

# Royal British Legion Centenary

## Why remember?

We must remember. If we do not, the sacrifice of the thousands of lives will be meaningless. They died for us, for their homes and families and friends and for a future they believed in; they died for their country. The meaning of their sacrifice rests with us as a nation; our future is their monument.



Prior to the Imperial (later Commonwealth) War Graves Commission (IWGC) being established in 1917, mass graves were used to bury our soldiers, but the IWGC introduced war graves. Row upon row of identical headstones, rather than crosses, which expressed an equality in death that was so absent in both life and home front cemeteries, where grand headstones attested to the wealth of the deceased.



They determined that, 'where the sacrifice had been common, the memorial should be common also'. Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Frederic Kenyon, director of the British

Museum, in his 1918 report to the Imperial War Graves Commission, stated that 'The place for the individual memorial is at home, where it will be constantly before the eyes of relatives and descendants, and will serve as an example and encouragement for the generations to come'. These memorials are evident in the plaques and stained-glass windows that decorate parish churches across the country but after four years of terrible attrition, traditional portrayals of heroic warriors and noble knights no longer seemed appropriate. Instead, memorials recognised an army wearied by battle and lost in solemn memories of their fallen brothers in arms.

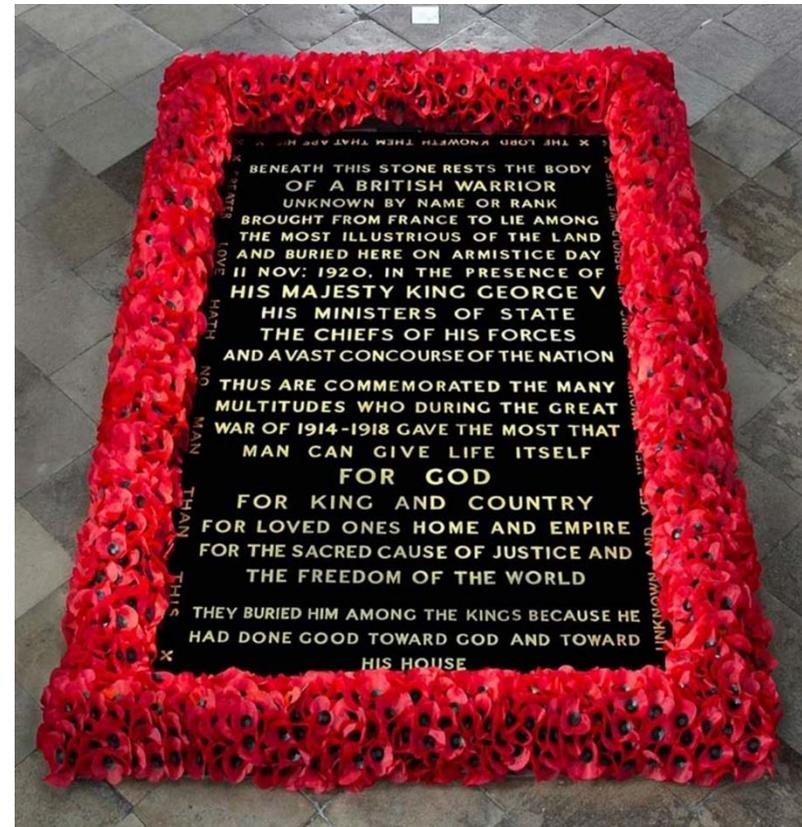
Funded by local communities, memorials also reflected the financial means of donors and sponsors and debate also sparked over the best use of memorial funds; a statue to the dead or a recreation ground, hospital or scholarship for the living.

## The Cenotaph

The first memorial to truly capture the public imagination was the Cenotaph, designed by architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, and installed as a temporary structure in Whitehall along the route of the Peace Day Parade in July 1919. The idea of an empty tomb atop a giant plinth proved wildly successful, perhaps allowing the bereaved who were deprived of a grave where they could mourn, to project their personal loss onto a very public monument. Estimates suggest 1.2 million people visited the monument in its first week, and for weeks after the parade people left flowers and wreaths at the foot of the thirty-five feet tall monolith. Such a spontaneous reaction swiftly prompted the Government to commission a replacement Cenotaph made from Portland stone, at a cost of £10,000, to replace the original plaster and wood sculpture. This national shrine has served as a focal point of Remembrance Day ceremonies ever since.



A year later, the tomb of the unknown soldier, officially called the grave of 'The Unknown Warrior' initiated a similar public response. The tomb in Westminster Abbey instantly became a focus of pilgrimage, drawing between 500,000 and 1 million people within a week.



For the hundreds of thousands of families without the wherewithal to erect or influence public monuments, memorials were on a smaller scale but no less heartfelt. Domestic shrines could display the personal effects of a dead relative, returned from the front.

## The Silence

A broader act of solidarity was the creation of Armistice Day, a way for the nation as a whole to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the bereaved and acknowledge the sacrifice made by their loved ones.

At the heart of Armistice Day was the radical idea of the two minutes' silence, an idea brought by Sir Percy Fitzpatrick from South Africa where he had served as High Commissioner. In Cape Town, from 14 May 1918 onwards, a cannon sounded at midday and the city would observe a three minutes' pause to remember those on the South African casualty list. The three minutes were soon shortened to two, the first minute a thanksgiving for survivors and the second to remember the dead.

On 07 Nov 1918 newspapers carried the request of a national silence from King George V. The two minutes would coincide with the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. Public respect for the silence appears to have been universal, bringing an unprecedented hush to the clamour and clanging of city life for many urban residents.

## The Poppy

The final mark of respect to endure long after a conflict was the poppy. Inspired by a line from the poem *In Flanders Fields* by John McCrae: 'In Flanders' Fields the poppies blow, Between the crosses, row on row...' the poppy symbolised the red of blood, the black of mourning, and, subversively, the opiates of painkilling (although hard evidence for this is elusive).

The first artificial remembrance poppies were made for American ex-servicemen by women in northern France, before the British Legion decided to copy the fundraising idea by ordering 1.5 million poppies to sell to the British public in 1921. In his book 'Lest We Forget,' Dr Gregory recounts how a basket of poppies was auctioned at Sotheby's for £90, only for the winning bidder to remove a single poppy and resubmit the basket for auction. By the end of the day the basket had raised an impressive £500.



# Armistice Day

Armistice Day is commemorated every year on 11 November to mark the armistice signed between the Allies and Germany bringing an end to hostilities on the Western Front of World War I.

The armistice took effect at eleven o'clock in the morning - or the 'eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month' of 1918.

A celebration was held a year later at Buckingham Palace, with King George V hosting a 'Banquet in Honour of The President of the French Republic', with the first official Armistice Day events held at Buckingham Palace on the morning of 11 November 1919.



At the outbreak of World War II, many countries changed the name of the holiday. Member states of the Commonwealth of Nations adopted Remembrance Day, while the US chose Veterans Day.

## Remembrance Day

THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD, AS WE THAT ARE LEFT GROW OLD:  
AGE SHALL NOT WEARY THEM,  
NOR THE YEARS CONDEMN.  
AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN AND IN THE MORNING,  
WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.  
**LEST WE FORGET.**



REMEMBRANCE DAY  
11<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER

Remembrance Day is a Memorial Day observed in Commonwealth of Nations member states to remember the members of their armed forces who died in the line of duty.

The red remembrance poppy has become a familiar emblem of Remembrance Day due to the poem *In Flanders Fields* by John McCrae. It was adopted by The Royal British Legion in 1921.

In the UK, two minutes of silence are observed on 11 November and ceremonies are held at war memorials.

## Veterans Day



Veterans Day is an Official US Public holiday honouring military veterans who served in the US Armed Forces.

It coincides with Armistice Day and Remembrance Day.

As it is a federal holiday, some American workers and students have the day off from work or school.

## 100 years commemorating the servicemen



This centenary is not to commemorate the end of a specific war; it has been 100 years since the Royal British Legion has been helping serving and ex-serving personnel and their families.

From those who served in the First World War to the men and women of our Armed Forces today, they believe no-one should suffer for having served others.