

Oxshott Heath – War Memorial

by Michael J Crute



The Memorial History

The Oxshott War Memorial stands on the hilltop above the south slope of Oxshott Heath in a prominent position facing South, it now has a backdrop of

trees. The memorial is surrounded by a low steel rail and a small box hedge to enclose it. When it was erected the area was open at the sides where the trees have since grown.

The stone memorial was erected after World War 1 by Sir Robert MacAlpine, who lived locally at Knott Park, he was the founder of the MacAlpine construction company and was often referred to by the 'nickname of Concrete Bob' for his use of the material by his company.

The memorial displays the names of 25 men who had connections with Oxshott and died in the 1914-18 war. It also has the names of the 25 men who gave their lives in the 1939-45 war so that their courage, bravery and sacrifice is never forgotten. The ground around the Memorial is maintained by the Oxshott Heath Conservators and is the place where a service of commemoration is held every year on Armistice Sunday.

In 2014 the focus of attention was on the centenary of the start of World War 1 and as a consequence Elmbridge Council arranged for the cleaning of the memorial. In addition to the regular November service of remembrance at the memorial, on 4th August 2018 a special Act of Remembrance was held there to mark the outbreak of the war and commemorate the local men who served and died in the war.

In October 1915 four of the twenty five listed on the Oxshott memorial, Walter Ackerman, Reginald Carter, Frederick Cotterell and Hubert Selby, enlisted in Kingston, three of them quite possibly on the same day, joining the 7th Battalion East Surrey Regiment. They all died in the battle of Loos, France, on the same day 13th October 1915, with no known grave they are commemorated on the wall panels at the Loos memorial. A chilling reminder of the horrors of the war and why feelings to commemorate those fallen ran so high.

Then in March 1918 the Germans launched their Spring Offensive in the Somme area, where within 10 days three others named on the memorial Alfred Burgess, Charles Hatch and Ernest Wiles all lost their lives.

Details of the Memorial

The stone memorial comprises a 7m high wheel-head cross rising from an octagonal column, this stands on a square plinth with inscriptions dedicated to those who lost their lives during the Second World War.

The square plinth is inscribed with the wording: A.M.D.G./ 1939-1945, on the front, with the 25 names of those who died on the other three sides.

A.M.D.G. abbreviation for Latin - Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam (To the greater glory of God).

The plinth sits on top of five octagonal steps 4.6m wide at the base, which have inscriptions and names in stylised lettering dedicated to those who lost their lives during the First World War.

The wording around the top plinth reads:

*IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF/ THE MEN OF OXSHOTT WHO/ SERVED THEIR
KING & COUNTRY IN THE GREAT WAR/ REMEMBERING BEFORE GOD/ THOSE
WHO GAVE THEIR/ LIVES IN THE CAUSE OF/ LIBERTY AND JUSTICE*

On the next three lower steps are the 25 names of those who died with their Rank and the Regiment in which they served.

Listed by Historic England in 2015, entry No. 1430670,
Name: Oxshott War Memorial, Oxshott Heath, Oxshott, Surrey, KT22
OTA

It is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons: Historic interest: as an eloquent witness to the tragic impact of world events on the local community and the sacrifice it made in the conflicts of C20;

Architectural interest: an elegant memorial in a prominent position.

Also, Imperial War Museum info. reference 23379
Location Ref. OS Grid Ref.: TQ 14003 61149

Sources, *Oxshott- A Surrey Village by B.S. Gidvani 1996,*
Oxshott Parish Magazine 1981 & Internet.

WAR MEMORIAL

WW1 Monuments and Memorials in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom the scale of the loss of those serving with the military during the Great War resulted in the fact that there are very few towns or villages which do not have some sort of public memorial to commemorate their men and women who died in the First World War. During the years following the 1914-1918 war public monuments were put up with public funding or by private and public subscription. In many cases a Roll of Honour was inscribed with the names of the fallen, both civilians and military personnel, in churches, public buildings, factories, railway stations, collieries, schools and so on.

Daily telegraph By Richard van Emden 30 Oct 2011

‘It was only in the Boer War at the end of the nineteenth century that the dead themselves became the centre of attention, but the need not only to remember the fallen but to acknowledge publicly the sacrifice made by their families developed gradually during the Great War.

By the end of the Great War, more than three quarters of a million British soldiers were dead, more than 192,000 wives had lost their husbands, and nearly 360,000 children had lost their fathers.

The scale of the suffering was almost beyond comprehension, and the official and public recognition of that pain - even if it was just a name on a memorial to the missing as in the great arch of the Menin Gate at Ypres - was enormously significant in helping these families to face the future.

War memorials matter. They stand in village squares, on railway stations, in churches and in football grounds, and they are cared for by the same communities from which the men were drawn.

Many were Kitchener volunteers, who had been to school, worked and enlisted together.

Their families knew each other well, and the grief was shared.

This close relationship between the memorial and the families of those recorded there was repeated in every town and village where a war memorial was erected.'

Names on Memorials

As the creation of war memorials has traditionally been organised locally, with there being no central government directives or funding, the question of who is or is not commemorated, the form in which their details are recorded and which conflict dates are used is held to be a local matter. There are no definitive 'rules' for the names included on war memorials or for which war dates are used. This is why some war memorials include those who died of wounds or disease (during or after a war) as well as those killed in action, or include civilian alongside service casualties. First World War dates on war memorials 1914-1918 are the most common dates for the First World War found on war memorials obviously commemorating the year the war commenced and the year the armistice was declared, on 11th November 1918. However, it is not unusual to find the dates 1914-1919 on First World War memorials. The 1919 date refers to the year when the Treaty of Versailles was signed. This was the peace treaty drawn up by the nations who attended the Paris Peace Conference and officially ended the state of war between Germany and the Allied Powers when it was signed on 28th June 1919. As explained above, there are no 'rules' for war memorial inscriptions so any of these dates are correct as the local community decided to use the dates which were most appropriate.

From the WAR MEMORIALS TRUST

This is why the heath memorial varies from the plaque in the church.