

War memorials

Within the parish we have three principal war memorials, together a number of plaques related to individuals from St. Michael's congregation.

The [Parish Memorial](#) is in essence a "Calvary" or "Rood" erected on and above the church's Choir Screen, accompanied by a nearby bronze plaque bearing the names of the parish dead.

A separate memorial, specifically relating to those individuals associated with residents of the Bedford Park Estate comprises the carved and decorated stone [Memorial Seat](#), now situated on the grass area to the West of the Parish Hall.

A third plaque inside the church commemorates those fallen who had been members of the [4th Cadet Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment](#), two Companies of which were based at St Michael's – developed from pre-war Boys Brigade groups.

Some of the names appear on more than one of these memorials.

Why do we have three Memorials to the Great War?

The public naming and commemoration of War Dead, particularly combatants, has an interesting history of development. In earlier wars, including the Crimean and South African Wars, monuments and memorials would generally celebrate victories, or commemorate particular leaders or national heroes. Only the wealthy were able to remember their family warriors with a physical memorial, much less commonly by repatriation of his body for burial or simply in the context of written accounts.

One of the first public monuments that expressed national gratitude for the lives and sacrifice of their fighters can be seen at the foot of London's Waterloo Place, in the Guards Crimean War Memorial: 'To the memory of 2152 Officers, Non-

Com. Officers and Privates of the BRIGADE OF GUARDS who fell during the war with Russia in 1854–56.’ Those killed in battle would have been buried where they fell. Repatriation of the dead was impracticable and individual marked graves infrequent. The same applied during the South African (Boer) Wars though families were more likely to commemorate those they lost, usually in local churches. At St. Michael’s, one such memorial is the Clock erected on the West wall, in memory of the first vicar’s son, Lieut. Harold Wilson, killed at Spion Kop.

The Great War, with its nearly 900,000 British and Commonwealth killed, affected all communities to a hitherto unimaginable extent, especially as the need for temporary voluntary and then conscripted service became apparent. Every parish mourned its sons and daughters and all families needed to express their grief in countless tangible ways, to be reassured that their loss and sacrifice had permanent meaning and value. At the national level, this led early on to the recognition of the need for individual commemoration of all combatants, regardless of rank, first articulated by Fabian Ware, appointed to command the voluntary Red Cross Mobile Ambulance Units in the first months of the War. By February 1915 he had become the Major at the head of the army’s Graves Registration Commission, ultimately the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission (CWGC) established in May 1917. The principles underlying the uniform design of our national cemeteries, identical headstones regardless of rank, creed and race, the invariable Cross of Sacrifice and the Stone of Remembrance, was a hard-fought compromise won by Sir Frederic Kenyon in the following months. Those principles were hotly debated between Church and State, and between Ware and the arch-rivals of the Arts and Craft movement: the architects Edwin Lutyens, Reginald Blomfield and Herbert Baker.

The Commission determined, early in 1915, to prohibit

repatriation of the dead and stop the tendency for more wealthy families to erect elaborate monuments to their lost sons in the Western battlefield.

It seems that the National debate was to be reflected to a significant extent in the Parish of Bedford Park, as it was in all other towns and villages in Britain. At a relatively early date, the parish magazine records that the vicar, Father Jacob Cartmel-Robinson expressed the need to commemorate the Parish Fallen. Initially, in July 1915 he called for an updating of the *"list of honourable men who are engaged, or have been – for, alas! some of them are dead – in the service of their country. ... At the end of the War it is our intention to set up a permanent memorial in the Church."* By January 1917, the parish losses became regularly reported – *"...reminding us of the heavy toll which the War is taking of our young men..."* . The Vicar went on: *"It is our wish to set up a Calvary in the Church garden ... as a memorial to the men who have given their lives as a sacrifice in the Great War ... let us see to it that it does not stand as a substitute for the indwelling Presence. We must see to it that it is a reflection of the Christ within us. ...Who will take part in erecting a Calvary which will remind everyone who passes of His sacrifice and the sacrifice of our own dear lads? ..."* By April the Parish Council had endorsed the idea and the first subscriptions had been raised. It was not long before the various opinions in National debate were reflected among Bedford Park society. Public meetings in the Club, and the Church Hall resulted in the decision to erect the secular Bedford Park Memorial Seat in the Church garden, and the separate and overtly Christian Parish Memorial, a Calvary or Rood, above the Chancel Screen within the church building, very much in keeping with the church's Anglo-Catholic tradition. The Cadet memorial appeared after the War's end.