

# St Mary the Virgin's Cross of Sacrifice, Rye



War Memorials Trust

## Introduction

A war memorial cross stands in a prominent position, overlooking the sea, in the south east corner of St Mary the Virgin's churchyard in Rye, East Sussex. It remembers those who were killed in action during both World Wars as well as the more recent Gulf War and Iraq War. In addition, some civilians who were killed during a World War II air raid and a member of the Home Guard are listed. In December 2017 the memorial was listed at Grade II affording it extra protection. This memorial provides an interesting example of one which commemorates more recent wars and different groups of people as well as being designed by a significant war memorial architect.

## History and design of the war memorial

During a public meeting at Rye Town Hall on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1918, it was agreed a permanent memorial to the fallen of World War I, which had ended a few weeks earlier, should be erected in St Mary the Virgin's churchyard. It was suggested that the 'Cross of Sacrifice' design by local resident Sir Reginald Blomfield, which had been adopted by the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC, now known as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission or CWGC), would be an appropriate memorial for Rye.

At the same meeting it was agreed a memorial cottage hospital would be funded from the public subscription. The town wanted something which could help people in the future. Like the memorial, the hospital was designed by Blomfield for free. The memorial hospital was opened by HRH Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1921. The original hospital was demolished in 1991 but a small section of the front wall was left standing and incorporated into the new building, near the front entrance. The wooden dedicatory board was re-erected in the new hospital.

The memorial in St Mary the Virgin's churchyard is made from Bath limestone and stands 6 metres tall. The cross of sacrifice, so called because it has a bronze sword set into the face of the cross, stands on a tapered shaft on a three-stage octagonal plinth which itself stands on a two-stepped base.



War memorial located in the south east corner of St Mary the Virgin's churchyard in Rye  
© David Ware, 2012



Inscriptions on the base of the plinth commemorating Fusilier Satchell and Corporal Rigby who were killed in action during more recent wars.  
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The memorial is surrounded by a low circular stone wall which incorporates flower beds. There are inscriptions incised into the octagonal plinth along with the names of those who lost their lives in World War I and II including eight civilian air raid casualties and one member of the Home Guard. Additional inscriptions were added to the plinth following the deaths of Fusilier S T Satchell who was killed on active service during the Gulf War on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1991 and Corporal John Rigby who served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion The Rifles and was killed in action in Basra during the Iraq War on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2007 aged 24.

It is understood the construction of the cross was supervised by Blomfield free of charge. The memorial was unveiled by Lord Leconfield and dedicated by Reverend A P Howes on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1919, shortly before the first anniversary of the Armistice. It represents one of the earliest examples of Blomfield's Cross of Sacrifice design being erected. The memorial was rededicated on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2007 following the addition of Corporal John Rigby's name.

### **Sir Reginald Blomfield**

Rye was the home of Sir Reginald Blomfield a renowned architect, garden designer and author who was knighted in 1919 in recognition of his architectural and written works. World War I marked the end of the larger architectural projects he had been involved in. Instead he turned his skills to commemorating those who had paid the ultimate sacrifice and did not be return home.

In the hall of Blomfield's Rye home hung a bronze long bladed crusader sword. This became the inspiration for the Cross of Sacrifice which he designed in 1918. The intention was to represent the Christian faith of the majority and the military character of the memorial or cemetery. The design was widely praised and quickly adopted by the IWGC and widely used in Britain and abroad in the Commission's Cemeteries.

1918 was also the year that Blomfield was appointed as one of the principal architects of the IWGC and for the next 9 years he was heavily involved with the design of their cemeteries in France and Belgium as well as the Menin Gate and numerous war memorials in the UK including the Royal Air Force memorial near Victoria Embankment, London  
[www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/112046](http://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/112046).



A close up of Blomfield's Cross of Sacrifice design which was used for Rye's war memorial situated in St Mary the Virgin's churchyard  
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## Teaching suggestions

Information about and photographs of this memorial can be used in sessions with young people about:

- War memorial designers: after World War I the design of war memorials made up a large majority of the work carried out by Blomfield and other significant British architects including Sir Edwin Lutyens who designed the Cenotaph in London, Sir Robert Lorimer and Sir Herbert Baker. It also provided work for many sculptors including Mr Vernon March who is discussed in the case study of Lewes's Victory sculpture. This memorial could be used to explore work by great architects and sculptors who designed and created war memorials
- War memorials in the local area: the Cross of Sacrifice is one of a number of war memorials in Rye. They take a number of different designs including a lychgate, plaques and a hospital. A memorial situated in Rye cemetery remembers the crew of The Margaret Colebrooke, a steam trawler. On the night of 17<sup>th</sup> December 1916, when the trawler pulled up its nets, one contained a mine which had been laid by a German U-boat. The mine exploded killing 6 out of the 7 men on board. The stories behind this and other local memorials, their designs, why they were chosen and the different groups who are remembered could be explored

## Useful links

The following link may provide additional helpful information about this memorial:

- War Memorials Online record: [www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/106976](http://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/106976)

Further information can be found at [www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/links](http://www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/links) which may help with lessons on some of the wider issues suggested here.

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