

Sir Herbert Baker



War Memorials Trust

Sir Herbert Baker (9th June 1862 – 4th February 1946) was an English architect who is remembered as a dominant force in South African architecture. He was one of the three principal architects appointed to the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission (IWGC) when the Commission was formed in 1917; designing many memorials and cemeteries in France and Belgium in the years following the end of World War I.

This helpsheet is designed to be used by primary teachers as background information on Sir Herbert Baker. There is also a set of [Sir Herbert Baker fact cards](#) which can be shared with pupils. Both this helpsheet and the fact cards can be used as part of WMT's [Art unit of work: Great artists and war memorials](#).

Early life

Baker was born at Owlets, the family farm, near Cobham, Kent. He was the fourth son of nine children of Thomas Henry and Frances Georgina Baker. As a child Baker spent much of his time walking around the neighbourhood of his home, exploring the historical ruins. While exploring he observed the time honoured materials of brick and plaster and the various aspects of timber use all of which he learned to appreciate. Between 1875 and 1881 Baker attended the nearby Tonbridge School where lifelong qualities of leadership and loyalty were instilled in him.

Training and work before World War I

In 1879, Baker began his architecture studies under the supervision of his cousin Arthur Baker. His education followed the accepted pattern of a three-year apprenticeship while attending classes at the Architectural Association School and the Royal Academy Schools. Between 1882 and 1887 Baker worked for Ernest George and Harold Peto in London prior to opening his own office in Gravesend, Kent in 1890.

The following year he passed his examination for Associateship of the Royal Institute of British Architects after which he embarked for South Africa to visit his brother. South Africa captured Baker's imagination and he resolved to remain in the country to develop his career and establish an architectural practice. One of his most significant commissions was the Union Buildings in Pretoria, the official seat of the South African Government.

Baker left South Africa for India in 1912 where he worked closely with fellow architect [Sir Edwin Lutyens](#) on the design of the New Delhi Secretariat Buildings. The following year he returned to England and set up a practice in London in partnership with Alexander Scott.

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War memorials and Commonwealth War Grave Commission work

In 1917, Baker was appointed as one of the three Principal Architects for the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission (now CWGC) along with Sir Edwin Lutyens, who he had previously worked with, and Sir Reginald Blomfield. The three architects visited the temporary burial places in France and Belgium to decide how to move forward with the design of the cemeteries.

Baker designed 113 cemeteries and memorials for the CWGC including:

- Tyne Cot in Passchendaele, Belgium (the largest CWGC cemetery in the world)
- Delville Wood Cemetery in Somme, France
- Loos memorial in Pas de Calais, France
- Adanac Military Cemetery in Somme, France
- Neuve Chapelle Memorial in Pas de Calais, France

Alongside his work for the CWGC, Baker is known to have designed war memorials for 24 villages and towns across England. He had a profound interest in symbolism and his designs would often include: a cross, encircled by carved stone roses and lilies to represent England and France, with an octagonal shaft on an octagonal plinth; a Crusader warship; a reversed sword; St George killing the dragon. War memorials he designed include:

- Rochester (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/161765). An example of Baker's recurring design of a cross with an octagonal shaft on an octagonal plinth. This cross has a Crusader warship on one side and a reversed sword on the other. It is located next to Rochester Cathedral
- County of Kent war memorial cross (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/160548). Situated within Canterbury Cathedral's Memorial Gardens, the cross has roses and lilies encircling it and a Crusader warship at the top of the shaft
- Overbury and Conderton lychgate (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/165767). Sited at the entrance of St Faith's Church in Overbury, Worcestershire the lychgate was designed at the request of the Holland-Martins whose son had been killed in France and had no known grave. All 27 local servicemen who died are commemorated on the lychgate. Within the lychgate is a large coffin in the form of a chest tomb, like a cenotaph, on a raised platform
- Kemerton, Worcestershire (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/165773). A Latin cross made from limestone which is situated at a road junction in the centre of the village. It commemorates 20 local servicemen who died in World War I and was unveiled on 9th January 1921. An additional 7 names were added following World War II

A list of other war memorials Baker designed can be found on the Resource sheet '[War Memorials Online links for war memorials designed by Baker, Blomfield, Lorimer, Lutyens and Toft.](#)'

Post World War I

Between World War I and II Baker designed many well-known buildings in London including South Africa House, Rhodes House and the Bank of England. He was knighted in 1927. Baker died aged 83 and is buried in Westminster Abbey.

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