

Memorials to World War II civilians



War Memorials Trust

Introduction

Tens of thousands of UK civilians died during World War II. Many of these were casualties of air raids during the Blitz in 1940 and 1941, with residents of London, Birmingham, Coventry, Liverpool and Glasgow among those particularly badly affected. Included in the count of civilian deaths are members of the Civil Defence Service (such as air raid wardens) and Women's Voluntary Service killed on duty.

War memorials remember all those killed or affected by war, and many memorials to the war dead include civilians as well as military personnel. Some other memorials have been created specifically to remember civilians killed in World War II. This information sheet gives details of some of these memorials that commemorate civilians and the events that affected those people, and can be used in conjunction with WMT's lessons about World War II.

Memorials in London

Around 20,000 London civilians lost their lives as a result of enemy action during World War II. Many of these were victims of air raids during the Blitz, a period of concentrated bombing of the UK's cities and industrial areas in 1940-41, which began on 7th September 1940 with raids over London. As well as ordinary civilians, people doing non-military war work such as firefighters and air raid wardens were affected. These people are remembered on a number of war memorials in the city.

People of London memorial

The memorial to the people of London killed during World War II consists of a circular block of stone, on the top of which is inscribed, in a circular pattern, 'In war resolution, in defeat defiance, in victory magnanimity, in peace goodwill.' Around the side of the stone is a further inscription: 'Remember before God the people of London 1939-1945.'

The memorial was unveiled in 1995 to coincide with the 50th anniversary of VE Day and remembers all Londoners who lost their lives during the war.

Firefighters memorial

The National Firefighters memorial is located near St Paul's Cathedral in London. It was designed by John W Mills and unveiled in 1991. At the time it was called 'Blitz' and listed the names of the firefighters who had died carrying out their duties during World War II. However, in 2003 the names of 1192 firefighters who had died on duty during peacetime were also added to the monument and it was renamed to reflect this change.

The memorial consists of a bronze sculpture of three firefighters on duty. They stand on a base on which is the names of the firefighters the memorial commemorates. On one side there is a relief sculpture of two female firefighters, reflecting the role women had during World War II alongside men.

While this is no longer only a war memorial, since it also commemorates peacetime casualties, it is an interesting design and a good example of a memorial that shows a lifelike depiction of its subject, rather than a more abstract design.

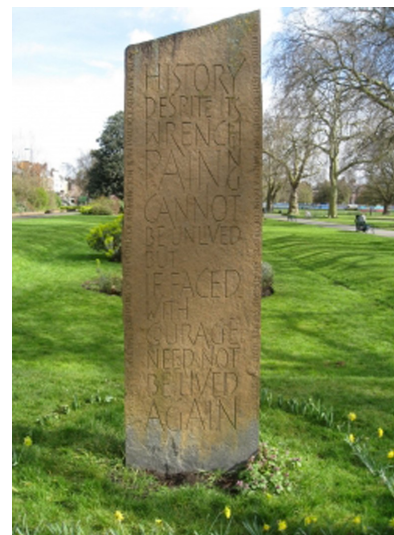


Firefighters' Memorial, London © Clive Gilbert, 2011

Kennington Park civilians

Kennington Park, in London, is the site of a memorial to more than one hundred civilians who died in a disaster there during World War II. The memorial was unveiled in 2006.

During the Blitz many Londoners sheltered from the air raids in London Underground stations but an alternative form of shelter was necessary. Other types of shelter like the Anderson were not possible for people who did not have a garden (which applied to the majority of Londoners). Communal shelters were therefore where many people went during a raid. Kennington Park's shelter was of the trench variety, constructed by digging trenches with reinforced walls and a roof. They were generally very basically equipped and vulnerable to damage. On 15th October 1940, at about 8pm, a 50lb bomb fell in the park causing a section of the trench air raid shelter to collapse and killing 104 people. Most of those who died were women and children, the youngest just three months old. Only around half the victims were recovered and buried in a nearby cemetery. The area was later filled in and re-turfed.



Kennington Park civilians memorial, London © Martin Shorthouse, 2015

The memorial was commissioned by the Friends of Kennington Park and designed by sculptor Richard Kindersley. It consists of a tall and narrow rectangular stone on which is inscribed, 'History despite its wrenching pain cannot be unlived but if faced with courage need not be lived again.'

Tottenham civilians

This memorial, in Tottenham Cemetery in London, remembers local residents of the area who were killed during the Blitz. The memorial consists of a brick wall with three main sections arranged in a semi-circular shape around a paved area. On the central section is a stone plaque which bears the inscription, '1939 1945 In memory of the civilians who lost their lives during enemy action in the Second World War many of whom rest here.' The memorial commemorates 94 local people.

Other London memorials to civilians

Given the number of attacks London suffered during World War II it is not surprising that there are many more examples of memorials for civilians killed or affected. Some of these, like the Kennington Park memorial, commemorate specific events and others, like Tottenham, are dedicated to the people of a specific area who were affected by the war. There are too many to list in detail here but we hope the examples included above give an idea of the range of designs used. Others include memorials to the disaster at Bethnal Green Underground station and the bombing of Balham Underground station. There is a comprehensive record of these memorials at www.londonremembers.com.

Memorials elsewhere in the UK

Penryn

The war memorial in the grounds of St Gluvias Church in Penryn is especially interesting because it is an example of a war memorial that commemorates military and civilian dead together. The names of 18 civilians are inscribed on a section at the base of the memorial (shown right). These 18 people were killed during an air raid on their homes on 11th May 1941. They ranged in age from 2 to 78 years old and included several children. Also remembered is Richard Ralph, who had fought in World War I and was killed in his



Penryn memorial, Cornwall © John Hodge, 2014

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home that night.

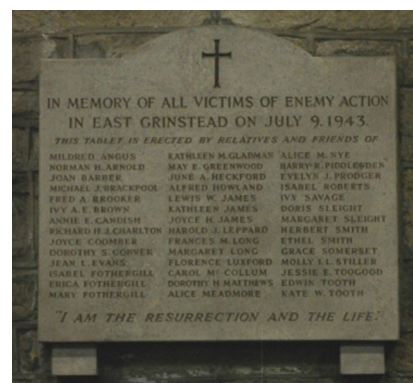
This memorial is also a good example of how war memorials can give us insights into past communities. For example, several of those commemorated share a surname – Pascoe. Some simple research reveals that these were all members of the same family and only one person in that household survived.

Bootle cemetery

This memorial is located on the former site of the cemetery's chapel. It consists of a black stone monument set within a circular paved area in the cemetery and is inscribed with the words 'in memory of the civilian deaths during the Blitz.' A further inscription indicates that the memorial was partly funded by the local community in Bootle.

Civilian casualties, East Grinstead

Where other memorials often commemorate the civilians killed during the whole period of the war, several memorials in East Grinstead are the result of a single incident. On 9th July 1943 a lone German bomber dropped eight bombs on the Sussex town causing the single largest wartime loss of life in the county. 108 people were killed, many of them children.



East Grinstead civilian memorial, West Sussex © Susan Featherstone, 2009

St Swithun's Church in the town has several memorials, some of which commemorate this event. A lychgate at the church's entrance was erected as a thanksgiving for deliverance in World War II. The town's main memorial in East Court Gardens includes a plaque dedicated to air raid victims, and a further plaque inside the church (shown to the right) lists the names of some of those who died on July 9th 1943. These are further examples of the differences between different types of memorials.

Efford cemetery civilian memorial, Plymouth

The Plymouth Blitz war memorial (right) is a freestanding octagonal monument. It is constructed of limestone and has six bronze plaques on the upper level bearing names. It is located within Efford Cemetery in the sunken section of a roundabout.



Efford cemetery civilian memorial, Plymouth © Plymouth City Council, 2011

The memorial commemorates the 1,174 civilians who lost their lives during the Second World War air attacks on Plymouth. The worst of these attacks took place over 7 nights through March and April 1941 and became known as the Plymouth Blitz. The memorial within Efford cemetery is the only memorial within the city to be dedicated to the civilian dead and within 10 metres of the war memorial is a mass grave for those victims. The main dedication reads:

"This memorial was erected to the sacred memory of the 1174 civilians who lost their lives by enemy air attacks on the City of Plymouth during the Second World War 1939-1945 of whom 397 are interred in the nearby communal grave and whose names are inscribed on this memorial."

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