YOU'

The General Post Office played an important role in recruiting men for the armed forces throughout the war. The famous Lord Kitchener poster was displayed on Post Office vans, circulars appealed for men to join the PORs and recruitment rallies were held at Post Offices throughout Britain.

## ► The 8th Battalion Post Office Rifles regimental cap badge



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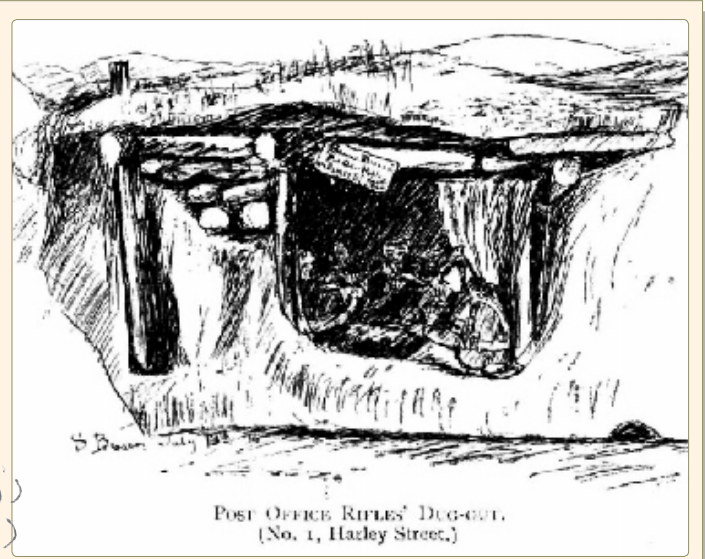


## On the Western Front

POR descriptions of fighting on the Front capture the grim realities of trench warfare.

*'We were shelled without stop, day and night... Our casualties became very heavy and to see pals you have known and worked with for years killed and wounded; it nearly broke our hearts – especially when the dead had to be buried in a quickly dug hole'*

**POR 1st Battalion,  
Battle of Festubert, May 1915**



### ▲ A POR dugout in the trenches

*'I thought you were a lot of stamp lickens, but the way you fought ... you went over like a lot of bloody savages'*

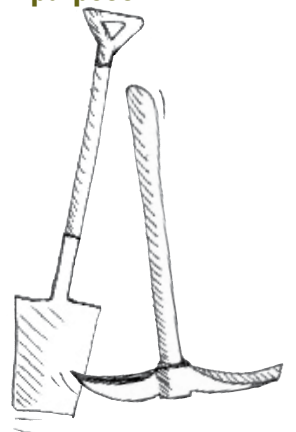
**Army Divisional General after an attack, 1917**

*'For several hours at a time, they [the enemy] would pound and tear at the parapets behind which the men crouched, unprotected by parades, with no head cover, not even a tin hat'*

**POR describes Battle of Passchendaele**



◀ **Conditions in Dartmoor were poor and COs were made to do heavy labour, often to no purpose**



©The Peace Pledge

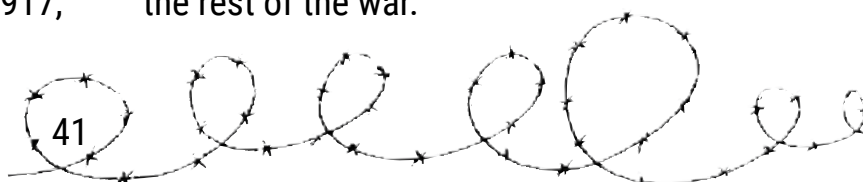
## Conscientious Objectors

Over 400 General Post Office employees who had strong anti-war beliefs became Conscientious Objectors (COs). Henry Horace Peacock was a Letter Sorter and a deeply religious man. Ordered to report to Mill Hill Barracks in 1917,

he refused to obey orders, pick up arms, put on a uniform or sign documents. As a result he was sentenced to hard labour first in Wormwood Scrubs and then in Dartmoor Prison Camp where he spent the rest of the war.



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## Battlefield wills

All soldiers were encouraged to write a will before leaving to fight. Many soldiers were teenagers and had nothing to leave to loved ones on their death.

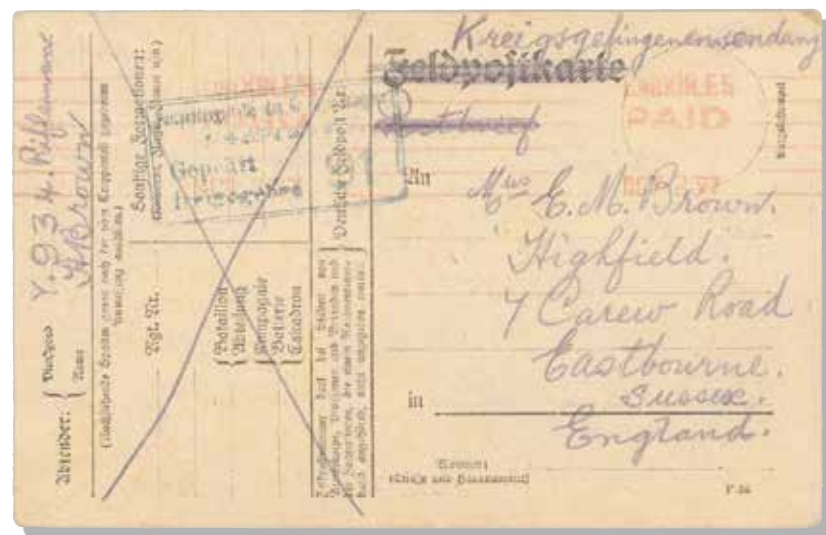
### ▼ POR prisoners of war, Germany



► Private Leonard Eldridge left a plant to his girlfriend and his army pay to his mother

## Prisoners of War

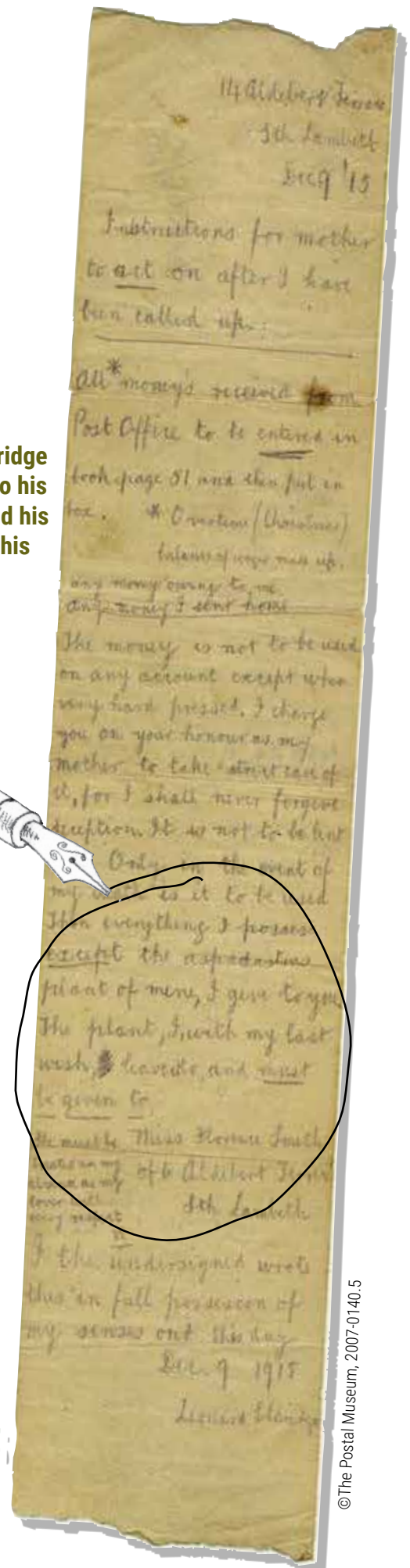
Many PORs who had left to fight were taken captive. Outward bound mail for British Prisoners of War (POWs), (and inward bound mail for German POWs), passed through neutral Holland.



### ▲ Postcard from a British POW in Germany to his mother

## Secret laboratories

All correspondence to German POWs was examined in a special laboratory to detect secret writing. In Britain, enemy prisoners could only write on glazed patterned paper that prevented the use of invisible ink. No envelopes and very few photographs or pictures were allowed.



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## Food parcels

The Post Office Relief Fund regularly sent food parcels to prisoners of war. Typically, they consisted of foodstuffs such as biscuits, jam, cheese and cocoa to help relieve a monotonous diet and to keep spirits up. Tinned receptacles were avoided in case the metal fell into enemy hands.

*'You should have seen the smile on my face when I opened the first parcel from the Post Office Relief Fund.'*

A soldier writing to his wife, 1915

## Mementoes

At Christmas in 1914, every soldier in the trenches received a tin containing gifts and a message from Princess Mary, daughter of George V, who had the idea. Soldiers could keep the tin and fill it with things that had special meaning to them.



▲ William Cox sent home this tin containing a button from the GPO uniform of a friend killed in action and a piece of shell that

*'burst over the office and dropped in the yard'*

© The Postal Museum, 2007-0141



▲ A winning design for a Roll of Honour erected by the General Post Office in 1917

## War memorials

The entire length of the Western Front is marked with graveyards and memorials to those who lost their lives in the First World War. Royal Mail and Post Office Ltd are custodians of around 300 war memorials commemorating postal workers who lost their lives in war.

## Awards for bravery

The Post Office Rifles received 145 awards for gallantry. The Victoria Cross, the highest military award was awarded to Sergeant A.J. Knight at the Third Battle of Ypres in France.

Three other GPO workers serving in other regiments also won the Victoria Cross. Major Henry Kelly and Sgt John Hogan who survived the war and returned to their jobs with the postal service and Sgt Albert Gill who was killed in 1916.



▲ Sgt Alfred Knight's Victoria Cross

© The Postal Museum, OB1997\_211\_1



▲ Captain Home Peel

## Killed in action

Sadly, on 24 March 1918, Captain Peel was killed in action near Longueval in France. This was one of the last German offensives of the war when 90,000 men were taken prisoner. The 8th Battalion Post Office Rifles lost over 300 men of all ranks killed, wounded or missing.

## ▼ Captain Home Peel's obituary

### Westchester Medal Verification Service

35 EDGEWOOD RD.  
PEEKSKILL, N.Y.  
10566



T. KISSANE  
R. CRAWFORD

#### OBITUARY.

"Captain Home Peel, D.S.O., M.C., London Regiment, was reported missing on 24th of March and is now officially reported killed on that date, was the only son of Mr. & Mrs. Charles Peel of Fairview, Buntingford, and privately, and 1895, he was educated at Charterhouse and privately, and entered the India Office in 1906. He became assistant private secretary to the Secretary of State. In the following year he was appointed private secretary to the Parliamentary Under Secretary, and in 1912 was promoted senior clerk. He obtained leave to join the army in September 1914, and was given a commission on 29th October, 1915. He was gazetted adjutant on 29th October, 1915, and was attached to the Staff from July 1916 to July 1917 and was attached to his regiment during the battle of the Somme. Appointed Staff Captain in July 1917 and Brigadier Major 15th November, 1917. Captain Peel was awarded the Military Cross in January 1916 and the Distinguished Service Order last January, and was three times mentioned in Despatches. He married in 1913, Gweneth, elder daughter of Lord and Lady Emmott, and leaves two daughters."

London Times, 15th May, 1918

# CAPTAIN HOME PEEL

Home Peel joined the PORs as a Second Lieutenant in the 8th Battalion in 1914. In May 1915, he was promoted to Lieutenant and in the same month was awarded the Military Cross for 'gallantry in action' at Festubert, France.



©The Postal Museum,  
OB1997.212.1

## ◀ Medals awarded to Home Peel

### High flyer

In 1916, Home Peel took part in the Battle of the Somme in France, and was mentioned in 'despatches'. He became a Captain and Adjutant (an administrative assistant to a superior office) then finally Brigade Major in 1917.

## A humanitarian gesture

A letter of comfort written on German military stationery was sent to Mrs. Peel by E.F. Gayler, a German officer who may have lived in England both before and after the war:

*"Although enemy and sometimes deeply hurt by the ridiculous tone of your home press, I feel it a human duty to communicate this sad news. Capt. Peel was killed in action near Longueval and died, as it seems by the wounds received, without suffering."*

► Captain Peel's widow wanted to purchase his field grave - the piece of land where he had fallen. Unfortunately his body had been moved to the Guards' cemetery near Les Boeuf in France





▲ Harry Brown in the uniform of the 2nd Kings Royal Rifle Corps, taken before he set off to fight in France

## RIFLEMAN HARRY BROWN

Rifleman Harry Brown was a soldier in the King's Royal Rifle Corps. Although he was not a POR, the British Postal Museum & Archives holds valuable documentation about him in Field Service postcards and letters (some returned unopened), as well as official correspondence.

### A prisoner of war

Harry's mother, Mrs E.M. Brown, wrote to her son throughout the war. On 12th July 1917 her letter was returned with 'Missing 10-7-17' written on the envelope. She immediately wrote to the Red Cross asking for information and had her letter acknowledged on 30th July, with the promise that enquiries were being made.

Harry had been captured after a battle at Nieuport les Bains in France on 10th July 1917. On 31st August he wrote a postcard from a German prisoner of war camp reassuring his mother of his good health and saying,

*'Don't worry about me as I have finished with the war'.*

Gefchrieben, den August 31 1917  
Dear Mother,  
I am in good health + if you  
send to the address below it will find me  
No doubt my last card reached you + I am  
looking forward very much to hear how all  
of you are getting on. The Post Office will  
give me some very particulars if you are in doubt  
when forwarding anything. I have been here for  
all and kindle Peter and Alice, but mine all at present  
Don't worry about me as I have finished with the war  
Give my love to May + all at West End. I don't love to talk to you  
Y. 934 Rfn H. Brown  
2nd Kings Royal Rifle Corps.  
Postbriefangestelle  
Limburg an Lahn  
Deutschland.

▲ The postcard sent by Harry from a prisoner of war camp in Beyreuth, Germany

Sadly, a letter sent to Mrs Brown on 17th February 1919 gave her the awful news that her son had died of inflammation of the lungs on 27th November, just 16 days after the end of the war.



▲ Sgt Alfred Knight in uniform with medal ribbon

## SERGEANT ALFRED KNIGHT

Sergeant Alfred Knight joined the General Post Office as a clerical assistant in 1909. In 1912, he moved to Nottingham with the Post Office Engineers and in 1914 joined the PORs.

### Wurst Farm Ridge

During the Battle for Wurst Farm Ridge (Third Battle of Ypres) on 20 September 1917, when more than half the POR fighting force was killed, Sergeant Knight single-handedly captured an enemy position.

*'Showing no regard for his own personal safety'*

he took control of his unit and others when their officers were killed or wounded.

### The Victoria Cross

Alfred Knight was later promoted to Second Lieutenant. He was one of four General Post Office employees, and the only Post Office Rifle to win the Victoria Cross.



In 1920, Sergeant Knight returned to the General Post Office and was transferred to the Ministry of Labour. He retired in 1951.

◀ Sgt Alfred Knight in action on Wurst Farm Ridge painted by Terence Cuneo

ALFRED KNIGHT WAY 15

▲ Alfred Knight Way, in Birmingham, Alfred Knight's home town

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## SERGEANT THOMAS MAY

Thomas May entered the General Post Office as a telegram boy aged about 14 and in 1915 joined the PORs.

During the war, Thomas kept a diary. This extract shows the discomfort, cold and hunger encountered while on the move to France after enlisting.

### ▲ Sergeant Thomas May

*Wed 17th March 1915: Paraded at 2am. Marched to Watford and entrained for Southampton at 6am. Arrived at Southampton 10.30am. Stayed in docks all day without food, and embarked on the S.S. Atlanta 7.55pm.*

*Thurs 18th: Arrived in Harve Harbour after a smooth passage but by no means comfortable. Taken to Canva Camp 2 miles situated very high, here we stopped for 24 hours. Very Cold.*

*Fri 19th 12.15pm: Left camp taken to Rly [railway] siding at Harve, here we stopped til 4.30pm entrained 37 men in each truck most uncomfortable journey. Lasted 23 hours.*

*Sat 20th: Detrained at Berguelte. Left here at 4pm for Auchel 3 hours march. Here we were put into Billets, by no means a clean place this I think is due to it being a coal mining village.*

*Sun 21st Parade at 9am: C.G. inspection, after this a short march, Officers Pow Wow on surrounding Country. At 2pm we had a practice alarm.*

*Mon 22nd: We were to have paraded at 10.30am and after waiting 4 hours Sir John French arrived and inspected the Battalion.*

### Survived

Although badly wounded in the trenches by shrapnel, Sergeant May survived and eventually returned to the General Post Office, retiring in 1952.

**Overview of the lesson:**

This KS2/3 Design & Technology activity is linked to Royal Mail's online database of the war memorials in its care and launched to mark the centenary of the First World War. [www.royalmailmemorials.com](http://www.royalmailmemorials.com) provides searchable information of around 300 memorials and their inscriptions.

Remembering the Fallen tasks pupils with designing a memorial to one of the men featured in the case studies.

**Before undertaking this activity, pupils are likely to have:**

- ◆ Researched the database for information on the men featured in the Case Studies (see pages 44-47)
- ◆ Searched the database for memorials in the school's location
- ◆ Discovered other types of memorials within walking distance of the school e.g. animals, natural disasters, foundation stones, street names, pub signs, plaques etc.
- ◆ Thought about how memorials reflect the opinions and values of those who built them
- ◆ Investigated the role of artists and craftspeople in designing and building memorials

**Extension activities could include:**

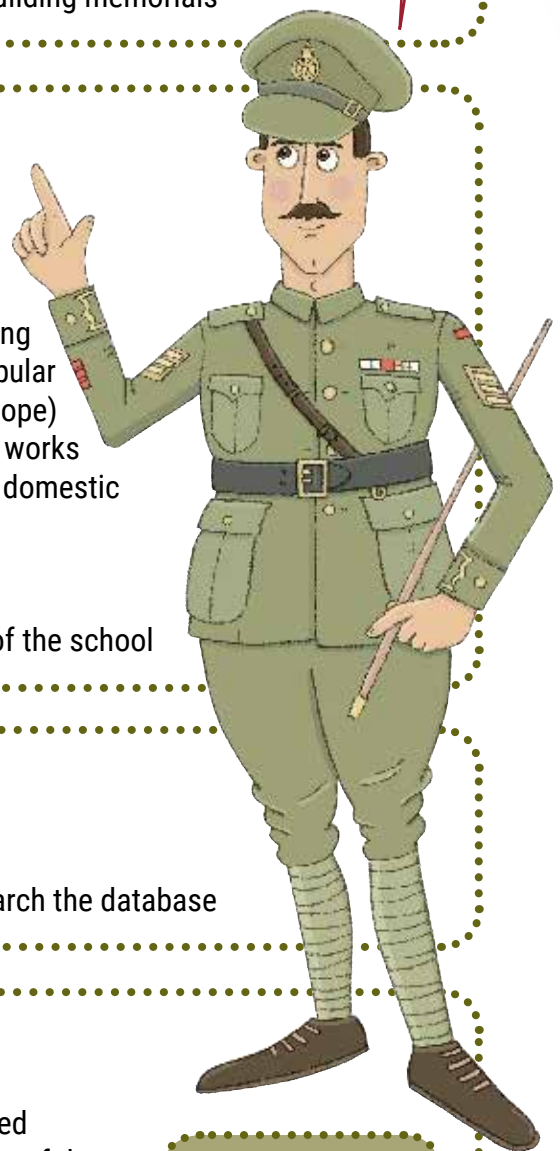
- ◆ **History:** Looking at memorials of different periods e.g. prehistoric memorials (round barrows), Roman tombstones, Celtic crosses etc.
- ◆ **English:** Using the memorials to unlock the stories behind them through drama, role play, poetry
- ◆ **PHSE/Citizenship:** Using conscience alleys with protagonists arguing for and against the erection of a public memorial (too expensive, unpopular design, against recognising emotional need to express grief, sorrow, hope)
- ◆ **Art and Design:** Investigating taste and fashion related to other art works of the time (sculpture, painting, architecture, medals and examples of domestic memorials such as needlework and pottery in museums)
- ◆ **Music:** Investigating music commemorating significant events e.g. Benjamin Britten's War Requiem, soldiers' songs
- ◆ **Geography:** Mapping all types of memorials within given distance of the school

**To do:**

- ◆ Visit [www.royalmailmemorials.com](http://www.royalmailmemorials.com) and search local memorials
- ◆ Walk the area around school to find different types of memorials
- ◆ **Assemble equipment:** art materials and/or laptops for pupils to search the database

**Success criteria****By the end of the project:**

- ◆ All pupils will be aware of why, where and when memorials are raised
- ◆ All pupils will have designed, made and evaluated a memorial to one of the men featured in the case studies
- ◆ Some pupils will want to investigate memorials further

**Key terms**

Memorial  
Commission  
Dedication  
Inscription

## ACTIVITY 8

## REMEMBERING THE FALLEN

Public memorials are built to remember important events and people in the history of a country. After the First World War, the General Post Office and employees erected memorials to honour the Post Office workers who were killed in the First World War.

► The war memorial at Mount Pleasant

**Your task is to design a memorial for a Post Office Rifle or a postal worker you find on the Royal Mail database.**

**Things to think about:**

**Subject:**

Who will be the focus of your memorial?

◆ What design features will you use in the memorial e.g. a portrait, the action for which he is remembered, his medal, etc.



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**Design:** Your memorial should give details of why your soldier is being remembered

**Make:**

- ◆ When considering the size and shape think about where your memorial will be sited e.g. in a park, on a wall, in a town square
- ◆ Choose your design materials for example, drawing and painting materials, clay, photography or a computer

**Evaluate:**

- ◆ Look at memorials of all types Which ones stand out and which ones don't?
- ◆ Will your design stand out when placed in its location?
- ◆ What could you do to improve the design?



**Overview of the lesson:**

This KS2 activity links with English and PHSE and focuses on the mementoes postal workers at war sent home to loved ones.



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*Pupils assemble a small box of 'mementoes' and a message to send someone fighting in a foreign war*

**Before undertaking this activity, pupils are likely to have:**

- ◆ Talked about aspects of their lives that inspire special memories – happy, funny and sad
- ◆ Considered what it means/meant to soldiers to have reminders of home
- ◆ Thought about items that would remind them of their home and family
- ◆ Researched The Postal Museum collections for information about items that soldiers sent home during the First World War
- ◆ Discussed practicalities such as weight, postage, size and perishability

**Extension activities could include:**

- ◆ **English:** Reading *In Flanders Fields* by John McCrae (see Reading List) writing a poem to enclose in the box
- ◆ **Design & Technology:** designing and making a box in which to save/send mementoes
- ◆ **KS3:** Ask pupils to assemble mementoes to an ex pupil or other significant person in their lives who has died; relate the activity to modern day conflict e.g. Afghanistan

**To do:**

- ◆ Ask pupils to bring in items that they take with them when away from home, and a small box
- ◆ Assemble materials for writing messages and drawing small pictures to enclose in the box

**Success criteria****By the end of the project:**

- ◆ All pupils will be aware of the need for comfort at certain times such as war
- ◆ All pupils will have compiled mementoes and messages to send 'home'
- ◆ All pupils will know how to address and send a parcel correctly
- ◆ Some pupils will want to investigate this topic further

**Key terms**

Memento  
Memorial  
Memory



## ACTIVITY

9

## A BOX OF MEMORIES

Imagine a loved one is fighting in a war  
a long way from home

**Your task is to put together a small box of things to remind him or her of home and to keep their spirits up.**

**Things to think about:**

- ◆ Choose something to remind him or her of your family for example a photograph, a small toy, a tiny favourite object
- ◆ Write a short message to keep his or her spirits up
- ◆ Draw a picture of something to remind him or her of family life.



**Things to find out**

- ◆ Weigh your parcel and find out on the internet on Royal Mail's website how much it might cost to send.

**Things to do**

- ◆ Wrap your box up neatly and write the address for the country your parcel may be going to. Don't forget post codes.
- ◆ Draw some pretend stamps including the correct sum of money.

