



George V unveils the stone Cenotaph on Armistice Day 1919. In the days after, huge quantities of flowers were laid here by the public

in Cabinet. On that occasion, Prime Minister Lloyd George, aware of arrangements for a victory procession on Bastille Day in Paris, suggested that the dead be represented on the route of the march past by a 'catafalque' designed by 'some prominent artist'. He also proposed the inscription.

To this end, the recently knighted architect Sir Edwin Lutyens was summoned to meet the Prime Minister. He was already involved in the Imperial War Graves Commission (*COUNTRY LIFE*, March 20, 2019) and had presented designs for a temporary shrine to the dead in Hyde Park in 1918. In their conversation, Lutyens stated that the 'saluting point' should be a cenotaph (not a catafalque) and developed the design in his mind with extraordinary speed. Early drawings show he toyed with some variations, adding a flaming urn, for example, but the form of the monument never substantially changed. On the same day as his meeting, he twice sketched the Cenotaph in its final form, replete with the four sentries with reversed arms on a sheet of notepaper. Working drawings were submitted the following morning.

Such clarity of conception is remarkable, but it was clearly informed by a number of concurrent war-memorial projects, notably that of Southampton, which was in the process of design from January 1919. In total, Lutyens would design 58 memorials. Many of them incorporate ideas and motifs found in the Cenotaph and some—such as at Maidstone, Kent—copied it (perhaps thanks to Sir Martin Conway, owner of nearby Allington Castle and an advocate of Lutyens's war memorials).

The campaign to make the Cenotaph permanent rapidly triumphed over every objection and the Ministry of Works began to complete its replacement in Portland stone (some enthusiasts had advocated bronze). At this point, Lutyens, although remaining faithful to the original, exactly revised the design to create the work of elemental Classicism that confronts the modern visitor. As built, the monument incorporates no true verticals or horizontals. The former converge on a point 1,000ft in the air and the latter follow the line of a circle, with its centre point 900ft below ground. Such infinitesimal distortions draw the eye upwards and lend energy to

the whole. Lutyens saw off attempts to make statues of the four sentries and also to add more carving, but he was forced to remove the pall and preserve fabric standards. He wanted to render the latter in stone, as on his Northampton war memorial, designed in 1920 to also replace a temporary predecessor of 1919.

The stone Cenotaph was completed a century ago in time for Armistice Day on November 11, 1920, when it was unveiled by George V as part of the ceremony of laying the Unknown Warrior to rest in Westminster Abbey (*'Onwards, unknown soldier'*, November 4). In its fossilised form, the Cenotaph became a natural focus of ceremony. By extension, it crystallised the Remembrance Sunday service that is familiar today, with its attendant two-minute silence, the march past, the laying of wreaths and the wearing of poppies. Added to which, by virtue of its universality, every subsequent generation has been able to read its own loss into this remarkable edifice. It stands, therefore, as an immediately recognisable national monument not only to the Glorious Dead of one conflict, but to the tragedy of all war. 🐉



The Glorious Dead

This year is the centenary of the unveiling of the Whitehall Cenotaph on Armistice Day in 1920. John Goodall explains how this famous monument came into existence and became a fixture in the nation's consciousness

ON July 19, 1919, a vast procession of 15,000 servicemen and women seven miles long wound its way through the streets of London, past a naval pageant on the Thames and saluted the King Emperor, George V, at the end of The Mall. It marched to the acclaim of an enormous and elated crowd. The so-called Peace Parade celebrated not only the end of hostilities in the First World War eight months previously, but also the Treaty of Versailles, signed three weeks before. It brought together soldiers from the nations, colonies and Dominions that had fought for the Allied cause during the conflict, from France, Belgium and America to China, Japan, Siam and New Zealand. There was only one important omission—the Indian contingent was delayed on its journey and paraded alone a couple of weeks later on August 2.

‘Every subsequent generation has been able to read its own loss into this monument,’

At one point, the triumphant mood dramatically subsided. As the massed ranks of troops marched down Whitehall, they passed a tall thin monument hastily fashioned from plaster, timber and canvas to look like stone. It rose by stages from a low podium to a surmounting tomb draped with a Union Flag pall and a laurel wreath. It is from this elevated tomb, honouring those buried elsewhere, that the monument takes its familiar name, from the Greek for empty tomb: the ‘Cenotaph’. Where the tall, dignifying base ends and the tomb begins is impossible to tell. To either side were fixed three standards and at each end was a further laurel wreath with the inscription of the date and the words The Glorious Dead. For the parade, there stood at the corners four sentries with their arms reversed.

‘No one,’ wrote the architectural editor of *COUNTRY LIFE*, H. Avray Tipping on August 2, ‘whose good fortune made Whitehall their standpoint on that day can forget the effect upon themselves of the salute of the Allied Commanders and their troops, each in turn,



Facing page: The Cenotaph today. Above: The temporary Cenotaph, built from plaster, timber and canvas, pictured soon after the 1919 Peace Parade. Note the Union Flag pall

to the glorious Dead... the salute of the Marshals, the dipping of the Colours, the passing by of the momentarily silenced bands.’ Certainly, the Cenotaph caught the popular imagination and, by the time he wrote those words, it had become a focus for public grief, with huge numbers of flowers being laid here. Almost immediately, there began a vigorous campaign to rebuild it as a permanent memorial in Whitehall. This popular attention was not surprising, perhaps, given the scale of casualties, the number of the missing and the prohibition on the repatriation of bodies. Even so, to the organisers it was unexpected.

That’s partly because the Peace Parade had been arranged at breakneck speed in a period of deep political uncertainty at home and in the face of opposition even from its organising committee. Its chairman, Lord Curzon, chosen in part for his experience as the impresario of the great Imperial Durbar at Delhi in 1903, openly doubted that the circumstances of the moment ‘really justified extensive celebration’. There was public demand, however, for some great event, to which George V added his own voice. It was, therefore, with only 18 days notice that the form of the Peace Procession was agreed ➤