



Historic England



War Memorial Parks and Gardens

Introductions to Heritage Assets



Summary

Historic England's Introductions to Heritage Assets (IHAs) are accessible, authoritative, illustrated summaries of what we know about specific types of archaeological site, building, landscape or marine asset. Typically they deal with subjects which lack such a summary. This can either be where the literature is dauntingly voluminous, or alternatively where little has been written. Most often it is the latter, and many IHAs bring understanding of site or building types which are neglected or little understood. Many of these are what might be thought of as 'new heritage', that is they date from after the Second World War.

This short guide provides an introduction to the memorial parks and gardens built as war memorials, principally after the First World War.

This guidance note has been written by David Lambert, The Parks Agency, and edited by Paul Stamper.

It is one of several guidance documents that can be accessed [HistoricEngland.org.uk/listing/selection-criteria/listing-selection/ihas-buildings/](https://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/selection-criteria/listing-selection/ihas-buildings/)

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Front cover: Memorial Park, Fleetwood

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Introduction

The First World War changed the nature of commemoration. The memorials of previous conflicts generally took the form of monuments, some of which were located in a pre-existing park, and they were often funded by regiments or wealthy individuals and sometimes by the lord lieutenant (Fig 1). After the First World War ended, the scale of the human loss demanded a different scale of commemoration.

It also demanded a different type of commemoration. While many cities, towns and villages favoured a traditional sculptural or architectural monument, many others (often with ex-servicemen taking the lead) discussed and opted for a memorial which, instead of focussing on the dead, would serve the needs of the living. The arguments often seem to have reflected political divisions, drawing on Lloyd



Figure 1
The South African War Memorial at Crewe of 1904 (listed Grade II) within the Grade II*-registered Queen's Park. Prior to the First World War, war memorials were generally erected by regiments or wealthy individuals.

George's famous vision of homes fit for returning heroes, and on the expectation that public health, housing and working conditions would be transformed in the wake of the War. Such 'living memorials' included homes for bereaved service families or for ex-servicemen, cottage hospitals or hospital wings, public baths, libraries, reading rooms, club rooms and memorial halls; even road improvements and bridges were proposed as a form of war memorial.

Parks, gardens, playing fields and avenues fell into this category of living or useful memorials. They provided not only for veterans and widows, but also for the next generation of young people, offering in the words of one dedicatory speech, a place where 'all people, young and old, could enjoy the beauties of nature in lovely surroundings, near to the centre of the town.' They also had a spiritual dimension: in the words of the War Memorials Advisory Council which was set up by the Royal Society of Arts in 1944:

'For the whole population the smooth current of peacetime life and the contentment of a quiet mind are shattered by the hideous calamity of war. Nature herself can best restore the balance which man's misguided mechanical ingenuity has so cruelly disturbed.'

The choice of a public park, garden or recreation ground also reflected what was often a lack of open space in new urban areas or in villages lacking sports facilities, where it stems from a pre-war move to create recreation grounds to meet the growing interest in health and the outdoors. Their geographical spread is wide but restricted to areas where land, unless gifted, was available for purchase. As a result, few memorial parks were laid out in older urban areas; it has also been noted that larger towns and cities often favoured

substantial building projects such as a museum or hospital as a war memorial.

Memorial parks and gardens are generally, though not always, modest in terms of design and materials, and were often laid out by the borough surveyor working with a local nursery. They tend to have more provision for sports and games than the public parks of the previous century, and a looser, less rigid hard-landscape structure. This partly reflected budgets but also a new culture of open-air recreation and activity.

Numbers are still unclear. There are currently 339 gardens and 212 parks or playing fields listed on the Imperial War Museum War Memorials Archive, but it appears likely that there are still more to be recorded. At a national level, Fleetwood Memorial Park in Lancashire, Gheluvelt Park in Worcester and Coventry War Memorial Park are included on Historic England's *Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest* at Grade II. Rowntree Park, York, which was originally dedicated as a memorial park after the First World War, is also included at Grade II. Astley Hall Park and Clitheroe Castle grounds (both in Lancashire) were both acquired by local authorities as memorial parks after the First World War, and are both registered at Grade II, but not principally for that memorial function.

In addition, the *Register* also contains two Grade II-registered war memorial gardens: Geoffrey Jellicoe's intimate and subtle War Memorial Gardens in Walsall, opened in 1952, and the War Memorial Gardens at Nottingham, opened in 1927. The latter should arguably be considered a park: the registered site comprises 2.7ha, but this in fact is only the ornamental core of the total area of land donated by the local industrialist Sir Jesse Boot in 1920. In total this memorial landscape comprises about 14.7ha, of which 12ha were dedicated to recreation grounds and playing fields for the adjacent schools (Fig 2).

More research remains to be done on memorial parks and gardens as a type, and they have received surprisingly little notice in either the literature of war memorials, or in surveys of twentieth-century landscape and garden design.

Over the years, architectural and sculptural memorials have attracted greater attention in terms of historic interest and conservation than memorial landscapes. However, those monuments are often physically set in a garden or park which is integral not only to their setting and enjoyment but to their cultural meaning. The open space and the monument provided for different aspects of memorialisation and different, but complementary, needs in the community. To focus only on the monument and its generally sombre character is to overlook the extent to which mourning was balanced by a desire to look forward, and the extent to which both post-war periods were coloured by a political determination to secure a better future.

While, as will be seen, most war memorial parks and gardens originated after the First World War, a significant number were also created as Second World War memorials. In this advice, the emphasis is on designed landscapes created after the end of the First World War, although it does look ahead to what happened after later conflicts. Brief notice is also given to wider memorial landscapes, although the topic lies beyond the scope of the present document.



Figure 2
Nottingham Memorial Gardens. The Grade II-registered gardens are only the core of the memorial landscape, most of which comprises playing fields for the neighbouring schools. The Memorial Arch, unveiled in 1927, is Grade II-listed.

1 History and Character

1.1 Terminology and definitions

War memorial parks and gardens comprise a range of different types of designed landscape, varying widely in size and design. Some are small sites, designed as no more than the settings to a sculptural or architectural memorial; some are gardens in which such a memorial is an important but subsidiary part, often in its own planted setting; some are public parks largely comprising sports pitches; and some are parks with a range of traditional amenities such as bandstands, lakes and ornamental planting alongside the usual provision for sports such as tennis or bowls (Fig 3). The typology should also include memorial avenues and bigger planting schemes such as the Whipsnade Tree Cathedral (Bedfordshire) and the National Arboretum at Alrewas (Staffordshire), where ‘our nation remembers.’



Figure 3
Gheluvelt Park, Worcester (registered Grade II), named after the 1914 battle in which the Worcester Regiment played a distinguished part. Opened in 1922, its character is largely that of a typical late Victorian or Edwardian public park.

Complicating a general lack of historical awareness, a number of these parks no longer have ‘war’ or ‘memorial’ in their common name. Full dedicatory names associated with memorial recreation grounds or playing fields are quite often dropped as a matter of common usage. But the names of parks can also change: as referred to above, Rowntree Memorial Park in York is now known as just Rowntree Park (Fig 4); Carr Bank Memorial Park in Mansfield (Nottinghamshire) is now Carr Bank Sculpture Park, while in several examples, such as Gheluvelt Park, Worcester, or the very recent Chavasse Park in Liverpool, the memorial origins are not explicitly reflected in the name.

Inevitably, given the local nature of their development and subsequent maintenance, the taxonomy of these memorial landscapes is inconsistent. War memorial parks, war memorial playing fields,



Figure 4
Rowntree Park, York (registered Grade II), an early photograph taken when its name still included the word ‘Memorial’.

war memorial garden or gardens, and gardens of remembrance, are all names which are interchanged. In some places, both 'park' and 'garden' are in current usage for the same site.

The names of memorial landscapes reflect the size of the site but there is no consistent threshold: Sileby War Memorial Park (Leicestershire) is 1.5ha., while Kirkham Memorial Gardens (Lancashire) are 4.5ha (and often referred to as Memorial Park). The names more often reflect the use of the site: a quiet, contemplative space, with formal features tends to be thought a garden, while a more active area, with a predominance of sports facilities, tends to be thought a park.

A memorial garden may be a small separate garden in a village, town or city, or it may be an enclosure within an earlier park such as the Memorial Gardens laid out around the war memorial in the recently restored Clifton Park, Rotherham (South Yorkshire). Memorial gardens generally contain ornamental planting and an architectural monument as a focal point.

Confusingly, while used for public gardens, it should be noted that the terms 'memorial garden/s' or 'garden/s of remembrance' are also frequently used for sites dedicated to the interment or scattering of ashes, unconnected with war memorialisation. These need to be distinguished from similarly named sites whose purpose is recreation. They are generally located in cemeteries or crematoria grounds and should be considered a sub-group of cemeteries rather than public parks.

To add to the confusion, there are examples of cemeteries which have been re-named Memorial Parks: West Norwood Cemetery and Crematorium (in the London Borough of Lambeth), was temporarily known from the 1970s to the 1990s as West Norwood Memorial Park, and the registered Flaybrick Memorial Park in (Lancashire) is a nineteenth-century cemetery. St Martin's Memorial Park in Tipton (West Midlands) is a closed churchyard.

Given that the terminology is inconsistent, it may be helpful to propose a typology for war memorial landscapes, regardless of name.

A provisional breakdown might include:

- Small garden settings to war memorials, under 0.5ha
- Ornamental gardens containing war memorials with no sports or games facilities, 0.5ha-2ha
- Public parks chiefly comprising sports pitches (recreation grounds), 2-5ha
- Public parks with a traditional range of amenities (for instance, bandstand/ornamental lake/café/toilets/ornamental planting), as well as limited sports provision (tennis, bowls), 2-10ha
- Large public parks with typical park facilities but with majority of space dedicated to sports provision, any size
- Other kinds of dedicated public open space (for instance, countryside), any size

1.2 Public parks and commemoration

As venues for large-scale events, public parks played their part in Armistice Day and Peace Day celebrations in November 1918 and July 1919. On 23 November 1918, fifteen thousand wounded ex-servicemen gathered in London's Hyde Park to be publicly thanked by the King. This was also the scene of a gigantic choral celebration on 24 May 1919 with an Imperial Choir of ten thousand singers with massed military bands and fireworks over the Serpentine, witnessed by vast crowds including the King and Queen. In Huddersfield the programme for Peace Day focussed on a procession from the Town Hall to Greenhead Park; in Stockport over twenty thousand children wearing fancy dress gathered in Alexandra Park, Vernon Park and other open spaces to sing hymns and patriotic songs accompanied by bands; in Rochdale there was dancing to the bands in the parks; and in Hackney the Peace Day celebrations included processions of schoolchildren to Victoria Park, Springfield Park and the Downs.

Parks also provided the venue for counter-demonstrations: a 'jarring note' was struck in July 1919 by a march in Manchester of unemployed ex-servicemen 'a battalion strong and more' from Albert Square to Platt Fields, while two days after the royal visit to Hyde Park in May 1919 it was the scene of a rally of ex-servicemen demanding work and a minimum wage, which ended with rioting in Parliament Square.

Parks were of course already established as a repository for monuments of one sort or another, commemorating local or national figures or events, and after the First World War many authorities chose their principal park as the site for a war memorial. Examples of fine war memorials inserted into older landscapes include Edwin Lutyens' arch in Victoria Park, Leicester (Listed Grade I) and his cenotaph in Watts Park, Southampton (Listed Grade II*). Others include those in Weston Park, Sheffield; Victoria Park, Widnes; Ashton Gardens, St Anne's on Sea; Albert Park, Middlesborough; Barrow Public Park (Fig 5),

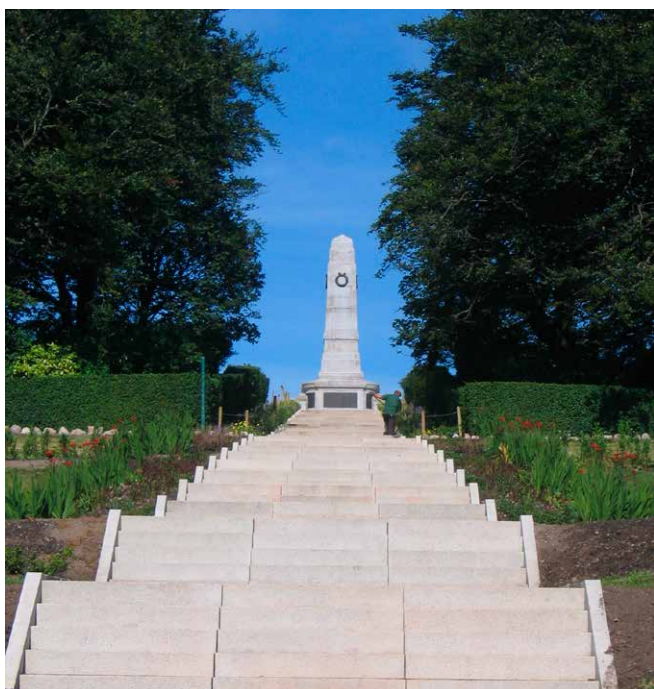


Figure 5
An example of a First World War memorial in an older park: the Grade II- listed memorial in Barrow Public Park (Cumbria), erected in 1919 to the 616 men of the town who died in the conflict.

Christchurch Park, Ipswich; and Central Park, in the London Borough of Newham, all of which have received HLF park restoration grants in recent years.

1.3 Parks as war memorials

The decision over what form a war memorial should take was generally made by a local war memorial committee, of which thousands were formed towards the end of and after the First World War in cities, towns and parishes across the UK. These were generally set up after a public meeting called by a civic leader such as a mayor or council chair, who would then convene a steering committee, but generally they remained independent of local authorities. In addition to determining the form of the memorial they were also responsible for the fund-raising required to meet the cost of construction: it was widely considered an important part of the memorialisation that fund-raising should be voluntary rather than draw on public funds. This independence was felt to be a strength: when in 1922 a gigantic national memorial on the corner of Hyde Park was proposed by the artist Frank Brangwyn, one of the scheme's opponents, H G Watkins, argued in the *Architects' Journal*:

'Since the war the outstanding feature of the great movement to erect war memorials in this country had been the universality of the smaller monuments, and the multiplicity of these in villages, churches, clubs, etc., which was very characteristic of the love of home and the individualistic spirit of the British people.'

The choice of memorial varied widely, and can be divided broadly into monumental and utilitarian. Many favoured an architectural monument which would possess the necessary gravitas, feeling uneasy about more utilitarian proposals. A leader in the *Hackney Gazette* for 23 May 1919 remarked:

'A Memorial should be one which the public could not fail to associate with the Great War, and its object, from this point of view, should be unmistakable. We are afraid that

some of the schemes suggested – notably at Shoreditch, where an extension of the public baths is being advocated – scarcely answer to the description of a Memorial at all, however excellent they might be as monuments of municipal enterprise.’

But others chose to focus on the future. The Coventry war memorial appeal, to provide a new park, argued that provision for games and exercise would be ‘of the greatest value in the healthy development of the young people of the City’, while the speech of dedication at Rockley Memorial Park (Nottinghamshire) in 1927 referred to it as ‘a memorial which would endure, be worthy of the sacrifices made, and give joy to generations to come.’

The park movement had evolved into a new phase by the early 1920s. The National Playing Fields Association was formed in 1925 to champion ‘the vital importance of playing fields to the physical, moral and mental welfare of the youth of the country’, and the Victorian emphasis on formal horticultural display and passive recreation had given way to a more modern aesthetic based on exercise and sport. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s new parks reflected this emergent spirit which continued to be reflected in the design of the war memorial parks of the 1940s. Stylistically there was little development between the 1920s and the 1940s, other than a faint reflection of contemporary fashion: Arts and Crafts motifs for example are evident in a number of First World War memorial gardens, such as that in Broomfield Park (London Borough of Enfield) (Fig 6), while others contain garden features popular in the inter-war period such as rock gardens.

After the Second World War, commemoration was again organised by local war memorial committees, and again parks and gardens were often considered the most appropriate form of living memorial. Where public opinion was sought there is evidence of a very strong antipathy towards monumental memorial. While there was some debate after the First World War, it seems that objections to sculptural and architectural memorials had hardened by the 1940s. The



Figure 6
The memorial garden in Broomfield Park (London Borough of Enfield), a design influenced by the pre-war Arts and Crafts movement. Registered Grade II.

Mass Observation Bulletin for November 1944 recorded a common factor running through replies to questions about the form memorials should take after World War Two. Under the heading, ‘No Stone Memorials’ it reported a common theme, that ‘practically no one wanted costly erections in stone.’ ‘Most people wanted a memorial which would be useful or give pleasure to those who outlive the war’ and favoured ways of ‘commemorating the dead through the daily lives of the living.’ One soldier’s wife remarked, ‘Preserve us from the erections of the last war! If we must have memorials, they had better be parks, trees, libraries, things that [a] town or village **needs**.’ However, there were inevitably fewer such parks developed, as memorialisation frequently took the form of adding to an existing memorial, and in many places the local demand for a park had by this time been satisfied.

1.4 Gardens of remembrance

Gardens of remembrance or memorial gardens, characterised by a highly ornamental character created in hard and soft landscaping, were generally laid out either as new gardens (Fig 7), or as enclosures within older parks. Such gardens were intended, in the words of the War Memorials Advisory Council, to be ‘places of rest and meditation’. In the words of one London councillor recommending a new garden as a memorial:



Figure 7
The Garden of Remembrance, Lichfield (Staffordshire), opened in 1920, adjacent to but quite distinct from the adjoining Museum Gardens. It forms part of the Grade II-registered Cathedral Close and Linear Park.



Figure 8
The Garden of Remembrance in Corporation Park, Blackburn, unveiled in 1924. The park, registered at Grade II, was opened in 1857.

‘the laying out and maintenance of the enclosure as a beautiful little garden should be as much a part of the Memorial as the erection of a piece of sculpture. It should be treated worthily and reverently as a little piece of Stoke Newington belonging to the men who went from our Borough to fight for their native land. Here, where they themselves were wont to pass, flowers, through all the changing seasons of the year, would greet their memory.’

Good examples of First World War memorial or remembrance gardens inserted into earlier parks include Corporation Park, Blackburn in Lancashire (Fig 8); the Garden of Remembrance at Broomfield Park; the Garden of Remembrance, Clifton Park, Rotherham; and Towneley Park, Burnley. However, some memorial parks, such as Hyndburn (Lancashire), do contain a discrete Remembrance Garden. One loss has been the garden of remembrance at Wickford (Essex), destroyed when new flood defences were built along the boundary of the park in 1960. Although not explicitly a separate memorial, the rose garden at Fleetwood Memorial Park was probably designed with an awareness of the intensely symbolic nature of roses in the national grief after the First World War.

1.5 Designers and designs

As indicated above, as a type, designed memorial landscapes include a wide range of different forms, from small formal gardens to large expanses of playing fields. As noted above, they were generally laid out to a design by the borough surveyor or a local nursery firm. This was largely a matter of cost: because the funding was raised voluntarily it rarely provided for extravagance and, although labour was often cheaply provided through unemployment relief schemes, the specification for materials and features tended to be modest.

While there is rarely evidence of professional landscape designers being involved, there are exceptions. In 1925 Thomas Mawson produced a design for the adaptation of the late nineteenth-century recreation ground at Kirkham (Lancashire) as a memorial garden (Fig 9), and he was also consulted on the layout for the Memorial Park at Padiham near Burnley (Lancashire), opened in 1921, but in both cases the commission may have been due to his ownership of the local Lakeland Nurseries, rather than his international reputation. Barron and Son, founded by the leading nineteenth-century designer William Barron, was involved in the design of Heanor Memorial Park (Derbyshire) after the Second World War, but this again was probably due to Barrons being the leading local nurserymen. Elsewhere, Percy Cane

was responsible for rock and water gardens at Coventry War Memorial Park in 1926, while after the Second World War Geoffrey Jellicoe designed the 2ha. Walsall Memorial Garden, opened in 1952, Peter Shephard was responsible for an Anglo-American Garden of Remembrance at Tewkesbury (Gloucestershire), and Peter Youngman designed a memorial garden in the churchyard of St John's Church, in the London Borough of Croydon.

Modest budgets meant that gradual development was also characteristic of these parks. Funds were dependent on voluntary subscriptions as a matter of principle, and although occasionally a local authority would assist, economic conditions were difficult in the wake of both wars. An article on the opening of Padiham War Memorial Park refers to introducing further features 'when times come normal.' At Gheluvelt Park, a separate appeal was required to fund the monumental gates, which were added eight years after the park was opened. Council minutes in Coventry make clear that renewing the housing stock was the more urgent call on funds, and the days of generous government loans for parks had passed. In most cases, the opening of the park was followed by several years during which further amenities and features were added as funds allowed.

While Willenhall Memorial Park on the edge of Walsall was formally opened in 1923, it was incomplete: the bandstand was built in 1927, and a pavilion, shelter, clock and aviary were added in the 1930s.

A memorial park often grew from a pre-existing aspiration for a public park. In Romsey in Hampshire, a park had been discussed for many years before the First World War, and the end of the War gave the campaign fresh impetus under the banner of commemoration. What was laid out was a traditional public park of some 2ha. complete with bandstand and ornamental planting (Fig10). Negotiations to purchase the estate which became Gheluvelt Park were opened as early as 1912, while the Memorial Park at Herne Bay in Kent was created on a site where a park had first been proposed in 1894. In other cases, as at Kirkham, a pre-existing park was adopted as a memorial. At Chingford in Essex, the Memorial Park was laid out in 1930 around the pre-existing war memorial garden. The site was extended to some 3.8ha. and became the Urban District Council's first municipal park, with a range of amenities including a bandstand and ornamental pond as well as sports pitches and a bowling green.



Figure 9
The Memorial Park at Kirkham, Lancashire, on which Thomas Mawson advised. This has a strong formal design with an axial walk aligned on the church spire.



Figure 10
An early view of Romsey Memorial Park (Hampshire), opened in 1920; the Grade II-listed war memorial was unveiled in 1921. As the principal park in the town it contained most of the amenities associated with a typical public park.

Among common features, commemorative gateways are perhaps the most notable (Fig 11). Materials are generally local but brick and wrought iron or mild steel are more widespread than might have been the case amongst earlier public parks. The grade II-listed gates at Ashbourne Memorial Park are in finely carved red Hollington stone (Fig12) while the imposing gates to Fleetwood Memorial Park are a theatrical composition using rendered masonry and timber (Fig13). Fine examples of memorial gateways include those Gheluvelt Park, Herne Bay (Kent), Heanor War Memorial Park (Derbyshire) and Pelton Fell War Memorial Park in Chester-le-Street (County Durham).

The design of many sets of gates included dedicatory plaques attached to the gate piers, which in some cases also include a roll of honour. At Fleetwood there were bronze bas-reliefs of a soldier and a sailor, one of which was subsequently stolen. At Pelton Fell, wrought iron wreaths were worked into the gate design matching those on the war memorial in the park. In many instances, the name of the park and its memorial function is prominently displayed, either as part of the ornamental metalwork of the gates or in carved stone.

Some war memorial parks, such as Coventry or Fleetwood, contain an imposing sculptural or architectural monument as a focal point. Elsewhere, a monument may be contained in its own discrete enclosure of paving, dwarf walls, or planting, either hedges or flower beds. However, many memorial parks do not contain a monument, the open space and its recreational facilities themselves serving as the memorial.

Memorial parks were often chosen as the location for one of the 264 'war-battered' tanks (sometimes accompanied by captured field guns), presented at the end of the First World War to towns around the UK in recognition of efforts in selling war bonds. All but one, at Ashford in Kent (listed Grade II), were later removed, many as part of the drive for scrap iron during the Second World War. In Ashbourne the presentation of a German gun for the new park was ambushed by indignant veterans, who hauled it away and dumped it in a lake.



Figures 11 (top), 12 (middle), 13 (bottom)

Top: Dawley Memorial Park (Telford & Wrekin), opened in 1902 to mark the coronation of Edward VII and rededicated as a memorial park after the First World War. A prominent display of the commemorative function is characteristic of memorial park entrances. Middle: View of the Grade II-listed gates at Ashbourne Memorial Park, Derbyshire, which was opened in 1922.

© David Hallam-Jones

Bottom: The entrance to Fleetwood Memorial Park (Lancashire), a theatrical construction of rendered masonry and timber, originally incorporating brass bas-reliefs in its ironwork. Here an existing park was redeveloped in 1925 by the noted town planner Sir Leslie Patrick Abercrombie (1879-1957) into a memorial to those who fell in the First World War.

1.6 Memorial avenues and trees

Avenues were widely considered as memorials after both World Wars. *Roads of Remembrance as War Memorials*, a pamphlet published in 1920, advocated the planting of trees along existing highways, as well as the construction of new roads as memorials. At East Keswick (West Yorkshire) in the early 1920s, a row of seventeen lime trees was planted leading from the war memorial cross along the road leading out of the village, each with a plaque commemorating one of the parish's dead. In Croydon, in south London, the Promenade de Verdun was laid out in 1923 on the Webb Estate to commemorate French sacrifices on the Western Front. It extends a third of a mile, and ten tons of French battlefield soil was imported to plant a line of Lombardy Poplars. At the south-east end is a tall obelisk, dedicated to the French soldiers who died in Petain's stand against the Germans in 1916.

Avenues also feature within a number of war memorial parks. At Herne Bay in Kent, an Avenue of Remembrance planted with horse chestnuts, recently diagnosed with bleeding canker, leads from the entrance (to which ornamental gates were added by the British Legion in 1932) to the central war memorial. Fleetwood Memorial Park is designed around a series of axial walks focused on the central memorial and includes an avenue dedicated to the Fallen of the First World War. An avenue of lime trees was planted from the Dartmouth Avenue entrance at Willenhall War Memorial Park (West Midlands) in the early 1930s. An avenue leads to the war memorial in Heanor Memorial Park (Derbyshire), laid out after the Second World War (Fig14). At Wickford Memorial Park, near Basildon (Essex), also laid out after 1945, the park was planted unusually with two rows, an inner row comprising smaller flowering trees.

Memorial trees were also planted singly or in informal groups in a number of parks. At Coventry some 249 trees were planted individually along the paths as memorials to the dead of the First World War, but the tradition has continued and there are now approximately 800 memorial



Figure 14

The avenue at Heanor Memorial Park, Derbyshire, opened in 1951. Conceived in 1945, the park included a new war memorial but was primarily so 'all people, young and old, could enjoy the beauties of nature in lovely surroundings'. Facilities included tennis courts and a children's playground.

© Paul Brentnall

trees not only to service dead but to civilians. Take-up in the 1920s may have been slow, as from the outset the Council charged for both tree and plaque; in 1923 the charge was 25 shillings (over £300 in today's prices). Chobham Recreation Ground in Surrey, purchased as a war memorial after the First World War, was subsequently planted with thirty-two chestnuts, one for each man who died in the Second World War, commemorated on a bronze plaque on the gate piers. The war memorial at Downham in Essex took the form of a nurses' home and also a planting of 27 oak trees for the 26 dead from three villages, the first tree being planted beside a memorial tablet with the full roll of honour.

Tree-planting was often ritualised as part of a local commemoration. At Fleetwood, the memorial avenue trees, one for each of the Fallen, were planted by the servicemen's children; similarly, at Downham, the individual oak trees were each planted by the next of kin with a name plate attached by a length of telephone cable cut from a reel brought back from France.

Name plaques were attached to memorial trees at many sites, whether planted in an avenue

or singly. Good examples survive at the War Memorial Parks in Coventry and the avenue at Wickford (at both, the plaques are of metal and mounted on low concrete plinths), but in most cases they have been removed or lost. Memorial trees, and in particular the use and disappearance of name plaques either attached or adjacent to trees, is a subject which deserves further research. As with war memorials and memorial parks in general, the deliberations of war memorial committees, most of whose proceedings survive in local record offices, are a rich source of detailed information which, apart from commendable examples of local history research, has scarcely been tapped.

1.7 Sports facilities

The other common characteristic of memorial parks is the provision made for sport, play and formal recreation. Facilities were provided for both veterans and the younger generation, and included bowling greens, tennis courts, football and cricket pitches, and playgrounds. Many memorial parks are now regarded or even renamed 'recreation grounds' in recognition of this dominant characteristic. In most parks over a certain size, a large proportion of the site was, and often still is, dedicated to such use. Sports pavilions often have a memorial function: at Padiham Memorial Park, which had been opened in 1921, the Second World War memorial was a new pavilion and sports club, with 54 individually dedicated seats around the cricket pitch, although these were in poor condition by the mid 1980s and subsequently removed. A memorial plaque on the pavilion reads: '1939-1945 / In memoriam / Ye that live on / Mid English pastures green / Remember us & think / What might have been'.

The strong emphasis on sport can be seen in numerous examples. Forster Memorial Park in the London Borough of Lewisham, donated by the local MP in memory of his two sons killed in the First World War, is a 17ha. site largely devoted to playing fields, although with some notable ancient woodland around its perimeter. North Walsham Park (Norfolk) is a 4.5ha site largely laid

out for playing fields with a hedged enclosure around the war memorial. Oatlands War Memorial Playing Fields in Surrey (now Oatlands Recreation Ground), was laid out in 1919, alongside the War Memorial Allotments. The Mobbs Memorial, commemorating Edgar Mobbs, DSO, who played rugby for Northampton and England, in Northampton's Garden of Remembrance in Abington Square, features panels depicting both the battlefield and the rugby pitch.

1.8 Landscapes of remembrance

Although provision for formal sport and active recreation was the dominant feature in most war memorial parks, other kinds of terrain were also sometimes acquired as memorials. In 1921 Sir Thomas Rowbotham, former Mayor of Stockport (Greater Manchester), presented some thirty-six hectares to the town in memory of its war dead to form Woodbank Memorial Park. The 1949 town guide said the park was 'beautifully wooded and, skirted by the river Goyt, presents striking natural views. The bluebells in the woods are a feature almost unequalled in any public park in the country.'

At Radcliffe-on-Trent in Nottinghamshire a local landowner, Lisle Rockley, purchased some nine hectares to create a memorial to the men of the village and to his son. The land comprised chiefly 'a stretch of the cliffs a mile long, covered with trees and tangled undergrowth. Vistas have been cut through, waterfalls constructed by tapping hidden springs, dell walks made down to the river, and a grass promenade 36 ft. wide laid out along the top of the cliffs, with two small parks abutting. More than 10,000 ornamental shrubs, flowering trees and evergreens have been planted.'

'Natural landscapes' – places of beauty and contemplation – were also given *in memoriam*. In the Lake District the Fell and Rock Climbing Club donated 3,000 acres of land including Great Gable to the National Trust in memory of club members who had died in the war; Scafell, and Piel Island were similarly gifted. The War Memorials Archive records a further fourteen

examples of land donations as war memorials, mostly in the Home Counties, although these form a far from complete inventory.

1.9 Memorial parks and urban planning

In a limited number of instances, memorial parks were developed as part of a piece of large-scale of town-planning. At Fleetwood in Lancashire), a 7ha. site was laid out to designs by Sir Patrick Abercrombie in 1925-6 on the former grounds of Warrenhurst House as an integral part of a new residential development. Willenhall Memorial Park on Walsall's urban fringe was part of a bold new council housing scheme, aiming to create homes fit for heroes in a green setting. It was a Park and Garden City combining open space for informal recreation with areas of woodland, laid out on the site of former mine-workings. The work was overseen by a War Memorial and Town Development Committee, and Walsall was ahead of its time in seeing a park as a key part of good quality housing development. The land used for the Memorial Park at Wickford was acquired after the Second World War as part of a planned public housing development and earmarked for recreational purposes from an early stage. Early designs show a clear planned relationship between the housing and the park, with a central residential avenue leading to a community hall set on the edge of the park and tied into it with formal tree planting.

In a small-scale version of homes fit for heroes, some memorial parks were associated with cottage-housing designed for returning servicemen, often disabled. The 'City of Worcester Homes for Disabled Sailors and Soldiers' in Gheluvelt Park were integral to the park design from the outset (Fig15), while housing for elderly village residents was part of the plans for Pinner Memorial Park (London Borough of Harrow) created out of the West House estate. Thomas Mawson had championed the idea of housing for disabled veterans in *An Imperial Obligation* (1917), the book he produced after his son James was killed at Ypres. Mawson's model village included not only market gardens and allotments but

also a recreation ground with bowling green, tennis courts and clubhouse as well as a war memorial in a formal garden setting located in a central position in the village, and gardens for the hospital to include a bowling green and flowerbeds.

In some instances, a group of war memorials was enabled by generous fund-raising. In Ilford for example, the £10,000 raised by the memorial appeal after the First World War was used to purchase the site for the War Memorial Gardens, to erect a monument, to build a children's wing to the hospital and to build a memorial hall. The park thus has a group value associated with these other memorials as well as its own specific significance. To modern eyes, some of these juxtapositions can seem incongruous, but recognising the extent and diversity of memorial parks and gardens is essential to understanding the nature of commemoration.



Figure 15
The City of Worcester Homes for Disabled Sailors and Soldiers were incorporated within the design of Gheluvelt Park from the outset.
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2 Change and the Future

Memorial parks now face the same threats as all parks maintained by local authorities; central government policy has resulted in unprecedented cuts to non-statutory services such as grounds maintenance, and these cuts are set to continue for at least another three years, by which time maintenance budgets will have been cut by 60-90 per cent from 2010 levels. Like all parks and like many other war memorials, their features are vulnerable to vandalism and metal-theft. In

addition, many memorial parks, while highly significant in terms of their intangible heritage of civic commemoration and personal histories, were not only physically modest designs, but were often spaces dominated by formal recreational provision. Combined with their all being relatively recent in origin, this has meant that their historic landscape interest has been undervalued at a national level and is only now being addressed.

3 Further Reading

Very little has been published on war memorial parks and gardens, and they feature little in surveys of architectural and sculptural memorials, such as Alan Borg's *War Memorials from Antiquity to the Present* (1991), Derek Boorman's *At the Going Down of the Sun* (1988) or the more easily accessible publication *War Memorials in Britain* by Jim Corke (2005). Boorman shows an appreciation for a well-tended garden, but generally memorial parks and gardens are viewed as little more than the setting for the monument.

In (2014), the Garden History Society published a special edition of *Garden History* (42: supplement 1) commemorating the First World War, which includes 'A Living Monument': Memorial Parks of the First and Second World Wars' by David Lambert. Kristine F Miller's *Almost Home: The Public Landscapes of Gertrude Jekyll*, University of Virginia Press, 2013, includes a chapter on Jekyll's designs for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries.

The best general account of war memorialisation is given in Alex King's *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (1998). Hazel Conway's 'Everyday Landscapes: Public Parks from 1930 to 2000', *Garden History* 28:1 (2000), gives a useful summary of the shifting priorities in park design.

The UK War Memorials Database (<http://www.ukniwm.org.uk/>) administered by the Imperial War Museum has entries for over two hundred war memorial parks and gardens, which comprise a proforma with basic survey information and, where known, references to archival and photographic material. The North East War Memorials Project has a similarly impressive depth of local research (<http://www.newmp.org.uk>).

The War Memorials Trust, which promotes the protection and repair of all forms of war memorial, co-published with English Heritage, the Garden History Society and Historic Scotland *Conservation and Management of War Memorial Landscapes* (2012), which provides guidance on the treatment of landscape in war memorial conservation projects.

More has been written on memorial tree-planting. In the late 1990s, Paul Gough published a useful series of papers relating primarily to memorial landscapes on battlefield sites, such as 'The Sacred Turf: War Memorial Gardens as Theatres of War (and Peace)' in English Heritage, *Monuments and the Millennium* (2001), 228-36, and 'Conifers and Commemoration – the Politics and Protocol of Planting,' in *Landscape Research*, vol.21, no.1 (1996), 73-87.

A number of parks have been investigated by county gardens trusts, details of which are continuously uploaded to the database of Parks and Gardens UK (<http://www.parksandgardens.org>); a short but useful article on First World War memorial parks in Sussex was included in the 2014 *Yearbook* of the Association of Gardens Trusts. A good deal of information on individual memorial parks is included on the London Historic Parks and Gardens Trust database (<http://www.londongardensonline.org.uk>).

Some of the best historical material has been published by local historians online, where detailed accounts of some memorial parks and gardens can be found by a simple name search; for example the Fampoux Gardens in Bournemouth at <http://www.wintonforum.co.uk/fampoux.html>; Easingwold Memorial Park at http://www.easingwold.gov.uk/park_history.htm; or Earby Memorial Park at http://www.pendle.gov.uk/info/200032/deaths_funerals_and_cremations/94/bereavement_services/14. Also, a number of local authorities or Friends groups have uploaded the conservation management plan for a specific park, for example that for Herne Bay Memorial Park can be found at <https://www.canterbury.gov.uk/leisure-countryside/things-to-do-in-the-district/parks-and-gardens/memorial-park>

Many more narratives remain to be recovered, especially from local newspapers. Increasingly these are available online via the British Newspaper Archive (<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>).

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