

# Sir Reginald Blomfield



War Memorials Trust

Sir Reginald Blomfield (20<sup>th</sup> December 1856 – 27<sup>th</sup> December 1942) was a renowned architect, garden designer and author. 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. He was responsible for the Cross of Sacrifice design which features in a number of these cemeteries and is the chosen design for a number of local war memorials in the UK as well.

This helpsheet is designed to be used by primary teachers as background information on Sir Reginald Blomfield. There is also a set of [Sir Reginald Blomfield 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

Blomfield was born at Bow Rectory in Devon in 1856 to parents Reverend George John and Isabella. His father was the local rector. Blomfield was brought up in Kent where his father became rector for Dartford and then Aldington. He studied at Highgate School in North London and then went on to Haileybury School in Hertfordshire. From here he went to Exeter College, Oxford where he gained a first class degree in Classics.

## Training and work before World War I

After a year of travelling Blomfield took up a place at the Royal Academy Schools in 1881. At the same time he accepted the offer from his uncle, Sir Arthur Blomfield, to become an articled pupil (similar to being an intern) in his London architect practice. Having completed his training at the beginning of 1884, Blomfield left his uncle's practice and established his own at 17 Southampton Street, off the Strand in London.

In 1886, Blomfield married Ann Frances Mary Burra, daughter of Henry Burra of Rye, Sussex. Rye was a town where Blomfield had designed a number of houses including his own (Point Hill, Playden). Blomfield's practice flourished between 1885 and 1914 and his work was dominated by the construction of new country houses and the renovation of existing ones, notably Chequers in Buckinghamshire (the Prime Minister's country house) and Heathfield Park in Sussex. However World War I put an end to the type of building projects he had been engaged with due to lack of demand.

## War memorials and Commonwealth War Grave Commission work

In 1917, Blomfield was appointed one of the three Principal Architects for the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission (now CWGC) for France and Belgium along with Sir Herbert Baker and Sir Edwin Lutyens. The three architects visited the temporary burial places in France and Belgium to decide how to move forward with the design of the cemeteries. The Cross of Sacrifice design used by the CWGC as the memorial in a number of their cemeteries was Blomfield's design. The inspiration came from a bronze long bladed sword hung in the hall of his

**War Memorials Trust 14 Buckingham Palace Road London SW1W 0QP**

**Telephone:** 020 7834 0200 / 0300 123 0764

**Email:** [info@warmemorials.org](mailto:info@warmemorials.org) **Website:** [www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org](http://www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org)

**Registered Charity Commission Number:** 1062255

© War Memorials Trust, 2019

Rye home. The intention was to represent the Christian faith of many and the military character of the memorial or cemetery whilst keeping the design abstract so that it was free from association with any particular style. It is also used as the design for many UK war memorials.

His work for the CWGC saw him oversee the design of more than 100 memorials and cemeteries including:

- Forceville Communal Cemetery and Extension in Somme, France
- Le Treport Military Cemetery in Seine-Maritime, France
- Louvencourt Military Cemetery in Somme, France
- Brandhoek Military Cemetery near Ypres, Belgium
- Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery near Ypres, Belgium
- Menin Gate memorial at Ypres, Belgium

Blomfield's role at the CWGC came to an end in 1928 but he remained interested in the works he had designed. When the Menin Gate was damaged during World War II he wrote to the CWGC with suggestions for repairs which kept some of the damage as 'scars of war'.

Alongside his work for CWGC, Blomfield designed many local war memorials in the UK including:

- St Mary the Virgin's, Rye ([www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/106976](http://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/106976)). This memorial takes the form of the Cross of Sacrifice and is located in one of the churchyards in Blomfield's hometown of Rye. It was unveiled on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1919. There is a case study about this war memorial in WMT's Sussex war memorial resources [www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/primary/sussex/sussex-case-studies](http://www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/primary/sussex/sussex-case-studies)
- Haileybury College, Hertfordshire ([www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/92177](http://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/92177)). Located in the grounds of the college, which Blomfield attended, opposite the west door of the chapel. The memorial is a Cross of Sacrifice and was unveiled on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1923
- Luton ([www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/196272](http://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/196272)). Situated outside the Town Hall this memorial features an 8 feet high bronze statue of 'Peace' stood on a podium into which the town's coat of arms and wreathes are carved. The 'Peace' statue was sculpted by Sir Hamo Thornycroft who was responsible for some of London's best known statues
- Men of Swinton lychgate ([www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/98020](http://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/98020)). Located at the entrance to St Peter's Church in Swinton near Manchester. Figures are carved into the niches on each face of the lychgate

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

### **Notable honours and positions**

- Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) (1881)
- Associate of the Royal Academy (1905)
- Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (1906)
- President of the Royal Institute of British Architects (1912-1914)
- Elected to the Royal Academy (1914)
- Knighted in recognition of his architectural and written works (1919)
- Elected into National Academy of Design as an Honorary Corresponding member (1933)

**War Memorials Trust 14 Buckingham Palace Road London SW1W 0QP**

**Telephone:** 020 7834 0200 / 0300 123 0764

**Email:** [info@warmemorials.org](mailto:info@warmemorials.org) **Website:** [www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org](http://www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org)

**Registered Charity Commission Number:** 1062255

© War Memorials Trust, 2019