War Memorials in Emsworth

The rededication of the War Memorial on The Square prompted interest in the history of war memorials in Emsworth and so during last winter I undertook some research into this interesting subject. Sources for the information included the parish magazine of the Parish of Warblington with Emsworth held in the Portsmouth Record Office, the resources available in Emsworth Museum and my own knowledge gained over the years from school history lessons onwards. The results are now on sale in the Museum as Emsworth Paper No. 7.

Crimean War Memorial, Southsea

Many people assume that war memorials have been part of the landscape since the invention of war, but this is not true. Death has always been such a constant presence in life that celebration anywhere than in the churchyard would mean every place awash with memorials. Any memorials erected have been in celebration of the great national victory rather than the commemoration of death. These great national achievements were celebrated because they marked the spread of the British Empire across the world, which was felt by the British to be of great benefit for the rest of the world. The death of officers in the Royal Navy or the British Army would be commemorated by a plaque in the local church, erected by loving family and friends, but the rank and file of servicemen did not have wealthy family to perform this task for them. Sometimes it took many months for the news to travel back from the far outposts of Empire and then the family may be too poor to afford the expense of a memorial to a dead man.

Attitudes to death were always more callous than today, and the dead of a battle were swept into vast communal pits to prevent disease spreading through the living. They were not marked and if the army did not pass that way again they were forgotten. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries the battles came thick and fast, with armies marching and remarching over the same stretches of the world. It was remarked in the Peninsular War (1807 – 1814) fought by Arthur Wellesley in Spain that travelling over old battlefields meant that the men had to march over bones that had been exposed by animals and weather. Similar experiences were recorded in India and in South Africa after the many Colonial wars fought there.

After the great cataclysmic Battle of Waterloo, where Britain alone lost over 10,000 men killed, some regiments lost so many men that there were not enough men left alive to bury their comrades, so they were put into great mounds and covered with earth. Many regiments put markers up to indicate where their dead were buried, then within a few years – giving time for the flesh to putrify and leave the bones clean – the bones were dug up by a company from Yorkshire, returned to England, ground up and used as fertiliser on the fields of England!!

It may be that this casual acceptance of death gradually became unacceptable to the men fighting many thousands of miles away from home and forming close bonds of friendship in order to survive, but in India small regimental monuments were erected to commemorate friends and colleagues who were left behind due to battle or illness. This need to remember people's death, rather than a victorious battle or war, spread back to Britain and by the end of the Boer War in South Africa in 1902 some civic memorials were being erected to mark the sacrifice of a community's men. Towards the end of the 19th century regiments were known by the name of a city or county and recruited men primarily from that area. Any deaths

occurring in that regiment were felt in one part of the country to a greater degree than the rest, thus the civic need for commemoration.


Cenotaph in Whitehall

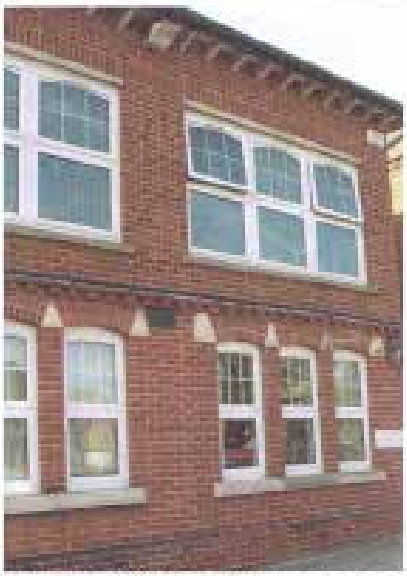
The real impetus for the erection of war memorials was the cataclysmic losses of the 1st World War. These memorials did not glorify the battles, but commemorated each man and woman lost from that area. The Cenotaph in Whitehall, London, was unveiled as the national war memorial in 1920, with people queuing for hours to be able to leave their tributes to their own family members. Families, especially wives and mothers, had great difficulty accepting that there was not a place somewhere where the body of their loved one was laid; they could not comprehend that a battlefield was fought over many times, and although they had been told a grave marker was in place soon after the death, that marker had been blown to smithereens, along with the body, when the next battle's shells flew and landed.

Nearly every war memorial was erected and paid for by the local community and so every war memorial is unique. There was never a central register of those to be included on memorials, and so every community went about the collection of names in a different way. Some names are on more than one memorial; others not recorded at all. The local people who undertook the task of tracing the names of those to be included worked hard, and would have gone from door to door, or put leaflets through letter boxes. Articles were inserted in the local press and announcements were made from the pulpits of all the churches; word of mouth was also a useful tool. However, if the family had moved away, there was no one there to put forward a name. Also, some families did not want public recognition of their loss: it was too raw for them and admitting the loss meant admitting that the loved one would never return home.

At the beginning of the 1st World War everyone was swamped by feelings of great patriotism and a belief that no-one could attempt to challenge the great British Empire, so the event would be a walk in the park and everyone would be home for Christmas. In 1914 there were about 2500 adults living in Emsworth and by February 1915 over 500 men had joined the colours; roughly equal numbers in the Royal Navy and British Army. They fought all over the world, in every theatre of war and gave their lives in every campaign from a submarine in Australia to a cavalry charge against bayonets in Belgium. With so many men in the Navy, just one ship being sunk could have a terrible effect on Emsworth; in November 1914 HMS Good Hope was lost at the Battle of Coronel with over 1000 men and no survivors – 7 of those men were from Emsworth. Just under 200 men of Emsworth died in the period 8th August 1914 to 1st January 1919; most of them are commemorated in Emsworth.

At the end of this awful conflict the impetus for a commemorative memorial in Emsworth for the fallen of the town was led by Rev. Guildford Sprigg, whose son, Aldwin, had been killed in Palestine in April 1918 serving as a Captain in the Hampshire Regiment. The sanctuary lamp that used to hang in front of the altar of St. James' was the personal gift of Rev. Sprigg and his family in his son's memory and the church appeared to be the obvious place. Rev. Sprigg wrote an article for the parish magazine in which he set out his ideas for the memorial. He even chose the designs for the paintings in the panels of the reredos; he based the designs on the life of St. James (patron saint of the church) and explained that the recruitment of St.

James as an apostle reflected the enlistment and recruitment of the men of Emsworth; the martyrdom of St. James represented the sacrifice made by the men of Emsworth; while the presence of Salome, mother of St. James, represented all the mothers and wives who had seen their men go to war. The memorial cost £500, raised by donations, and was dedicated on 24th July 1920 by the Bishop of Chichester. Two prominent men were also involved in the work: Reginald Blomfield (the architect responsible for the Menin Gate Memorial in Ypres) assisted with the design and Maurice Greiffenhagen (illustrator of the books of Rider Haggard) painted the three panels. Nowadays there are complaints that it does not fit the space and hides part of the east window, but it was chosen as the most prominent place in the church, and the most sacred.


Emsworth Victoria Cottage Hospital

With an official memorial within the sanctuary of the church, many of the returning servicemen did not feel that a stone memorial would be of much use in the town, and so they endowed two beds in the Victoria Cottage Hospital. Endowment of beds in local hospitals was of great benefit to the local people because, until the National Health Service was ntroduced after the 2nd World War, all medical treatment had to be paid for, including staying in hospital. Many people could not afford this expense, and many never used the medical services unless they really had to. Therefore, endowing beds meant that their use was free or at least at a very much reduced charge. This would be of immense help to the families of the fallen men, because their need would be increased as they would not necessarily have a bread-winner in the family. The families of the fallen suffered great poverty and hardship because of the loss of the men: it was the men who earned the money, and the women stayed at home to look after the children. Apart from domestic service or shop work, there was very little work for women, especially if they had children.

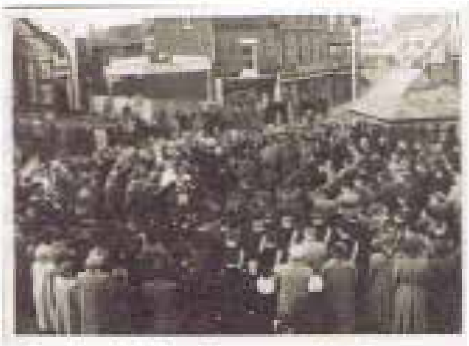

Cross of poppies planted each year in the Garden of Remembrance in St. James' Churchyard.

The terrible slaughter of the 1st World War gave rise to two great institutions in Britain. Firstly the Empire War Graves Commission, later the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, set up to maintain the vast cemeteries around the world in perpetuity, then the Royal British Legion, formed by the ex-servicemen themselves to maintain the bonds of comradeship established during the conflict in order to help them to adapt to civilian life and combat memories of all they had suffered. Emsworth had a very active branch for many years, with its own hall behind the Baptist Church in North Street. It was the centre for much of the social life of the town for some considerable time, until burnt down in the 1960s. Every year, the ladies' branch of the Emsworth Royal British Legion laid out, within the grounds of James' Church, a garden of remembrance in November for members of the public to leave their crosses to remember their loved ones, while the men's section organised a parade through the town, which ended with a service in the church when all the names of the War Dead were read out: it was sombre listening.

After the 2nd World War a similar feeling of not wanting a useless stone memorial abounded in Emsworth. The names of those killed were added to those who had fallen in the 1st World War on the memorial in the church, and then a useful memorial was required as a visible symbol within the town. It was a custom in the town that people congregated on The Square to exchange views, hear news and generally keep in touch. Many photographs in Emsworth Museum show the men leaning against the lamp post while they chatted. Therefore a seat was thought to be ideal, and gradually the idea of a covered seat and bus shelter was devised. The Emsworth Branch of the Royal British Legion undertook to coordinate the efforts and they approached Havant & Waterloo U.D.C. and the Southdown Motor Services, as well as many local organisations, for grants and awards to help fund the project. £200 was needed and the building was designed by 17year old Peter Elcock who was studying at The Southern College of Art.

Emsworth Square, c 1936

In December 1950 the building was unveiled with representatives from all the local organisations, standards from the Royal British Legion and many local townspeople watching. It was an occasion of great civic pride in Emsworth and acknowledgement of the efforts and sacrifice of its young men. At the same time an agreement was drawn up between the Royal British Legion and Havant & Waterloo U.D.C. that the local authority would be responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the Memorial in the future.



Standards dipped as a mark of respect.

Sadly times change and over the years the purpose of the bus shelter has been lost. Its significance at the centre of the community has been diminished and it has been abused and misused regularly. Anne and Paddy Kean, who lived in Tower Street and were both independent councillors on Havant Borough Council for many years, left money for restoration, but the significance soon sank into obscurity again.

The war memorial today.

The Emsworth Business Association in conjunction with other local organisations undertook to restore this unique part of Emsworth and raised funds of £2,500 to carry out the work. Members of the army based at Thorney Island undertook the actual manual work on the seating which cut the costs considerably. It is hoped that a fund can be established to meet the costs of maintenance of this memorial so that it can be a credit to the town and to all the brave men it commemorates.

If you would like to make a contribution towards the preservation of Emsworth's War Memorial please contact Linda and she will be pleased to pass details on.

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