

# The Turin Men: Evaluation

## Context

In July 2018, following Twitter publicity from 'Away from the Western Front' about the Salonika film we had commissioned, we were contacted by Emma Pace, a teacher working in Blaise Pascal School near Turin. She asked for additional information about 16 British soldiers who died between May 1918 and July 1919 and were buried in the CWGC plot in Turin Town Cemetery. This led to a research project which uncovered the histories of the soldiers, as well as two soldiers buried in nearby cemeteries at Meana di Susa and Oulx. Descendants of some of the soldiers became aware of the project via social media and came forward with additional information and photos. Building on the research carried out by Lyn Edmonds, Emma Pace worked with her students as part of their English studies, exploring First World War poetry and preparing eulogies to be read out in English at the soldiers' graves on Remembrance Sunday. In addition, there was publicity about the research and the project in Italian local and regional media, and a representative from the British Consulate in Milan joined Emma and her students to commemorate the soldiers on 11 November 2018. The event was filmed for local TV. In addition to the students' activities, an illustrated 'Book of Remembrance' was published, containing accounts of the soldiers; a blog was maintained on the 'Away from the Western Front' website and the project was presented, along with a display panel, at the 'Away from the Western Front' national conference in Bristol on 30 October 2018. Individual soldiers were commemorated through additional publicity on the centenaries of their deaths, some of which occurred after the armistice.

## Evaluation methodology

Besides keeping figures of the number of participants and people attending events, Emma Pace used 'Away from the Western Front' forms to carry out baseline and summative evaluation with her students. In addition it was possible to estimate the impact of the project through various media outlets, including the @aftwf1418 Twitter promotion.

## Quantitative findings

This project achieved a wide impact, even though few people were involved with the activities themselves. Energetic social media activity led to further print and digital media interest in the UK, Italy and Australia.

Audience	Detail	Numbers
School	Italian students (aged 17-18), teachers and other participants	30
Volunteers	Researchers	11
	Attending events in Italy	c. 25
	Attending events in UK	c. 50
Wider public	Social media (@aftwf1418 + re-tweets)	c. 300+
	Regional media reach (UK): - Northern Echo	220,000
	Media reach (Italy) including local papers (e.g. La Valsusa), regional papers (e.g. Luna Nuova), national press (La Stampa) and regional TC (TGR Piemonte )	c. 1,500,000
Website	'Away from the Western Front' website analytics:	

	- Total users during the period July-December 2018	5736 <sup>1</sup>
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## Qualitative findings

21 students completed evaluation forms.

### Baseline evaluation

The first question was completed before the activity and asked what the students' expectations were. In general, the answers indicated that the students expected to find out more about an aspect of the First World War which was new to them, i.e. they expected to extend their knowledge and understanding of history, and to see the FWW from other perspectives. The following quotes give examples of the expectations of the students:

- I'm expecting to discover a lot of things about the forgotten fronts and to know a lot of things about the English soldiers who are buried in Turin. I didn't know anything about these facts so I think that this experience will be great. (Asya)
- This is a new way of learning History from another point of view. Surely this experience will be interesting and educational. (Chiara)
- I expect to be as involved as I can with the stories of these soldiers and to learn more about how they fought for their country. Having my father in the Italian Army I already feel connected to them and I'm looking forward to this project. (Cristina)
- I would like to commemorate the lives of these young soldiers that died at the end of the First World War and are buried in the Turin cemetery. I think that this project is very useful and interesting. I can't wait to start. (Giulia)
- I believe we have a great opportunity to get to know something almost nobody knows. (Massimiliano)
- I would particularly like to know more about all the soldiers who died and are buried in Turin and nearby, in order to preserve their remembrance. (Yuliana)

However some students saw opportunities for deeper empathy and awareness:

- My expectation is to understand English traditions about this anniversary and to feel part of this deep sensitivity to First World War, because I think we miss it in Italy. (Elisa)
- I hope that this experience will be an alternative way to succeed in putting myself in one of the soldiers' shoes, so that I could, even just for a while, feel that his sacrifice has not been useless. I really would like to feel that, because it's not something you learn from history books at school. (Eleonora)
- From this activity I expect to feel a new form of empathy and stop dehumanizing people who were just like me. I hope some of these soldiers will stop being just numbers to me, I hope they'll have names and faces. (Margherita)

### Knowledge and understanding

In Italy there seems to be less public awareness of the First World War than in Britain, especially from the perspective of soldiers from other countries. The students were studying English and had studied British war poets, but these are largely concerned with the Western Front. Therefore the project introduced them not only to other fronts, especially Salonika, but also to the fact that Turin was involved.

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<sup>1</sup> For the whole 'Away from the Western Front' website.

- Thanks to this activity I learned that during the First World War many people died all over the world (Giulia)
- At the beginning of this experience I was excited but also confused because I had never heard anything about "The Turin Men". When we started to discover things about them everything became clear. (Asya)
- I also learnt about the role of Turin during the Great War. (Francesca)

The students were able to understand the war from the perspective of individual soldiers and this gave them an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of war.

- I think that if you simply read what is written in history books, then you can only get a grasp of the situation. Instead the fact that we focused on eighteen soldiers, their life and their service as soldiers changed everything! In this way we managed to figure out how terrible and silly WW1 was. (Eleonora)
- This experience helped me because I think that, for the first time, I thought about the real meaning of the war. Looking at the tombstones of the soldiers at the cemetery, I thought that we have to thank them for what they did: they fought for our freedom and to give us a better life. Then, studying their life and their history, it was like knowing them as if they were still alive. (Chiara)
- I consider them as heroes, so I am very delighted to have had the opportunity to know more intimately those who died in my city. (Ludovica)
- This experience has been one of the most touching of my life because it made me feel deep feelings and made me understand better what war means. (Theodor)

### **Skills**

Students developed 'soft' skills in developing and managing a project, as well as using literacy and historical enquiry skills.

- I learned History from another point of view, studying its protagonists ( the soldiers) (Chiara)
- I worked actively for the project, and I was also involved in every step of it.(Chiara)
- I felt very moved in class when we tried to write something poignant and meaningful on soldiers' crosses. I really enjoyed selecting war poems, according to our sensitivity, and choose those that emotionally involved us. (Elisa)

### **Enjoyment, inspiration, creativity**

The activities organised through this project affected the students profoundly, so that it became a very rewarding process, as expressed in these quotes:

- During the remembrance I felt happy because the soldiers for the first time received our gratitude for their role during the Great War. (Asya)
- I really liked the fact that we found the descendants of the Welsh and Australian soldiers (Beatrice)
- After months of organising, being in the cemetery in front of these soldiers was emotional. I was really moved during the ceremony when each of us read some poems. I felt happy for these soldiers who finally had someone who remembered them. (Cristina)
- Each of us was given a soldier, so I started getting some information about my soldier's private life and I actually took a liking to him. I was really amazed at the way

I got involved! I would like each of us to visit our soldiers every so often since it is as if we have adopted them. (Eleonora)

- I loved decorating the wooden crosses with the phrase we had chosen to honour our soldier. Personally I think it was a beautiful moment. (Ludovica)
- The activity at the cemetery was definitely the best part of the project. Not just because we prepared for two months to be there, but because we finally met the soldiers, and with the poppies and crosses we were all together to honour them. A feeling I will never forget was when I entered the cemetery and I saw the exact place where the gravestones are situated. I tried to imagine it before, but it was definitely different from what I saw in the cemetery, it was like I was visiting someone I've known, not for very long, but surely someone I felt very close to. (Margherita)

### **Attitudes and values**

The success of the project achieved a lasting impact on the students, allowing them to develop their views and attitudes, to deepen their empathy and to consider how the experience might continue to affect them in years to come. The following comments were in response to the question 'how has the activity changed you?'

- We are just like those boys. (Massimiliano)
- This activity at the Cimitero Monumentale in Turin ... was an object of reflection; it also made me think about Italian soldiers who served away from their homeland. (Beatrice)
- Through the activity and the visit to the cemetery I have understood the importance of the remembrance because all the soldiers (even if often they were very young or they had a family) enrolled and gave their life for the country, to guarantee a better future. (Carola)
- I already knew what it meant to have a father in the military and not seeing him for a long time (I didn't see my father for over 7 months) but with this project I realised how difficult it was for them to be far from home fighting a war and also how terrible must have been from the families at home to hear that their relatives had died and that they were buried here in Turin, where nobody could have gone to visit them. (Cristina)
- Now, every time I hear something about the First World War, I feel in contact with the soldiers who died there. (Valentina)
- The activity and the visit to the cemetery really changed me. During the remembrance ceremony I felt the same way King George V described in his speech in 1922: "in the course of my pilgrimage, I have many times asked myself whether there can be more potent advocates of peace than the massed multitude of silent witnesses to the desolation of war". (Eleonora)
- I believe that reading the soldiers' histories helped me to empathize with them and to see them as human beings with a story to tell us, and not only a grave. The visit to the cemetery made me reassess this site, no more like a macabre and sad one; now I think a cemetery is a normal and peaceful place where you can visit someone dear and alone like our soldiers. (Elisa)
- Surely thanks to the activity ... I will always remember them and sometimes I will go visit. (Francesca)

- I believe that without ... this project, it would not have been possible to give our Turin men what they really deserve. They deserve to be remembered and I have committed myself to this project so that every year they will be honoured. (Ludovica)
- The connection between two far off times has much more things in common than anyone could ever think of, so personally, I think that the importance of history will play a substantial role in my life. I've learned that the truth beneath the surface should be discovered not only to preserve it and to keep it in mind as a lesson for life, but also to create a sort of connection between the thoughts of people who lived before us and the ones that someday will influence the world. (Yuliana)

### **Progression**

Clearly the above quotations indicate the success of the project on many levels, but it is also possible to identify examples of progression. For instance Margherita says before the project:

- 'I expect to feel a new form of empathy and stop dehumanizing people who were just like me. I hope some of these soldiers will stop being just numbers to me, I hope they'll have names and faces.'

Afterwards she says:

- 'I tried to imagine it before, but it was definitely different from what I saw in the cemetery, it was like I was visiting someone I've known, not for very long, but surely someone I felt very close to.'

Eleonora said before the project:

- 'I hope that this experience will be an alternative way to succeed in putting myself in one of the soldiers' shoes, so that I could, even just for a while, feel that his sacrifice has not been useless.'

.. and afterwards:

- 'I started getting some information about my soldier's private life and I actually took a liking to him. I was really amazed at the way I got involved! I would like each of us to visit our soldiers every so often since it is as if we have adopted them.'

Robin Clutterbuck

January 2019