

Types of war memorial



War Memorials Trust

On this sheet you will learn:

- The different types of war memorial that exist in the UK.
- Some typical features of war memorials
- Why war memorials vary so much.

Photographs of different memorials can be found in War Memorials Trust's Gallery at www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/youth-groups/gallery.

Church fittings

Church fittings include items such as **bells**, church **organs** or seating. These have often been chosen by communities as a way of remembering war casualties and may have a plaque or **inscription** identifying the object as a war memorial.

Crosses

Some war memorial crosses are plain and **simple** with few additional features, while others might be more **elaborate**, have a Celtic wheel cross design or additional carvings. Crosses are often made of a type of **stone** and may have a **sword** on it to show that it commemorates war.



Woodham war memorial cross, Surrey © Clive Gilbert, 2011

Landscape features

Landscape features include **parks**, **gardens**, fields and **outdoor** spaces that

make use of the **natural** environment that have been dedicated as war memorials. Often there will be information identifying the space as a war memorial, such as a plaque or gates at the entrance.

Lychgates



Newton Regis memorial lychgate, Warwickshire © War Memorials

A lychgate is a gate with a **roof** covering it, which stands at the entrance to a **church**. Lychgates that are war memorials will often have the **names** of those commemorated carved into the wooden **frame** or **roof**, or be on plaques fixed to the gate. Not all lychgates are war memorials but they were a popular choice after the First World War.

Monuments

The term 'monuments' covers **cenotaphs**, **obelisks**, **pillars** and **columns**. These are large war memorials usually located in outdoor spaces, often in prominent places where they can be seen by lots of people. Some monuments have particular **meanings**. For example, memorial pillars are often constructed to look broken off halfway down, symbolising **life cut short**. The word 'cenotaph' means '**empty grave**' and is used to commemorate those whose remains are elsewhere.

Plaques

Plaques can form the whole memorial or be a part of a larger monument. In the latter case they are often the part that bears the

inscription and list of names. If a plaque is the only part of the memorial then it might also include another feature such as a **carving** or **painting** of an **image** or **symbol**. Plaques can be made of different **materials** such as wood or stone and be placed inside or outside a building.

Sculptures



Nuneaton war memorial sculpture, Warwickshire © War Memorials Trust, 2010.

War memorial sculptures are often large and situated in a prominent position within a community. Some war memorial sculptures are of men or women in the **Armed Forces** shown either ready to fight or after a battle so that the **effect of war** can be seen. Many are shown with **'arms reversed,'** meaning that their weapon is turned inwards and the person is resting their hands on it. This is a traditional sign of **remembrance** and **mourning**. Other sculptures show figures that mean **victory** or conquering enemies, or **peace**.

Structures and buildings

Buildings or other types of structure may not be immediately obvious as a war memorial – you might have to look carefully to find something like a plaque or Roll of Honour that shows that the building is a memorial. The UK has examples of war memorial **schools**, **hospitals**, **bus shelters**, **chapels** and **village halls**. These memorials are obviously more **functional** than the more traditional designs such as crosses or monuments. Why do you think some communities chose to remember their fallen with one of these

types of memorial?

Windows

Stained glass and other types of window that have been dedicated as war memorials might feature images similar to those mentioned above, such as **soldiers** or figures of **peace** or **victory**. They may also include some form of written dedication, either as part of the window pane itself or as an accompanying plaque.

Others



Torquay war memorial painting, Devon © War Memorials Trust, 2008.

As well as the types listed above, there are many other war memorials that do not fit into any of these categories. These include **books** where the names of the fallen are written in a memorial book (which may then be put on display), **pictures** such as a collection of **photographs** of those affected by war or **paintings** of a war-related nature that have been dedicated as a memorial, shrines and even **vehicles** that were involved in wartime events and that have been turned into memorials.

Thankful villages

A thankful village is a place where all those who went to fight in the First World War also returned home again. There are thought to be around **fifty** such communities in the UK. A handful of these are also described as **'doubly thankful'** because no one from the community was killed in the Second World War either. While these communities obviously did not erect

the type of war memorial that so many others did, commemorating lives lost, lots of them did want to mark their **luck** and somewhat **unusual** status. This was usually done with a **plaque** carrying an inscription naming those who had served and expressing **gratitude** for their survival.

Design features and imagery

We can see that, while war memorials are all unique, there are many similarities between them and some design features and imagery that were commonly used by designers and architects. A **wreath** is often carved or painted onto a memorial plaque or monument. This is a traditional symbol of commemoration, symbolising **ongoing** life. Laurel wreaths are also a traditional symbol of victory. Another commonly used image on many larger monuments is a carved soldier with **arms reversed**. This is a traditional symbol of mourning or respect. Many memorials also feature an '**eternal light**' or patriotic symbols such as **flags**.



Fenton war memorial with arms reversed sculpture, Staffordshire © War Memorials Trust, 2001.

Diversity of war memorial design

Every war memorial was created by a different **community**, who each had different views and ideas on what form theirs should take. There were not, and still are not, any **rules** or government **directive** over what form war memorials should take and each individual community created a **committee** to decide what their local memorial should be like. Today, alterations or additions to war memorials are still seen as a **local decision**. Consequently, we

have a huge range of war memorial types in the UK and each memorial is **unique**, reflecting the thoughts, beliefs and emotions of that particular community at a critical point in history. War memorials are therefore valuable not only as an extremely **poignant** reminder of enormous **sacrifices** made but also as a link to a past that is almost beyond living memory and as a source of **information** on the people and events of that time.

Summary

- There are many different types of war memorial in the UK, including monuments, crosses, sculptures and buildings.
- Each memorial was created by the local community according to their beliefs and wishes.
- Some war memorials also feature particular images such as a wreath or symbol that is closely linked to the group it commemorates.