



### **The Experience of a First World War Soldier**



This topic introduces pupils to a first-hand account of a soldier's experience during the First World War (FWW). Through a series of activities, centred round the letters of a young soldier from Pitlochry, pupils will consider how his words inform their understanding of life for a soldier and his family during the FWW. Through a combination of critical thinking, group discussion and dramatic characterisation this topic will seek to:

- educate pupils on the use of primary, archival resources
  - teach research skills
  - encourage critical and interpretive thinking
- use first hand sources to emotionally engage with collections and people

This topic meets the following outcomes in the Curriculum for Excellence:

- I can show my understanding of what I listen to or watch by commenting, with evidence, on the content and form of short and extended texts.  
**LIT 3-07a/ LIT 4-07a**
- Using what I know about the features of different types of texts, I can find, select, sort, summarise, link and use information from different sources.  
**LIT 3-14a / LIT 4-14a**
- To help me develop an informed view, I am exploring the techniques used to influence my opinion. I can recognise persuasion and assess the reliability of information and credibility and value of my sources.  
**LIT 3-18a/ LIT 4-18a**
- I can use my knowledge of a historical period to interpret the evidence and present an informed view.  
**SOC 3-01a**
- I can describe the factors contributing to a major social, political or economic change in the past and can assess the impact on people's lives.  
**SOC 3-05a**
- I can discuss the motives of those involved in a significant turning point in the past and assess the consequences it had then and since.  
**SOC 3-06a/ SOC 4-06a**

**Unit 1 – John Alex Veitch**

Where: Perth & Kinross Archive, AK Bell Library, Perth  
Duration: 1 hour 20 min (plus additional time for arrival and settling)  
Delivered by: Assistant Archivist or CPK Learning Officer

This Unit will begin with a short tour of the archive providing pupils with an overview of the collections and an understanding of the work of the archive. This will help to provide context for the documents used in the Topic.

*There is potential for this Unit to be delivered in the classroom depending on circumstances but we would strongly recommend, where practical, that it be delivered on site.*

This Unit introduces pupils to Private John Alex Veitch a young man from Pitlochry who joined the 1<sup>st</sup> London Scottish in 1917. It comprises six activities, with identified learning outcomes. In groups pupils will be given two of John Alex's letters and a photograph which they will use to identify some of the external and internal influences that shaped his experience. They will also use dramatic interpretation and a 'Role on the Wall' exercise to engage and empathise with a young man engaged in war.

**Unit 2 – Trench Life**

Where: Classroom  
Duration: 40 mins  
Delivered by: Teacher

This Unit takes a closer look at John Alex's description of trench life and compares it to the experiences of other soldiers. John Alex often describes his trenches as warm, safe and dry which contradicts many descriptions of trench life from other sources. It comprises three activities with identified learning outcomes. Teachers will be given a lesson plan, copies of John Alex's letters and links to online resources. Pupils are asked to consider John Alex's accounts against their own knowledge and understanding of trenches and consider whether censorship and a desire to shield his family from worry could be affecting his version of events.

**Unit 3 - Troop Movement and The Battle of Cambrai**

Where: Classroom  
Duration: 40 mins  
Delivered by: Teacher

This Unit covers John Alex's experience of troop movement and the events of the Battle of Cambrai, the first major offensive that he participated in. It comprises three activities with identified learning outcomes. Teachers will be given a lesson plan, copies of John Alex's letters and links to online resources. Pupils will use John Alex's letters to track his journey on a map from London to the front lines. They will then look at accounts of the Battle of Cambrai and discuss how John Alex might have been affected by his first real taste of battle.

**Unit 4 – The Fate of John Alex Veitch**

Where: Classroom  
Duration: 40 mins  
Delivered by: Assistant Archivist or CPK Learning Officer

The final Unit reveals the fate of John Alex Veitch and draws together all of the information discovered in the previous three Units to create a full picture of this FWW soldier's experience. It comprises three activities with identified learning outcomes. Pupils will reflect on the information learned in Units 2 & 3 to expand on the external and internal influences that shaped John Alex. They will return to the 'Role on the Wall' activity from Unit 1 to add these new details and draw to a close John Alex's journey. Pupils will finally be asked to discuss how the use of primary sources/archives has helped to inform their learning throughout these Units.

W: [WWW.SCOTTISHARCHIVES.ORG.UK/EDUCATION](http://WWW.SCOTTISHARCHIVES.ORG.UK/EDUCATION)

E: [CONTACT@SCOTTISHARCHIVES.ORG.UK](mailto:CONTACT@SCOTTISHARCHIVES.ORG.UK) T: +44 (0)131 535 1367

A: GENERAL REGISTER HOUSE 2 PRINCES STREET EDINBURGH EH1 3YY

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**Unit 5 – Giving a Voice to a First World War Soldier (Optional)**

Where: AK Bell Library or School

Duration: 1 – 2 days

Delivered by: Assistant Archivist and Teacher

This optional Unit invites pupils to further engage with John Alex Veitch through dramatisation of his letters. Using their own voices they will bring John Alex's words to life through sound recording. Pupils will be introduced to performance and recording techniques, alongside script editing and photography. Alternatively pupils will be given the opportunity to produce a piece of creative writing using John Alex's experience to inform their own letters from the trenches. The outcome will be added to the collections in Perth & Kinross Archive and a final film will be created for the school.

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