

Exploring diversity at GCSE:

making a First World War battlefields visit meaningful to all students

Having already reflected on ways of improving their students' understanding of historical diversity at Key Stage 3, Joanne Philpott and Daniel Guiney set themselves the challenge of extending this to post-14 students by means of fieldwork activities at First World War battlefields sites. In addition, they wanted to link the study of past diversity to another of their objectives and concerns, the need to address their own students' growing diversity.

In order to increase students' sense of personal connection with First World War sites, Philpott and Guiney decided to select stories and sites that would take account of the changing cultural and ethnic population of their community in Norfolk. In their rationale for their revised enquiry, they also link overview and depth and make connections between international, national and local history. In all these ways Philpott and Guiney sought to help students find meaning and interest in events that many had previously found too distant, large or complex for meaningful study.

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The power of historical stories

I thought we wore poppies to remember that lots of soldiers died in the war and we shouldn't forget them. I didn't think of them as real people. I know why I am wearing a poppy this year Miss.

I've always worn a white poppy at Remembrance but I think I will wear a red one this year.

These reflective remarks, from a pupil and a teacher respectively, were made immediately after a Remembrance assembly in November 2010. The assembly presented stories of two soldiers from different conflicts. One story described the now familiar experiences of a modern soldier's survival and disfigurement from the war in Iraq, as related by Corporal Simon Brown through the British Legion DVD materials sent to all schools.¹ The other was a more detailed account of the life of Dereham soldier, Chris Brunton, who never returned from the horrors of Delville Wood at the Battle of the Somme in July 1916. Chris Brunton's story from the Great War does not have the recent immediacy and familiarity of Simon Brown's yet his account resonates across the century. It engaged an assembly audience of 11–16-year-olds and their teachers.

Powerful narratives have long been employed by history teachers eager to engage pupils in the past.² Many teachers have argued that real people and real episodes from the lives of ordinary people provide a window that reflects and illuminates an often distant period of time for even our most reluctant learners. Some history teachers have argued, in particular, that it is personal narratives concerning ordinary individuals that make the challenging, broader, national narratives meaningful and accessible to all abilities and all ages.³

One of the authors (Joanne Philpott), working as an Advanced Skills Teacher supporting practice in other schools, has encountered many history departments who recognise the need to go beyond historical storytelling into using stories in the context of critical enquiries that will foster forms of historical thinking. She has noted that many history teachers are uncertain, however, *how* to make use of engaging stories within an historical enquiry. How might such enquiries be designed in order to enable pupils to ask questions and think critically about the historical issues raised by or lurking behind the personal narratives?⁴ It is our experience that by designing a structured series of lessons driven by a single probing question and harnessing one or more personal narratives, a teacher can encourage pupils of all abilities not only to connect with the people telling the stories of the past, but to analyse in structured ways the individual's historical situation and experiences. Such an enquiry question might require pupils to generalise about the complexity of that individual's world, to reflect on the change or continuity that they were experiencing or to wrestle with some of the problems in the evidential record. A variety of types of enquiry question can thus help pupils to use these highly engaging human stories not only to become fascinated and enthralled by the individuals at the heart of such stories, but to move on to critically decipher the world in which the individuals lived.

If we want pupils to think in a disciplined way about the extent to which experiences of people within a particular context were similar or different, then a diverse range of

Figure 1: Daniel Guiney describes the historical research through which he found the 'local voice' of Chris Brunton

My own journey began when I was awarded the *HM The Queen Mother Great War Scholarship*, an annual scheme funded by the Royal British Legion and set up by The Prince of Wales to commemorate the loss of Captain Fergus Bowes-Lyons, the late Queen Mother's brother, who was killed at the Battle of Loos in 1915. This gave me an opportunity to research my local regiment. I was based at Thiepval Visitor Centre, run by the Historial de la Grande Guerre, for five weeks. By searching the magnificent database compiled by Pam and Ken Linge, I managed to unearth wonderful and noble accounts of Norfolk soldiers. I also looked for their names on the white Portland stone of Lutyens' memorial to the missing (see Figure 3). Very soon, I had photographs and names of a good number of soldiers who came from the town and who were declared missing on the Somme. These included architects, footballers, basket-makers and even a footman to the King.

Although 385 of the c.800 who went over at Carnoy were killed, the Norfolks were one of the few British forces to achieve their objective on the first day of the Somme, in part thanks to the mine exploded at Casino Point. This provided a hook with which to motivate pupils into interest in the period. Other sites of interest included Crucifix Corner where the Norfolks were on burial detail (mainly burying Yorkshire Regiment soldiers) and Norfolk Cemetery in which 16-year-old Isaac Laud was the first to be buried. Rows D, F, and G had the most Norfolk graves. Authuille Wood, where the Norfolks spent some time, is an extraordinary untouched trench. Thapedi Masanabo, the manager at Delville Wood (which is now a South African memorial) gave me access

to those records kept on the 8ths in their small research centre. I also stumbled upon an 18lb British shell at Falfremont Farm where the Norfolks experienced heavy shelling from Combles Alley and visited the grave of Harry Wyatt, a Norfolk footballer who died trying to take Hawthorne Ridge on 1 July. Harry is buried in Auchenvillers. Among the many Norfolk soldiers recorded on Thiepval were the Smith brothers, who were both killed and whose letters are stored in the Norwich Regimental museum, and Frank Hogben, whose wife married his brother shortly after his death. It was now apparent that this material would work very powerfully if used to inform the itinerary of our fieldwork trip.

Having gained this background, it would have been easy to have simply fed this information to pupils. However, I wanted them to find 'their' soldier. We therefore began by taking some pupils to the local war memorial in Dereham. Here they did some basic cliometric analysis and number crunching comparing surnames of those on the memorial's brass plaques to the current school register. We were surprised at how many names recurred.

Pupils wrote down a handful of soldiers' names on which they decided to do further research using the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Through this rudimentary start the name Pte C. Brunton was discovered. Pupils were able to discover his regimental number, date of birth and the fact that he was in the 1st (Regular) Battalion of the Norfolk regiment. From here we leafed through the town's local newspaper records via the Dereham Antiquarian Society and the Norfolk Heritage section of the local library. We found

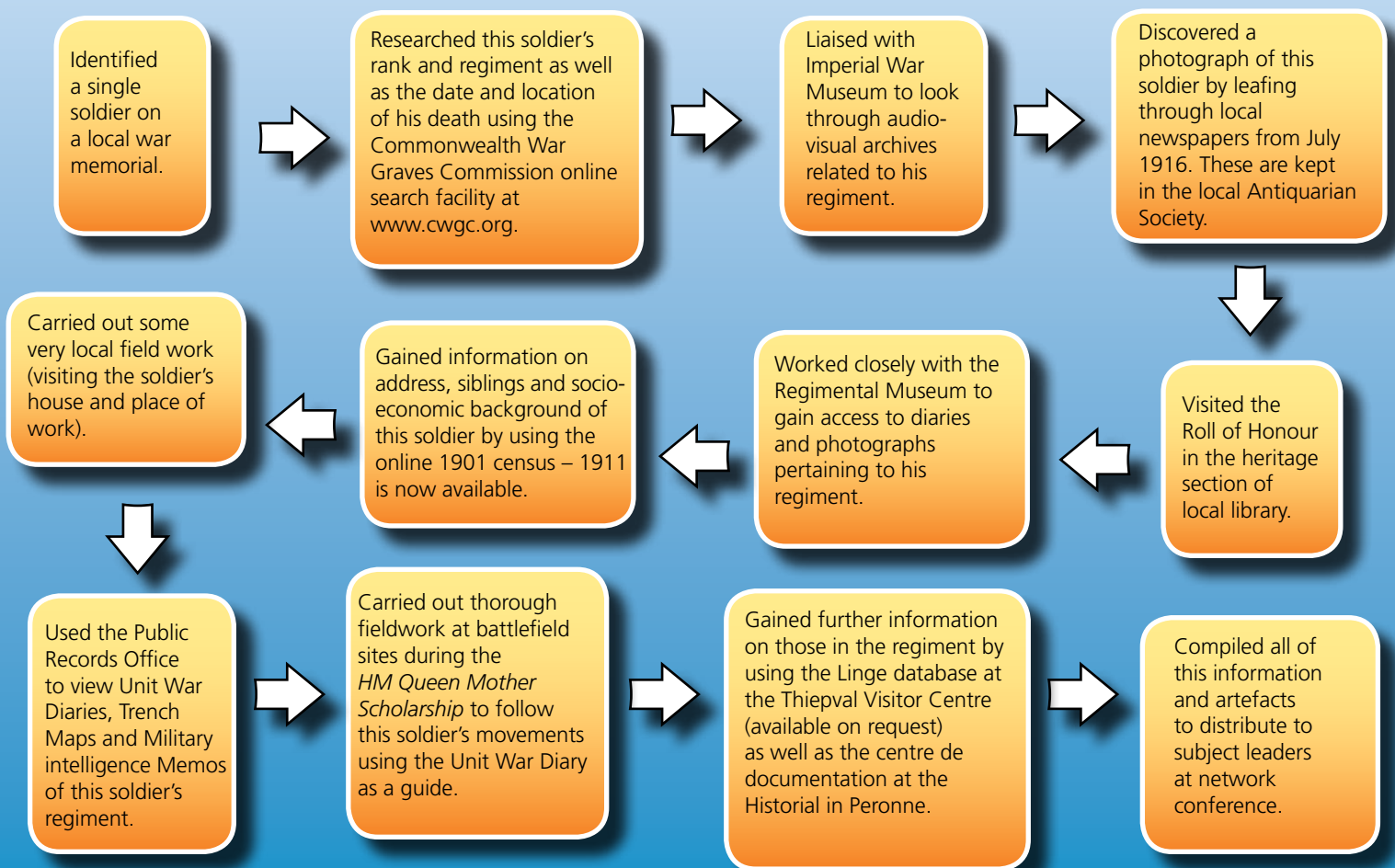
his date of death: 27 July 1916. These records also revealed his place of employment ('Hobbies', a store still open in the town) and the dates of various injuries he sustained. What is more, the newspaper accounts provided a photograph of this soldier as well as letters written by him to his neighbour. The pupils had found Pte C. Brunton's 'voice'.

He signed his letters 'Chris' and spoke of parks and places our pupils knew. Our pupils perceived a significant deterioration in his mood over a two-year period. We then used the online 1901 census which revealed his address (a thinly constructed two-up two-down terrace about half a mile from school), the number of people in his household, as well as information such as his socio-economic background (his parents were low-paid basket-makers) and so forth. Pupils could now make inferences about Chris: 'He signed up because he needed the money Sir.' 'There wouldn't have been too much to do here in 1914 Sir.' 'His house was just too crowded Sir.'

The final stage of research was undertaken at the Public Record Office in Kew. This houses the Unit War Diaries for Chris's regiment. Chris was not named in person but it was compelling to read military intelligence memos that detailed the movements and events of the days when he was on the Somme as well as to explore trench maps and officers' logs. I will never forget the terrible weight of the unit war diary for July 1916 compared to the others that I handled. In this diary I discovered that this soldier was one of many Norfolk men who died at Delville Wood during a bayonet charge which involved gas and shelling, and in which lines on both sides were overrun, several times.

Useful contextual information on the above events can be found in McCarthy, C. (1993) *The Somme: a day by day account*, London: Wiedenfeld Military; Middlebrook, M. (2007) *The Middlebrook Guide to the Somme Battlefields*, London: Pen and Sword Military; Westlake, R.(2009) *British Battalions on the Somme*, London: Pen and Sword Military.

Figure 2: Flowchart showing stages of research carried out by Dan Guiney



personal narratives, reflecting a diversity of human experience, is necessary for the creation of a robust enquiry. The need to consider diverse experiences was reinforced for teachers when it was made a requirement by the 2008 National Curriculum through the identification of 'diversity' as a concept and as a feature of the Attainment Target.⁵ This raised awareness of the need to explore different voices of the past if pupils are to grow in confidence in 'discerning, analysing, re-shaping or questioning accounts of difference among peoples, experiences and states of affairs in the past'.⁶ The 2008 document also clearly stated – as had previous versions – the need for history departments to embrace local, national and international dimensions of history and to link local stories to the international stage.⁷ Thus stories, if effectively chosen, if embedded in coherent enquiries and if creatively linked to historical learning outcomes, can help pupils to become disciplined historical thinkers within many scales of time and space.

In our own department at Dereham Neatherd High School, we found ourselves revisiting these issues each time we considered aspects of our curriculum planning and development, especially when developing Key Stage 3 in response to the 2008 National Curriculum. As a consequence of these discussions we also found that our planning for the annual GCSE battlefields coursework visit with Year 10 was dominated by three interlocking themes: making use of personal stories, considering diverse experiences and linking local places and people to the national and international historical landscape. The established visit had increasingly

felt more of a tourist trip of museums, cemeteries and battle sites rather than a rigorous historical enquiry outside of the classroom. We were also concerned that we might have failed to make historical sites and events meaningful to *all* our pupils. We had become aware that increasing numbers of pupils were requesting to visit sites linked to their own family history yet we were not using these opportunities, nor were we even sure how to build them into an accessible itinerary for all. How could we create an historical investigation in the field that employed some of their personal stories of battle? How could we do this in such a way as to shed light on the bigger events of the Great War needed for GCSE? In addition how could we build on our enactments of the 2008 National Curriculum requirements in our Key Stage 3 curriculum, in order to create a coherent transition between Key Stage 3 and GCSE? Furthermore, how could we also embrace the ethos of internationalism promoted through our whole school curriculum as a specialist language college?⁸ Most importantly, how could we engage *all* our pupils in a First World War battlefields experience?

The local challenge

Like many secondary schools across England and Wales, Dereham Neatherd history department offers its pupils a visit to the battlefields of First World War in France and Belgium.⁹ We had always linked the visit to Year 10 GCSE coursework using an enquiry combining breadth (considering experiences of soldiers on the Western Front) with depth (a more detailed

Paying respects to 15 year old 'Joe' Strudwick.



Soldiers known unto God.



Figure 3: Data taken from the Thiepval Memorial

This table records Norfolk Regimental soldiers who have no known grave and who are remembered on Piers 1C and 1D at Thiepval. Statistically, these figures strongly supported the potential for investigating a soldier of the rank of private.

	Number	Percentage of total
Captains	6	0.7%
Lieutenants	3	0.4%
2nd Lieutenant	12	2.6%
Reg Sergeant Major	8	1.0%
Sergeant	33	4.3%
Lance Sergeant	8	1.0%
Corporal	34	4.4%
Lance Corporal	94	12.2%
Private	574	74.3%

enquiry into the Battle of the Somme, through a focus on General Haig). This trip had been developed over time by a number of colleagues within the department and was considered a highlight of the pupils' GCSE experience. Several aspects of the visit were now causing us concern, however, and these left us posing the following questions:

- ▶ Would the trip resonate with and be meaningful for *all* of our increasingly diverse pupils?
- ▶ Was our visit offering a diverse view of soldiers' experiences or were we promoting a narrow view of who the soldiers were and of their lives on the Western Front?

Figure 4: The agendas we were attempting to balance in our battlefields trip

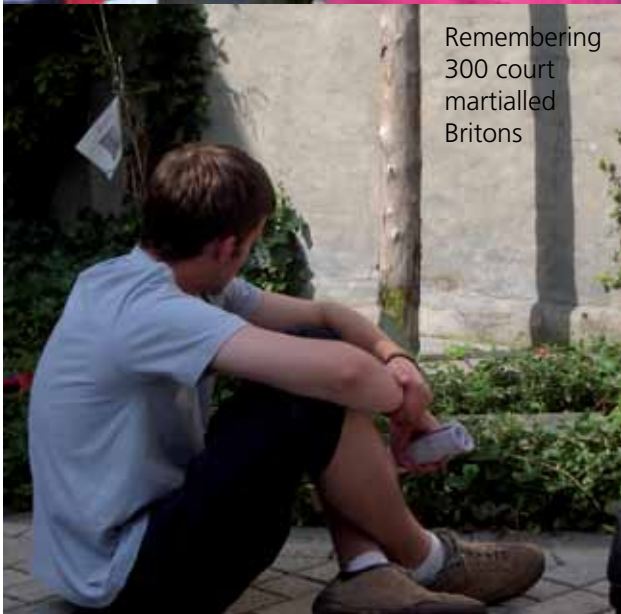


Many of our concerns were a response to the shifting educational landscape, both locally and nationally, that we were working in at this time. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Norfolk experienced a demographic shift, with increased numbers of European migrants moving into the local community. This was creating its own social issues within the relatively static population who have traditionally experienced limited economic and social mobility. Our school, as a Specialist Language College, was attempting to address these broader issues through many strategies, including an increased focus on internationalism. Different aspects of the school curriculum were being encouraged to promote international awareness and the positive contribution of multiculturalism to our lives. The history department had been confident in embracing this approach through British Council Comenius projects and an internationally diverse Key Stage 3 curriculum. We now realised, however, that our GCSE curriculum did not match this. Our initial concerns now became more concrete and we raised specific questions in relation to the battlefields visit in particular:

- ▶ How would our Portuguese and Polish pupils respond to an Anglo-centric educational visit?
- ▶ How could we create an opportunity to engage all our pupils in the remarkable diversity of soldiers' experiences on the Western Front?
- ▶ Would our existing itinerary, enquiry focus, choice of sites and choice of stories provide culturally diverse pupils with opportunities to find history both relevant to them as individuals and as members of a locality?

The National Curriculum, especially the 2008 version, already actively promotes educational visits outside the classroom and emphasises local, national and international links across historical topics studied.¹⁰ This was not, therefore, a new approach to the teaching of history. Moreover, Banham's work on using depth to reveal common and diverse features of past periods and to prepare pupils for an interest in historical overview has influenced a generation of history teachers.¹¹ All versions of the National Curriculum since 1995 have promoted blends of depth and overview, including the use of local stories to illuminate national and international events.¹² A focus on diversity was similarly not new. The 1991 National Curriculum promoted the analysis of similarity and difference within past situations and encouraged teachers to consider the extent or nature of similarity and difference.¹³ Furthermore, since NC 2008 explicitly stated 'diversity' as a concept, many more history teachers, such as Bradshaw, have revived exploration of diversity as an analytic tool with which to help pupils break down monolithic images of people from the past and discourage assumptions of:

homogeneity within any pre-defined group ... [and instead] to question the validity of calling that group, a 'group', or better still, to look for other, possible 'groups' or equally significant 'groups' that cut across the existing labels.¹⁴



Remembering 300 court martialled Britons

- ▶ A 'local voice' should be used to create a sense of identity and to suggest the possible significance of the places visited and events witnessed there.
- ▶ Links between local individuals and national memorials should be made explicit and designed to resonate with our pupils.

Keeping these principles at the forefront of our planning, we devised our enquiry. We included sites and memorials that echoed the international profile of our school and that reflected the rich diversity of the soldiers who fought at the front. Finally we attempted to research a story of one local soldier – Chris Brunton – and to follow in his footsteps from our departure from Dereham to the fields of Flanders and the Somme.

Linking the local voice to remembrance

Included in all these emergent purposes, was a concern to make remembrance meaningful. We wanted pupils to reflect on the sacrifice of a unique generation through a personalised lens: not just Field Marshals but local Tommies, not just boardroom strategy but ground combat, not just nations but individuals. We judged that to focus solely on the big picture of politics and military strategy was to risk losing sight of the individuals who made such a noble sacrifice and thus to risk disengaging those pupils who might perceive themselves as distanced from the 'otherness' of wider affairs. A different approach to planning and research was required in order to find this 'local voice' that would resonate with our pupils.

These efforts to find a local voice were underpinned by some historical research that one of us (Dan Guiney) carried out. This is detailed in Figure 1 and shown as a flow chart in

Like Bradshaw, we reflected that our current curriculum had to some extent lost sight of this. It was in our 14-19 provision, in particular, that our renewed discussion of progression in pupils' thinking about diversity revealed a significant gap.

Drawing on all these influences and reflections, we resolved that the planning of our trip itinerary should be guided by the following educational and historical principles:

- ▶ The itinerary should include sites in which all our pupils can find meaning.
- ▶ There should be opportunities for pupils to investigate the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of soldiers and to analyse the similarities and differences of their experiences.

Figure 2. The moving and often disturbing stories that this research revealed came to underpin our planning for our students' work, linking our various objectives with the wider goal of provoking reflection on remembrance.

Making it meaningful for all

The differing agendas (see Figure 4) that we were attempting to balance and plan for could have left us in confusion and with a trip lacking clarity or focus. We were conscious that the site visits could easily result in our pupils becoming the historical tourists that Nemko describes in his discussion of pupils' responses to sites and memorials.¹⁵ We therefore reflected carefully on the impact of the visits. To assess the extent to which we were successful, it is useful to refer back to the educational and historical principles that we agreed would guide us:

The itinerary should include sites in which all our pupils can find meaning.

In order to create a meaningful itinerary, we considered which sites, museums and memorials would help pupils appreciate the assorted experiences soldiers underwent as well as the diverse range of soldiers who were undertaking them. As shown in Figure 5, we also used the sites explicitly to help pupils make connections with their own past or with the personal stories that they had heard. Whereas we used some sites from our previous visits, such as the much-visited Flanders Museum, others, such as the Norfolk Cemetery, Delville Wood and the Portuguese cemetery at Neuve Chapelle, were new to us and only chosen after a reconnaissance trip. We had selected these sites not only for how they would help our pupils to test generalisations about the diverse experiences of soldiers in First World War but so that pupils could learn about the war that their ancestors and neighbours' ancestors fought in. We hoped that our new selection of sites would evoke strong images of what it might have been like for the soldiers who fought there, thus enabling pupils to engage with their own and their locality's past.

These more personal starting points seemed to allow pupils to begin to maximise their understanding of the general through their interest in the particular. Furthermore, by making personal links with the itinerary and by understanding our choices, the pupils were better able to create and later share their own accounts of the battlefields experience.

There should be opportunities for pupils to investigate the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of soldiers and to analyse the similarities and differences of their experiences.

Discussion of the Portuguese experience in war allowed our pupils to share stories of the experiences of Portuguese migrants in Dereham. As well as reflecting the cultural diversity of our own community, our choice of sites also introduced our pupils to less familiar cultures such as those of Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus. By visiting the remarkable Indian memorial at the site of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, built to represent the 4,742 Indian soldiers with no known grave, we were able to address the wider link between shared national values or national cohesion and many different ethnic communities. Wider issues of citizenship and co-operation were prompted by our pupils' contributions at

our evening workshops. There were no written outcomes of this aspect of pupils' learning but we were in no doubt from their oral responses that the nature and extent of diversity as an area of historical thinking had been challenged and strengthened through the itinerary.

Links between local individuals and national memorials should be made explicit and designed to resonate with our pupils.

The story of Chris Brunton (see Figures 1 and 5) brought the war home for many of our Dereham pupils. They knew where Chris had lived and they had walked past his former home many times. We visited many of the places Chris had visited as part of his tour of duty and our pupils were able to connect with the experiences that Chris would have gone through. Throughout the trip we visited several sites at which Chris had been stationed and read the letters that he wrote which were part of our work booklet. It would even have been possible to eat the same food, so detailed were the Unit War Diaries. Pupils found Chris's name on the Thiepval memorial and we contributed our findings about Chris Brunton to the Thiepval Linge database so that others would know his story.¹⁶ On our visit to our final destination, the South African Memorial at Delville Wood (known as Devil Wood by many of the soldiers due to the horrific fighting and characterised by the one remaining tree of 1916 and rows of visible trench lines) we told the final chapter of Chris's story. Pupils were taken to the exact position of the regiment at Delville Wood on the day Chris went over the top. They held a thoughtful silence for him.

Whereas we were about to embark upon our journey home to Dereham, Chris was never granted the same privilege. His remains lie amongst the roots of the newly planted trees which now populate the dense woodland. The audible silence of our pupils filled Delville Wood. At that moment our pupils doubtless confirmed in their own minds that the war was about individual men with families similar to their own. To us, it demonstrated the power of individual narrative not only in engaging children with the past but in making it meaningful to their own lives. The capacity of the personal story to shed light on broader events from history was also made apparent to us all when telling Chris's story: now pupils could comprehend the human reality of a war involving inconceivable numbers.

Reflections

In a post-trip reflection meeting held shortly after our return, developments and amendments to our future history trips were discussed. Next time we would want to make our enquiry a more robust enquiry in relation to the principles we refer to at the start of the article. We would also like to have researched a wider range of accounts and sources before and during our trip. We needed to investigate personal stories other than Chris Brunton's, enabling pupils and teachers to explore in greater depth the diverse experiences of people during the First World War.

Some pupils had done their own research and were thus able to make the visit a personal and moving experience, one they were eager to return home and tell their families about. Many were hopeful of a return visit with their own families. Reflecting on this, we realised that there was a need for a less

Figure 5: Extracts from the itinerary of the Dereham Neatherd battlefields site visit

	Time	Place	Focus
Day 1	13.00	enter Flanders Field Museum	diversity of experience; Chris Brunton's experience
	14.20	depart Ypres; visit – Tyne Cot, Langemarck, Essex Farm, Bayernwald.	diversity of remembrance; Chris Brunton's experience
	20.00	'Last Post' and tour of Menin Gate	diversity of remembrance
	20.20	evening workshop on Menin Gate	reflection and consolidation
Day 2	09.00	depart Munchenhof; visit – Indian and Portuguese memorials, Neuve Chapelle, Vimy Ridge, Bapaume – Albert Road, La Boisselle, Thiepval, Beaumont Hamel.	diversity of memorials; Chris Brunton's experience
		dinner; evening workshop; free time	reflection and consolidation
Day 3	09.00	depart for Albert; visit – Wellington Quarry, Norfolk Cemetery, Delville Wood.	diversity of experience; Chris Brunton's experience
	16.00	arrive Calais	

teacher-driven enquiry with greater pupil involvement in the investigation, research and planning stages of the pre-trip preparation. This was reinforced by comments entered into a 'pupil reflection book' in which pupils expressed a wish to personalise the trip further. Many pupils discussed the possibility of discovering more about previous generations of their own families and communities.

One way to achieve this might be the formation of a steering group of Year 9 pupils chosen to reflect the diversity of the local community who would pose their own questions, plan their own enquiry and undertake their own research. They could be supported by Year 10 trip 'veterans' able to share their own historical knowledge and research skills and to provide a historical context for their investigations. The release of the 1911 online census data will provide more contemporary information than we were able to access. This would have the benefits of creating a bespoke trip itinerary and increasing the interest of all participants (pupils and staff) in the memorials and sites visited. It would allow our pupils to discover even more about the enormity of the events of First World War through the small stories of individual voices.

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