

# War memorials



War Memorials Trust

On this sheet you will learn:

- What war memorials are and what they look like.
- Why we have so many war memorials in the UK.
- Why war memorials are still important to many people.

## What are war memorials?

A war memorial is an **object** that **remembers** a war or **people** who were involved in a war.



Denton cenotaph, Greater Manchester. © Peter Jackson-Lee, 2011

There are many different types of war memorial. Some are **large monuments**, like a cross or statue that is in a place where lots of people see it like a churchyard or village square. Others are less obvious and might not look like what you probably imagine a war memorial to be, such as **stained glass windows** or **books** with the names of people they remember written inside them.

## Why are there different war memorials?

War memorials tell us different **information**. Some list the people from the place where the war memorial is who died during the war. Some also list the names of the people that **fought** during

the war but were not killed. Some memorials give further information about the people, such as their **age** or **rank**.

Some memorials are to **civilians**. This means people that were not in the Armed Forces but **contributed** to or were **affected** by the war in another way. Such as people who were killed during air raids.

Each war memorial is different because **different communities** created them. There weren't, and still aren't, **rules** about what war memorials should be like so each town, village, school, club or workplace decided what they wanted their memorial to be like. That means each one is **unique** and is a community's **personal** way of remembering the war and the people they knew who died or served during it.

## Why are there so many war memorials?

There are thought to be around **100,000** war memorials in the UK. They existed before the First World War and remembered previous conflicts (such as the **Boer War** of 1899 to 1902), but after 1918 there was a huge drive to create new ones, **more** than ever before or since. So what was it about the First World War that led to such a **dramatic** increase in war memorials?

The First World War had a **bigger impact** on more ordinary people than previous wars had done. Many men either **volunteered** for or were **conscripted** into the Armed Forces and so most communities had lost someone, with many losing high numbers of men. The war was felt by **everyone**, as can be seen from the number of flowers surrounding the war memorial in the photograph on the next page. Over **7000** people attended the unveiling ceremony to pay tribute to the locals who had been killed.



Worthing war memorial, West Sussex, during its unveiling and dedication ceremony in 1921. © Farthing Collection, 1921.

As well as this, during the First World War the bodies of the dead were not sent home for burial. They were **buried** close to where they had died, with the men who had died with them. Many have **no known grave** because they were never identified. This meant that their families had no grave at home.

Lots of people therefore wanted a way of **remembering** large numbers of people that had been lost, and something in their local area that they could **visit**. War memorials acted as a focal point for people's grief and were a way of permanently **marking** what had happened to the community.

## Why are war memorials still important?

These days war memorials continue to be used by communities to **remember** the events and sacrifices made during the **First World War** and **later** wars. In a lot of places no-one directly remembers those events anymore because they are too long ago for anyone alive today to have lived through. But war memorials **remind** us of those events and help us ensure that the **sacrifices** made by so many are remembered, learnt about by new generations and **respected**. In some places a war memorial is the only existing **record** of those who were involved in wars. This is why war memorials continue to be important and why we must make sure we look after them and **protect** them, so that people in the **future** will also be able to

know about the people and events they commemorate. By learning about war memorials **you** are helping to make sure that people understand their **importance**.



A new generation of children now learn about the World Wars and Remembrance in school © Hillcrest Infant School, 2011.

## Summary

- There are around **100,000** war memorials in the UK. A war memorial is any object that **remembers** a conflict and the people who were involved.
- Each war memorial was created by a different **community**, so each one is **unique**.
- Many war memorials were created after the First World War (1914-1918) so that people could remember their friends and family who had fought.