

Sir Robert Lorimer



War Memorials Trust

Sir Robert Lorimer (4th November 1864 – 13th September 1929) was renowned as one of Scotland's leading country house architects during the first two decades of the 20th century. The majority of his work was in domestic architecture but he also carried out significant public works. Lorimer was appointed as one of the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission (IWGC) architects in September 1918 designing a number of cemeteries and memorials in Italy, Germany, Egypt and Macedonia as well as the three naval memorials in the UK. He also designed a number of war memorials in the UK including the Scottish National War memorial.

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

Lorimer was born in Edinburgh, the third child and younger son of James and Hannah Lorimer. The family lived at 21 Hill Street in Edinburgh's South Side close to where James worked as Regius Professor of Public Law at Edinburgh University. From 1877 to 1882 Lorimer was educated at Edinburgh Academy. He then studied at the University of Edinburgh from 1882 to 1885 but left without graduating as he had decided to become an architect. His interest and enthusiasm for architecture had developed when his father leased and repaired Kellie Castle in Fife in 1878.

Training and work before World War I

In 1885, he was articled (similar to being an intern) to Anderson, Wardrop and Browne. He took technical classes at Heriot-Watt College and passed the qualifying exam in 1888. During 1889, Lorimer toured England for several months before settling in London where he found a place in the office of George Frederick Bodley. Bodley encouraged the use of fine craftsmen which would shape Lorimer's own work and become a characteristic of his own later practice. It was here that he received his first independent commission, a Queen Anne house in Wimbledon.

After 18 months Lorimer left Bodley and joined two Scottish friends at a practice. Shortly after, in 1892, Lorimer left to take a tour of Europe. He returned in 1893 when he opened an office at 49 Queen Street, Edinburgh. The practice remained largely domestic however following the outbreak of World War I the demand for large new houses lessened and Lorimer's attention shifted to smaller scale projects, restorations and latterly war memorials.

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War memorials and Commonwealth War Grave Commission work

Lorimer was appointed as Principal Architect for Italy, Macedonia and Egypt by the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission (now CWGC) on 21st September 1918.

His work for the CWGC includes:

- Memorial of the Missing at Lake Doiran, Greece
- Alexandria (Hadra) Cemetery in Egypt
- Barental Military Cemetery in Italy

In June 1921 Lorimer was appointed principal architect for the CWGC in the UK. Tasked with designing three identical war naval memorials, he worked with sculptor Henry Poole to create three tall obelisks which are located at Portsmouth, Plymouth and Chatham. Lorimer's work for the CWGC ended on 31st December 1927.

Alongside his work for the CWGC, Lorimer was commissioned to design many local war memorials in the UK including:

- Scottish National war memorial (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/120546). Located within Edinburgh Castle, the memorial is a large stone building featuring a long hall of honour, a shrine and a book of Remembrance for the Scottish who fell in the two World Wars
- Workington (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/118604). Cenotaph situated in Vulcan Park which was unveiled on 24th June 1928. Carved into the stone, high on each face, are the coats of arms of Workington Borough, Cumber County Council, the Border Regiment and Royal Artillery. A bronze panel depicts a soldier's farewell to his wife and child while another panel shows a soldier carrying a wounded comrade. On the two remaining sides are smaller panels portraying the principal industries of the town – steelmaking and mining
- St Andrew's (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/145034). Takes the form of a Celtic cross on a tapering column stood on a two stepped base. On the front face is a Cross of Sacrifice. The memorial is set in front of a curved wall which has name plaques set in to it

A list of other war memorials designed by Lorimer 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

- Elected to Art Workers Guild (1896)
- Became a Fellow of the Royal Institute of Architects (FRIBA) (1906)
- Knighted (1911)
- Appointed a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (KBE) (1927)
- Became President of the Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, the professional body of Scotland

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