

By George

Animals of the Great War

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In September 2014, the Charity Life Wisdoms began an unusual project: "Animals in the Great War", with pupils in year 6 of St Thomas Church of England Primary School in Groombridge, Tunbridge Wells.

It is important to remember those who sacrificed so much at one of the bleakest times in our history. In what was the centenary year of Britain joining the War, it was especially poignant to honour not only the people that gave their lives, but the animals too.

It is not so well known that animals played a vital role: more animals were used in the First World War than any other, before or since. Their actions saved hundreds of lives, and vitally affected the outcome. There is also a special poppy: a purple poppy, for remembering animals in War.

What these 10 and 11 year olds discovered about animals surprised everybody. They learned about the role of messenger pigeons and even sent messages on carrier pigeons. They learned about the role of dogs, first aid and mercy dogs for example, helping the wounded on the battle field. They visited working horses, the type that would have been used for hauling equipment and supplies. They learned how jars of glow worms helped soldiers read maps in the dark. They learned how to research, how to ask questions, and were inspired to reflect on the sacrifice of people and all sorts of animals in the First World War.

The monument to animals who served in wars on the edge of Hyde Park says: "They had no choice". The children learned that these animals were capable of incredible bravery and sacrifice, as well as essential companionship and comfort to soldiers who were living in horrific circumstances.

Our Furry Friends Helped

By Erin & Josh

When people think of war they think of the poor soldiers in the horrible trenches but what about the animals?

During World War One animals played many vital roles, including: mascots, messengers, and medics. One of the most well-known roles was that of transport. Although it was cruel to some animals, they saved many lives.

Animals had a vital part in World War One. If they hadn't helped, some of us may not be alive today.

Crack a Code

By Jacob B

Crack this code for an interesting fact about World War One.

Message:

KJDF PGUFO TQSFBE UIF EJTFBTF
USFODI GFWFS. UIJT SFTVMUFE
JO B USFODI DBTVBMUZ SBUF
PG VQ UP 26 ☺

Actual A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
Code B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z A

Actual 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 % =
Code 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 ☺ ☹

"There are still millions of horses that have fought or are still fighting in wars that haven't been noted for their service. It is up to us to change that."

By Helena



Misty the dog visits from the Blue Cross



Research in progress, with volunteer Chris Marks

The Different Roles of Animals in the War

TRANSPORTERS

Animal transporters were vital in World War One: carrying men, equipment and supplies. Their job was to pull or carry objects that were too heavy for a human and be able to cover long distances in short amounts of time. Overall, they were more reliable than cars, as they would not run out of fuel, would not blow up if shot; killing the soldier and the destroying the car. Horses could dodge in and out, cars could not; horses could jump over things, whereas cars could not. Without them, the war would've looked very different, and many more people would have died.

By Josh

Courageous Camels get the Hump

You may think of a camel as ordinary wild animals in the desert but they played a surprisingly vital part. Although they are loud, slow and obviously needed food, luckily they did not need so much water as they store it in their humps. Camels were used in mainly hot and sandy countries, but as the war went on they also used them in France, Germany and northern Europe, giving them camel shoes to walk.

By Lucy



Elephants

Elephants were a very important part of the war. They were used to carry heavy loads of weapons and carts; the carts were often used to pull injured men as well as to deliver clothes to the soldiers. Elephants were so strong that they could carry up to six bags and a man on their back at the same time.

By George

Rudolph the 'War Time' Reindeer

In 1914, the Russian army joined forces with Britain, and decided to introduce reindeer into the war effort. They were used to pull supplies and other essentials through snow, as they were used to the climate. Although reindeer are notoriously stubborn, they turned out to be a great companion and a great help.

By Josh

Warrior – the Real War Horse

Warrior was an unusual and incredible horse. He was known to give courage to both cavalry and to other horses around when he lead. He was at the battles of both Ypres and the Somme and survived. He became a symbol for British courage, and the mascot of the Canadian Cavalry to which he was attached.

He was awarded the Dickin Medal: the Victoria Cross for Animals, on 2 September 2014. He is the only animal in the PDSA Roll of Honour to be awarded the "Honorary" Dickin Medal, which states:

"Warrior and General Jack Seely commanded three regiments of the Canadian Cavalry, leading the charge at some of the bloodiest and most infamous battles of World War I. Warrior's Honorary PDSA Dickin Medal was awarded on behalf of all animals that served in the Great War."

By Eric, George, Helena, Issy, Josh & Lucy

MESSENGERS

Messengers were a vital part of the British Army, delivering different kinds of messages and saving millions of lives. There were different types of messages needed: across no-mans-land, from trench to trench, and to warn soldiers. The most well known messenger was the pigeon, but there are lots of other messengers that people don't know much about: canaries, dogs and even the garden slug.

By Rose



Pigeon Palaver: the Main Messenger

Pigeons were vital in World War 1. If we hadn't have had them life may have been very different today. They were dedicated to delivering messages and could travel amazing distances at blitzing speed. They were expert at delivering messages under any condition and at any time, some even had cameras.

By Jacob K



An actual message carried by a pigeon in the First World War, with the carrying canister

Cher Ami

Cher Ami, meaning dear friend, was donated by Britain to the U.S. Army Signal Corps in France. She is particularly famous for getting a vital message through despite being shot in the breast, being blinded in one eye, and having a leg hanging off by a tendon. Two previous pigeons had been shot down by the enemy but she managed to deliver the message that saved the remaining soldiers under attack. She became the hero of 77th Infantry Division, and saved 194 lives. She was awarded the Croix de Guerre 1914-1918, the French military decoration.

By Finley, Jacob K, Olivia & Rose

Canary Sacrifice Saves Soldiers Lives

Canaries had a big impact as they could smell gas from very far away. When a canary fell off its perch it meant gas was coming and the soldiers only had 9 seconds to put their gas mask on.

By Finley

Common Garden Slugs Save Lives

You might think of garden slugs as cabbage patch pests, but have you ever thought that these thieves could detect one of the most used methods for killing soldiers by the dozen? The presence of gas was a great threat to soldiers in the trenches, and surprisingly, garden slugs proved to be very reliable gas detectors.

By Olivia

WORKERS



French soldier with a mercy dog

Dogs were amongst the most reliable and hardest workers. They had lots of different roles including: casualty dogs, messengers, sentry dogs, scout dogs and those that laid wires.

The most common dogs were German Shepherds and Doberman Pinschers, these dogs were very good at camouflage with their dense coats and were renowned for their outstanding agility. Other smaller breeds were also used, such as Terriers, who were most often employed as 'ratters': dogs trained to hunt and kill rats in the trenches.

By Ella



Dog collar for carrying messages

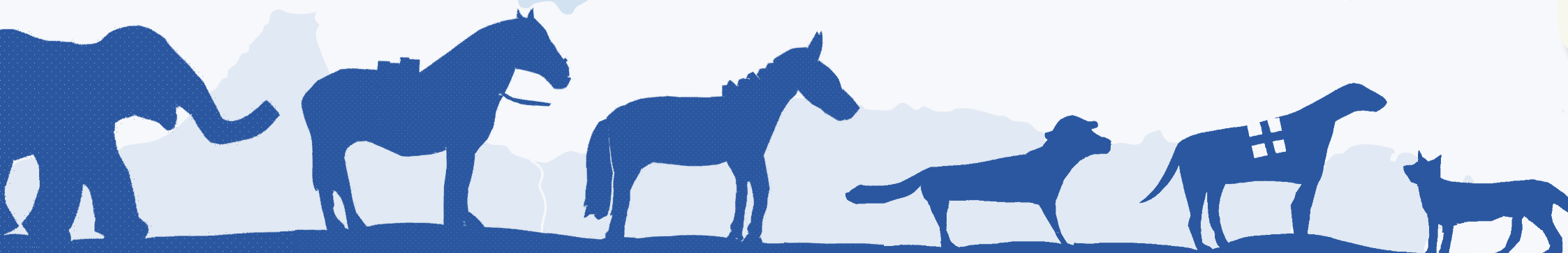
Dogs Deliver Warnings of Danger

Dogs became famous for zooming across no mans land to deliver essential messages. The messages they carried undoubtedly saved millions of lives. Doberman Pinschers were chosen for their strength, stamina and speed. They were also known for their protective guarding abilities. They were ideal for the vital job of taking and delivering messages to and from the trenches when other methods of communication could not reach the men.

By Louis, Livvy and Gus



By Ella



PESTS

Sergeant Stubby

As well as being one of the most famous bull terriers in the world, Stubby became the most famous American war dog by the end of WW1. Stubby served 18 months and participated in 17 battles on the Western Front. At the Smithsonian (U.S.A.) he is recorded as being the only dog to be nominated for rank and subsequently promoted to Sargeant.

Private Robert Conroy had found Stubby on the streets of Yale university (U.S.A.). He smuggled him onto the ship which was taking them to France for the war and hid him in a coal bin. When they arrived and travelled to camp, the commanding officer found out about Stubby and was less than pleased. But fortunately for both of them, Stubby gave the Colonel a salute which impressed him so much that he allowed him to stay.

Stubby remained with the 102nd Infantry, 26th known as Yankee Division. Sergeant Stubby was the first American war dog and is famous for saving his regiment from gas attacks, finding and comforting wounded soldiers, and single handedly taking down a German spy. He survived the war and was awarded the Dickin medal for bravery.

By Isaac



Star the mercy dog, visiting the class at Redoubt Fortress and Military Museum, Eastbourne



postcard: courtesy of A. Crosby private collection

Most animals helped and saved soldiers in and out of battle during the First World War. The animals were treated with respect and some became famous like Sergeant Stubby. But some of them became an expanding army of hatred. These were pests, such as: rats, lice, fleas, mice and frogs.

By Daniel & Thomas

Wrecking Rats and Mischievous Mice Get the Bite Back

Rats and mice were a real problem for soldiers as they spread disease and ate their food. Many of the rats in the trenches were reported to have been as big as cats. Rats have about 900 babies a year, so you can imagine how many rats were running about and carrying fleas and disease.

By Poppy & Thomas

Frogs, the Unusual Enemy

Frogs were a big problem. They thrived in the bottom of the trenches and spread diseases by infecting drinking water with parasites. They would go rotten and smell when they died. They are also very slippery and caused falls and accidents.

By Bethan



Fighting Fleas and Lice for Victory

Fleas and lice may be small, but they enraged the soldiers, and also made them ill. They spread very rapidly and carry and spread horrible diseases. Lice spread pyrexia, commonly called 'trench fever': a highly contagious disease that took soldiers an average of twelve weeks to recover from. Symptoms are similar to flu and typhoid, and include: headaches, skin rashes, inflamed eyes and leg pains. Lice and fleas made an already bad situation a whole lot worse.

By Daniel & Jacob B

Bottom left: "This is a snapshot of my section, I did not know it was being taken" is the statement on this postcard signed "Frank"



By Daniel



By Sam

MASCOTS

Mascots played a vital part in lifting the soldiers spirits. There are many stories of animals who became companions and mascots to soldiers: they provided comfort by reminding the troops of home. This was a very important job as it boosted morale for those who were finding life on the frontline gruelling.

Several different types of animals were used as mascots, such as: dogs, cats, pigs, bears, foxes and even koalas. They also became a symbol for the company they were apart of. People got very attached to mascots, some even took them home, although many did not return due to the hostile conditions of the battle fields. Mascots played a crucial part in the war effort and they will be remembered forever.

By Aimee, Bella, Edward, Erin, Sam and Tom

Sailor Saves the Bacon

A German pig was rescued from a sinking German ship and became his new owners' mascot. He was named Tirpitz by the crew of the British ship HMS Glasgow who rescued him.

Tirpitz quickly got used to his new life on board ship. Many of the sailors aboard the ship became depressed and home sick during their long months at sea but the sight of Tirpitz waddling about the deck brought smiles to their faces and helped lift their spirits for the long journey ahead.

By Aimee

Cute Cats

Cats had many jobs and made great companions and mascots. Many cats were used in the trenches to keep the soldiers happy and positive.

By Bella

Cuddly Koalas

The Australian army used Koalas as mascots. Being native to Australia they were good as companions as they are furry and the way they hold onto you is very comforting. They were used by the soldiers on the battle fields near the front line, where the Australian soldiers fought alongside the British army..

By Sam

The South African Extra

Jackie the baboon, another famous mascot, was taken to France by South African soldiers. Jackie had excellent eyesight and hearing; he used to warn soldiers of enemy movement or possible attacks by making noises and tugging their clothing.

By Erin

The Famous Honey Eater

There are quite a few bears that were mascots. One American black bear called Winnipeg became very famous. When the Canadian soldiers came over to fight, their mascot Winnipeg was taken to London zoo, where he remained until he sadly died in 1919. An American soldier said: "The bears grip was so tight, it really made you feel comforted." From this we get the phrase 'bear hug'. When Winnipeg was in London a boy and his father visited the zoo. Christopher Robin Milne liked Winni so much that his father: A.A.Milne, was inspired to write the famous 'Winnie the Pooh'

By Edward

PEOPLE

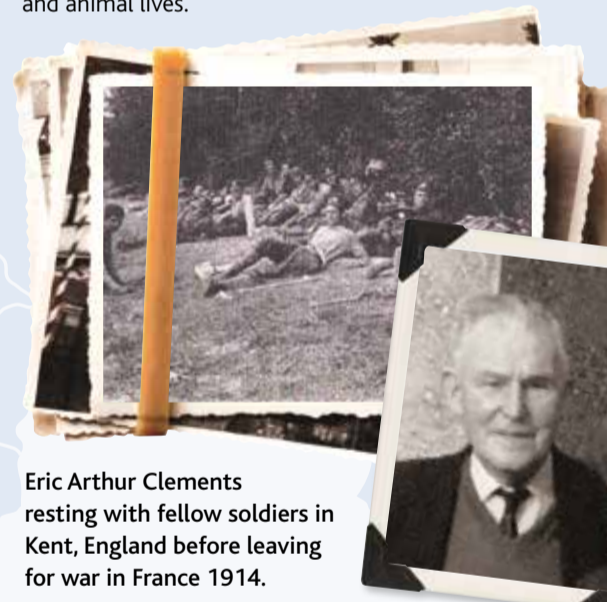


Photos: courtesy of James Bamford

Colonel Reginald Bamford

The enormous amount of animals used in the War obviously required human help and assistance for food, care, and to stay alive. Colonel Bamford was a local Veterinarian who worked in France during the War, and was highly decorated for his service.

Soldiers assigned to care for the horses, and those in the cavalry, were given a booklet for the management and care of horses. It included advice on how to make a tired horse feel better, by pulling his ears and hand rubbing his legs. Strong bonds were formed between animals and their handlers, and loyalty saved both human and animal lives.



Eric Arthur Clements resting with fellow soldiers in Kent, England before leaving for war in France 1914.

The children heard about a local grandfather Eric Clements. Eric volunteered to join the 1st World War when he was 21. He spent the first part as a machine gunner in the trenches. He then changed to transport military equipment by horse up to the front lines. Lorries and even the tanks could not get through the mud so horses were invaluable. Eric was very exposed riding the horse and was injured by shrapnel twice, once in the head and once in the leg.

Eric fought for 4 years on the western front and survived the Battle of Somme, and the Battle of Ypres. He returned to England and married and had two children.



The Army Medical Museum

We visited the Army Museum at the beginning of the project. Gail Anderson told us about codes used to send messages, and showed us artefacts such as a camel shoe, a messenger dog collar and a cloptrap used against horses. We deciphered a coded message and enjoyed looking round the museum and lots of different things, including gas masks for horses and dogs.

Below L-R: cracking a coded message; looking round the Museum; a horse gas mask



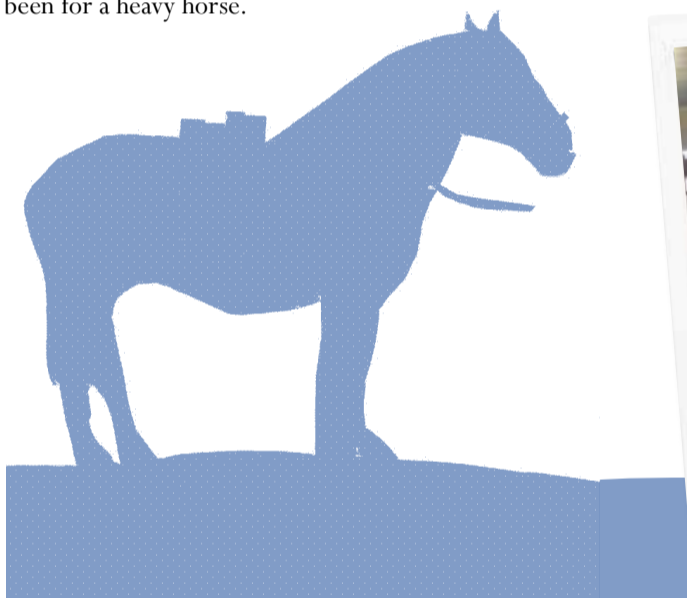
Learning about research at the Library with Susan Rogers

Tunbridge Wells Library

We learned from how to use library services to look things up and about books on the First World War and animals. We read some of these books and made notes.

The Working Horse Trust

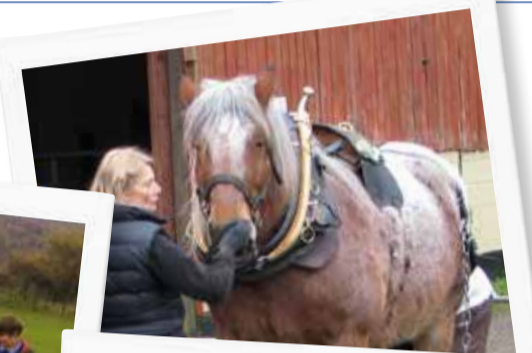
Jo Ambrose told us about different types of horses, bred for working on farms, suddenly transported to the battlefield to haul supplies and equipment. We met a shire horse, an Ardennes horse and a rare Suffolk horse. We also went into a field of mud to experience something of what it would have been like for horses in the conditions of the battlefield, which was quite fun, but we could imagine how difficult it must have been for a heavy horse.



One of the Ardennes breed



How difficult it is to walk through mud



Harnessing a horse, the way it would have been done 100 years ago



Trying on different military uniforms next to the World War One replica trench

The Redoubt Military Museum and Fortress

We learned loads about animals from historian Peter Harrison, and saw and touched some interesting artefacts. We saw the World War One replica trench and met Star the mercy dog there especially to visit us. We also tried on different military uniforms and helmets and saw an actual messages delivered by a pigeon in World War 1.

Secret Messages

Donna Beard brought pigeons into class and told us how pigeons were used in the War. We saw a real canister which was actually used on a pigeon in World War 1. We learned about the different types of codes, then wrote a code each. We were in teams of three and attached three codes to each pigeon then released them. We all got to touch the pigeon if we wanted. We got the answers emailed back with which team's pigeon came first: they were quite fast!

Below: setting off the carrier pigeon with a message; Donna Beard shows how to fix the message to the pigeon



Code Cracker: answer to the coded message on page 1:

Lice often spread the disease trench fever. This resulted in a trench casualty rate of up to 15%

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Secret Messages

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