

# Types of war memorial



This helpsheet provides information on and explanations of the range of war memorial designs in the UK and some of the key features of different war memorials.

## 1. War memorial types

There are estimated to be more than 100,000 war memorials in the UK. While these may have the same purpose, there are many different types of war memorials, some of which are outlined here. For more information about what may be considered a war memorial, please see our 'Teachers' information about war memorials' primary helpsheet.

Photographs of the memorial types and design features mentioned in this helpsheet can be found in the Gallery section of [www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org](http://www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org).

- **'Traditional' war memorials**

Many war memorials have a traditional design which makes them easily recognisable as a war memorial. One of these is a **cross**, of which there are many forms, including the wheel cross, Latin cross, Calvary cross and market cross. **Plaques** are another commonly used war memorial type, and may form the entire memorial, be included on a larger monument, or be used alongside another memorial type to indicate its status as a war memorial (especially on some of the more unusual war memorial types outlined below). Plaques are often used especially when the memorial includes names of the fallen or some sort of inscription (see below).

Other war memorials are monuments, and again there are different types. One of these is an **obelisk**. This tall and narrow tapering monument has been used as the design for many important monuments, including war memorials in the UK.

The **cenotaph** is another example of a type of traditional war memorial monument, one notable example being the Cenotaph on Whitehall in London. The word 'cenotaph' derives from the Greek words for 'empty tomb' and the design is therefore used to commemorate those whose remains are elsewhere. A cenotaph may be used as a memorial to an individual or a group.

War memorials can take the form of a **pillar** or **column**. In particular, a pillar that looks to have been broken off is often used, with the broken pillar symbolising lives that have been cut short.

**Sculptures** may either form the whole memorial or be incorporated into part of a larger monument, and often commemorate a specific group. Notable examples of this include the 'Women of World War II' memorial in London and the 'Shot at Dawn' memorial at the

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National Memorial Arboretum. Victory or Peace sculptures are often used as part of a war memorial as well.

The war memorial types listed above can be placed in a variety of locations, often occupying prominent places in a community. They may be placed on a plinth or raised base, often with some sort of boundary marker such as railings or a paved contemplation area.

- **'Functional' war memorials**

While the memorial types described above have a familiar sculptural or architectural form, some communities chose a more functional design as their way of commemorating those lost in war. This may have been because of the relevance of the memorial type to those remembered or because the community wanted a way of remembering their fallen that would add something of direct value to the community, both at the time and in the future for subsequent generations.

Many of these take the form of **buildings**, such as **schools, village halls, or sports venues**. Others may be **church fittings, bells, benches, gardens or playing fields**. Such memorials may include a plaque either on the wall of or within a building or, in the case of a garden or playing field, on gates at the entrance, explaining the object's status as a war memorial and often listing the names of those commemorated.

## **2. Design features and imagery used on war memorials**

Although war memorials can differ in terms of their main design type, there are many common design features or images that are often used on memorials. Some of these are outlined below.

A **wreath** is often carved or painted onto a memorial plaque or monument. This is a traditional symbol of commemoration, symbolising ongoing life. Laurel wreaths are also a traditional symbol of victory. Another commonly used image on many larger monuments is a carved soldier with **arms reversed**. This is a traditional symbol of mourning or respect. Many memorials also feature an **'eternal light'** or patriotic symbols such as **flags**.

## **3. Names and other inscriptions**

A feature of many war memorials is an inscription listing the people and/or conflicts commemorated and including some form of dedication. There are no fixed rules about what should appear as a dedication, but common ones include the phrases, 'Their name liveth forevermore,' 'We will remember them,' and the Kohima epitaph. Others simply state the start and end dates of the war, while some identify the people responsible for erecting the memorial, thus giving information about the fallen and the community to which they belonged. War memorials were erected by different sorts of communities. Often it was a geographical community but sometimes members of a school, Scout group or workplace erected a memorial to their peers. Some inscriptions give thanks for those who returned from war as well as remembering those who died. Looking at the inscriptions on a war memorial and analysing them can help pupils understand the memorial's significance.

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There were also no fixed rules about if and how names should be recorded on war memorials. Some do not record any names of the fallen (these may be recorded elsewhere, such as on a local Roll of Honour, so it is worth checking this if you are planning to research the memorial with pupils). Other war memorials list each name, sometimes including details such as the person's rank and date of death.