



## ENQUIRY 6

# Why is Ypres such a focal point for First World War remembrance?

Key stage 3

## ENQUIRY OVERVIEW

This enquiry is designed to be taught as part of a broader study of the First World War and students should be introduced to its broader historical context prior to embarking on the activities suggested here.

The focus of this enquiry is twofold.

Firstly on the strategic significance of the small Belgian city of Ypres during the First World War. The fighting in the area, which became known as the Ypres Salient, was continuous. In 1914 the series of battles known as the 1st Battle of Ypres ended the 'Race to the Sea' and saw the start of trench warfare. In April 1915 the Germans used poison gas for the first time in what became known as the 2nd Battle of Ypres. The biggest and costliest fighting took place in 1917, officially the 3rd Battle of Ypres it is also known as simply Passchendaele, the small village where the fighting ended in November 1917.

Secondly on the area's continuing significance in the years since as a focal point for First World War remembrance. The students will look at the different ways that Ypres is remembered today and consider whether this is a fitting legacy to those who fought on the Salient.

*Much of the work in this enquiry could be enhanced through a visit to Ypres and the surrounding area. There are many battlefield sites, memorial museums and cemeteries in and around Ypres that provide ample evidence of its significance both during the War and since. Indeed the increasing popularity of Ypres as a destination for battlefield tours might raise some interesting questions for the students about remembrance and significance as will the opportunity to take part in one of the daily remembrance ceremonies at the Menin Gate.*

Beyond the history classroom a study of Ypres could link to English lessons which focused on the literary response to the Great War, not just the War Poets but the postwar memoirs of ex-soldiers like Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden, Siegfried Sassoon and Ernst Junger and women e.g. Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby. It might also be possible to link to the modern fiction: Pat Barker, Sebastian Faulks and Thomas Kennealey.



## LESSONS

### STAGE 1 How is the First World War remembered in Ypres?

In small groups ask the students to use **Resources 1** Remembrance in Belgium (images of the Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate, the In Flanders Field Museum at the Cloth Hall, and St. George's Memorial Church) and Remembrance in Britain (Ceremony at the Cenotaph and a local war memorial)) and their own research to answer the following questions:

*How is First World War remembered in Ypres? Why is the Last Post Ceremony held in Ypres every evening?*

*How is this similar to the two-minute silence on 11 November held in the Uk every year? In what way is it unique?*

*Why are there so many places that 'remember' the First World War in Ypres?*

Round off this section by asking the groups to consider what all this tells us about the significance of Ypres – through discussion begin to tease out the significance during the War and ever since.

*If visiting Ypres ensure that your students witness the Last Post Ceremony. Ask them to view how traffic is stopped and the area comes to a standstill to pay respect to those who have fallen.*

*Give them time to look at the names of the missing on the Menin Gate and to locate the names of soldiers from different countries.*

*Ask them why they think the Last Post Ceremony continues to be so important today?*

### List of resources, worksheets, video clips and interactive activities for use with Stage 1

#### Resources 1

Students may also want to see a 'Last Post' ceremony at the Menin Gate to understand the number of people who attend to pay their respects:

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern\\_ireland/8163686.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/8163686.stm)

A video clip of Remembrance Day at the Cenotaph in 2012 is available here:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-20288154>



## LESSONS

### STAGE 2 Why was the location of Ypres so important during the First World War?

In their groups, ask the students to use **Resources 2** to work out why should Ypres was so significant for both sides in the First World War.

#### 1. The 'Race to the Sea'

Some teacher explanation may be needed to ensure that students understand the 'Race to the Sea' and the term 'outflanking'. You may also need to explain this in the context of the First World War.

Use Map 1 to ask students to consider how this led to the trench system being created.

#### 2. A vital transport hub

Students should look at Map 2 and why the road network around Ypres would make it a vital 'transport hub'. This would make it easier to move men and supplies.

#### 3. Ypres was a 'Salient'

Students will need to understand this term and why in military strategy it is vital to have control of such a position. Map 3 will help to explain this term and its military significance.

Salient is a military term which refers to a piece of land held by one side which sticks out from a straight defensive line.

Finally ask the students to study Map 3 once more and the last source to work out why the Germans had a considerable advantage over the Allies once both sides had dug in 1914.

Make sure that the students appreciate that neither side could afford to give up the continuing battle for this part of the Western Front. The Allies had to hold on to Ypres at all costs while the Germans couldn't allow them to break through their lines. This last point is important as it will help the students to understand why both armies were prepared to endure the often terrible conditions on the Salient which is the focus of the next section.

### List of resources, worksheets, video clips and interactive activities for use with Stage 2

#### Resources 2



## LESSONS

### STAGE 3 Why do we remember the fighting on the Ypres Salient?

The aim of this stage is to help the students appreciate why the battles of Ypres have been remembered, often ahead of many of the other battles of the First World War with the exception of the Battles of the Somme and Verdun.

In their groups the students should complete the task in Resources 3 which asks them to consider the range of sources – and to use their own research – to explain why the conflict on the Ypres Salient is so widely remembered.

The focus should be on such factors as:

- the duration e.g. the number of battles, the attempts to take/defend Ypres
- the damage to Ypres and the surrounding land, and the effect this had on the battlefield conditions, the casualties on both sides, the tactics including the first use of gas (The IWM podcast at <http://www.1914.org/podcasts/podcast-13-gas-attack-at-ypres/> provides a first-hand account from those who experienced a gas attack at Ypres)
- the impact on Britain and the Empire – the range of soldiers from different backgrounds who fought there.

*Whilst on a battlefields tour of Ypres the students could use the In Flanders Field Museum (Ypres), or the Passchendaele Memorial Museum to carry out further independent research into the fighting on the Ypres Salient.*

### List of resources, worksheets, video clips and interactive activities for use with Stage 3

#### Resources 3

A podcast available of a first-hand account from those who experienced a gas attack at Ypres.

<http://www.1914.org/podcasts/podcast-13-gas-attack-at-ypres/>

### STAGE 4 How did the appalling conditions at the Battle of Passchendaele affect people's attitude towards the War?

This stage looks at how the fighting on the Ypres Salient – particularly at the 3rd Battle of Ypres (more usually known as the Battle of Passchendaele) – was beyond anything ever witnessed before.





## LESSONS

---

### **STAGE 3 What did the builders of the 'Trench of the Bayonets' monument want people to feel about the First World War? (continued)**

---

Alternatively, use these tasks as a basis for a whole class discussion.

For the concluding activity they are asked to design a memorial to commemorate the sacrifice made in Ypres to be situated back in the UK – either in their local communities to commemorate the sacrifice of local men, or an equivalent national memorial. The students will show their understanding of the significance of Ypres through their designs for the memorial – what they choose to include in terms of text images, symbols etc.

---

### **List of resources, worksheets, video clips and interactive activities for use with Stage 5**

---

#### **Resources 5**