

## Remember and remembering on 11<sup>th</sup> November

After years of standstill on the Western Front, in March 1918, the progress of the First World War suddenly changed from the stalemate of the past four years to a very mobile and volatile conflict: the Germans launched the Spring Offensive and the British army was thrown into a frantic retreat. There was a brief standstill in the summer and then in early August, the Allies launched the decisive attack which led to the rapid retreat of the German army and the signing of the armistice in November. This year we will see the commemorations of the end of the First World War taking place, poignantly perhaps, as this year Armistice Day coincides with Remembrance Sunday.

In Somerset, there have been many events during the centenary years, notably led by the South West Heritage Trust and its *Somerset Remembers* project (<http://www.somersetremembers.com/remembrance.ashx>). There have also been many local endeavours looking at town or village experiences of the war, often concentrating on the men listed on their war memorials. And this brings me to the considering the war memorials in the county: there are many, they are varied and some, sadly, are slowly falling into disrepair. It has been fascinating to take time to look at some of them, as often as not they were built by local communities who wanted to have a focus for their grief and loss.



Taunton Memorial in Vivary Park



Yeovil Memorial ©Neville Stannik Photography

Our leading towns have great examples of the variety: Taunton's in Vivary Park can be seen above. By Ivor Shellard, it has a four-stepped base surmounted by plinth and square column with four pillars around the column supporting a domed canopy. Consecrated in 1922, the granite stele records the names of 449 Taunton men who lost their lives in the war. Yeovil has a memorial in the middle of the shopping area of the town. The memorial was dedicated in 1921 and has 226 names on it. Designed and made locally from Ham Hill stone, it comprises an Eleanor cross mounted on octagonal castellated plinth.

Bridgwater has an altogether different memorial in King Square: designed by John Angel and produced by W. Morris Art Foundry, it was unveiled in 1924 and has 364 names on it. The tall square plinth has a shallow raised cross to each side bearing plaques with names of the fallen. The principal feature is a bronze figure of seated young woman in long robe with hands outstretched (Civilisation); in her right hand is a hollow globe with small figures standing on it. Kneeling at each side are two angels with huge open wings, their hands holding the book of law on her knee. Three panels to the rear depict work, the family and learning; beneath her feet, a skeleton and figures - Strife, Bloodshed, Corruption and Despair - which writhe in torment. An

exceptionally fine and moving memorial, which forms an important focal point to this fine late Georgian square (Pevsner, 1958).



*Bridgwater Memorial and close up of the head*

More modest memorials can be found in the smaller towns and villages of Somerset. Somerton has its memorial in the centre of the town.



*Somerton memorial*



*Glastonbury Memorial*

The design was one of several issued by the War Office for use by communities wishing to make suitable and accurate memorials to their dead. The soldier is a Royal Artillery man standing in the reversed arms position – a mournful pose. The memorial was dedicated in 1921 with 55 names on it. The memorial dates the war as lasting from 1914 – 1919. Many commemorative structures use this dating as the war did not formally come to an end until the Versailles treaty was signed in 1919. Glastonbury’s memorial (93 names), also in the centre of town, was designed by local archaeologist Bligh Bond. The Cross is of Doulling stone, 20 feet tall and was based on a Celtic cross he had found some years earlier when excavating the monks’ graveyard



in the Abbey. Glastonbury, probably like many other towns, has auxiliary memorials in the two local primary schools, the fire station, the town hall, a factory memorial and a memorial book held in St John's church. Up and down the county are to be found memorial halls such as at Trull and Draycott, Cheddon Fitzpaine, Coxley and Leigh on Mendip (how many of the original buildings survive?).

A particularly striking memorial, albeit of a very personal nature, can be found in Mells church: a bronze statue of Edward Horner designed by Sir Alfred Munnings and mounted on a plinth, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens who also designed the fine memorial (21 names) further down the hill in the village. In the churchyard can also be seen the grave of Siegfried Sassoon.

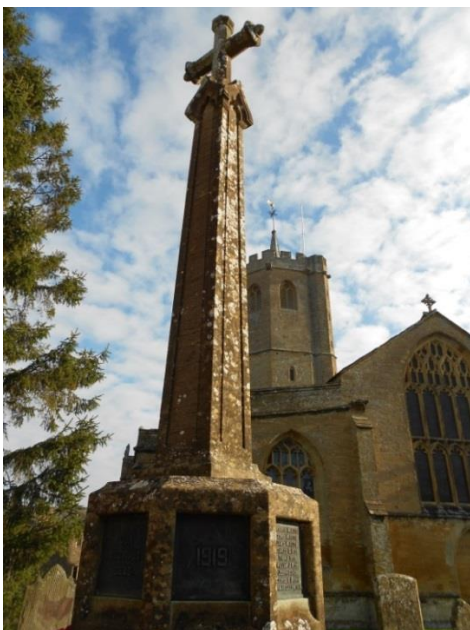


*Horner Memorial*



*Grave of Siegfried Sassoon*

Some memorials are to be found in churchyards, as in the case of South Petherton (57 names) below. You can also occasionally find Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstones in churchyards, like this example below from Bishops Lydeard. It records Driver H. Gibbs who died 1<sup>st</sup> September 1918.



*Memorial in South Petherton churchyard*



*CWGC headstone in Bishops Lydeard churchyard*

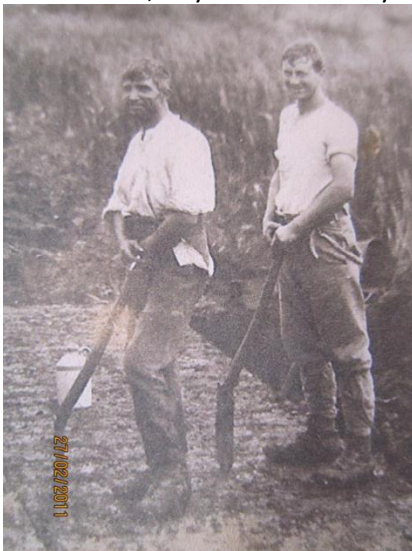
Within Somerset nine thankful villages have been identified. No other county has as many as Somerset. Rodney Stoke is one of these villages in Somerset which suffered no fatalities during the First World War. Instead of a war memorial, the parish church's west-facing window is dedicated as 'both a thanksgiving and as a permanent war memorial'. It is thought to be the only church window in England to be dedicated in such a way (Somerset Remembers website accessed January 2014).

These are just a few examples of the different memorials to be found in Somerset. They reflect the depth of feeling that the losses of the war produced in local communities. The memorials were about the missing, the empty places in the middle of what were small communities. It is hard to comprehend from this distance the sense of bereavement and hardship which must have echoed for years after the war ended. Many memorials took years to be completed, partly due to difficulties in funding or identifying the fatalities, but also due to different opinions about remembrance. Today they blend into their neighbourhoods with only an annual pilgrimage on Armistice Day or Remembrance Sunday in recognition of their presence.

However, perhaps it is timely to reflect on how well these memorials are standing the test of time. War Memorials Online (<https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/>) is an opportunity for the public to upload images of war memorials and log concerns for the conservation of these important community and historical sources for future generations. To date, over 30,000 war memorials have been added and over 20,000 condition reports. The War Memorials Trust administers a number of grants schemes which between them cover the whole of the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man (<http://www.warmemorials.org/grants/>). Funders include the UK government, Historic England, Historic Environment Scotland and the War Memorials Trust. The Heritage Lottery Fund will make grants (available up to 2019) to community projects and details can be found at <https://www.hlf.org.uk/looking-funding/our-grant-programmes/first-world-war-then-and-now>.

Looking after these memorials in some way, however modest, will keep these tributes to the lost present in our minds and also the memory of the war and its consequences that we cannot even now escape. The world had gone mad and millions had been killed and many more terribly wounded. Sacrifice, glorious dead, empire were replaced by the horrors of the battlefield, trauma and personal tragedy. The people of Somerset must have wondered what they had all been fighting for. 100 years later, we are still trying to understand and, importantly, we have not forgotten.

Also personal memorials: photographs and artefacts kept to remember one soldier, who died just as the war was ending. **Victor John Reed Burgoyne** was from Glastonbury. He enlisted December 1914 in Taunton and was a driver, Royal Field Artillery "B" Battery 67th Brigade.



Images of Victor Burgoyne above courtesy Jackie Maidment

He sailed to Egypt in 1915 with the 67<sup>th</sup> Brigade. In September 1914, the Brigade joined the 13<sup>th</sup> Division and then the 10<sup>th</sup> Division, and arrived at the Salonika Front in October 1915. Early in September 1917, it moved to Egypt, completing assembly near Rafa by October 1917.

The 10th Division then played an important part in the Palestine campaign in 1917 and 1918. Commencing with the breakthrough action of the Third Battle of Gaza in October 1917, the Division moved forward to Jerusalem and Jaffa (December 1917), the Jordan valley (February to May 1918) and finally Syria, culminating in the battle of Megiddo in September 1918. This was a minimum of two days travelling from Cairo and possibly a good deal more than that.

Victor may have been moved to one of the British base hospitals that had been established in Cairo at any point as records for his service cannot be traced. Malaria amongst soldiers who served in Salonika and indeed other parts of the Middle East, was a frequent cause of casualties (over 162,000). Victor Burgoyne died of fever in Cairo Hospital on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1918 aged 27 and was buried in Cairo War Memorial Cemetery. His descendant, Jackie Maidment says: *'VJR was my great grandfather and he died right at the end of the war of malaria fever in Egypt. His brother William Cecil also served and he survived. The story goes that the family thought they could celebrate as war ended, not realising that VJR had died, until later'*. He left a wife Lily and 2 children. One soldier, one bereaved family amongst many, and each one a tragedy.  
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