



ENGLISH HERITAGE

# Commemorative Structures Selection Guide

Heritage Protection Department

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# Selection Guide

## Commemorative Structures

### I INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

Commemorative monuments, which include public statues and memorials, funerary monuments in churchyards and cemeteries, and war memorials, include some of our finest works of public art. War memorials are poignant reminders of the tragic impact of world events on communities; public statues were often executed by our leading sculptors, and bear witness to the achievements of leading figures from the past, as well as the cult of civic honour; our historic churchyards are unsurpassed, and their many tombs and headstones bear eloquent witness to the lives and faiths of previous generations. Taken together, they are our history made manifest. Sometimes they possess high aesthetic value too. Monuments and memorials play a special part in the public realm and are often deserving of respect and care. How we assign special interest to them is discussed below.

This selection guide concentrates on memorials, monuments and statues. Some practical items erected as memorials, like fountains, will be found under the **Street Furniture** selection guide. Chapels in cemeteries and crematoria are briefly covered under **Places of Worship**.

### 2 SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN SELECTING COMMEMORATIVE STRUCTURES FOR DESIGNATION

Some commemorative structures stand alone, and can be assessed individually. Others, especially tombs, form part of special enclaves. While individual monuments may warrant designating in their own right, consideration should always be given to the context. The overall importance of a graveyard or cemetery is very much greater than the sum of its individual parts. Funereal landscapes may warrant designation as conservation areas, or to be included in English Heritage's *Register of Historic Parks and Gardens* (available on the English Heritage website), which has undertaken a thematic study of landscaped cemeteries.

There are many hundreds of thousands of commemorative memorials in graveyards and cemeteries across the country and it would be neither feasible nor desirable to designate them all individually, even though they are unique reminders of individuals and provide important evidence of family history. Selective listing can draw attention to exceptional individual memorials or monumental groups or to those commemorating famous individuals. It can assist with interpretation and with identifying conservation priorities. Internal monuments within churches or chapels are not listed individually, but will be covered by the listing of the building in question.

Churchyard memorials have huge importance beside their individual interest as a key component in the setting of what is often the community's single most important building. Churchyards deserve to be considered as a whole, and guarded as very special

enclaves. As with cemeteries, considerable selectivity is required when assessing monuments but designation may serve to concentrate attention on particularly fine memorials or groups, and suggest where conservation efforts should initially be targeted. Surveying churchyards and cemeteries for designation can be a daunting task, given the quantity of structures present. Investigation may well lead to more items of special interest being identified.

Statues of public figures, sometimes raised by subscription, are often dominant features within the public realm and are often of high quality. These should normally be protected. Commemorative structures are also sited dramatically within private parks and gardens: while these will often have considerable intrinsic interest they should also be considered for their contribution to the wider designed landscape.

### 3 HISTORY

**Pre-Georgian Monuments** Churchyards have often been used for burial for many centuries: few places can boast of such continuity of use, or of such historical importance. Medieval churchyard memorials and early post-Reformation outdoor tombs are extremely rare: exceptions such as the canopied monument at Astbury, Cheshire are all the more remarkable. People rich enough to be buried beneath a grand memorial usually opted to be laid to rest inside the church. Medieval grave-markers have often sunk into the ground and wooden markers have long since perished: what has come down to us is a very limited selection of what we assume to have been erected. Early modern outdoor survivals such as the elaborate chest tomb to Henry Wood at Wateringbury (Kent) of the 1630s are of high significance. The rate of survival of such tombs is unclear. Exposed to the weather and vulnerable to later campaigns of clearance, they are prone to collapse and dismantling, and the choice and availability of weather-resistant building stone has been a key factor in determining their survival. The later seventeenth century witnessed the rise of the headstone: single pieces of stone set directly into the earth, sometimes with matching footstones. Imagery and inscriptions were initially very limited (skulls and crossbones were a favoured motif). This was to become one of the most important forms of memorial in Britain. Legible dated examples are relatively rare from this period, and the condition of outdoor tombs is steadily declining, making identification ever harder.

From the mid seventeenth century onwards, Anglicans began to have reservations about burial inside churches. Both Nonconformists and Jews began to open burial grounds for their reserved use in London from the 1650s onwards. Such places are among the earliest surviving testaments to developments in religion and to patterns of migration, and hence are of particular historical significance.

Public monuments of this date are very rare, and reveal the arrival of Renaissance modes of commemoration to Britain. Most statues of this period commemorate royal subjects such as Hubert Le Sueur's equestrian statue of Charles I at Charing Cross, London, which dates from the early 1630s and has been on its present spot since 1675. In the City of London, the Monument, as its name implies, stands at the head of this tradition. Designed by Robert Hooke with Sir Christopher Wren, it dates from 1671-76. Its classical inspiration would be echoed in towns and parks alike in subsequent centuries, but never on such a heroic scale.

**Georgian Public Monuments** The early years of the eighteenth century witnessed a rise in the erection of public statues and monuments. Often the work of the leading architects and sculptors of their day, they form the visual centrepiece of formal architectural compositions and public spaces, and are thus very prominent indeed. The statue by Scheemakers of Thomas Guy, at his foundation of Guy's Hospital, Southwark in 1734 was an early appearance of a non-royal subject in this medium. Architectural monuments began to appear in the early eighteenth century as part of the Baroque rediscovery of classical antiquity. Some were civic: the earliest public obelisk to be raised in England was that at Ripon of 1702. Such developments are more commonly encountered within the context of private parks where monuments such as those at Stowe, Blenheim and Chiswick form key incidents within outstanding landscapes, and often carried iconographic meanings along with their impressive built forms. Commemoration was a very important aspect of classical culture: there was a relish for monument-making at this time that resulted in monuments to pets as well as more solemn erections. All shed light on the Hanoverian ways of life. At the end of the Georgian period, monuments of some grandeur were erected to the victors of the Napoleonic Wars.

**Georgian Funerary Monuments** Outdoor funerary memorials survive in very considerable numbers from this period and gradually began to fill the churchyards surrounding earlier parish churches; they form our most important evidence regarding the Georgian way of death, and form crucial elements in our churchyards, which overall are of international importance. Only a small minority of persons ever got a permanent memorial. Outdoor tombs fall into certain categories. The bulk of memorials took the form of headstones, one of the glories of English craftsmanship, but this remains a relatively little-studied area. Higher status tombs tended to be more architectural in character, the standard form being the chest tomb, a hollow box standing above a burial vault, sometimes protected by iron railings. Developing out of seventeenth-century forebears, these were put up in huge numbers and were often graced with elaborately panelled sides and incised ledger stones. Less common were obelisks, urns and pedestal tombs; far less common still were monuments embellished with outdoor statuary. Native stones were widely used but sometimes Italian marble was deployed. Artificial stone and cast iron is also occasionally encountered. Carved epitaphs became increasingly fulsome, and visual imagery abounded, particularly in the earlier Georgian period.

**Victorian Civic Monuments** Public statuary enjoyed a Golden Age during Victoria's reign. The Victorian fascination with history and with the cult of fame, combined with the desire to aggrandise and beautify fast-developing towns and cities, resulted in considerable statue building. Classical, medieval and Renaissance models were used: the results, once dismissed, are now accorded high respect. The rise of the public park in the 1830s and 1840s created another opportunity for monument-makers. The earliest war memorials began to appear soon after the end of the Crimean War in 1855.

**Victorian Cemetery Monuments** The opening of cemeteries created a new opportunity for tomb making. Churchyards and burial grounds had become full. New funereal landscapes were created, and steadily filled with private monuments. At first these were private concerns: Kensal Green and West Norwood Cemeteries in London were opened in 1833 and 1837; Arnos Vale in Bristol was opened in 1841. The next and biggest wave dates from the 1850s, when urban graveyards were closed in large

numbers, and local authorities (through their Burial Boards) given the responsibility of opening new places for interment.

In the mid nineteenth century tombs became more affordable, and technological developments assisted in this through the mechanisation of tomb production (machine cutting and polishing of stone, especially granite), and through progress in transport (the conveying of stone by canal and railway, which widened greatly the range of affordable materials on offer). The Victorian cult of mourning also placed great stress on respect for the dead, and monuments continued to be ways of asserting family affection. Hundreds of thousands of outdoor tombs from this period survive, and the huge majority were conventional and of interest to family members only. At their best, however, cemeteries contain some of the finest collection of statuary outside churches and the houses and landscaped gardens of the affluent.

Funereal monuments are important reflections of design trends. Published pattern books led to the repetition of designs, and certain idioms enjoyed popularity for long periods. The neoclassical style retained its popularity into the mid-Victorian period and beyond, but was challenged from 1840 onwards by the Gothic Revival. The Egyptian Revival was a relatively rare, but consistent, idiom employed throughout the period. Eclectic, one-off designs were produced throughout the century, however, and were often of remarkable quality and embody the period's exuberance and visual vitality.

Many nineteenth-century cemeteries are finely landscaped, the planting responding to contemporary thinking about the Picturesque and full of the symbolism of death and resurrection. Grander monuments were often positioned along the main paths and avenues, thereby creating a hierarchy of commemoration.

**Twentieth-Century Funerary Monuments** The great age of Victorian tomb making was largely over by the 1880s, and although the formalities of mourning and commemoration endured well into the twentieth century, a decline in the vigour of the outdoor monument can be detected. The desire to attract attention gave way to a move towards greater reticence and conformity, a development that intensified following the First World War. Monuments from this period have been little-studied, and discoveries remain to be made. Works of noted carvers such as Eric Gill, or designs by architects such as Lutyens, form highlights. Much tomb production was mechanical and uninspired, however, and of interest to family members only. Recent developments have reversed this trend, however, and the revival of letter-cutting and headstone design constitutes an upturn in the history of the memorial.

**War Memorials** The impact of both world wars on Britain was huge. One result of the First World War was the biggest single wave of public commemoration ever: precise figures are hard to ascertain, but they are in the tens of thousands. The huge majority of casualties were buried where they fell, so memorials became the foci for grief and remembrance, a role they continue to perform. War memorials possess considerable historic interest for their link with world conflicts, while the lists of the names of the dead show the poignant cost of such involvement.

The first outdoor war memorials, in the modern sense of the term, were erected in the wake of the Crimean War and are rare; before then, military memorials consisted of monuments inside churches and cathedrals to individuals and regiments. Monuments to

the fallen of the Boer wars are slightly more common (five times more common than memorials to the fallen of the Crimean War), but the great (and tragic) age of memorial building was in the aftermath of the First World War. Thousands of communities paid for monuments, and these range from the humble to the flamboyant, from the simple cross to the Baroque ensembles of architecture and sculpture found in the major cities. Huge numbers of Imperial (later Commonwealth) War Graves Commission memorials were erected in churchyards and cemeteries to mark the graves of soldiers of various nationalities who died in Britain during the World Wars. (Those who died abroad were buried near where they fell). Aerial bombing in the Second World War led to a number of civic memorials marking the mass graves of civilian victims.

**Twentieth-Century Public Monuments** As with cemetery monuments so with public monuments: Victorian exuberance gave way to twentieth-century reticence. Prime civic locations tended to have already been colonised by Victorian statues or war memorials, leaving fewer opportunities for new work. One exception to this is to be found in public housing and new towns, where architects and local authorities pursued a deliberate policy of enhancing new communities with art – almost invariably sculpture. Some were the work of noted sculptors and possess high aesthetic quality. Post-war commercial development has often included an element of public art as a way of mitigating the impact of large-scale structures, and of introducing a degree of human interest and aesthetic pleasure to their new environments. Public art of recent decades is becoming eligible for designation: judgment will be necessary as to its significance and quality. Appreciation is growing for this aspect of the public realm, and our understanding is developing too.

## 4 COMMEMORATIVE STRUCTURES: SUMMARY OF SELECTION CRITERIA

**Pre-Georgian Churchyard Monuments** Surviving pre-Georgian monuments which retain their essential form will generally be eligible for designation, and at a high grade in the case of more elaborate tombs. Plain headstones without imagery or notable inscriptions will seldom warrant individual designation unless of exceptionally early (i.e. generally a mid seventeenth century) date. The position of grave markers is less clear: these are hard to date and have sometimes escaped notice. Securely dated examples should be taken very seriously. Churchyard crosses have often been scheduled in the past, and are of particular significance as very early outdoor objects often with a memorial function.

**Georgian Funerary Monuments** In general, because of the rate of survival and the increasing conformity of tomb design, the earlier Georgian the tomb, the more likely it is to be listable. Outdoor tombs of this period often reflect high *design quality*, especially those bespoke monuments that tried out new architectural forms. Some such tombs could be the work of leading architects, sculptors and masons but anonymous craftsmen were responsible for outstanding monuments, too. Regionally distinctive styles, including the products of local workshops should be looked out for carefully. Chest tombs will generally warrant designating but examples after c.1770 will have to display special features (high quality design or lettering, for instance) if they are to be included, as so many were erected.

Unusual or exemplary *symbolism* may well warrant designating, and sculpted outdoor monuments are so rare as always to warrant protection. The person commemorated may be of sufficient *historic interest* to justify listing – inclusion in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* is a good rule of thumb - but inscriptions may be intrinsically significant for other reasons. Epitaphs are vital sources of family history, as well as providing insights into religious belief and social (and personal) conduct; their elegiac verse can often be most affecting. The quality of their *lettering* in itself may be a determining consideration for listing, as well as the content. *Location* can be a key consideration as well: a group of monuments can form a particularly impressive part of a churchyard (perhaps reflecting the most prestigious area for burial), and this should be recognised in designation terms. *Group value* can thus be a consideration. *Railings* survive in varying degrees, depending on the parish's attitude to wartime reclamation: where they survive intact, there will be a much stronger case for listing the monument within. *Architectural monuments* such as columns, pyramids and obelisks will always justify serious consideration, given their design quality and relative scarcity, and may warrant designation in the higher grades. *Mausoleums* slowly developed as a type during this period and are sufficiently rare, as well as often of considerable design importance, for designation.

Headstones pre-dating c.1770 which display interesting *imagery* through relief carving (often depicting emblems of bodily decay and resurrection) and well-crafted inscriptions – sometimes including verse epitaphs - will warrant serious consideration for individual designation. After this time, selection needs to be more rigorous. This shift reflects both an increasing survival rate as well as the impact of neoclassicism, which rejected rusticity and directness of symbolism in favour of a more polite approach to both design and imagery, which sapped the genre of some of its vigour. *Historical references* to events (particularly international ones) may be a consideration also.

**Victorian Commemorative Structures** From 1840 onwards, greater selectivity is required in selecting funerary monuments for listing mainly because the number surviving is so great, and so much mass-production took place. Some of the larger cemeteries have been comprehensively evaluated for listing, but many others await inspection. Here too, discoveries remain to be made.

Tombs of *high architectural or sculptural quality* will be listable. Some of these may be the work of leading architects or sculptors, many of whom worked in this field, and who transferred their innovative design flair to the monumental field. Particularly good examples of a style or development in tomb design will warrant consideration as will unusual symbolism, whether of an intensely religious or moral nature, or whether reflecting a deceased person's life. Sculptural quality deserves recognition: much funerary sculpture was mass-produced in commercial yards and was repetitious and mechanical in quality, but there are always exceptions to this generalisation and these should be sought out. *Historic interest* of the individual commemorated will often be attached to tombs of famous people, as is the case with monuments of an earlier date and may be supported by special architectural or sculptural quality, or by striking epitaphs. A variety of *materials* were used: Portland stone was a commonplace in earlier monuments, giving way to polished granite and Italian marble later in the century, but more unusual materials such as slate, metals, rare imported stones etc will warrant attention. So too will bronze statuary, which could be of very high quality. *Location* can be a key factor too: some monuments, by dint of position, scale and grouping, can play

a vital part in establishing the character of a cemetery or churchyard and these should be carefully considered. Mausoleums became common in some of the larger cemeteries, and isolated examples were built in churchyards too. They will be assessed on architectural grounds, and if they possess elaborate interiors, then the case for designation will be all the stronger. Far fewer headstones of the period possess special interest, but those exceptions with high quality decoration, imagery and epitaphs will warrant careful consideration. As ever, inclusion in a registered landscape will add weight to any case.

**Victorian Public Sculpture** often possesses considerable sculptural merit and will generally warrant designation, and sometimes at a high grade too. Appreciation of these monuments has risen in recent years, and some of the existing grading may reflect outmoded thinking; even the Albert Memorial in Kensington Gardens (1872) was once condemned. Care needs to be taken with locations, as some statues have been re-positioned and their context drastically altered. That can sometimes render them not listable although the intrinsic quality of the piece may determine otherwise.

**Twentieth-Century Commemorative Structures** Relatively few monuments from this period are listed: this is not simply because the standards for selection become more rigorous for the huge number of monuments post-dating 1900, but because so few notable monuments that sought to stand out from the rest were erected. Occasionally, flamboyant Modernist tombs were erected, such as the Bianchi memorial of the 1930s in Hampstead Cemetery, London Borough of Camden, but this was exceptional. Most monuments were produced by commercial masons; most of their output was fairly routine and derivative. The outstanding figure in early twentieth-century letter cutting was Eric Gill: his works will generally warrant designating and they set a high standard. Our understanding of this field is still developing, however, and it is likely that there is much awaiting discovery in this realm.

**War Memorials** attract considerable public interest and will warrant serious consideration for designating. Those of more than special visual interest will warrant listing at higher grades: these may be the works of celebrated designers and sculptors, such as Eric Gill's cross at Trumpington, Cambs. The moving bronze reliefs on the Liverpool cenotaph of 1930 by H. Tyson Smith show just how fine these additions to the public realm could be, and what fitting tributes they sometimes were to the memory of all too many dead.

Unless compromised by alteration or of little design interest, there is a presumption in favour of listing all war memorials. Many memorials followed standard designs, such as Celtic crosses and calvaries. Nonetheless, such is the historic significance of these objects that listing will often still be warranted, particularly when inscriptions of casualties are included. Discretion is still required, however, with memorials of limited formal or visual interest which lack the impact of more fitting tributes: listing is undertaken to identify those items which require extra consideration through planning, and isn't a catalogue of all examples. The main exception to this overall presumption to designate concerns utilitarian or functional memorials. Sometimes, communities opted for practical living memorials, such as village halls, pavilions or extensions to hospitals. These foundations may incorporate inscription plaques, but are first and foremost buildings, and need to be judged for listing against the standards for the relevant building

types. Sometimes these discrete parts can be listed in their own right, however, such as the name-covered archway at the former Manor Hospital, London Borough of Islington.

The large numbers of Imperial and Commonwealth War Graves Commission monuments –headstones, Crosses of Sacrifice, inscribed plinths - are well tended and secure, as well as being designed to standard formulae. They will not normally warrant individual designation.

Second World War memorials are relatively rare: often modest in scale and design, their interest may be essentially historical. Visual plainness should not hide the importance of memorials such as the municipal markers over mass graves in cemeteries of civilians killed by enemy action. More recent memorials to military sites are considered under the **Military** selection guide.

**Twentieth-Century Public Sculpture** can be of high quality and thus deserving of designation. The relevant principles of selection will include aesthetic quality; historic interest; and relationship to the object's environment. Critical assessments have yet to be made of much of the more recent arrivals which makes consideration for designation a challenge.

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