Can you help to locate Britain’s missing First World War ‘National Munitions Factories’?

The Home Front Legacy 1914-18 project, coordinated by the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) is calling on volunteers to help track down the ‘National Munitions Factories’ which were established in the First World War to gear up our war effort here on home territory. Sites for these 170 factories can often be difficult to pinpoint, with existing factories often repurposed for war work rather than being purpose built.

Dan Snow, CBA President and military historian said, “Local knowledge can really open up our understanding of the tremendous impact on our towns, villages and countryside of gearing up our country to go to war. There was extensive activity on home soil before and during the Great War, but many of the sites and buildings associated with the home front are little known and vulnerable. Often, very little of the original fabric of the building survives so, critically, local knowledge is likely to be the most useful source of information. By recording these sites, local people can preserve our stories before they are lost, so that future generations can understand how the momentous events of 1914-18 affected our families and changed life in Britain for ever.”

Volunteers are being asked to identify the location for these factories using contemporary maps, plans, documents and photographs and then photograph and record the former site or existing physical remains using the Home Front Legacy project app.

English Heritage military expert, Wayne Cocroft, believes local knowledge of our Home Front remains provides us with a missing link to understanding this momentous event in our history, “By combining the results of our research and finds made by CBA volunteers, we’ll finally be able to do justice to this chapter of our history in bricks and stone.”

Local people are being asked to help locate the sites for these ‘missing’ factories:

- HM Explosives Factory Colnbrook (Belgian government guncotton works)
• National Filling factories at: Abbey Wood no. 11 (Kings Norton Metal Co.) & Southwark no. 8 (Sumner street)
• Trench Warfare Filling Factory Fulham (Stevenage Road)
• National Small Arms Ammunition Factory Coundon (Coventry) – a very small factory that employed only 78 people
• Chemical Warfare Factory Langley (Birmingham)
• National Gauge Factories at: Croydon (Gloucester Road, Vidal Engineering Co.) & Kilburn (Fairfax Yard)
• National Tool Factory Gateshead (Coulthards Lane)
• National Salvage Depots, where material recovered from battlefields was sorted and repaired for re-use. Often located in ports, we are hoping to track down sites at: Blyth, Immingham, Ridham & Trafford Park
• National Cartridge and Box Repair Factory Dagenham Dock
• National Gun Carriage Repair Factory Southampton (Empress Road)
• National Box Factories at: Castleford, Leeds (J H Abrahams Ltd Wellington Stret), Lechworth, Liverpool (Brasenose Road Bootle), Luton, Woolwich (Watt Torrance and Co. Trinity Street), Guildford (Walnut Tree Close) & Maidstone
• Willesden (Park Royal) Non-returnable Box Depot
• National Steel Billet Breaking Factory Trafford Park
• Cotton Waste Mills, used to process cotton waste for the manufacture of explosives. Typically these were existing Textile mills. We are seeking information on:
  • Cloughfold Mills in Rawtenstall
  • Hall's Mill in Whaley Bridge.
• National Fuse Filling Factory, Chaul End, Bedfordshire. This had a special railway station was built for the workers. The station is now disused but its location is recorded, however where the factory lay in relation to the station is still unknown

Get involved

A resource pack for volunteers, including an online recording form and app, guidance on recording First World War sites and buildings and a directory of heritage services and resources is available on the CBA’s website.

Register for the Home Front Legacy project website to record your findings and submit your photographs and information direct to the Historic Environment Record held by your local authority. Your site will appear on the project’s UK map of First World War sites as a public resource.

Register at www.homefrontlegacy.org.uk and share your findings on Twitter: @homefrontlegacy

See factory types at: http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/first-world-war-home-front/home-front-legacy/land/

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For further information, interview requests, images and partner logos please contact Louise Ennis at the CBA, 07709 353741 louiseennis@archaeologyUK.org
Notes for editors

The Council for British Archaeology (CBA)
For almost 70 years the Council for British Archaeology, as an educational charity, has been promoting archaeology for all and is the leading voice for the public interest in archaeology. Active both in Westminster and with grassroots community groups, the CBA works with the voluntary sector and across archaeology to safeguard the UK’s historic environment and make the case to decision makers that archaeology matters. www.archaeologymatters.org.uk

Project partners
Home Front Legacy 1914-18 is a partnership project, enabling communities across the UK to preserve their local knowledge and enhance future understanding of the impact of the First World War on Britain’s landscape and consciousness.

The project resource pack is based on materials developed through a nine-month English Heritage-funded pilot study led by the University of Bristol and the University of York in 2012 which located over 110 sites in Staffordshire and the Lower Lea Valley, just north of London.

The Council for British Archaeology is working with partners across the UK to encourage archaeology for all with support from English Heritage and the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO UK). In England the project will feed field observations into local authority Historic Environment Records and relevant National Monument Records on the Heritage Gateway website, expanding our knowledge and influencing future protection for remains.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency and Queens University Belfast (with funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council) are using the recording toolkit with local groups and volunteers to encourage wider participation in First World War research and archaeology and add to the sites and buildings documented in the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record.

Historic Scotland, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS), Archaeology Scotland and ALGAO Scotland are taking the project forward in Scotland to encourage participation in First World War recording and enhance records and archives for the Centenary and beyond.

In Wales, Cadw and the Welsh Archaeological Trusts are encouraging volunteers to identify, record and document sites and update Historic Environment Records with new local knowledge.