

Sir Edwin Lutyens



War Memorials Trust

Sir Edwin Lutyens (29th March 1869 -1st January 1944) was one of the leading British architects of the 20th century. He was known for adapting traditional architectural styles to the needs of the time. His works include houses, bridges and public gardens. 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 also designed a number of war memorials in the UK, including The Cenotaph in Whitehall.

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

Lutyens was born in London, the ninth son and tenth child of Charles and Mary Lutyens who went on to have a total of thirteen children. As a child he suffered from rheumatic fever and as such was the only one of the boys in the family not to go to public school or university. He shared his sisters' governess and received extra schooling from a much older brother in the holidays. While growing up in Thursley, Surrey Lutyens was able to follow his passion of looking at houses and watched all stages of the buildings in the local area going up. He spent time in the local carpenter's shop and a builder's yard in Guildford where he acquired much technical knowledge. His flair for mathematics and drawing made it apparent that he would become an architect.

Training and work before World War I

In early 1885, at the age of 16, Lutyens became a student at the Kensington School of Art. He would only complete two years of the course feeling that after this he had no more to learn there. He then became an apprentice in the architect office of Ernest George and Harold Peto where he remained for less than a year. It was here that he first met [Herbert Baker](#) who he went on sketching tours with and would go on to collaborate with for the building of New Delhi, India.

Lutyens began his own practice in 1888. Shortly after, he met Gertrude Jekyll, a horticulturist and garden designer, who he collaborated with on the landscape part of many of his subsequent works. Jekyll's social connections enabled Lutyens to accumulate many more commissions in subsequent years. In 1912, he was elected to the Delhi Planning commission and on 28th March set sail for India on the first of nineteen journeys there to look at the area and plan the new city. He was formally appointed joint architect for New Delhi with Herbert Baker in January 1913.

War Memorials Trust 14 Buckingham Palace Road London SW1W 0QP

Telephone: 020 7834 0200 / 0300 123 0764

Email: info@warmemorials.org **Website:** www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org

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War memorials and Commonwealth War Grave Commission work

In 1917, Lutyens was appointed as one of the three Principal Architects for the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission (now CWGC) along with Sir Herbert Baker, who he had previously worked with, and Sir Reginald Blomfield. The three architects visited the temporary burial places in France and Belgium to decide how to move forward with the design of the cemeteries. It was Lutyens who suggested that all of the cemeteries should have permanent monument – a stone of Remembrance. His work for the CWGC includes:

- Etaples Military Cemetery, France (1919)
- Memorial and cemetery at Faubourg d'Amiens cemetery in Arras, France (1924-1925)
- Thiepval Memorial in Somme, France (1926-1927)
- Villers-Brettonneux Military Cemetery in Somme, France (1927-28)

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

- Rochdale cenotaph (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/134442). Situated within the Memorial Gardens, the cenotaph stands at around 10 metres tall and is surmounted by a catafalque bearing a draped, horizontal figure. The design includes four carved and painted flags and a carved wreath which surrounds the arms of Rochdale
- Southampton cenotaph (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/120533). Located in Watts (West) Park and unveiled on 6th November 1920. Like Rochdale it is surmounted by the effigy of a dead soldier in a casket. Carved wreathes enclose the emblems of the army, navy, merchant marine and air force
- Tower Hill (Merchant Navy) memorial, London (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/125358). A stone colonnade with plaques bearing the names of those from the Merchant Navy who lost their lives according to vessel
- Leicester (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/120347). Located in Victoria Park the memorial is of an arch design with carved painted flags. It is very similar to Lutyens's design for India Gate, New Delhi

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

One of his most renowned memorials is The Cenotaph in Whitehall, London (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/122342). In 1919, David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister at the time, invited Lutyens to design a temporary catafalque (low empty platform) which would form a central part of the procession on Peace Day, 19th July 1919. Lutyens designated it a cenotaph, a much taller monument which in Greek means 'empty tomb'. Originally a temporary structure made from plaster and wood, the Cenotaph received immediate acclaim and an identical structure made from Portland Stone was unveiled on the same site on 11th November 1920.

Notable honours and positions

- Knighted for work at New Delhi (1918)
- Elected as President of the Royal Academy (1938)
- Order of Merit – the first time this had been awarded to an architect (1942)

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