

Session Plan 8

Material culture from the Home Front

This session explores the material culture that survives from the First World War Home Front and considers what these objects tell us about life at the time.

The activities are designed to support the National Curriculum in England, Wales and Northern Ireland at Key Stage 2 and are suitable for pupils in Scotland following the broad general education phase of the Curriculum of Excellence. They are relevant for the KS2 'Local History Study' in England and Wales, 'The World Around Us' at KS2 in Northern Ireland, and support experiences and outcomes in Social Studies at Levels 2-4 in the broad general education of the Curriculum for Excellence. The activities are also tailored for youth groups such as Young Archaeologists' Clubs, Scouts and Guides.

Session aims

- For your group to understand what material culture means.
- For your group to discover what types of material culture from the First World War Home Front survive today.
- For your group to explore what these objects tell us about life on the Home Front during the First World War.
- For your group to consider what types of material culture from today might survive for future archaeologists to study.

Session outcomes

Your class or group will have learned what material culture can tell us about life on the Home Front. Your class or group will have developed skills of object description, drawing and photography. They will have the opportunity to curate an exhibition of objects and/or their written and artistic work.



Resources required

Home Front Legacy material culture – Finds Report Sheet (below):

The 5-page worksheet will enable your pupils or group members to record material culture objects in the same way as archaeologists record their finds made on site.

Material culture objects from the Home Front (or photographs)

If you cannot source original objects from the First World War Home Front, you can use photographs (see below). You could try contacting your local museum to source objects, as they may have objects from their collections or a loans box that they can share. Local libraries or archives may have documents from the period that you can use too.

Session plan

Begin your session with a discussion of what 'material culture' is. Do your pupils or group members have any ideas about what 'material culture' refers to?

Material culture relates to the physical artefacts of a period. These artefacts can help us explain how people lived during a period of history and are very useful for both historians and archaeologists.

Artefacts, mementoes and documents from the First World War can tell us a lot about the Home Front. These artefacts can include objects such as badges worn by war workers, documents such as contemporary photographs taken of First World War sites, and even souvenirs like postcards and letters written to loved ones, for example, family members serving in the trenches on the Western Front.

Writing challenge... Can your pupils or group members write their own postcard from the point of view of a woman or child on the Home Front? For example, they could write to a male relative fighting in the trenches on the Western Front or a female relative in the new Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) working overseas in a non-combat role. Women in the WAAC worked as cooks, drivers, mechanics and in administrative roles. Women were also employed on the frontline as doctors and nurses.



Detective work... Can your pupils or group members (or teachers/leaders) find any objects from the First World War to share with the class or group? You may have some family memorabilia belonging to relatives – such as letters, badges, medals or photographs.

You might be able to track down some objects or documents via your local museum and/or local library and archive. Local history groups might also be able to help you hunt for material culture from the First World War relating to your area.

Once you have collected a selection of objects, encourage your class or group to work in small teams to discuss what the objects are and why they are important. What information can your pupils or group members infer from the objects they are investigating?

If you have not managed to find any original objects for this session, use the photographs (below). Encourage your groups to discuss what the photographed objects are and what they might have been used for.

What do the objects (or photographs) tell us about life on the Home Front during the First World War?

Writing challenge... can your pupils or group members use one or more of the objects to tell a story? They could research the object and what it was used for and tell its story from the past to the present day, explaining how and why it was kept; or they could use the object to inspire a piece of creative writing set on the Home Front during the First World War – does the object have a starring role in the story?

Recording challenge... Challenge your pupils or group members to complete one of the Finds Report Sheets (see below) for their material culture object.

NB – if you cannot source original objects from the First World War for this activity, you could challenge your pupils to record a modern-day object using the same techniques.

Writing challenge... Using the information from their Finds Report Sheet, challenge your pupils or groups members to write a short description of their chosen object



that could be used as a museum label. What information do they think needs to be included in a label for an object in a museum? You might like to arrange a trip to your local museum before undertaking this activity to see how objects are displayed and labelled in a museum setting.

Curatorial challenge... Why not create a pop-up museum in your school, local library or museum which shows off some of the objects that your class or group have collected? Remember to include the labels for the objects that your pupils or group members have written. You might also like to display some of the Finds Recording Sheets that your pupils or group members have completed, and their photographs and drawings too.

Time to talk... What do your pupils think is important about the objects that have survived from the First World War Home Front? Why have these objects been saved or looked after? What types of objects from today do your pupils think will be still around in 100 years' time?

Final questions

At the end of this session, your pupils or group members should be able to answer the following questions: ***What is material culture? What can material culture tell us about life on the Home Front during the First World War? How are objects recorded archaeologically?***

Home Front Legacy – Material culture Finds Report Sheet (p1)

Name of archaeologist: _____

Date of recording: _____

Drawings of my object: *(Form)*

My scale is:

____:____

Cut out a scale bar to stick in here! Make sure
you write down what scale you are using too.



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Home Front Legacy – Material culture Finds Report Sheet (p2)

Photographs of my object:

Stick your photographs of the object into this space. Make sure that you include a scale bar or ruler in your photographs alongside the object. Remember that you must photograph every side of the object including the top and bottom!



Historic England



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Home Front Legacy – Material culture Finds Report Sheet (p3)

About my object: Write your answers to each of the questions below:

1) What is your object made from? (*Fabric*)

2) Is the object complete or a fragment? (*Condition*)

☐

Complete

☐

Fragment

3) What colour(s) is your object?

4) What does your object feel like? What texture is it?

5) Describe any decoration or patterns on your object:

6) What is your object for? Or, what do you think it is for? (*Function and interpretation*)



Historic England



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Home Front Legacy – Material culture

Scale bars (p1)

How to use scale bars:

When doing either illustrations or taking photographs of archaeological finds, it is very important to include a scale bar. This means that you can still see how big an object is even when the drawing or photograph has been shrunk or enlarged.

For all photographs, include a 1:1 scale bar. Each centimeter marked on a 1:1 scale bar equals 1cm in real life too. A ruler would also work as a 1:1 scale bar. The scale bars below are for several different scales:

- 2:1** This scale is for drawing small objects and shows that your illustration is twice the size of the object that you are drawing. For example, if you were drawing a Viking coin that is 2cm across in real life, your drawing at a 2:1 scale would be 4cm across.
- 1:1** This scale should be used when you are drawing your object life-size. Your drawing should be exactly the same size as it is in real life. Make sure you always use a 1:1 scale for all your photographs.
- 1:2** This scale is for drawing bigger objects. It shows that your illustration is half the size of the object that you are drawing; every 1cm in your drawing equals 2cm in real life. For example, if you were drawing a Roman pot that is 20cm tall in real life, your drawing at a 1:2 scale would be 10cm tall.
- 1:5** This scale is for drawing much larger objects. It shows that the object is five-times bigger in real life than in your drawing; every 1cm in your drawing equals 5cm in real life. If you are drawing a medieval tile that is 50cm across, your drawing at a 1:5 scale would be 10cm across.

Home Front Legacy – Material culture

Scale bars (p2)

Scale bars:

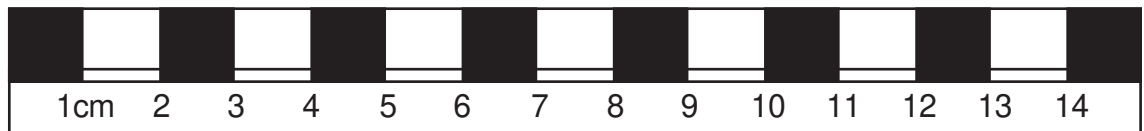
Photocopy and cut out these scales to use on your illustrations and photographs.

Make sure that you use the most appropriate scale!

2:1



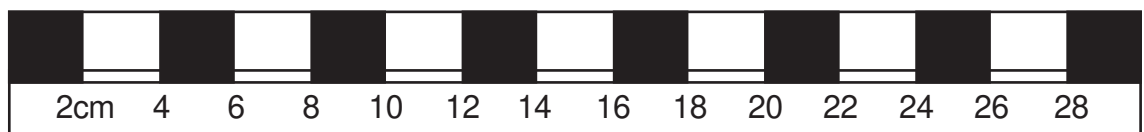
1:1



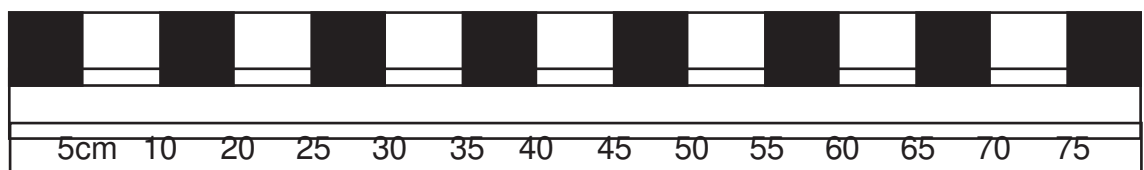
1:1



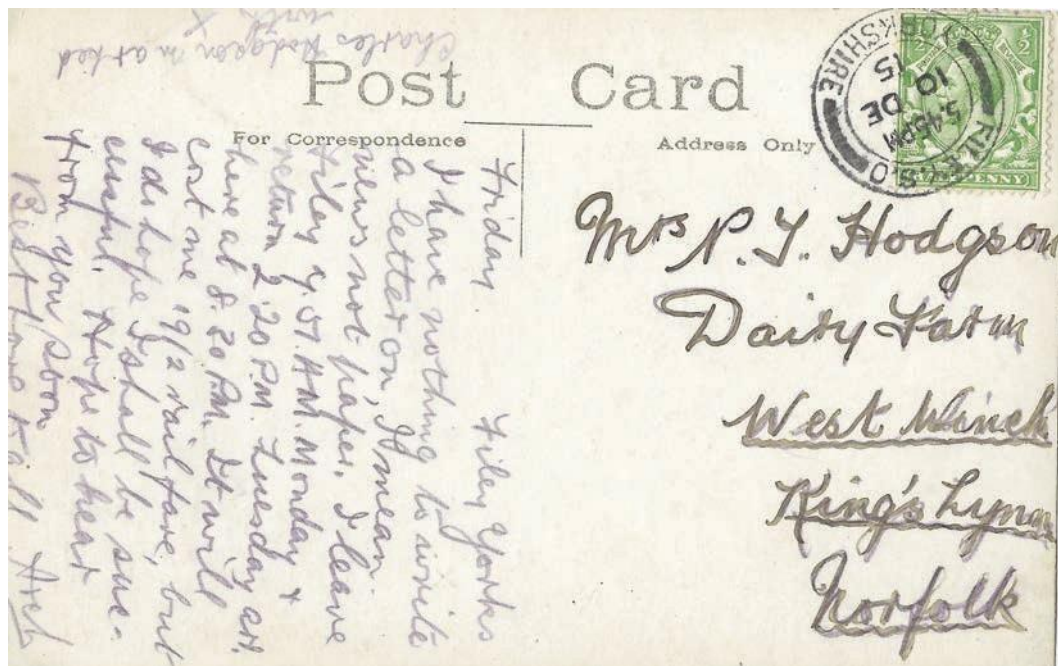
1:2



1:5

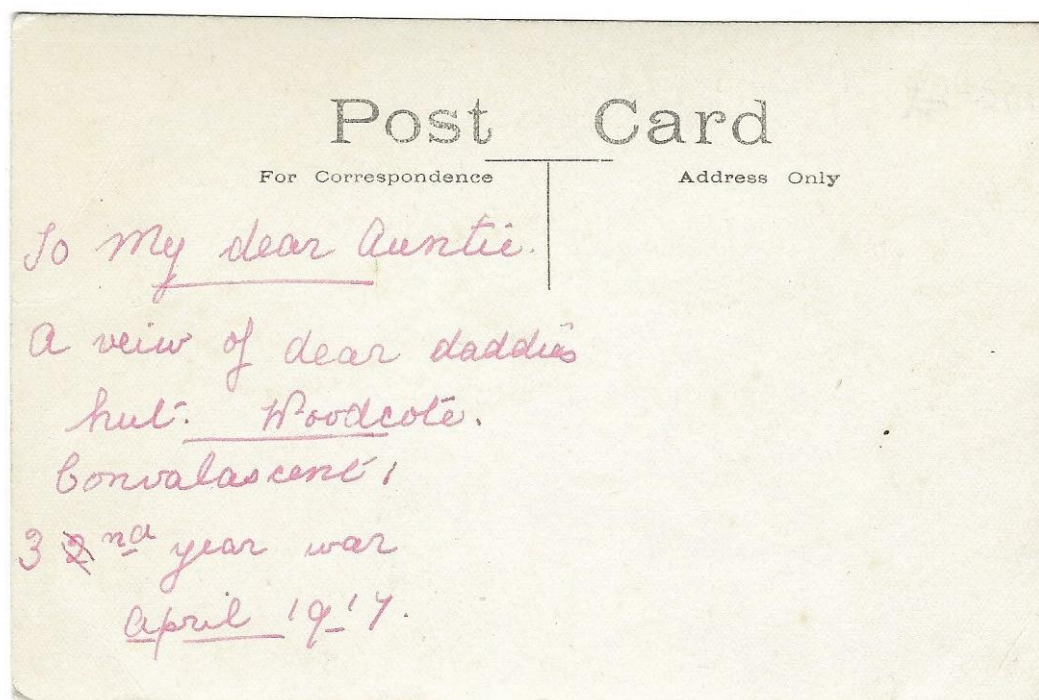
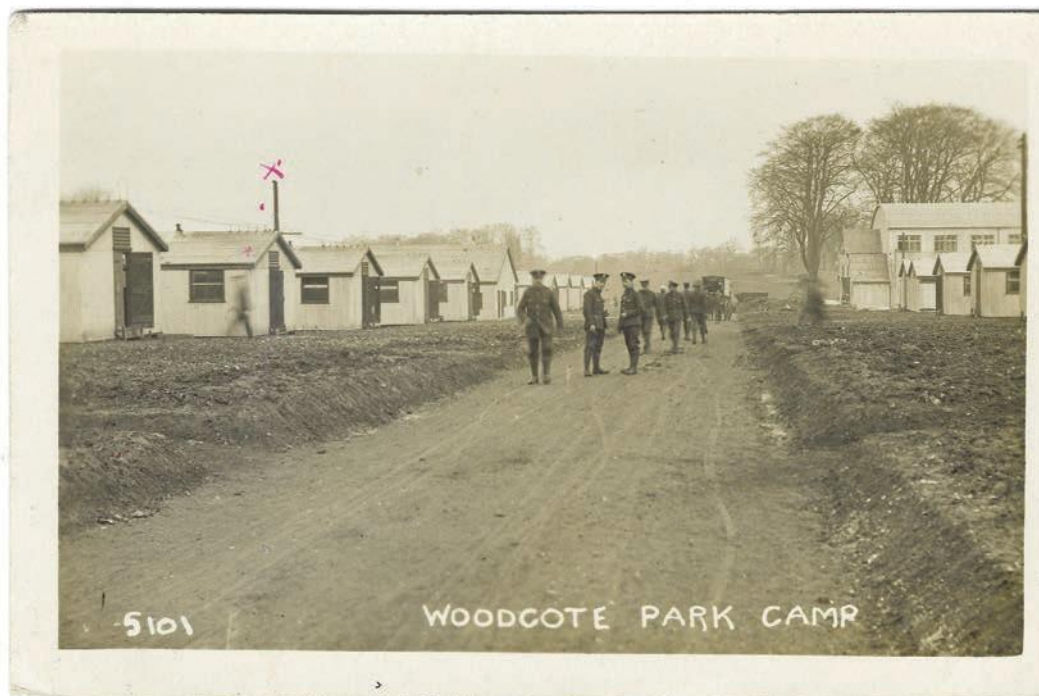


Home Front Legacy – Home Front material culture examples



Postcard with a message. Postcards often showed soldiers or buildings on the Home Front that were involved in the war effort.

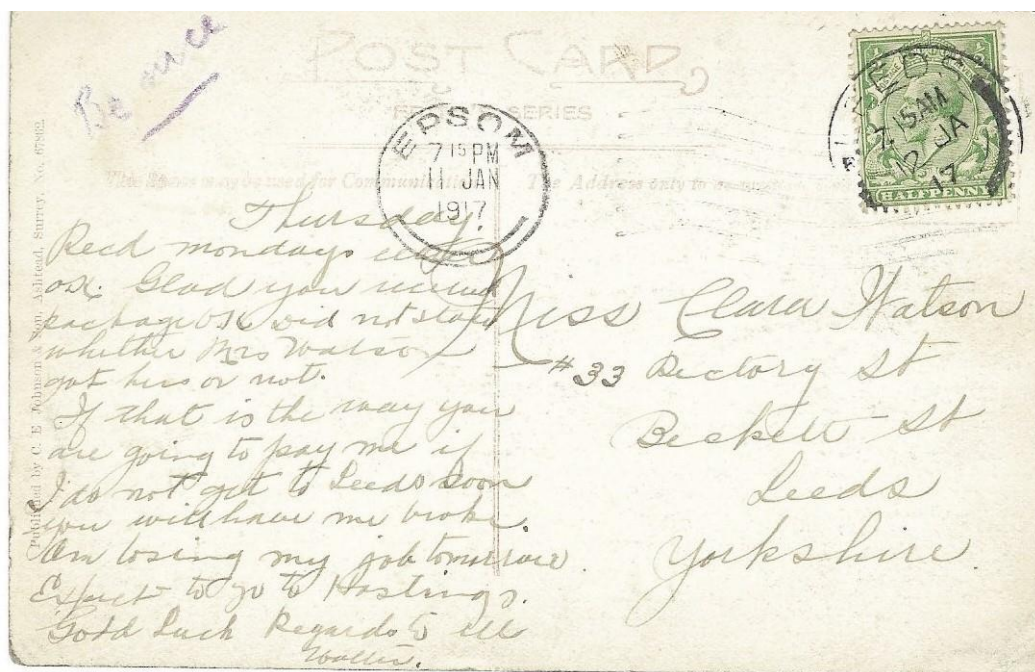
Home Front Legacy – Home Front material culture examples



Postcard with a message. Postcards often showed soldiers or buildings on the Home Front that were involved in the war effort.

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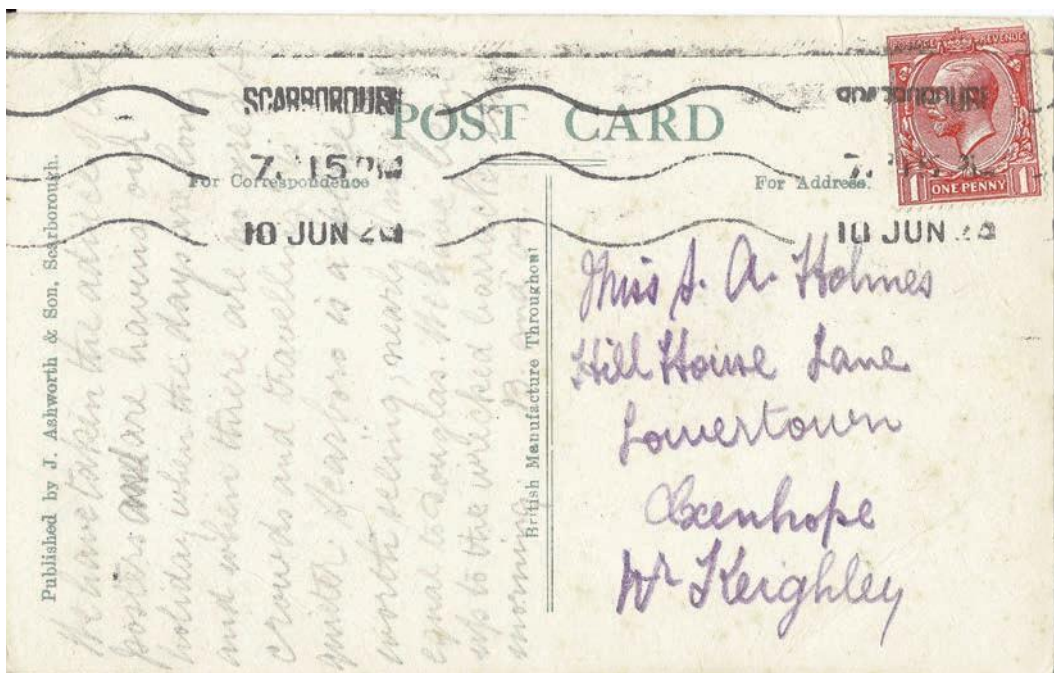
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Home Front Legacy – Home Front material culture examples



Brass button stick engraved with "R.A.M.C. 18362" and "BODILL PARKER & Co., LIMITED. MANUFACTURERS & CONTRACTORS. BIRMINGHAM".

The object is 17.5cm long by 4.3cm wide.

Button sticks were part of the personal kit of military personnel. They were used to protect the fabric of a military uniform whilst polishing brass buttons on it. The button stick was placed behind the button, over the fabric.

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Home Front Legacy – Home Front material culture examples



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TOP: Princess Mary's Gift Fund 1914 Box, containing a bullet pencil made from expended .303 cartridge with pencil inserted into top, and a New Year's card with greeting and sword/wreath motif. The Gift Fund was created by Princess Mary in October 1914 to provide a gift to every serviceman at the front for the first Christmas of the war. Most Princess Mary boxes contained tobacco, cigarettes, a pipe and lighter. For non-smokers, writing paper and a pencil were provided.

BOTTOM: A group of British soldiers of the Army Service Corps (ASC) with their Princess Mary Christmas gift tins at a camp in south-east England, December 1914.

Home Front Legacy – Home Front material culture examples



Circular enameled First World War 'On War Service' badge.

'On War Service' badges were issued by the government and private firms from December 1914 onwards to signify that the wearer was engaged in essential war work.

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Home Front Legacy – Home Front material culture examples



British Army rum jar marked with the letters 'SRD', which stood for 'Supply Reserve Depot'. Some soldiers said that SRD actually stood for 'Seldom Reaches Destination' or 'Soon Runs Dry'! Soldiers could be issued with a small measure of rum by their commanding officer or on the recommendation of their medical officer. It was commonly issued during or after the dawn 'stand to'.

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First World War British munition worker's 'On War Service' badge. This badge is associated with the wartime service of Miss Daisy Louise Allen (later Mrs Turner) with the Ministry of Munitions.

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Envelope containing a piece of wire from Zeppelin SL11, which was the first Zeppelin to be shot down over the British mainland.

This was sold by the British Red Cross Society as a souvenir.

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Home Front Legacy – Home Front material culture examples



This decorated shell case appears to have been brought home by a British serviceman who served in Italy during 1917–18.

This is an example of trench art and may have been kept as a souvenir.

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