

Victory Sculpture, Lewes



Introduction

Lewes Victory Sculpture is prominently sited on the junction of the High Street and Market Street in Lewes. Having been originally listed at Grade II on 29th October 1985 this was amended to Grade II* on 27th October 2014. It was one of six war memorials nationwide to have its listing upgraded to mark the beginning of the centenary of World War I. This memorial is renowned for its interesting design which was created by notable sculptor Vernon March whose premature death makes his war memorials his main legacy.

Design of the war memorial

Lewes Victory sculpture consists of a Portland stone pedestal upon which there is a winged Victory statue made of bronze standing on an orb. Victory holds aloft a laurel wreath and faces east towards Flanders. At the base of the pedestal there is a figure of Peace with a dove on her shoulder and a figure of Liberty holding a torch. Both figures are holding shields which have the inscription and names of the fallen from World War I. Inscribed on the pedestal is a quotation by Sir Winston Churchill as well as the inscription remembering those who gave their lives in World War II. The names of those killed on active service and those missing but believed killed during World War II are recorded on stone plaques fixed to the north and south faces of the memorial. The name of the sculptor, Vernon March, is inscribed at the base of memorial. The [list entry description](#) notes that the design of the memorial is particularly well suited to such a constricted site.

History of the war memorial

Over 250 men left Lewes to serve their country during World War I and did not return. Designs for the town's war memorial to commemorate the sacrifice made by these men were requested by 1st August 1919. A local committee chose the design by Vernon March on 19th September. Almost three years later on 6th September 1922 the war memorial was unveiled by General Sir Henry Chrichton Slater a local landowner who had been the General Officer Commander-in-Chief Southern Commander in 1916-1919 and dedicated by Bishop Suffragen of Lewes who himself had been a Chaplain during the war. To the embarrassment of the town of Lewes the cost of the memorial was not paid in full until 1924.



Lewes war memorial located on the junction of the High Street and Market Street © War Memorials Trust, 2018



Liberty sculpture holding shields with World War I names on © War Memorials Trust, 2018

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In 1950 the quotation by Sir Winston Churchill 'This was their finest hour' was added to Lewes war memorial however it was not until 1st March 1981 that the memorial was rededicated following the addition of the names of those who were killed in World War II.

Vernon March

Born in Hull in 1891 Vernon March was the youngest of nine children. Untutored he became the youngest exhibitor at the Royal Academy in 1907 aged just 16. He lived and shared a studio in Farnborough, Kent with his brother Sydney and his sister Elsie. Although March had learnt to fly before the Great War and joined the Royal Flying Corp, his poor eyesight stopped him from serving as a pilot.

In 1919 March exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum's exhibition of memorial designs. As a sculptor March was renowned for the vigour of his figures. His greatest achievement is believed by many to be the Canadian National War memorial in Ottawa which was completed by his brother Sydney, who was also a sculptor, following March's premature death in 1930. The Lewes memorial is deemed to be on a par with the memorial in Ottawa and another in Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland.

Teaching suggestions

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

- War memorial designs – Lewes war memorial is an example of a memorial with interesting design features and can be used as a local example of how war memorial designs vary from large sculptures remembering the men of the town to smaller plaques or tablets which remember a few named individuals. A local committee chose the design for the memorial from several that were submitted. Discussions could be had about why the design by Vernon March was chosen along with some of the design features he included such as the figures of Victory, Peace and Liberty and the reason for Victory facing towards Flanders
- Research names – More than 350 people are commemorated on Lewes war memorial. By finding out more about the people named on the memorial young people have the opportunity to develop their historical research skills in and creating a more personal link to the names on the memorial. War Memorials Trust's lesson plan on Researching names on war memorials details how this activity may be carried out, www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/primary/pri-lessons/researching-names

Useful links

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

- War Memorials Online record: www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/120512

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

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