

Common War Memorials in NSW

There are more than 3000 war memorials in NSW. Each is unique and together they represent a significant heritage resource of national importance that binds together millions of Australians through ties of remembrance.¹

This Fact Sheet provides information about some of the more common types of war memorials in NSW.

Local war memorials in NSW were usually erected by committees established to create memorials in recognition of the service and sacrifice of members of the local community who had served their country. Common types of war memorials include cenotaphs, obelisks, honour rolls and statues. Columns, cairns, windows, flagpoles, gates, ornamental structures, parks, gardens, or buildings can also be war memorials or part of war memorials.

Many war memorials were created by local masons or artists, others are works of recognised sculptors or architects. Often located in public parks, memorials are an essential part of the Australian landscape. They are focal points of collective memory and expression, particularly on Anzac Day.²



Pyrmont and Ultimo War Memorial. (Source: NSW Public Works 2013)

The most common types of war memorials in NSW include:

- Statues
- Sculptures
- Obelisks
- Columns
- Cenotaphs
- Crosses
- Honour Rolls and Honour Boards
- Memorial Gateways and Arches
- Eternal Flames
- Orbs and Urns
- Fountains
- War Trophies
- Windows
- **Functional War Memorials**—buildings and places that serve another purpose and are built or dedicated as war memorials. These include parks, gardens, pavilions, avenues of trees, public swimming pools, halls, and hospitals.

Statuary

Sculpture and statuary have been widely used in war memorials in NSW. Sculpted elements may be of such quality that they are considered to have significant artistic merit³ as well as symbolic importance. Some war memorials have been designed by important figures in twentieth-century Australian art; others are the work of lesser-known artisans employed by memorial masonry firms.

Traditional war memorial sculpture represents soldiers, angels and wreaths. In more recent times, abstract sculpture has also been used for war memorials.⁴

Statues are often used in war memorials for their evocative symbolism. The most commonly used statue in Australian war memorials is that of the lone soldier or the 'Digger'. The Digger is an icon of Australian remembrance.⁵ A statue may form the whole memorial or be part of a larger monument.

Ornamental features like orbs, wreaths and symbolic flames can also be part of a memorial rather than the main element.



Waverley Soldier's Memorial. (Source: NSW Public Works 2013)



Braidwood Memorial. (Source: NSW Public Works 2013)

Obelisks

An obelisk is a tapered, four-sided pillar with a pyramidal top. Obelisks are a common form of war memorial, often designed as a landmark and located in prominent positions in public spaces.

The lower portions of the obelisk and plinth are often inscribed with the names of the fallen, or all that served from a local community.



Araluen War Memorial Obelisk. (Source: Peter Levarre-Waters)



Lismore World War I Obelisk and Memorial Plaques. (Source: Sydney Trains)

Columns

Many World War I memorials in NSW are **architecturally designed classical columns**. The columns usually sit on an inscribed pedestal, and may be topped with statues of a soldier or angel, a globe or an orb (a spherical ornament that symbolised the Empire).



Manly Anzac War Memorial, designed by John Burcham Clamp in 1916. (Source: Peter Levarre-Waters)



Queanbeyan World War I Memorial column, designed in 1923 by architects John Reed and Son. (Source: Peter Levarre-Waters)

Cenotaphs

The word 'cenotaph' derives from Greek and means 'empty tomb'. Cenotaphs are symbolic monuments used to commemorate a person, or people, that have no known grave or are buried elsewhere. They are used as war memorials to honour soldiers who died in battle and whose graves lie elsewhere.

Cenotaphs are often designed by prominent architects or artists. The basic form of a cenotaph is a tomb chest on a plinth but many World War I cenotaphs are based on the 'stepped pylon' shape of the Cenotaph in Whitehall, London.

The most famous cenotaph in NSW is the Cenotaph in Martin Place, Sydney, which is believed to have served as the focal point for the Anzac Day Dawn Service since 1926.



Martin Place Cenotaph, Sydney. (Source: Greg O'Beirne, January 2006)



Gundagai War Memorial Cenotaph. (Source: Flickr)



The Cenotaph, Whitehall, London, designed by architect Edwin Lutyens in 1919. (Source: David Larkin, July 2014)

Crosses

Several types of Christian crosses are used for war memorials, the most common being the Latin cross, in which the vertical bar is much longer than the horizontal bar.

Memorial crosses are often designed by artists and sculptors and can be made from many materials including stone, concrete, bronze, steel and timber. They can be part of a war memorial or form the entire memorial.

Crosses sometimes have a sword fixed on the front, such as Sir Reginald Blomfield's 'Cross of Sacrifice' for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.



Chatswood War Memorial. (Source: Rick Eyre, Flickr)

Honour Rolls

The earliest physical public acknowledgement of those who had enlisted to fight in World War I came in the form of honour rolls, in print and on boards or plaques. These evolved into a form of war memorial from about 1916.

War memorial honour rolls record and commemorate members of the armed forces from a local community who lost their lives in war.

They are often located in public spaces, such as community halls, schools, libraries, clubs etc—often in entranceways, foyers or areas with high foot traffic. They can also be part of a larger war memorial that includes other elements such as an obelisk.

Common decorative elements include wreaths, poppies and insignia of the branches of the Australian armed forces.

More details about honour rolls can be found at <https://nswanzacentenary.records.nsw.gov.au/on-the-homefront/history-week-2015/community-memorials-honour-rolls/>



Redfern Public School Honour Board, 1919. (Source: Aub Silock)



Tumbarumba District War Memorial. This memorial lists the names of those who served from World War I to Vietnam. In addition to the honour rolls there is a white marble obelisk. (Source: Peter Ellis)

Memorial Gates

Ceremonial entrance gates are widely used to honour those who served in war. Memorial gates are often highly symbolic, monumental structures placed at the entrance to a town or public place such as a park or university. Memorial gates in NSW often display the names of fallen soldiers from the local community.

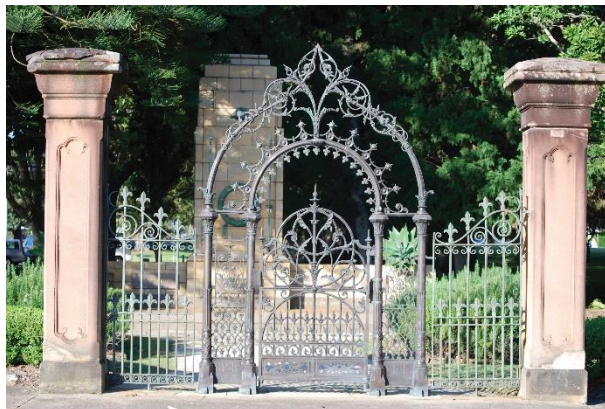
The most famous memorial gate is the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing in Ypres, Belgium. Commemorating soldiers missing in the battlefield area of Ypres in World War I, it bears the names of 54,389 soldiers who were lost at Ypres and have no known grave. The names are engraved into panels fixed to the inner walls of the central Hall of Memory.



Menin Gate (Source: Chris Lofty: Dreamstime.com)



Bega Soldiers Memorial Gate. (Source: Register of War Memorials)



Rose Bay War Memorial. (Source: NSW Public Works 2013)

Eternal Flames

An eternal flame is a flame, lamp or torch that burns continuously for an indefinite period. A flame is widely accepted as a symbol of eternal life. An eternal flame at a war memorial symbolises a nation's perpetual gratitude towards, and remembrance of, its war dead.⁶



Wagga Wagga Roll of Honour and Eternal Flame Memorial. (Source: Kenneth May)

War Trophies and Memorabilia

War trophies, usually guns, are often found in parks or public spaces. These trophies were distributed to towns and cities for display following World War I and World War II. They may be part of a larger war memorial or sit alone, typically displayed on a stepped concrete or stone pad or pedestal.



St Leonards Park Memorial Gun, a 77mm field gun captured in France in 1918. (Source: Recorded by Jane Williamson / Peter Levarre-Waters)



Enfield War Memorial includes a 105mm Howitzer gun donated by the French government in recognition of Australia's wartime assistance in World War I. (Source: Familypedia)

Stained Glass Windows

Stained glass windows in churches, halls, schools and hospitals are often used to commemorate those lost at war. They may commemorate an individual or group of people who served and died in armed conflict.



Austin Memorial Window—All Souls Church, Leichhardt. (Source: Recorded by Peter Levarre-Waters)

Functional War Memorials

Any building constructed or repurposed and dedicated in memory of those who served in the armed forces is considered to be a war memorial.

Common types of functional war memorials are town halls, clock towers, school buildings, public swimming pools and hospital buildings.

Many will have an honour roll, or other form of inscription, listing those who served in a conflict who are remembered through the continued use of the building.

Gardens, Parks and Avenues of Trees can also be War Memorials.



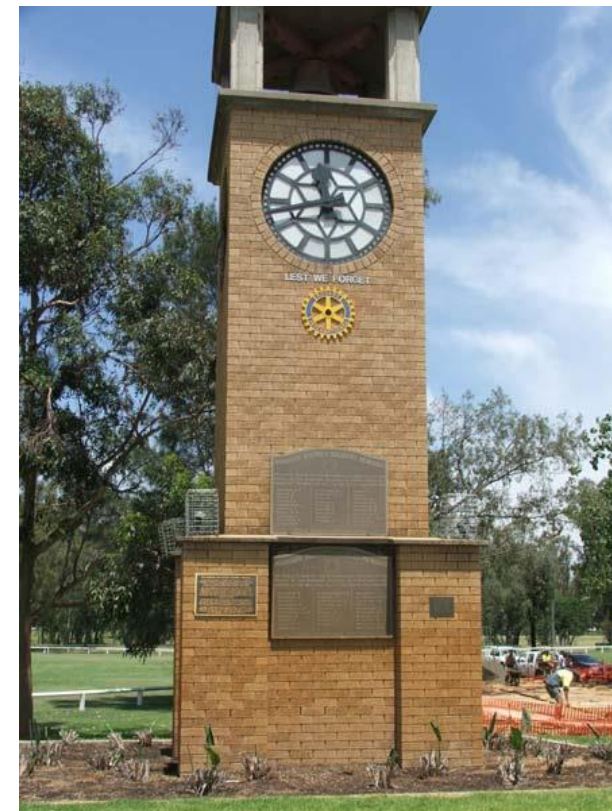
Soldiers Memorial Hall, Gerringong. (Source: Recorded by Vaughan Williamson)



Boorowa War Memorial, which has a meeting room inside. (Source: Boorowa RSL sub-Branch)



Yass and District War Memorial Swimming Pool. (Source: Recorded by Peter Levarre-Waters)



Narrabri Memorial Clock Tower. (Source: NSW Register of War Memorials)

Information on the variety of forms and types of war memorials can be found at:

- <http://www.warmemorials.org/types/>
- <https://www.veterans.nsw.gov.au/heritage/caring-for-our-war-memorials/>

Endnotes

¹ Caring for our War Memorials.

² Caring for our War Memorials.

³ Creating Remembrance.

⁴ Caring for our War Memorials.

⁵ Caring for our War Memorials.

⁶ Australian War Memorial website <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/eternal_flame>.