

WAR MEMORIALS

in the towns and villages of the Falkirk District

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*"They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow;
They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old.
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn;
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We shall remember them"*

(Laurence Binyon).

Ballads, poems, trophies, graves and memorials are as old as warfare itself. They have served to glorify war, as well as to reveal its awfulness. They have exhorted the victorious, uplifted the oppressed, and pacified the conquered. All commemorate the dead.

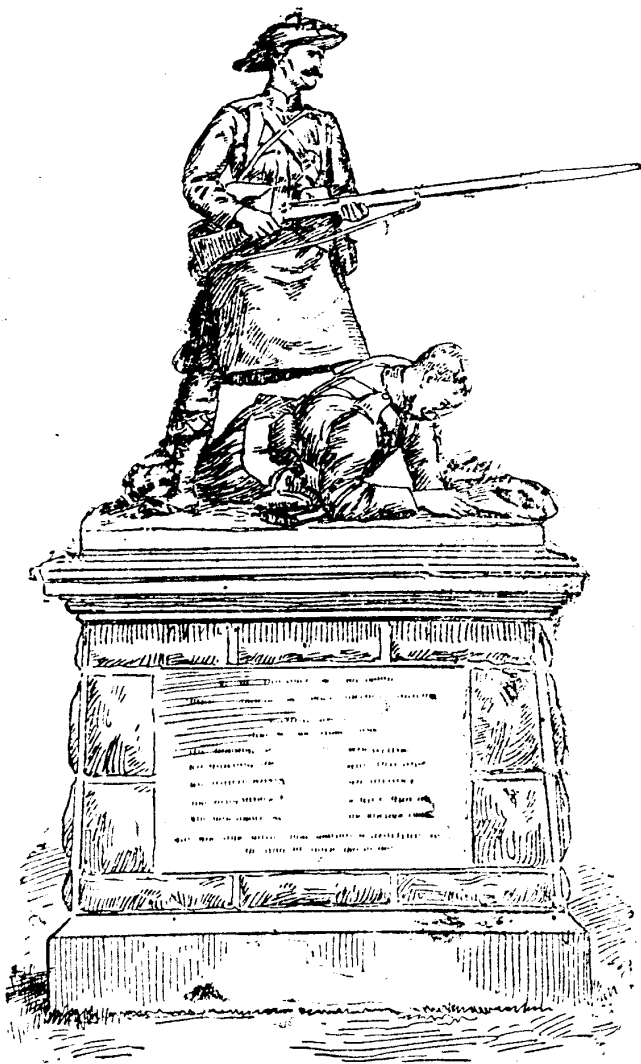
Elaborate structures, full of the symbolism of a culture, have been erected since before written records began. Their design may be reconstructed on paper, but their meanings can never be recovered, nor yet the emotions that they evoked.

The Boer War marked a distinct change in the public's perception of war. It was better reported than any before it, and it affected more people in a direct manner. Society had changed considerably since the Jacobite rebellions, it was more regulated and industrialised. Material wealth created by surplus production meant that local communities, probably for the first time, were able to raise memorials which would form a focus of their newly found civic pride. Two monuments to the wars in South Africa occur in the Falkirk District. That at Slamannan still echoed the class structure in that it commemorates George Waddell, the son of the local landowner. It was meant to be practical as well as ornamental and incorporated a clock and two drinking troughs -

although there was a delay of a year before piped water was introduced into the village. The conflict between a memorial as an abstract symbol of aesthetically pleasing design, and one of utilitarian function to later generations was one which was to raise its head in the aftermath of each succeeding war.

Illus: The Dobbie Hall, Larbert.





In Larbert an ironmaster generously gifted a memorial hall to the people. It met with popular approval: "Not any or all of the South Africa victories could have been celebrated in a more tangible form" (Falkirk Mail 1900).

The Africa War memorial in Falkirk was more conventionally conceived, harking back to the classical monumental tradition of using figures mounted on a pedestal. It was not, however, intended to be aloof and the community was to be closely involved. To this end, the design was chosen from competition, and a Falkirk art student won.

Illus: Original drawing for the Falkirk's South Africa memorial.

All of these memorials were impressive and became important foci in the Landscape. They could not fail to attract interest and communal pride. Less than two decades later the Great War stunned all of the communities, large and

small, within Britain. This was a war of unprecedented scope producing the most horrific death statistics. Few families were left untouched and the flood of national sentiment was high. Epitaphs flowed from the pen, and people turned in search of a tangible outward expression of their pain, some form of visible expiation to recognise the price and sacrifice of the war. Once more communities opted for memorials in the form of monuments.

Gone was the triumphalism of nineteenth century war memorials. Victory was muted with the images of suffering and death created by artists, and poets such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. From the stock of traditional artistic expression came the sombre images embedded in the nation's culture. In Scotland this often meant the Celtic or Iona Cross - enigmatic and mysterious, ancient and evocatively religious. Its form often combined with another Celtic symbol, a sword - powerful and final. Such Celtic crosses are to be found at Airth, Avonbridge and Laurieston. They rest on rustic plinths representing mother earth to which we all return.

The elusive power of such symbolic images rests in their simplicity and their cultural associations with the dead, for they are all cenotaphs. The word

'cenotaph' is derived from the Greek words 'kenos', meaning empty, and 'taphos', a tomb. The ancient Greeks had used an altar shape to symbolise the sacrifices made by their warriors who had fallen overseas and had no burial place at home - so it was appropriate that the British National Memorial in London's Whitehall should take this name and form. It was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1919 as a temporary wooden structure. This simple and elegant edifice seemed to epitomise the nation's sentiments so well that it was replaced in Portland stone the following year and became a model for many local monuments. Its graceful lines represent a tomb chest set on top of a tall stepped pylon - an image so abstract in the twentieth century that it has largely lost its original concept. The Larbert and Falkirk memorials are derived from the Whitehall original; that at Falkirk being particularly plain and severe.



Illus: Front elevation of the Falkirk war memorial.

The obelisk, the ancient symbol of Egyptian power and military supremacy with its mystical eastern associations, was another abstract shape used after the First World War. Mounted on a plinth suitable for receiving inscriptions it acted as a beacon, calling the attention of the passer-by to its presence. At Bonnybridge and Longcroft it stands at an important road junction, a traditional location for wayside shrines. At Bo'ness it points out to sea, looming over the town below. The obelisk's cultural counterpart, the column, was chosen for another road junction, at Slamannan.

The classical use of figures was again employed. At Denny is a heavily draped female figure, the personification of Peace doubling as Victory with her trophies of war - a laurel wreath and a broken sword. She comes straight from the Greek and Roman sculptural traditions. Chosen because Peace is depicted on the burgh's coat-of-arms, another product of the mistaken identity of the place name 'Dunipace'. The figures on the memorial at Grangemouth contrast sharply. Here the lion and the eagle are depicted in a modernist fashion. They are dramatically hewn from the stone, full of vitality and strength, by the well-known sculptor Alexander Proudfoot.

More than any of the other monuments in the District, Grangemouth caused controversy. The designer was appointed before any sketches were even submitted. He was Sir John Burnett, a leading Scottish architect. He had already executed two designs for churches in the area: the Dundas Church in Grangemouth itself, and the MacLaren Memorial Church in Stenhousemuir. He was also responsible for the 100 foot tall obelisk at Cape Hellos, Gallipoli. However, at Grangemouth the completed monument was dominated by a sculptural group portraying the British Lion with its teeth sunk into the German Eagle. Not a theme in keeping with the prevailing spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. Indeed, this scene took the monument's committee and the burgh council as much by surprise as it did to the people of the town as the eagle had not appeared on any of the original sketches. Attempts were made by various pressure groups to have the lion's grip loosened, or to have the eagle flown away, but to no avail. The designer was adamant that it was an integral part of his composition. The affair of the lion and the eagle attracted the attention of a poet:

"The lion to the eagle said,
"Since every soul in town's abed,
Would you mind if I slacken my grip?
This chewing just gives me the pip.
If I'm forced any longer to gnaw,
I'm sure I shall fracture my jaw.
Don't imagine that I am complaining,
But I don't find your feathers sustaining."
The eagle replied, "I agree,
I'd very much like to be free.
But do you imagine we dare?
Supposing we're caught unaware."
Said the lion, "The danger is slight,
For even in broadest daylight
The townsfolk wouldn't make a fuss:
They can't make head or tail of us.""

But the local people seem to have grown fond of their monument, although the original scheme overall cost just above £4000 this was easily raised, but when a project was put forward in the late 1940s to remove the bird and to add bronze plaques it was only able to gather £570 in five years.

A large part of the cost of the Grangemouth scheme had been for new park gateways connected to the central monument by curving precinct walls and railings. These helped to define a raised forecourt around the plinth, creating an area of special sacred significance. Such semi-enclosed spaces are an essential part of these memorials. High semi-circular walls are used at Larbert, but it was more normal to use low walls surmounted by cast iron railings. At Slamannan three recumbent lions guard the raised area around the central feature. Such raised platforms are common.

Sir John Burnett was the best known of the architects working on memorials in the Falkirk District. Normally they were designed by local firms, often with the fee being waived as a contribution towards the cost. Some of the smaller structures were conceived by the stone masons themselves. At Laurieston the design was taken from the Academy of Arts, which was helping small communities to keep their costs down.

The designs were selected by ad hoc committees set up for the purpose of raising the memorials. Each community wanted to remember its own dead, and was proud of its achievement in erecting a fitting monument.



Illus: The Denny and Dunipace War Heroes' Memorial Committee.

The cost of the structures varied considerably depending upon the type, material and scale of the centrepiece and the elaboration of its setting. Undoubtedly there was some degree of rivalry between towns. Laurieston's committee appear to have been the most pragmatic, for they decided that they could raise about £1000 and set this as their target, choosing a design to fit their pocket. This was a Celtic cross, and it was a smaller version at Avonbridge that was the first to be completed in what is now Falkirk District. In other cases the original designs proved to be too ambitious and had to be scaled down. Falkirk had the most trouble in raising the necessary money. Procrastination and vacillation in choosing a site and design caused the project to drag along, slowly running out of steam. When it was finally unveiled, in June 1926, it was the last in the District and was executed in freestone rather than the favoured but more expensive granite. Granite was seen to represent purity. It was cleaned and longer lasting and had been used for many of the other monuments in the area. At Polmont the white granite central column contrasted aesthetically and symbolically with the red sandstone corner plinths with their lions.

Location	Date Unveiled	Estimated Cost
Airth	8.12.1923	
Avonbridge	24.10.1920	£ 260
Blackness	23.12.1922	£ 200
Bonnybridge	30.04.1921	
Bo'ness	12.07.1924	
Denny	6.05.1922	

Location	Date Unveiled	Estimated Cost
Falkirk	13.06.1926	£ 1100
Grangemouth	22.09.1923	£2478
Larbert	24.09.1922	
Laurieston	27.08.1921	£1000
Longcroft	25.06.1921	
Muiravonside	14.05.1921	
Old Polmont	8. 10.1922	
Shieldhill	31.05.1924	£350
Slamannan	9.10.1921	
Standburn	19.11.1922	

The money was raised in a variety of ways, but largely by canvassing. Some individuals made particularly large donations. At Grangemouth, for example, the ornamental park gates and piers, which cost £1625, were paid for by five gentlemen. Raffles were held, as were dances and sales. Local firms too subscribed and collected money from amongst their workforces. There was even a special football match between Stenhousemuir and Glasgow Rangers. In many cases, such as at Grangemouth and Larbert, there was ample money and the surplus was given to the local library and for endowed beds at the hospitals.

The only official help seems to have been in the selection of a site, its subsequent landscaping, and then in accepting responsibility for its upkeep. Central locations were preferred, but the cost of such sites and their lack of availability tended to favour more distant sites. The African War memorial in Falkirk had been built on council land, and it was not therefore surprising that in an already congested town the new committee should turn to the council again. Newmarket Street was favoured, being a broad busy thoroughfare near the town centre. However, the council considered that monument there would be too obtrusive and eventually, after much delay, offered a site beside the Camelon Road in Dollar Park. Charing Cross was the favoured site in Grangemouth, but again there were traffic problems. Here, as at Bo'ness and Denny, a site peripheral to the town was quickly settled upon. Apart from the practical considerations these more rural landscapes were thought to be more suitable for the fallen heroes. Burnett had stressed the need for a picturesque backdrop, preferably composed of woodland. A site on the Bo'ness Road bridge over the Grange Burn was suggested to him, as the water would make a suitable background for an Adam's Style triumphal arch. The ground adjacent to the new park, however, held more appeal for practical and aesthetic reasons. At Bo'ness the Forth estuary with the Fife coast and the hill beyond provides a splendid Setting. Local landowners also came up trumps in providing sites. Many of them had served in the army themselves, or had sons who had been at the front.

The Falkirk and Grangemouth sites had anticipated the increase in road traffic that was to occur in the next decades. In 1968 the Redding and Brighton War Memorial had to be moved from near Polmont station to Polmont North Church due to road realignment and widening. A project to transplant the Larbert memorial to Crownest Park in 1945 was, however, abandoned on the grounds of cost estimated at £3000. Avonbridge's memorial was moved too. In this case it was moved to a traffic island in 1964 due to vandalism at its more rural setting near the river. The Boer War monument at Slamannan was also a target for vandals and had to be set behind railings. The last of

the First World War monuments to be moved was that from South Alloa. It was formerly attached to the school building, the centre of the community's life. When this was sold in the 1980s it was put into storage and has now been set into a cairn at the junction of the main road and that into South Alloa.

In general, the larger memorials belonging to the towns were unveiled by a part of the Scottish military hierarchy, then being wheeled around the country to perform such tasks. Thus Grangemouth had Sir George Ian Hamilton, and Falkirk had the Duke of Montrose. The smaller, more intimate communities, normally involved the paternalistic figure of the main local landowner or businessman. In all cases the official presentation of the memorial was performed with a deep sense of auspicious ceremony, coupled with a dedication service with religious performances. Speeches were made on the futility of war and the great sense of loss. The names of the fallen were read, the Last Post was sounded, and the guard of honour fired a volley of salute in honour of their dead comrades. A scene repeated each Armistice Day.

Individual schools and churches also set up their own memorials. These varied in scale from the stone cross outside the church at Denovan, or the door surround at Falkirk Parish Church, to the brass plaques at Camelon or Laurieston. Town halls, meeting halls, bowling clubs, etc. often commemorated their own members separately. At Laurieston the school's headmaster also compiled an album with photographs of all the men from the village that had served in the army. This is now an extremely valuable collection for military and family historians alike, and has been lodged with the Falkirk Museum Service.

It came as a great shock to many of the young survivors of the Great War, the war to end all wars, when only twenty years later they found themselves at war with the same enemy. Although fewer people died in the Second World War each death was as heartfelt. The return of peace saw Britain in economic difficulties. These problems may have muted the nation's response to the commemoration of the recent losses through material display, but in any case the use of the existing monuments with their already hallowed sanctity was culturally apposite as well as pragmatic. Many of the old monuments were cleaned and overhauled, new plaques added, and peripheral changes made. Both Denny and Larbert came up with plans to move them, but neither came to fruition. Only Bonnybridge built an entirely new structure, appropriately adjacent to the earlier one, and after first debating whether or not to build houses for the homecoming troops. The new memorial takes the form of a wrought iron arch with a clock - functional as well as decorative. The audited balance sheet for this was published in the Falkirk Herald so that on completion the public could see where their money had gone.

BONNYBRIDGE & DISTRICT WAR MEMORIAL FUND BALANCE SHEET						
INCOME						
Works' employers' donation -						
British-American Tobacco Co Ltd	£21	0	0			
Broomside Foundry Co (1922) Ltd	5	0	0			
Bonnybridge Silica & Fireclay Co Ltd	12	2	0			
James Dougall & Sons Ltd	30	0	0			
Lane & Girvan Ltd	5	5	0			
Mitchell Russell & Co Ltd	50	0	0			
Smith & Wellstood Ltd	70	0	0			
John G Stein & Co Ltd	15	0	0	208	7	0
Works' employees' donations -						
Bonnybridge Silica & Fireclay Co Ltd	£2	9	0			
British-American Tobacco Co Ltd	4	3	0			
Glenboig Union Fireclay Co Ltd	2	0	0			
Lane & Girvan Ltd	4	0	0			
Mitchell Russell & Co Ltd	14	13	0			
John G Stein & Co Ltd	2	2	0	29	7	0
General and private donations				260	0	0
District collections by Committee				135	1	0
Other donations -						
Miss A Henderson (Aladdin Pantomine)	£170	1	7			
Mr Walter Alexander	100	0	0			
Rangers-Falkirk Football match	65	15	7			
Basket whist	48	2	6			
Football match (Anderson Park)	43	5	9			
Schools football match	8	5	9			
Bonnybridge Players (Little Minister)	50	0	0			
Flag days	23	0	8			
Concerts - Bonnybridge & Greenhill	32	7	9			
Mr A Walker - show in Bonnybridge Public Hall	10	18	0			
Whist drives - Bonnybridge & Greenhill	32	10	5			
Bonnybridge Savings Association Committee	120	0	0	£704	8	0
Bank interest	8	8	11			
Customs deposits returned	27	0	0			
				1372	11	11

BONNYBRIDGE & DISTRICT WAR MEMORIAL FUND						
BALANCE SHEET						
EXPENDITURE						
Duncan Stewart (B) Ltd - masonry work	645	0	0			
R Smith & Co Ltd - gateway and plaques	380	0	0			
English Clock Systems Ltd - clock	113	0	0			
W Morrison - clock alteration	26	0	0			
T Laurie & Co Ltd - fitting switch box	61	13	5			
South East England Electricity Board - cable	2	10	0			
Bonnybridge Co-operative Soc Ltd - paintwork	17	12	6	1245	15	11
Unveiling expenses						
J Menzies & Sons - erecting platform	2	17	6			
Graham & Morton - erecting curtains	4	8	6	7	6	0
Printing and advertising	31	2	1			
Hall lets	5	13	0			
Catering	14	16	10			
Presentation to Architect	22	17	8			
Gratuities	1	2	9			
Secretary's expenses	£8	6	6			
Treasurer's expenses	1	11	0			
Customs deposits	27	0	0	1365	11	9
Balance paid to Bonnybridge Savings Association Committee	7	0	2			
				1372	11	11

Earlier, in 1948, the Grangemouth Town Council had published a list of names in the same newspaper to ask for corrections or additions. Public accountability had arrived with the involvement of the councils, but it may also be seen as a reflection of the less personal nature of the communities.

At Grangemouth there was also a need for a new monument to commemorate those who had actually died in the immediate area and indeed were interred in the cemetery at Grandsable. These were the airmen and crew associated with the airfield. This fell under the remit of the Imperial War Graves Commission, who erected a "cross of sacrifice" at Grandsable. A simple hexagonal cross reflecting contemporary tastes in architecture.

These sites will continue to be cared for and venerated by those who remember what they stand for. Undoubtedly names will be added from time to time. The Korean War is represented at Denny, and the Gulf War will be at Slamannan. It is to be hoped that their memory will serve to ensure that the like will never happen again. Next to the war memorial at Bo'ness is a tree dedicated to the United Nations, perhaps it points the way forwards.

"If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields"

(John Macrae who died on active service).