

The Stones of London's War Memorials

*'If I should die, think only this of me;
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England'*

The Soldier, Rupert Brooke (1887-1915)



Memorial at the Tower of London for the centenary of the outbreak of WWI: 'Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red' by ceramicist Paul Cummins.

The opening lines of Rupert Brooke's famous poem (above) illustrates much of the sentiments associated with the design of war memorials and war graves. It has become traditional, on the most part, for stones representing the soldiers' countries of origin to be used in memorials constructed to commemorate them. For example, the war memorials commemorating the British Forces killed during WWI in France and Belgium, such as Thiepval and the Menin Gate, are built from brick, with piers, vaults, columns and the panels bearing the inscriptions of names in **Portland Stone**. As we will see below, stones have been imported from all over the World to commemorate the soldiers from those countries who fought in the European theatres of the first half of the 20th Century. Indeed there are corners of foreign fields, or in fact London, that are forever Australian, Canadian or Maltese.

I am predominantly focusing on memorials to WWI and WWII. Many of the War Memorials and their stones catalogued below have been previously described in other Urban Geology in London Guides. These include the memorials in the vicinity of Hyde Park Corner (Siddall & Clements, 2013), on the Victoria Embankment (Siddall & Clements, 2014) and the Malta Memorial near the Tower of London (Siddall, 2014). Detailed descriptions of these memorials is provided in these texts and they are simply listed here. The war memorials in UCL are described in Siddall et al. (2014). Further information is also available from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the War Memorials Trust.

War Memorials

Cenotaph | Whitehall SW1A

The Cenotaph on Whitehall is the focus of Britain's remembrance ceremonies. It was designed by architect Sir Edwin Lutyens and completed in 1920. The word means 'empty tomb'. It is built from **Portland Stone** and is a largely unadorned pillar, with a carved wreath at both ends. Replicas of the London Cenotaph occur in Auckland, New Zealand; London, Ontario and in Hong Kong. Of these certainly the Auckland cenotaph is in Portland Stone imported from England.



The Cenotaph, Whitehall; 9th November 2014

RAF Memorial | Victoria Embankment

This is a simple pillar in **Portland Whitbed**, commemorating airmen lost in both World Wars. It was designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield in 1923, the gilded eagle on the top is by sculptor William Reid Dick.

Battle of Britain Memorial | Victoria Embankment

This memorial was erected in 2003 by sculptor Paul Day and architects Donald Insall Associates. It recycled and 25 m long **Dalbeattie Granite** superstructure to a air-vent which had been installed when the embankment was constructed in the 1860s. A new granite, probably **Kemnay Granite** from Aberdeenshire was used on the top of the monument.

Submarine War Memorial | Victoria Embankment

This monument on the embankment was erected in 1922, designed by A. H. Ryan Tension with bronze attachments by F. Brook Hitch, this memorial is covered in small bronze anchors which act as hooks to which wreaths can be attached on Remembrance Sunday. This monument probably utilised the existing granite already in place on the Victoria Embankment. Unfortunately, the origin of this stone is unknown. It is a coarse grained granite with pink orthoclase feldspars, white feldspar and biotite. There are a few megacrysts, 2-3 cm in length, of white feldspars with rims of pink feldspar (Siddall & Clements, 2014).

Camel Corps Memorial | Victoria Embankment Gardens

The Imperial Camel Corps Brigade served in the Middle East during the First World War. Although initially a small outfit, four battalions were eventually formed, two Australian, a New Zealand Battalion and another with soldiers from Great Britain, which included men from India. This memorial, featuring a bronze rider mounted on the ship of the desert was made by a sculptor who was also a member of the corps, Major Cecil Brown. He stands on a plinth of **Portland Stone**. The monument was erected in 1921.

Malta Memorial | Byward Street, EC3

This simple monument commemorates the George Cross Island of Malta which underwent siege from 1940-42 and defended the Mediterranean for the allied convoys. It is a geological gem, being composed of

the **Scutella Bed** of the Lower Coralline Limestone, quarried on the small island of Gozo in the Maltese archipelago. It is packed with fossil sand dollar echinoids, *Scutella subrotunda* (Siddall, 2014).



The Malta Memorial, Byward Street, next to the church of All Hallows-by-the-Tower; 9th November 2014

Merchant Navy Memorial | Trinity Square Gardens, Tower Hill, EC3

This impressive monument in bronze and **Portland Stone**, commemorates the Merchant Navy and fishing fleets who were lost at seas in both the first and second World Wars. The WWI section, by Sir Edward Lutyens was completed in 1928 and commemorates 12,000 men who have a grave at sea. Sir Edward Maufe designed the WWII section, with sculpture by Charles Wheeler (in Portland Stone), commemorates 24 casualties. This was completed in 1955 (Commonwealth War Graves).

Royal Artillery Memorial | Hyde Park Corner, SW1

This monument features a Howitzer carved from **Portland Stone** on a plinth, with very fine relief carving and bronzes by sculptor Charles Jagger. Jagger worked architect Lionel Pearson and the monument was completed in 1925 (Siddall & Clements, 2013).

Machine Gun Corps Memorial | Hyde Park Corner, SW1

This small memorial stands on the northern side of the Hyde Park Corner roundabout garden. The white limestone plinth is surmounted by a bronze male nude, and real Vickers machine guns coated in bronze and with bronze wreaths. It was designed by Francis Derwent Wood and completed in 1925. The monument was vilified by Pevsner (Bradley & Pevsner, 2003) who found it to be woefully inappropriate. The white stone used on the plinth contains abundant stylolites and fossil fragments. Its origin is not confirmed but it bears a striking similarity to **Pietra D'Istria**, a Jurassic Limestone from the Croatian coast. If so, this is an unusual case of a non-British stone being used on a monument to commemorate British Forces.

Australian War Memorial | Hyde Park Corner, SW1

Completed in 2003, the wall of green charnockite that is the Australian War Memorial was designed by Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects and artist Janet Laurence. The stone is **Laguna Verde** from Jerramungup in

south-western Australia. This is an ancient rock, 2.6 Ga, from the Yilgarn Craton containing blue green microcline feldspar, hornblende, plagioclase and quartz (Siddall & Clements, 2013).

RAF Bomber Command Memorial | Piccadilly, SW1

A large neoclassical structure by Liam O'Connor houses the RAF Bomber Command Memorial erected in 2012. It is built of **Portland Whitbed** from Jordan's Quarry. Inside, the bronze airmen stand on a plinth of purple porphyry from the Eastern Desert of Egypt. This stone was known to the Romans as Imperial Porphyry and it is now marketed simply as **Egyptian Red Porphyry** (Siddall & Clements, 2013).

Canada Memorial | Green Park SW1

This memorial commemorates Canadian forces who fought and died in both World Wars. It is mainly constructed from polished, brown **Anticosti Granite** from Quebec, a 1 Ga charnockitic granite. Decorative inlays of pale brown Appalachian granite are used to make the compass rose (Siddall & Clements, 2013).

RAF Coastal Command Memorial | Cloister, Westminster Abbey, SW1

This memorial, erected in 2004, commemorates the airmen of the RAF Coastal Command Squadrons who fought in the Battle of the Atlantic (WWII), which was at its peak in 1944. The memorial is made from a light grey Carrara marble which perfectly echoes the stormy seas and skies carved in relief by Neil and Richard Talbot. The grey varieties of Carrara marble, showing this cloudy patterning are marketed as **Bardiglio Nuvolato**. The Carrara marbles, geologically the Hettangian Marbles, belong to a formation of Triassic and Jurassic limestones, metamorphosed in the Miocene and are quarried in the Alpi Apuane of Tuscany.



RAF Coastal Command Memorial, Westminster Abbey

Intelligence Services Memorial | Cloister, Westminster Abbey, SW1

This memorial commemorates all members of the British Intelligence Services since 1909, including those who worked in the Government Code and Cypher School during WWII at Bletchley Park. It is by sculptor

John Maine and was dedicated by the Queen in 2009. It takes the form of a convex bowl, with a pattern reminiscent of the design of the 13th Century Cosmati Pavement in the Abbey's Sanctuary. It is a shape known as a quincunx, the arrangement of 5 dots on dice. The stones used commemorate intelligence workers are granites derived from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Unfortunately their origins are not recorded on the Abbey's website. The main bowl is of a grey gneiss. If this is a British stone, then the most likely candidate is one of the gneisses from the Lewisian Complex of Scotland. However it may well have been derived from abroad. The roundel on the left, as one looks at the monument represents England. This is 300 Ma **Cornish Megacrystic Granite**, probably from either the Land's End or St Austell Plutons. The top roundel, unfortunately out of my reach, is a blue grey porphyry with white feldspar phenocrysts. This is probably Wales's contribution and I believe it to be **Grey Trefor Porphyry**, a 450 Ma granitic rock from the Garnfor Intrusion on the Lleyn Peninsula. The granite roundel at the bottom has slightly purplish orthoclase feldspars, white plagioclase, hornblende and biotite. It is almost certainly **Mourne Granite** from the Tertiary intrusions of County Down, Northern Ireland. This means the roundel on the right is Scottish Granite. Unfortunately it is non-typical being cut through by a vein of ink granite which dominates the roundel. The oatmeal texture of the surrounding brown-grey granite suggest that it might be from Kemnay.



John Maine's Intelligence Services Memorial at Westminster Abbey. On the right are top; the Scottish Granite cut by a pink orthoclase-rich vein. Below is the Cornish Megacrystic Granite.

Animals at War Memorial | Brook Gate, Park Lane, W1

This memorial recognises all the animals that have played a part in war from horses and camels to pigeons and even the glow-worms that provided light in the trenches. It depicts war-weary animals walking through a gateway in a wall of **Portland Stone** to freedom and an open field beyond. The sculptor was David Backhouse. The monument was unveiled in November 2004.

Conscientious Objectors' Memorial | Tavistock Square Gardens, WC1H

A rough-hewn block of **Lake District Green Slate** sits in the NW corner of Tavistock Square Gardens. This monument commemorates the struggles of conscientious objectors to assert their commitment not to be involved in the violence of war. It was erected in 1994 and designed by architect Hugh Court. This stone is

from the Ordovician volcanic rocks of Cumbria, pyroclastic deposits accumulated in a lake and thus developing the striking sedimentary structures which have earned them the name 'ornamental slates'.

Memorials to Individuals

Edith Cavell Memorial | St Martin's Place, WC2

Edith Cavell was a British Red Cross nurse working in Brussels, who found herself behind enemy lines when Germany invaded Belgium in 1914. She was charged with helping allied soldiers to escape and executed by the Germans on 12th October 1915. Her monument is by Sir George Frampton and was completed in 1920. The statue of Edith Cavell is in white **Carrara Statuario** marble, whilst the pillar behind her is in Cornish **De Lank Granite** (right).



Noor Inayat Khan | Gordon Square Gardens, WC1E

The monument to WWII Resistance fighter, Noor Inayat Khan is described in Siddall et al. (2013) Noor was a radio operator for Special Operations, working in France. However she was betrayed and executed by the Germans in September 1944. Her memorial has a bronze bust by Karen Newman (2012) which sits upon a plinth of **Lake District Green Slate**.

Chelsea War Memorial | Sloane Square SW1

The War Memorial stands at the eastern end of the Square and commemorates the men and women of Chelsea who died in the First and Second World Wars. The style of the memorial is a 'cross of sacrifice', a much repeated form designed to be reproduced in a range of sizes by Sir Reginald Blomfield in 1918. Characteristically a bronze longsword is attached to one side. This style of memorial is found in most large war cemeteries and is used for town memorials in the UK, Commonwealth and the United States. Like many of its brethren, this cross and its plinth is constructed from **Portland Whitbed**.

References & Further Reading

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War Memorials Trust: <http://www.warmemorials.org> | <https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk>

Westminster Abbey: RAF Coastal Command <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/people/raf-coastal-command>

Westminster Abbey: Intelligence Services: <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/people/intelligence-services-mi5.gchq.sis>



The Royal Artillery Memorial at Hyde Park Corner

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