



# Plymouth in World War I

KS2 History Resource



Museum  
Gallery  
Archive



---

The Box is Plymouth's new multi-million pound museum, gallery and archive. With brand new exhibition spaces alongside state-of-the-art facilities for research and learning, it's the perfect place to teach, inspire and engage students of all ages.

---

---

# Contents

4

About this  
resource

6

The Three Towns

7

Defence of  
the Realm

8

Call to arms

9

Help from home

10

Wounded in action

11

On the home front

13

1914  
Disruption to  
local schools

15

1915  
Military in the city

17

1916  
Conscription  
and COs

19

1917  
Borlase Smart

21

1918  
The end of the War

23

Ideas for activities

---

# About this resource

This resource features the story of the amalgamation of the Three Towns of Plymouth, Devonport and East Stonehouse in 1914, reflecting on them as home to the Royal Navy, Army Garrisons, Royal Marines and Royal Naval Air Service.

---

It also looks at the impact of World War I on local peoples' lives – touching on recruitment, conscription, the fighting, the cost, the aftermath and the 'home front'.

This is not just a standard review of the War from start to finish. It's the story of Plymouth and Plymothians from 1914 to 1918.



# Plymouth in World War I



2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 1146 2 3

1146

Officers' Course of Sunnery, Citadel, Plymouth. February, 1916

---

# The Three Towns

The modern day City of Plymouth has largely grown out of three, once separate, neighbouring towns - Plymouth, East Stonehouse and Devonport.

---

Nowadays, Stonehouse and Devonport exist as communities within greater Plymouth but, until 1914, each was distinct with its own governance.

Plymouth and East Stonehouse are the two oldest settlements. In contrast, Devonport is a relatively new town. It was established in the early 1700s, growing around and alongside the purpose-built Royal Naval Dockyard at Plymouth Dock. Remarkably, by 1801, Dock had a larger population than Plymouth.

Throughout the 1800s, the 'Three Towns' steadily merged together on the ground. However, it was the threat of the war and the military's need for streamlined communication, that finally saw the 'Three Towns' joined as one.



---

# Defence of the Realm

In 1914, a third of those working in Plymouth had a job associated with Britain's armed forces. During World War I, Plymouth's status was possibly unique.

---

It was a base for the Royal Navy, the Army, the Royal Marines and, from 1917, the newly established Royal Naval Air Service. There was also a Royal Naval Hospital and a Military Hospital.

The Royal Naval (RN) Dockyard at Devonport was a focus. In addition, there were various specialist RN training establishments, the RN Barracks, the Royal Ordnance Depot at Bull Point and the Royal William Victualling Yard, Stonehouse. In support of the Royal Navy, the 'Plymouth Division' of the Royal Marines had long been garrisoned at Stonehouse Barracks. In 1917, the formation of the Women's Royal Navy Service meant that the large Plymouth contingent also needed to be housed locally. In early 1918, wooden huts were provided for this purpose at Mount Batten.

The defence of Devonport and greater Plymouth was traditionally in the hands of the Devon Royal Garrison Artillery. The Royal Citadel was the historic fortification, but the 'Three Towns' were also encircled by a chain of Victorian forts, stretching from Fort Staddon in Devon, to Fort Tregantle in Cornwall. Plymouth Sound itself was protected by sea level fortifications.

---

## Call to arms

When Britain entered World War I, its army of regular troops was relatively small in number.

---

In August 1914, the call for volunteers went out. Posters and adverts appealing to patriotic pride appeared everywhere, asking men aged between 19 and 30 to volunteer for the Army and Royal Navy.

In Plymouth, there were open air recruiting meetings at various places, including Hawkers Avenue, Prince Rock Tram Terminus, Cattedown Road, Hyde Park Corner and Plymouth Market. Leading local figures like Waldorf Astor MP and Councillor Isaac Foot made speeches urging men to enlist.

In November 1914, Suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst spoke at Plymouth Guildhall, telling men to uphold the honour of Britain and asking women to encourage men to join up.



---

## Help from home

In November 1914, the Commander of the Plymouth Fortress spoke of the generosity of the Plymouth public.

---

Mrs Nancy Astor added that she thought it was “*the aim of the people of Plymouth to do something to make happy the life of the soldier.*”

At the end of 1914, Plymothians were asked to donate pianos, gramophones, books, magazines and other things, to equip ten new recreation huts for the troops in Plymouth. Local appeals for gifts and money would continue throughout the War.

The ‘Western Evening Herald’ organised a ‘Tobacco Fund’. As elsewhere, concerts and other events were held on a regular basis. These might be to entertain the military, but almost all were to raise money for war-related good causes. There was a nationwide appeal to make or donate warm clothing and blankets for soldiers fighting at the Front.

---

## Wounded in action

World War I was dominated by the use of high explosives and heavy artillery.

---

About 2.6 million British men were wounded and upwards of 1.6 million of these were as a result of shell fire. Some 41,000 men had one or more limbs amputated and around 65,000 suffered head, eye and facial injuries. During and after the War many patients struggled to re-adjust back into any form of normal life - or to be accepted by others.

In 1914, there was a mix of hospital provision in Plymouth and Devonport, including Infirmaries managed by the Guardians of the Poor, and Voluntary Hospitals. In addition, there were military hospital facilities, notably the Royal Naval Hospital at Stonehouse, and the Royal Military Hospital in Devonport.

At the start of the War the Ford Workhouse at Wolseley Road became the 4th Southern General Hospital, under the Royal Army Medical Corps Reserves. Schools at Salisbury Road, Hyde Park and Camels Head, along with Mutley Barracks, were among the buildings taken into hospital use.



---

# On the home front

The War affected both family and school life.

---

Family life was quite different to what many people usually experience today - lots of dads were away from home, many families had reduced house-keeping budgets and more mums needed to find work. Childcare and discipline became a problem.

At the same time, school life was disrupted and new controls were placed on children working.

Most teachers were men, so there was a wartime shortage.

A number of large schools were taken over and converted for military use.

In August 1914, some 5,000 Plymouth school children were displaced, rising to 6,000 by 1917. Another 5,500 were disrupted as classes were moved, schools were shared and school days were shortened. School attendance levels fell.

# Images from the Collection



---

# 1914

## Disruption to local schools

Laira Green Primary School was used to accommodate troops waiting for deployment.

---

The children were moved to Mutley Wesleyan Sunday School premises for their lessons. This wasn't too far away but the change in location would have probably been a shock for them. They were moved back to the school on 7 October 1914, but by 15 March 1915, pupils from Hyde Park Road Elementary School were transferred to Laira while their school was being used as a hospital. One school occupied the building in the mornings and the other in the afternoons.

Also in August 1914, both Devonport Higher Elementary School and Salisbury Road Primary School were taken over as temporary hospitals for the wounded. Clearly, as war had only been declared earlier that month, the expectation was that many of the wounded would be returning for treatment.

The image on page 14 shows a page from the Laira Green Primary School's log book from 1914.

It discusses the changes in staff in September 1914.



4  $\frac{16}{7}$ 

As the school at Laisa has been requisitioned by the Military for use during the War re-opened school in the Mutley Wesleyan Sunday School premises (Mutley Plain) on Aug 31<sup>st</sup>. Attendance Registers not marked first-day. Entered 29 girls transferred from the Inf-Dep<sup>t</sup>. Miss Elsie Shephard & Miss Dorothy Dodge have been appointed to serve on the staff in place of Miss Hapley & Miss Wotton. Average number in attendance for week 147.1; number on books 242.

Miss Caple of Prince Rock School Staff who had been appointed to serve here temporarily withdrawn on Tuesday. Attendance poor on Wednesday and Friday afternoons.

Mr Ambrose visited on Thursday morning & gave class their Science lesson. Average attendance for week 184.3

14

Registers tested per Assistant Secretary found correct

J. Chandler Cook



---

# 1915

## Military in the city

Military personnel had become abundant in Plymouth the previous year, with huge numbers of local men signing up to fight, including prisoners from Dartmoor Prison.

---

Devonport Dockyard had doubled its workforce to 9,000 men and women, working on Q-ships - converted merchant ships that were heavily armed - and K-class submarines.

Plymouth had become a focal point for military activity and was surrounded by military camps. Huge queues are recorded at enlisting stations. Late in 1914, Canadian troops arrived in Plymouth with ammunition, food supplies, 127 field guns, aeroplanes and 7,679 horses.

When this photograph on page 16 was taken in 1915, planes landing on water had become a common sight in Plymouth. Seaplane trials had been taking place since 1913 on the Cattewater.

The plane in this photograph on page 16 is a Short Admiralty Type 184, often called the Short 225 due to its engine. By 1917, the Grade II listed hangers that still exist at Mount Batten today had been built. These would later house the larger flying boats that would still fly from Mount Batten until World War II.



---

# 1916

## Conscription and conscientious objectors

The hotly debated Military Service Act came into force on 2 March 1916. From this date, most single men between the ages of 18 and 41 years old were considered to be in the military and could be called-up to fight.

---

A second Act in May 1916 included married men and a third, in 1918, raised the upper age limit to 51.

Conscientious Objectors were nicknamed 'Conchies', or COs for short. Some had successfully convinced a tribunal of a deeply held religious belief and that it was wrong to take up weapons and fight a war. A second group, mostly thought to be anti-war revolutionaries, had failed in their appeal but simply refused to wear uniform or play any part.

The Mayor of Plymouth considered them traitors. Others saw them as cowards. After May 1916, it was decided that COs should no longer be kept in military custody and they were all sent to ordinary prisons. Dartmoor Prison, just north of Plymouth at Princetown, became a CO 'Work Centre' in March 1917. Groups of men were employed working the Dartmoor fields and building a road. The prison warders became 'Instructors'. The cells were not locked and, when not working, the COs could come and go as they wished. The image on page 18 was taken on Dartmoor.

---







---

1917

## Borlase Smart

Borlase Smart was born in Kingsbridge in 1881, and studied at the age of 15 with artist FJ Snell.

---

Snell's interest in painting scenes of Plymouth may have had a bearing on Smart's decision to study at Plymouth College of Art from 1897–1900. After his studies, Smart became art editor and critic at the Western Morning News/Illustrated Western Weekly News from 1901–1913. At this time he won many local awards for his painting.

Captain Smart served in the Artists Rifles 2/24 London Regiment, The Queens during WWI, and later became a Captain and Instructor in camouflage in the Machine Guns Corps. This detail from one of his paintings on page 20 shows the aftermath of the Battle of Arras. He also made paintings of Ypres (where the infamous Battle of Passchendaele took place) and other notable areas.

An exhibition of Smart's works on paper from World War I was shown at Harris & Sons in Plymouth in 1917. Ten of those drawings were purchased for our collections including this one.



A SHELL SWEEPED ROAD  
SEPT. 22, 1918

---

# 1918

## The end of the War

Memorials to the war dead were later built in the city to celebrate their actions, but also for remembrance.

---

The photograph on page 22 shows soldiers being welcomed back to the city after the War had ended. It shows Old Town Street, before the city was rebuilt after the catastrophic events of World War II, filled with soldiers and onlookers.

This event would not only be a celebration of the triumphant return of service personnel to Plymouth, but a reminder of some of those who didn't return.

Memorials across the city were refurbished in 2014 as part of the commemoration of the centenary of World War I. Many of these are in easily accessible parts of the city and can be visited as either part of a school trip or independently.







---

# Ideas for activities

## Throw of the Dice

In WWI, it's estimated that two-thirds of all military deaths occurred in battle. We've made the odds slightly better for your pupils, but play the game until everyone in the class has understood the likelihood of them not surviving.

You'll need a dice - if you throw a:

1. Dig the trenches – either by digging from the ground downwards (entrenchment), extending the ends (sapping), or underground (tunnelling). **You are still in the game.**
2. A period of calm – time to wash the lice from your clothes and avoid the rats that share your trench. **You are still in the game** (though slightly worried about the rats nibbling your toes).
3. Put the kettle on and have a cup of tea. Does anyone else want one? **You are still in the game.**
4. Narrowly avoid a mustard gas attack. However, you were close enough to the blast to now vomit in the trench, and your eyes start to get sore. There is no clean water to wash them with so you have to use muddy, vomit-laden trench water. **You are still (just) in the game.**
5. An officer calls for you to join others and go 'over the top' into No Man's Land. Your leg is badly injured by an explosion and will need to be amputated in the field hospital. A nurse is called and you are sent away from the front line. **You are out of the game.**
6. You are caught in a direct hit from the enemy artillery. You do not survive. **You are out of the game.**

---

# Ideas for activities

## War poetry

Despite the harsh reality of war, poetry and art were still able to flourish. Due to the need for recruitment and finally conscription, many artists, photographers and poets experienced war service.

Wilfred Owen is one of the most celebrated poets of WWI. While undergoing treatment back in England, he was encouraged to write. He returned to service in 1918, but was sadly killed in action. Below is one of his poems:

1914

*War broke: and now the Winter of the world  
With perishing great darkness closes in.  
The foul tornado, centred at Berlin,  
Is over all the width of Europe whirled,  
Rending the sails of progress. Rent or furled  
Are all Art's ensigns. Verse wails. Now begin  
Famines of thought and feeling. Love's wine's thin.  
The grain of human Autumn rots, down-hurled.*

*For after Spring had bloomed in early Greece,  
And Summer blazed her glory out with Rome,  
An Autumn softly fell, a harvest home,  
A slow grand age, and rich with all increase.  
But now, for us, wild Winter, and the need  
Of sowings for new Spring, and blood for seed.*

Explore the poem with your pupils. Dissect the language and structure of the poem – what are the main messages? Explore ideas of the depth of language or imagery, and discuss an 'elegy' or 'lament' as a form of the expression of grief.



Visit our website for the  
latest offers, news and  
projects for schools,  
and to book your  
experience with us:  
**[theboxplymouth.com](http://theboxplymouth.com)**



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**