



Historic England

Types of War Memorial





Apethorpe, Northamptonshire. A Grade II-listed war memorial.

Almost a million Britons died in the First World War, and many times that number suffered injury or bereavement. The over-riding sense at the war's end was of loss, and over the following years most communities subscribed to a memorial to those who had served, and especially to those who had died. Early on in the war the decision had been taken that bodies should not be repatriated, but instead be cared for in the cemeteries of the Imperial (later Commonwealth) War Graves Commission. This absence of a grave close to home greatly increased the need for a focus for remembrance.

Precise figures are hard to ascertain, but the UK National Inventory of War Memorials estimates that overall there are over 100,000 war memorials in the UK. These memorials took many forms, far more than is today realised.

Traditional war memorials

Most typically a freestanding cross or sometimes an obelisk or column, usually bearing the names of those who had died in the conflict, was erected in a prominent place. Exceptionally, some include civilians killed by enemy action or in war work. Most are modest affairs, albeit with deep significance and poignancy for the local community where they stand. But especially if there was a wealthy local patron, or in larger towns and cities, memorials were often more ambitious. Many were imposing ensembles of architecture and sculpture, often depicting servicemen in uniform.

Other memorials include:

- memorial plaques in places of worship, workplaces and educational establishments

Found mainly in places of worship are:

- memorial stained glass windows, seats, organs, rolls of honour, regimental flags, books of remembrance, furniture
- lychgates

Functional war memorials

Some communities, often following the wishes of ex-servicemen, chose more socially beneficial forms of remembrance. Often these carry inscriptions recording their memorial function. They include:

- village halls
- parks, gardens or playing fields
- civic spaces
- hospitals or additional wards
- Nurses' homes

Front cover

Caterpillar Valley Cemetery, on the Somme: a Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery.



Salle, Norfolk. The Grade II memorial hall, built in 1929.

- chapels
- schools
- tracts of open countryside (sometimes vested in the National Trust)

Which war memorials can be listed?

To be candidates for inclusion on the National Heritage List for England (available at www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list), war memorials must be free-standing, exterior monuments that are more than thirty years old.

Unless compromised by alteration or of little design interest, there is a presumption in favour of listing war memorials. Listing is undertaken to identify those items which require extra consideration through the planning process. It is not a catalogue of all examples, so discretion is still required with memorials of limited formal or visual interest. Free-standing, exterior, war memorials, such as the traditional types mentioned above, are the focus of the war memorial listing project.

Functional war memorials can sometimes be listed. First and foremost, however, these need to be judged for listing or registration against the standards for the relevant building or landscape type.

The other types of traditional war memorial, such as plaques, rolls of honour, furniture and so on, and other interior features, are not legally eligible for listing.

The large numbers of Imperial and Commonwealth War Graves Commission monuments are well tended and secure. Clearly deserving of the greatest respect, they will nonetheless not normally warrant individual designation as they already enjoy special protection through the supervision of the CWGC.

Historic England publishes a set of Listing Selection Guides. These explain in more detail which structures are eligible for designation. War memorials are dealt with in the Listing Selection Guide for Commemorative Structures (www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/dlsg-commemorative-structures/). The guides on different building types indicate the standards that are relevant to functional war memorials, such as village halls (www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/selection-criteria/listing-selection/). There is a separate set of Selection Guides for designed landscapes eligible for inclusion on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest, including one on Landscapes of Remembrance (www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/drpgsg-landscapes-remembrance/).



Historic England

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guidance@HistoricEngland.org.uk

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Tel: 0370 333 0607

Fax: 01793 414926

Textphone: 0800 015 0174

Email: customers@HistoricEngland.org.uk

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