

The unveiling of the permanent Cenotaph at Whitehall, by King George V, 11 November 1920.

The Cenotaph has become the central focus of remembrance events in Britain.

But it was never intended to be permanent.

The Cenotaph represents the unprecedented losses suffered during the First World War. It stands on Whitehall as an enduring symbol of remembrance and commemoration.

Since 1919, it has become the focal point of the National Service of Remembrance, held on Remembrance Sunday. Its meaning has developed over time, and it now memorialises those who have given their lives in all conflicts since the First World War.

The word Cenotaph means 'empty tomb'. The inscription reads 'The Glorious Dead'. There are no names inscribed on it, allowing individuals to assign their own meaning to the memorial.

After the First World War, it provided a tangible place of mourning for those whose

loved ones had died without a known grave.

The structure that stands today was unveiled on the 11 November 1920 by King George V. However, it was not the first Cenotaph to stand on Whitehall.



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In 1919, British architect Edwin Landseer Lutyens was tasked with designing a catafalque – a raised platform to hold a casket or tomb. Lutyens designed a cenotaph that would be erected to coincide with Peace Day celebrations that July.

In his sketches, Lutyens imagined the Cenotaph as it would have appeared during a remembrance ceremony. The structure is adorned with flags and a crowd gathered before it. Four stone soldiers are also positioned at each corner, but were later removed from the design.

On the 19 July 1919, thousands of soldiers marched past the newly erected wood

and plaster structure. British, French, American, Belgian and Greek soldiers were all present, as well as men from the British Empire.

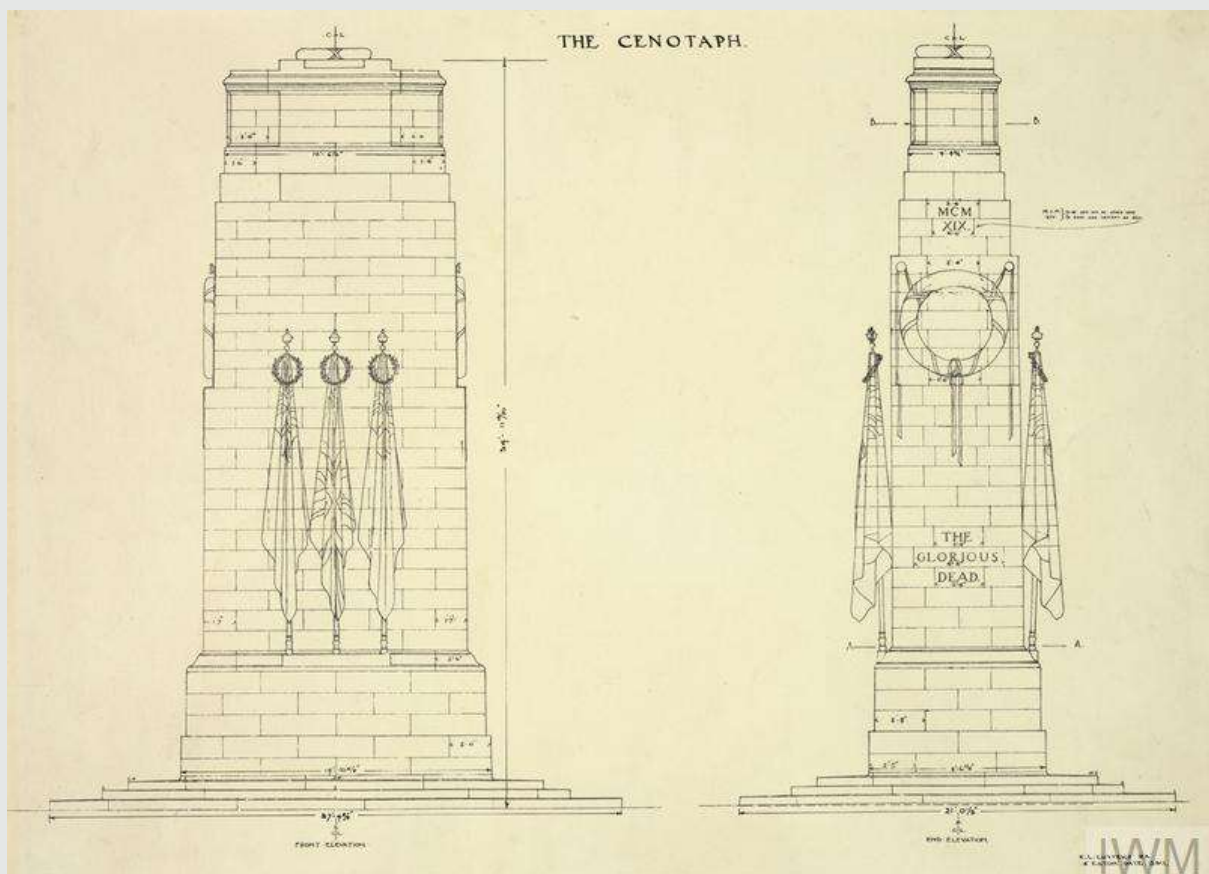
Although only intended to stand for one week, it proved so popular that a permanent replacement was commissioned.

After the removal of the original in January 1920, the new structure was constructed from Portland stone. It was unveiled on the second anniversary of the Armistice.

During the same ceremony, the body of the Unknown Warrior was borne by gun carriage to Whitehall, later to be interred in Westminster Abbey.

Part of the original Cenotaph was displayed by the Imperial War Museum, at that time located in Crystal Palace. It became a focus for remembrance activities at the museum during the 1920s.

Lutyens was commissioned for local memorials around the UK. His design for the Cenotaph has been replicated around the world.



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