

Archaeology

What is archaeology?

Archaeology is the study of past civilisations by the recovery and recording of the physical evidence that they left behind. Archaeological techniques are used to examine all periods, from prehistory to the relatively recent past.

Archaeology and the Great War

Archaeologists have been studying First World War sites, particularly on the Western Front since the late 20th century. The vast scale and longevity of the Great War presents archaeologists with the opportunity to study many aspects of the conflict. Excavations on the Western Front have shed new light on trench warfare and provided evidence for the development of military equipment and tactics throughout the course of the war.

Inevitably, human remains are often encountered by archaeologists working on Great War sites. In such circumstances, remains are recovered for reburial and every effort is made to discover their identity. This can involve the careful study of associated artefacts, such as regimental insignia, analysis of the remains themselves, and historical research.

Closer to home

Physical evidence of the First World War can also be found in the UK. For example, between 1915 and 1919, two military training camps were located on Cannock Chase. An archaeological survey of the camps has recorded practice trenches and a scale model of Messines in Belgium, used to prepare troops ahead of an offensive.

The most obvious reminders of the Great War, however, are the memorials erected in villages and towns across the UK in the wake of the conflict.

