



Menin Gate Resource E: What does the Menin Gate look like?

The architect of the Menin Gate (Reginald Blomfield) had a great deal of responsibility. Right from the very start it was clear that it would be Britain's most important war memorial. For the British people Ypres was a unique and highly significant place. Every division in the British Army had served in the area around the City known as the Ypres Salient. Four fierce and important battles had been fought in this area. Casualties had been very high in all four battles and over 200,000 British soldiers had lost their lives. Ypres had become a symbol of national suffering.

Blomfield's plans for the Menin Gate had to be very carefully thought through.

- A massive lion would be placed on the eastern arch that looked out east along the Menin Road, towards the old front line. Blomfield wanted this lion to look 'not fierce and truculent, but patient and enduring'. His aim was for the lion to be a symbol of the 'strength and heroism' of the British race. The final design for the lion was changed during the planning of the monument. Blomfield's original 1921 drawings show the lion with its head resting sadly on its paws. However, the lion which sits on top of the Menin Gate, sculptured by William Reid Dick, holds its head proudly erect.



Their Past Your Future, November 2004

A model of the Menin Gate located on the ramparts above the memorial, showing the lion.

- Facing the town, on top of the western arch, would stand a sarcophagus (a stone or marble coffin or tomb, especially one bearing sculpture or inscriptions), draped with a flag and surmounted by a wreath – 'a symbol to the people of Ypres of the sacrifice the Empire made for them and the causes of justice and peace'.



Their Past Your Future, November 2004

The Menin Gate from the town, showing the sarcophagus.

- The 'Hall of Memory' is 36.5 metres long and 20 metres wide. The archway is 9 metres wide and 14.5 metres high with flat arches on either side of it 3.5 metres wide and nearly 7 metres high. Blomfield's design was reminiscent of the great Roman triumphal arches that he admired. The Imperial War Graves Commission did not want the monument to be interpreted as a kind of Arc de Triomphe, a celebration of military victory. They believed that this would be seen as an 'offence' by the relatives of the soldiers whose names are inscribed on it and who would see the monument as 'a Memorial to their Dead, and in no sense a Monument of Victory'.
- The feature that makes the biggest impact on visitors to the Gate are the 60 name panels, containing nearly 55,000 names. In the centre of the sides are broad staircases, leading up to the ramparts and to loggias (covered areas on the side of a building) running the whole length of the building. The names are carved on Portland stone panels fixed to the inner walls of the Hall, up the sides of the staircases and inside the loggias. These name panels were carefully planned so that soldiers from every nation of the then British Empire would be mentioned in the central hall. For example, the four central pillars in the main hall were used for the commemoration of troops from India, South Africa and the West Indies. Soldiers from Canada and Australia, along with troops from British units are commemorated on panels that begin in the central hall and continue up the staircases.



Their Past Your Future, November 2005

One of the name panels in the central hall.

- Carved over all the walls and columns of the gate are the names of 54,344 British soldiers killed in the Ypres salient between October 1914 and mid-August 1917 who have no known grave. It was initially decided that the Menin Gate would commemorate all the soldiers with no known graves who died in all four Battles of Ypres or who were lost in periods in between. However, it was calculated that the gate could only provide space for 60,000. The decision was therefore taken to build a second memorial to the missing at Tyne Cot Cemetery for those who died after 15 August 1917 in the Ypres region. (The Tyne Cot Memorial at Passchendaele contains the names of a further 34,888 soldiers killed in the salient between mid-August 1917 and the end of the war in November 1918, who could not be identified for burial.] Exceptions were made for Australian and Canadian soldiers who had died fighting in Belgium and had no known grave. All of these men were commemorated on the Menin Gate, even if they were reported missing in action after August 1917.
- In October 1923 the Nobel Prize winning writer, Rudyard Kipling, put forward his suggestions for texts to be displayed on the memorial. Kipling had been involved with IWGC since it was first set up and had lost his son, Jack, in the war. His role was to write the text for the eastern and western faces of the Menin Gate and for above the staircases in the central hall. On both the eastern and western façade of the Menin Gate is the following inscription by Rudyard Kipling:

'TO THE ARMIES OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE, WHO STOOD HERE FROM 1914 TO 1918 AND TO THOSE OF THEIR DEAD WHO HAVE NO KNOWN GRAVE.'

Over the arches to the staircases leading out of the main hall, also by Kipling, is:

'AD MAJOREM DEI GLORIAM.
HERE ARE RECORDED THE NAMES
OF OFFICERS AND MEN WHO FELL
IN YPRES SALIENT BUT TO WHOM
THE FORTUNES OF WAR DENIED
THE KNOWN AND HONOURED BURIAL
GIVEN TO THEIR COMRADES IN DEATH.'



The inscription by Kipling.

Their Past Your Future, November 2005