

# War memorial maintenance



War Memorials Trust

On this sheet you will learn:

- How you can help look after local war memorials by doing practical work

## Why do war memorials need maintenance?

A crucial part of looking after war memorials is general awareness of their **condition**, day to day **maintenance**, and vigilance to ensure they are not vandalised or at **risk** (or that action is taken quickly if they are). A war memorial that is clearly the focal point of a community and well cared for will be less appealing to **vandals**. Furthermore, war memorials are an **important** and unique part of our heritage and as such should be cared for in this way. The **emotional** significance of war memorials means that there are often strong feelings surrounding this issue, with most people supporting the idea of keeping war memorials in good condition. If a war memorial is well looked after it indicates that it is **respected**, whereas a neglected war memorial gives the impression that it does not matter, and this can lead to misuse and the memorial falling into disrepair, damaging its value as an historical record of those involved in wars.

## What can you do?

This is a chance for you and your group to get involved in caring for a war memorial in a **practical**, hands on way. There are various things you can do to help. For example, you can make a regular **visit** to a memorial and **clear** the area around it (memorials located outside might have **litter** or **weeds** surrounding them). For memorial landscapes, **paths** may need clearing or a build up of dead leaves removing if there are trees nearby. You can also do **gardening** work if the memorial is in a landscaped area. There are some jobs however that you should **not** attempt – see below for further guidance on this.

Your site visits may reveal that 'your' war memorial needs more attention than the minor jobs we suggest here. For example, it might need **structural** work or work to improve the legibility of inscriptions (if inscriptions cannot be read the memorial can be seen as losing its commemorative function because it is not a clear record of who is remembered). You **must not** try and do any such work yourself but you can get involved in helping to address any issues. You can find out who the **custodian** is and **write** to them explaining the issues you think need addressing. They may already be aware and dealing with them but it is worth showing your interest and **support**, or they may find the information useful, especially if the memorial is not a particularly well known one.

Having highlighted the condition of the memorial, it could be that the custodian seeks to undertake works to the memorial. Depending on the nature and cost of the works this could give you the chance to **raise awareness** of it within the community and help with things like **fundraising**. You could also offer to help organise, and then take part in, a **rededication** ceremony after any work has been completed.



A war memorial after the area around it was landscaped by local school pupils. © War Memorials Trust, 2012.

## Why should you get involved?

General maintenance and awareness of condition can help **prevent** minor issues becoming serious **problems** and keeps the memorial at the heart of the **community**, which is increasingly important as the wars that many of them commemorate move beyond living memory and the personal connection to them lessens.

Participating in a project like this, with **practical** work and tangible **benefits** for the community, can also be very rewarding and **fun**. If it is the type of work that interests you it can be really enjoyable and you will meet new **people**, learn new **skills** and create visible lasting results for the memorial and the community. Work of this type can also contribute towards other schemes you may be working towards such as the **Duke of Edinburgh Award**.

A project like this can help build a **positive relationship** between your group and the wider community. Unfortunately **young** people are often seen by some as being **disrespectful** or having no understanding of the significance of war memorials and similar aspects of history. While this is not usually true, the image is not helped by the fact that a small number of young people have been caught damaging war memorials in recent years. With the centenary of the First World War approaching in 2014-2018, your contribution towards the maintenance of a local war memorial will hopefully have two key outcomes: the memorial will be in **good condition** and the focal point for commemorative events taking place; and you will have helped to **raise the profile** of your group, and your generation, among local people.

## Things to remember

You must check with the custodian before you do anything. There are many things you can do but some things you should steer clear of. For example, **ANY** work to the actual **structure** of a war memorial such as cleaning stone or other materials, re-painting lettering or repairing joints **MUST ONLY** be done by a **specialist**. War

memorials are historic structures and the materials that were used to make them may be old and delicate, so it is very important that specialists do any repairs as even basic cleaning, if not done correctly, can unintentionally **damage** the memorial.

War Memorials Trust supports **conservation** practices. This means only doing repairs and cleaning when necessary, doing like-for-like repairs and retaining as much of the **original** memorial as possible. Even with cleaning, using tools or materials that are **abrasive** such as scrubbing brushes or household cleaners would be too harsh and would remove some of the original. This means that any work you suggest doing to a war memorial must be discussed with the custodian and should be carried out by a **professional**.

If you are not sure about doing any type of work to a local war memorial there is detailed **guidance** available at [www.warmemorials.org/a-z](http://www.warmemorials.org/a-z), including information about the conservation of different types of memorial and different materials. War Memorials Trust's Conservation Officers can also advise on what is and isn't appropriate.

## Summary

- **Maintenance** is an important part of looking after war memorials and keeping them as part of the community.
- You can help with **gardening** around a war memorial, clearing litter and weeds and keeping the area **tidy**.
- You **must not** try any work to the actual structure of the war memorial.