

How did local communities decide who should be included on war memorials?

The decision-making process regarding the names listed on war memorials is one of the great local mysteries of the war memorials movement. War memorial committees drew up their own inclusion criteria, but, being members of the community themselves, they were often subjected to local pressures and tended to have certain inherent local sympathies.

A number of key themes can be identified:

- 1) In the first instance, a community usually decided to include all resident males who served and died.
- 2) They usually privileged the dead and relatively rarely included all who served.
- 3) Women who served in any of the uniformed services were almost entirely excluded.
- 4) If the memorial was going to be erected in a civic space, it usually included all members of the community. However, if it was built in a religious space there were occasionally discussions over whether only active members of the religious community should be included.
- 5) There were no firm rules regarding residential qualification for inclusion, which often depended on individual circumstances and local pressures:

A man born in the parish/district, who moved away as a child and never returned might be included if this was requested.

Men who had moved away for work reasons, etc. (even some considerable time earlier), might be included if their parents were still resident.

If a widow returned to live with her parents or family then she might request to have her husband included on the local memorial, even if they had not lived in the area during their marriage.

Special requests from people making large financial contributions to the war memorial were often considered, even when they wished to commemorate a soldier who had never lived locally.

- 6) Very occasionally, a community found out about an execution case and debated whether the individual concerned was suitable to be included on the war memorial. However, this was very unusual due to lack of hard information about such cases in the immediate aftermath of the war.

There were no hard and fast rules governing these decisions, and this makes memorials all the more fascinating as symbols of identity and belonging. This also helps explain why names often appear on a multitude memorials.