

War memorials and inscriptions

War memorials are a way of remembering servicemen and women who have given their lives to protect their country.

Memorials are places to grieve, pay tribute, remember and commemorate, both individually and as a community. Some memorials record just the fallen, others, those who served as well. Memorials can celebrate a victory in war, but in modern times they tend not to glorify war, but honour those who have died.

There are about 100,000 war memorials across the UK. About two thirds of these were created after the First World War.

Types of war memorials

After the War memorials of different forms were erected in cities, towns and villages to commemorate those who left their homes and never returned.

The Memorial Clock Tower in Coalville was erected in 1925 to commemorate the local men that lost their lives in the First World War.

There are many types of war memorials; some of the most common are:



A **cross** - including the Wheel cross, Latin cross (a representation of the cross on which Jesus died), Calvary cross (a cross resting on a base of three steps), and Market cross (used to mark a market square in market towns).



A **plaque or tablet** - may form the entire memorial, be included on a larger monument, or be used alongside another memorial such as sculpture or a tree.



An **obelisk** - is a tall and narrow tapering structure and is a very common design for monuments.

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Sculptures – these can form the whole memorial or be part of a monument. Victory or peace sculptures may form part of a monument.



Functional memorials – these include schools, church fittings, benches, gardens and playing fields. They may have a plaque on a wall explaining the building's function as a war memorial and listing the names of those it commemorates.



Cenotaph – this is a traditional war monument memorial, the most famous of which is the Cenotaph in Whitehall, London.

The word cenotaph comes from the Greek words kenos, meaning "empty", and taphos meaning, "tomb" as the design aims to commemorate those whose remains rest elsewhere.



A pillar or column – in particular a pillar that looks as though it has been cut off symbolises lives that have been cut short.

Above: Memorial Types ©Michael Faulkner



Above: St John the Baptist Church Whitwick Memorial Cross ©Michael Faulkner

In the ringing chamber at St John the Baptist Church, Whitwick, hangs a photograph in remembrance of Robert Underwood, a Whitwick baker and bell-ringer who was killed in the First World War.

Robert was born on 30 November 1887 and served in the Royal Navy Reserve; he married Alice Broadhurst early in 1916 and they lived on North Street, Whitwick. He died in Rouen, France, on 25 March 1918, aged 29, from the effects of gas poisoning. His daughter Margaret, who he never met, went on to become a bell-ringer.

Exactly 100 years after his death, in March 2018, the bell-ringers at Whitwick Parish Church rang a quarter peal on the eight bells in memoriam.



Photograph of Robert Underwood ©Michael Faulkner

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission looks after cemeteries and memorials at 23,000 locations across 150 countries to commemorate the 1.7 million men and women of the Commonwealth forces who died in the First and Second World Wars. In many cases the people commemorated on these war memorials may not have a proper grave because they died on the battlefield or were lost at sea.



Above: War graves ©Michael Faulkner

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Above: Memorial to Archibald Holt ©Michael Faulkner

An inscription refers to the words on a war memorial or plaque dedicated to those who have fallen. Inscriptions are often cut into stone; others take the form of lead lettering or bronze plaques or the stone may be cut away around the words so that they are raised.

There are no rules about what words are used in war memorials, but they commonly include words about remembering and paying thanks for the sacrifices people made.

Names may be added in alphabetical order, or by order of rank; they may also be listed elsewhere, for example on a local Roll of Honour.

Inscriptions of soldiers who have died in the First World War are often seen added to existing graves. On the three-tiered cross (left) we can see the name of Archibald Holt is included on the headstone of his parents.

Private Archibald was wounded in battle and died on 22 September 1918 aged 23. He was buried at St Johns Church, Coleorton on 26 September 1918.

Below – This memorial plaque commemorates the men from Coalville who died in the First and Second World Wars.

It was originally located in Coalville’s British Legion Club being unveiled on 12 February 1950. It was later moved to the North West Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC) offices on Whitwick Road and can now be viewed in the reception area.

Inscription above the list of names:

“THEY LIVE! AND THOSE WHO KNEW THEM WILL NOT FORGET.”

And beneath:

“LET THOSE WHO COME AFTER SEE TO IT THAT THESE NAMES ARE NOT FORGOTTEN.”



Above: War Memorial at North West Leicestershire District Council offices ©Joe Ashby

Glossary

Battlefield	A place where fighting takes place or has taken place
Biographical	About someone's life
British Commonwealth	A group of nations consisting of the United Kingdom and several former British colonies that are now sovereign states but still pay allegiance to the British Crown
Community	A group of people who all live in a local area or share a common interest
Commemorate	Remember or show respect for someone or something
Glorification	The act of describing or representing something as admirable especially unjustifiably
In memoriam	As tribute to somebody after they have died
Memorial	Something designed to preserve the memory of a person, event, etc.
Plaque	A plaque is a sign that is used to identify what is being remembered, and commonly fixed near or to a memorial
Rank (military)	The roles and responsibilities within the armed forces that give authority over others
Roll of Honour	A list of the names of servicemen who fell in the war often belonging to a particular community or place of work
Servicemen	Members of the Armed Forces
Veterans	A person who has had long service in the Armed Forces

Useful Websites

War Memorials

<http://www.leicestershirewarmemorials.co.uk/>

<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/index.htm>

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/>

<https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/first-world-war-home-front/what-we-already-know/land/war-memorials/>

<https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/>

War Graves

<https://www.cwgc.org/>

<http://www.britishwargraves.co.uk/>

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/projects-and-partnerships/war-memorials-register>

<https://www.twgpp.org/>

War Records

<https://www.royalleicestershireregiment.org.uk/>

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/british-army-soldiers-after-1913/>

<https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-united-kingdom-records-in-military-armed-forces-and-conflict>

<https://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/category.aspx?cat=39>

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/research/tracing-your-family-history/tracing-your-army-history/where-to-find-army-service-records>

<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/research/military-records/british-soldiers-ww1-service-records.htm>

<http://record-office-catalogue.leics.gov.uk/CalmView/>