

ISSUE 11 - February 2024

# LAST POST

Newsletter of the Leicester City, County & Rutland **At Risk War Memorials Project**







The Leicester City, County & Rutland At Risk War Memorials Project welcomes any information which can help or promote their work. If you have any details of any War Memorial you feel is at risk, or can help in any way, please contact us on:



Or contact the project's directors:

Denis Kenyon: **07834 324352**

Chris Stephens: **0116 2716086**

Robin Jenkins: **07988 431226**



[www.atriskwarmemorials.co.uk](http://www.atriskwarmemorials.co.uk)



[www.facebook.com/arwmp](https://www.facebook.com/arwmp)



@ARWMP

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**The Chancel,  
rear of All Saints Church,  
Highcross Street, LEICESTER  
LE1 4PH**

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# Welcome

**T**here has been a bit of a lull over Christmas and the New Year, which is just as well because as you will read on subsequent pages, there has been significant activity on our part.

We look forward to a year which if all goes to plan will bring significant change in our circumstances and also a widening of our work in the education sector. This is important not only in itself but also for enhanced credibility with grant aid bodies.

For those of our supporters who have not visited for some time, do come to an Open Day. You will be astounded at how many extra magnificent memorials we have taken into care.

We look forward to welcoming you.



**Denis Kenyon**  
Project co-founder

## Help us build the Project's future

**D**o you appreciate the work we do? Do you want us to keep going from strength to strength? **You can help.**

From conserving and restoring memorials, to paying rent and creating exhibition panels, the cost of ensuring Leicestershire and Rutland's memorials aren't lost to history soon mounts up.

Any donation is greatly appreciated, and helps us to carry on saving these unique objects, and telling the stories of those who gave their tomorrow so we could enjoy a brighter today.

### Online

Sort Code: 40-32-04

Account No: 31749153

Use 'Donation' as the reference

### By cheque

Made payable to 'Leicester City, County and Rutland At Risk War Memorials Project' and posted to:  
*C/o Denis Kenyon, 2 Horn Lane,  
Hallaton, Market Harborough,  
Leics. LE16 8UG*

### In person

By cash or card during any of our Open Days.

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### COVER IMAGE:

The 'Gilbert angel', being crafted in Alfred Gilbert's workshop in Bruges.  
For the full story see pages 8-12.

# NEWS

## A lucky bonus



Elsewhere in this issue, we report on the transfer into our care of the Wigston Parish Roll of Honour. As a postscript, it is also worth noting the unexpected arrival, also from Oadby and Wigston Borough Council, of another intriguing little memorial.

This illuminated Roll of Honour records the contribution of the District Councils' Leicester Branch of the National Association of Local Government Officers towards the creation of Knole Lodge as a practical war memorial, to be used as a convalescent home in Bournemouth for members of the N.A.L.G.O. trade union and states that it is made in "recognition of the achievements & sacrifice of their colleagues who served... 1939-1945".

The Roll lists twenty-seven local government employees (from Barrow-upon-Soar, Blaby

## Project under investigation

The actual event was not as alarming as the headline indicates. We were delighted to be contacted by three students from De Montfort University who are on a course of Investigative Journalism run by the University in partnership with Channel 4.

They had been set the challenge of finding a story, filming, interviewing and editing for the finished piece within a single day for their "Newsday" challenge.

Imaginatively they had considered the subject of Remembrance and memorials, so where better to come?

The questions put to me by Yasmin were very well crafted and thought out. I give their report in their own words.

"The purpose of the interview was to talk to an expert and someone closely involved with war memorials as part of our video on whether the public participation in Remembrance Day is declining.

"Our visit to you and the church was fascinating and so valuable for our video and also our own insight. You explained to us what At Risk War Memorials do, why remembering is so important, and also importantly the future of how things are going to be run with this great campaign.

"Overall, the interview was great. The video we produced was not for broadcast or for assessment but as part of a 'Newsday' where we only have a single day to produce a 2 minute + story on a topic of our choosing.



"We personally chose this story because as young people we felt a lot of other younger people's care about Remembrance Day was lower than it should be. As part of the video, we also spoke to my friend who's in the army and also a member of the council who was involved in organising Remembrance Day. We felt that it was a successful video that highlighted how although some statistics say fewer people are wearing the poppy for example, there are people who work so hard like yourself and will continue to represent the majority of people in the UK who understand how important war memorials are."

We are flattered and delighted that the subject of Remembrance and Memorials is being taken to heart by these charming students – may they prosper on their way to a great career in investigative journalism.

We have asked for a copy of the film.

and Lutterworth Rural District Councils and Oadby and Wigston Urban District Councils respectively) with their ranks and corps – or Service, as the Royal Navy (including Submarines) and R.A.F. are both represented. These are men who served during the Second World War rather than gave their lives. It is carefully framed and has its own wooden carrying case; suggesting perhaps that it travelled from one council office to another one or was taken to wherever the N.A.L.G.O. branch met.



## Knoll update

Robin and Denis were both present at an online meeting on 23rd January where the University Botanic Gardens Project Board were updated on the latest progress.

The original plan was to bid for Government Levelling Up Phase 3 money. But for whatever reason, the money for Phase 3 was handed to originally unsuccessful Level 2 applicants, leaving the cupboard bare!

The plan now is to focus on NLHF and other funding bodies. It was stated publicly that the inclusion of ARWMP was a distinct plus adding to the heritage aspect of the whole project. It may mean that we will need a temporary home for a while, but we are adamant that the Project will at all times have a physical presence. Temporary storage of the whole display is not an option.

# Wigston Council Roll of Honour



As we reported in October's Last Post, the magnificent Roll of Honour from the old council offices in Wigston is now safely installed at All Saints. It is truly a most impressive memorial to those from the Parish of Wigston who lost their lives in two World Wars.

However, the Roll of Honour poses a number of questions. The most obvious is the date of its creation. The memorial was housed in the council chamber of the Oadby and Wigston Borough (a product of the 1974 local government reforms) and clearly was either part of the wood panelling of the room, or carefully incorporated into it. However, it relates solely to the 'Parish of Wigston' and therefore presumably considerably predates 1974.

As our photograph shows, the memorial is a splendid piece of work, recording Wigston's

Roll of Honour in gold lettering on seven wood panels, held in a wooden framework, topped with a lengthways board which states clearly what it is ('Roll of Honour for the Parish of Wigston') above the well-known Latin tag that it is "sweet and fitting to die for one's country"; originally from Horace but better known now thanks to Wilfred Owen's

poem. The outer four panels are shorter and seem to have been added later, though conforming to the original design.

The outer two panels record deaths from 1939-1945 and although it seems great care was taken to 'match' the original lettering, the regiments and corps are no longer underlined. The panels next to those of the Second World War (panels 2 and 6) also seem to be additions, as they duplicate several of the regiments from the central three panels. There are, in fact, two distinct sets of names from the Leicestershire Regiment, the Royal Garrison and Royal Field Artillery and the Northumberland Fusiliers on the central and outer panels respectively.

Those panels clearly also record names from the Great War however, as they include the Tank Corps which had become the Royal Tank Regiment in 1939, and the Royal Naval

Division which was disbanded in 1919. In fact, although research into those commemorated has only just begun, it seems that most names in panels 2 and 6 are those of soldiers who died in 1917 or 1918. A few, however, are from the first years of the war, suggesting that the outer columns are additional to those from, say, 1914-1916 but also include names submitted too late for the first phase of the memorial.

This, of course, begs the questions just how was the memorial put together and what does it represent? It seems almost incredible that the fresh gold paint and almost unblemished panelling could be more than a century old. Could it perhaps be a recreation or restoration of an older memorial, which preserved exactly the form and order of the original and did not attempt any amalgamation or combination in the case of the Great War panels?

It is known, for example that Wigston did have a temporary war memorial and the Midland Mail of 31 August 1917 reported the unveiling of "a temporary memorial, consisting of a "Roll of Honour", in an oaken frame" which, apparently, listed 129 Wigston men. Sadly, the central panels of our memorial list 143 but this story does, at least, prove that Wigston's Roll of Honour slowly evolved and that the monument we have today reflects some of those stages of development.

We should be delighted, of course, to hear any memories of the Roll of Honour's earlier days; or suggestions which offer alternative ideas of its creation and evolution. Like all the memorials in our care, Wigston's has a story to tell.

*Robin Jenkins*

## Open Days

**Saturday 16th March**

**Saturday 25th May**

**Saturday 27th July** (joined by CWGC)

All 11.00 am to 4.00 pm

## Heritage Open Days

**Saturday 7th September**

-10.00 am to 6.00 pm

**Sunday 8th September**

-2.30pm am to 5.00 pm

## Open Day

**Saturday 16th November**

-11.00 am to 4.00 pm

## Find us at:

**Chancel, (rear of) All Saint's Church,  
Highcross Street, Leicester LE1 4PH.**

*The Project is located to the rear of All Saints Church. Parking is available in the John Lewis Multi-story car park nearby.*

## 2024 Open Days





# Wigston, All Saints War Memorial

By Denis Kenyon, with thanks to James Freckingham for extracts from the Parish Magazine.

On our Home page there is a heading "Restored to Glory" and there you can find out about the fifteen war memorials we have assisted in situ. Our help is sometimes financial, physical help or leading the project making use of our contacts in various specialities, such as correct cleaning techniques, stonemasonry, woodwork, paper restoration, specialised printing.

Our first objective is always to leave or return a war memorial to its original location if practical. Unfortunately, in the city this is very seldom possible. This is because most city-based war memorials are located inside churches, chapels, working men's clubs and factories and the threat has come from closure, change of use or demolition.

Advised by several of our contacts, we were aware of the rather sorry state of the memorial in the churchyard of All Saints, Wigston, standing over the pavement opposite Long Street. We contacted a local councillor offering to assist in any way we could to restore it to its original glory.

Fortunately for our somewhat depleted coffers, the councillor promised to obtain funding but looked to us for help in arranging the physical work involved.

One of the joys of becoming involved in jobs like this, is that you learn quite a lot about the background and history of a memorial. In this instance we were puzzled by the fact that the names in the three columns were in completely random order. In most cases a column of names will be alphabetical but not here!

We agreed that the restored memorial

columns would replicate the present one but taking the opportunity to correct glaring errors of spelling, inserting a man's missing initials. Simple as it sounds this took an amazing amount of effort with five revisions going to and from Denis Kenyon to Keith Bodicoat who had a lot of information about the men listed.

In the meantime, our carpenter Chris Clarke had the memorial taken down and delivered to his workshop.

Brian Postlethwaite arranged for the names to be printed on DiBond metal panels to fit on to the wooden structure in place of the rotting wooden ones.

It was completed in a week and returned in good time for Remembrance.

The mystery of the random order of the names produced several interesting angles on early memorialisation. It was said that during the awful slaughter of the Great War, when several men living in the same street were killed in the same battle, a shrine was put up at the end of that road and the men's names inscribed upon it.

By late 1916/early 1917 with no end to the horror in sight, the people of Wigston



led by the then Rector, the Revd. Thomas W Wright MA and churchwardens of All Saints decided that a central War Shrine should be erected. In the absence of a body, repatriation was forbidden, this Shrine – not a memorial (though the difference is in part semantic) was to be the focal point of mourning, memory and even a source of pride honouring those young men who answered the call to fight for freedom.

It was a bold decision to go ahead with no funding guarantees. The story can best be followed by reading the following extracts from the Parish Magazine of the period, kindly sent to me by James Freckingham.

Top right: The memorial prior to renovation.

Below: Carpenter Chris Clarke repairing the memorial at his workshop. Right: The repaired memorial awaiting the cross.







Above: **A WWI street shrine in London, 1917.**  
Below right: **A service sheet from the dedication of the Wigston War Shrine.**

Excerpts from Parish Magazine of All Saints Church, Wigston Magna:

#### Vicar's letter for March 1917

"The War Shrine opposite Long Street will I hope soon be in position. The Children and Teachers of the Day Schools, in answer to my appeal last month, most generously handed me £1 7s 9d. towards the cost of the Shrine, and I have also two other gifts of 3/- and 2/6. To complete the Shrine and paint the names of Wigston's brave lads who have fallen in the war will require a little more money, but I am getting the work done, and I hope it will be ready before Easter. When the Shrine is up, I expect I shall receive the balance of the expense in just a few small sums."

#### Vicar's letter for June 1917

"The War Shrine will soon be ready and in place. Mr. Charles Hurst has worked out a very beautiful design in fumed oak, and when it is unveiled, he will receive the congratulations of all who see it. He is kindly doing the work before the actual money for it has come in; but we feel sure that when it is seen many will want to contribute to the payment as an act of charity towards the brave lads who have given their lives. It is proposed to have a special service when it is unveiled, possibly at the end of a Requiem Eucharist on one Sunday morning, and which special invitations will be sent out to all the friends and relations of the Wigston men who have fallen. We hope to secure some well-known person to take part in the ceremony and preach on the occasion."

#### Vicar's letter for September 1917

"Sunday, September 23rd, is the day fixed by The Bishop of Leicester. For the dedication of the War Shrine. The Bishop has kindly promised to preach at the Requiem Eucharist at 11, and at the close of the service a procession will be formed to the churchyard for a short service of dedication. I hope as many as possible of the relations and friends of the brave Wigston Men who have fallen in the War will be able to be present at the service and as far as possible seats will be reserved for them."

#### Vicar's letter for October 1917

"Never before within living memory has our old Parish Church been filled with worshippers on a Sunday morning as it was on the occasion of the Requiem Eucharist offered for the Wigston men fallen in the War, and never before has such a large and reverent crowd assembled outside the church as that which came together to take part in the Dedication of the War Shrine by the Bishop of Leicester.

"I was so thankful to see so many of the bereaved parents and friends at the service and that they were able to hear the sympathetic and helpful words of the Bishop."

#### Extract from the Leicester Mail, Monday 24th September 1917

##### Dedication of Wigston War Shrine

"Yesterday will remain a vivid memory with those who attended the Requiem Eucharist and dedication of the War Shrine at the parish church of All Saints, Wigston Magna. From 10.30 to 11 a muffled peal was rung, relatives of the fallen Wigston Lads, besides the regular congregation, meanwhile streaming into the church until every seat was occupied and many were standing. Everything inside the church was indicative of the desire to honour those dear ones who had so nobly given their lives for the right.

"The chancel screen and the alter rails were draped with the Union Jack and the chancel steps were thickly covered in floral tributes. A party of soldiers arrived from the barracks, by permission of Colonel Drew, under the command of Capt. Worsley. The processional hymn was "When our heads were bowed with woe" Psalm 23 "The Lord is my Shepherd" was also chanted.

"The Bishop of Leicester was the preacher. He first expressed the deepest sympathy of the church with the mourners and referred to the "Weep Not" of our Lord to the widow at Nain. The same Lord was with them now; He never spoke of death- only sleeping. Jesus did not risk death; He chose it. That was the object

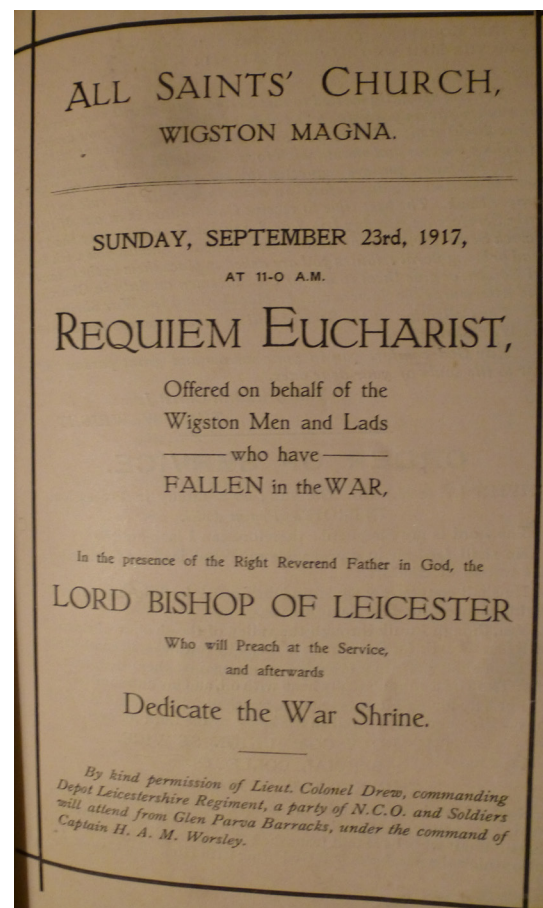
of His coming into the world. He did not die like our splendid lads, for common cause, right, and his country, but for the forgiveness of sin. The Crucifix was not only a memorial; it was a pledge of pardon. We were learning what real greatness was. The simple laddie left home, the office stool, the factory bench to meet death for his country. Here was real greatness — a greatness that grips more than the greatness of Kings and statesmen. Who could be so cruel, so heartless, as to stop praying for their loved ones just because they had departed this life? Our boys in Paradise still looked for prayers as they did on earth. Our Lord had still great blessings for them to answer to our prayers. Never pass that shrine without a prayer, a word or two with God for them."

For the rest of 1917 and right on through 1918 donations of 1/-s; 2/6d and greater were being received with the total finally reached in August 1918.

ARWMP, and in particular our support team of Chris and Brian, can be immensely proud of what has been achieved and which will endure at least another 100 years.

"Let those who come after, see to it that their names be not forgotten".

King George V





## Gateway Grammar School & Gateway College

# A link with the past

In winter 2018/2019, Leicester City Museum Service mounted a very good exhibition in The Newarke Houses Museum about our work, including some of our and some of their stored memorials.

One of theirs was to the young men of Gateway Grammar School, which originally was based in what is now the Museum building.

In February 2019, I approached the modern Gateway College in Hamilton and asked whether they would like a copy. The reaction was most enthusiastic, as the College is very keen on strengthening the ties with the alumni of the old Grammar School.

We produced a full-size copy on foam board which the College has had framed. We also gave them two copies of a fine ring-bound book of biographies of the men on the memorial, based on the research carried out by Ken Patterson, a retired teacher at the Grammar.

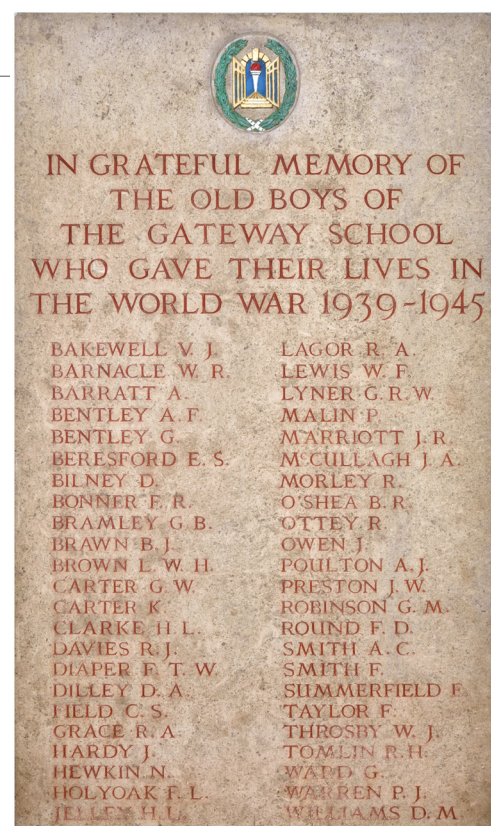
We had several meetings with the Chair of Governors, Principal, and other key staff to discuss how we could work together.

It was explained that the College was keen

to incorporate the memorial into their regular Remembrance Service, which Robin and I were invited to attend. We were asked to lay a wreath, along with the Deputy Lieutenant of the County and the Principal. The service had been brilliantly prepared by some students who also led the service. "The Street", a large open area like a shopping mall, was packed with students with more on the gallery. Attendance was voluntary so they could have left earlier but chose to stay on – so all credit to them.

With no bugle player available, the Last Post and Reveille were played from a recording. During the Two Minutes silence a huge shower of paper poppies, made by the students, descended on to the assembled crowd on the ground floor. It was most moving. We were greatly honoured to be included.

After the service, we were served refreshments and had a most productive discussion with a member of staff about ideas for future collaboration. This would make use of the students' skills and imagination to produce an art work relevant



to remembrance. The idea being that ARWWP would display these which would then attract students and parents.

We thank the key staff who made us so welcome and very much look forward to working with them in the future.

*Denis Kenyon*

A video of the Remembrance Service is available on YouTube [here](#), or by tapping the image below.





**T**he war in South Africa had been brought to an end by the treaty of Vereeniging on 31 May 1902. The victory had been formally celebrated, although there had been delays, occasioned by the illness of the new King Edward VII, but in Leicestershire there was a strong feeling that some permanent memorial to the county's 311 dead should also be set up. A meeting was therefore called for Monday, 12 January 1903 in the County Rooms, on Hotel

Street in Leicester.

It was an illustrious gathering. The Lord Lieutenant, the Marquess of Granby, took the chair. Also present were William Wilkins Vincent (the Mayor of Leicester), the Mayor of Loughborough, Colonel Baillie (of Illston) whose son had been one of the defenders of Mafeking, Mr J A Corah, Sir Thomas Wright, Hon M Curzon, Hussey Packe and many others. More were quick to be associated, including Lord Braye, who had led the Militia

to South Africa (until illness forced him home) Colonel Blair, representing the Imperial Yeomanry, Sir J F L Rolleston MP, George Murray Smith and the sometime High Sheriff, Captain Burns Hartopp.

A committee was formed with the seemingly simple object of raising funds to erect "a suitable Memorial...to the Memory of all Officers, Non-commissioned Officers and Men of the Leicestershire regiment, and all other Leicestershire Officers and Men who

**Robin Jenkins** tells the story of how those Leicestershire men killed in the South African war finally achieved commemoration in the city of their birth.

# *"A memorial of good deeds and gallant services"*

British troops observe the Boer laager at Paardeberg, South Africa, 1900.





## Leicestershire's South African War Memorial

have fallen in the late War in South Africa." A sub-committee was also appointed (of John A Corah, Richard Taylor, and Francis Hewitt) to organize collections in factories and business establishments. They were an astute choice: Corah, of course, was a director of Cooper, Corah & Sons, the hosiers; Taylor represented the elastic web manufacturer Archibald Turner & Co.; while Hewitt's company, F. Hewitt & Sons, ran nearly half the county's newspapers, including the *Daily Mercury*, *Daily Post* and *Leicester Chronicle and Mercury*.

There was no lack of urgency or energy. A printed appeal (preserved in the Minutes of the Committee: DE171) was circulated both for funds and information: "As there will be some difficulty in ascertaining the names of the Officers and Men who formerly lived in Leicestershire, and who have died, if you know of any lately residing in your neighbourhood, you are hereby requested to send the full Name, Regiment, and regimental Number (with the date of death, if possible), to the Hon. Secretary."<sup>1</sup>

Despite a 'rival' fund, begun on 16 February 1903, for a memorial tablet and stained glass window to the Leicestershire Regiment's casualties only, (for which a circular letter survives amongst the regimental archives) the fund-raising committee was able to report a significant success as early as the second meeting at the County Rooms on 20 April 1903. Including £200 promised by the local Patriotic Committee, over £1,100 had been raised; nearly £98 from factory collections and over £727 from private subscriptions. It was



Right: **Vintage illustration of the siege of Ladysmith, South Africa, 1899-1900.**  
Below: **Alfred Gilbert.**

considered more than enough to erect a fitting memorial. It was then, however, that problems began to arise.

Firstly, there was the question of the form of the memorial. The Marquess of Granby, from the Chair, referred to a number of possibilities including a fund for some appropriate benevolent purpose. The Mayor of Leicester objected to this, arguing forcefully and successfully for a public monument. The Marquess had clearly foreseen this development, for he then reported that he had already made enquiries with the sculptor, Alfred Gilbert RA., who had assured him that "a very suitable monument could be erected for £1100".

Gilbert is now known as the renowned sculptor of Eros in Piccadilly Circus. In 1903 Eros was still an unpopular novelty and Gilbert was a recent bankrupt, exiled to Belgium, notorious for his inability to complete any work. Although the Marquess of Granby reassured the committee that his enquiries had been made "entirely for the information of the Committee" and that he should "be glad to hear of any other proposal", it is almost certain that he was under considerable pressure from his own wife, herself an accomplished artist and sculptress, to steer them towards Gilbert.

On 13 May 1903 Alfred Gilbert appeared before the committee with two designs for 10 feet high figures of 'Victory' and 'Britannia' respectively. The committee opted for 'Victory'. They also pondered the possible locations for the column and figure. The Municipal Square, opposite the Midland Railway Station, or Humberstone Gate were all suggested but, after a vote, it was agreed that the entrance to Victoria Park was the best site.

The committee met again on 26 January, a year after the initial meeting. All seemed



satisfactory, as Gilbert had written to assure them that his "Model of the Figure was now approaching completion". This was however just his *model* rather than the actual figure. There is no sign of disquiet amongst the more business-like members of the committee, although a request that the first third of the fee be paid directly to Gilbert, rather than "to his credit to the *Compagnie Générale des Bronzes*" [which was to do the casting] was dismissed.

At the beginning of May 1904, the committee met again at the Marquess of Granby's London home in Arlington Street. There was clearly enough uncertainty to despatch agents, in the form of Sir Thomas Wright and the committee's secretary, William Jesse Freer, to visit Gilbert's Bruges studio. The travellers returned somewhat reassured, and the committee agreed to the sculptor's request that the casting of the statue (and the fee for the same) be reassigned to him. There is the slightest hint of something being wrong, in that before signing the minutes, which recorded "a supplementary agreement... drawn up at Bruges which was perfectly satisfactory", Granby struck out 'perfectly'.

From November 1905 the Memorial Fund Committee minutes become increasingly distressing to read. First, Alfred Gilbert



## Leicestershire's South African War Memorial

is reported as ill and unable to work. Undoubtedly, as his entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* makes clear it was one of the lowest points of the sculptor's career. His wife had left him and he took up, instead, with a client, "the beautiful but deranged widow of a Blackpool doctor". There is even a suggestion that Gilbert had succumbed to morphine.<sup>3</sup>

Then, in December 1905, the committee received the devastating news that "after differences with regard to the repairs to the roof of his studio at Bruges, the Plaster Statue had been seized and he [Gilbert] requested the Committee to allow him to commence a new Statue." Five months later, Freer and the Hon H R Scott visited Gilbert's new premises (his landlady had kindly created a suitable studio for him) to find that despite clear instructions to the contrary, he had begun the model again in *papier maché*. Worse still,

having received a court order for the removal of his original design (as he owed £40 rent and some £15 costs) Gilbert had actually destroyed both the original sculpture and its pedestal.

Despite great personal efforts to motivate the artist, on 8 May 1907 the chairman, now elevated to the dukedom of Rutland, was forced to admit that the situation with Gilbert "appeared to be quite hopeless". A letter from the Duchess of Rutland to Alfred Gilbert's son makes the position clear: "My husband curses the day he gave the Leicester monument to your father to be done! He considers now that your father has played him false! It probably means that my husband who is so poor that he is having to sell his art treasures – to be able to get along at all – will out of his own pocket have to refund all the money already given to your father..."<sup>4</sup>

On 24 January 1908, the committee received

a report from John Corah, who had spent some time in Bruges "investigating the Committee's position". Corah's conclusion, that "there was not the slightest chance of the Committee getting the Statue", signalled that it was time to cut their losses and start again; nearly five years after the committee had first been nudged in Gilbert's direction.

All that remains of Gilbert's Leicestershire war memorial is a small cache of sepia photographs taken in his studio in Bruges.<sup>5</sup>

The statue is curious (to say the least) and, had fortune smiled upon the project, many would find Leicester a touch more colourful as a result. Gilbert's reputation has since recovered but in 1908, his name was mud. The Duke of Rutland took his complaint to the Royal Academy, which asked for the sculptor's resignation for conduct both "dishonourable and unworthy."<sup>6</sup> It was not until 1932, two years before his death, that Gilbert was became a knight and, once more, an RA.

Freed from the curse of Gilbert, the War Memorial committee sprang into life. To read their minutes it is almost as though a crushing weight had been lifted from them. The committee was rejuvenated. The immediate problem was money, as all but £159:7:7 of the original £1,100 had been eaten up feeding the Bruges chimera. A private circular was sent to the committee asking for help; which, with another £200 from the Patriotic Fund, raised the balance in the bank to £919.

The problem of a sculptor was readily solved. By March 1908 the Duke of Rutland and W. J. Freer had approached Joseph Crosland McClure, of the Leicester Technical and Art School, who had agreed to submit his own designs for the monument. Despite the estimated cost of between £1,000 and £1,250 (depending on size) the committee gleefully accepted the home-grown offer. They further commissioned John Breedon Everard, of Everard and Pick, to furnish the necessary granite base and agreed with the Town Council that the memorial would be erected in the Municipal Square.

Even then things did not go as smoothly as the committee might have felt they deserved. Although further donations were received, the additional money was swiftly eaten up by the need to enlarge the bronze plaques (not because of the number of names but rather "owing to the Regimental headings being so numerous"). McClure also returned to the committee with a request that instead of lions at either end of the memorial, he should cast figures of 'war' and 'peace'. The committee



Gilbert's angel, being worked on in his Bruges studio.



agreed – the minutes revealing none of the frustration with ‘artists’ that they may have felt.

### On the home straight

The project was on the home straight however. A further appeal for a last £200 was circulated and £60 had already been saved by using cheaper Irish granite. The main business of the meeting of 23 January 1909 was to select a date for the unveiling and to write to “Lord Roberts (and failing him Lord Grenfell) to come to Leicester for this purpose.” The choice of Lord Roberts is understandable. He had commanded the forces in South Africa (although the Leicestershire Regiment had actually served under his great rival, Redvers Buller). Francis Wallace Grenfell, first Baron Grenfell however seems a stranger candidate. He had just been promoted to the rank of field marshal on retiring from the command of the army in Ireland it is true but his last active service had been in Egypt and the Sudan, followed by a spell as Governor of Malta. Perhaps his best qualification was availability: since on the day he *was* – and Lord Roberts *wasn't*.

The committee or its sub-committee met six times in May, ironing out arrangements for traffic control, luncheon, a church service, and even “£10 towards the Entertainment of the band and men of the 1st Battalion”. More money was raised and a final account shows that it was spent on advertising, cleaning rooms and the erection and decoration of a platform, as well as hiring carriages, plus the

final instalment of £250 for McClure. There was nothing more to do but hope for good weather.

Thursday, 1st July 1909 proved to be a fine day, with a chilly wind to make the most of flags and bunting. Although the programme of the day officially began with the arrival of Lord Grenfell at the Midland Railway Station at half-past eleven, one of its most important ceremonies was by then already over.

The day before, a special train had brought the band and drums, plus a detachment of 100 men, selected from the Leicestershire Regiment's 1st Battalion, up from Shorncliffe in Kent to the Depot at Glen Parva. On 1st July they attended a service at St Martin's to lay up the Old Colours of the battalion, before marching to the Municipal Square, to await the arrival of Lord Grenfell's party. As the *Green Tiger* reported: “here on all sides were heard compliments relative to the fine physique and bearing of the men as well as remarks on the large proportion of n.c.o's [sic] and men who were wearing medals.” These were the men who had fought throughout the South African War, enduring months of privation in Ladysmith and of boredom in blockhouses. Curiously, that detachment of the 1st battalion enjoyed the best view of the day's events. Space around the still veiled memorial dictated that only they and Grenfell's immediate party could stand in front; invited guests in their special enclosure and the public in general observed either from surrounding buildings, or from closer, *behind*

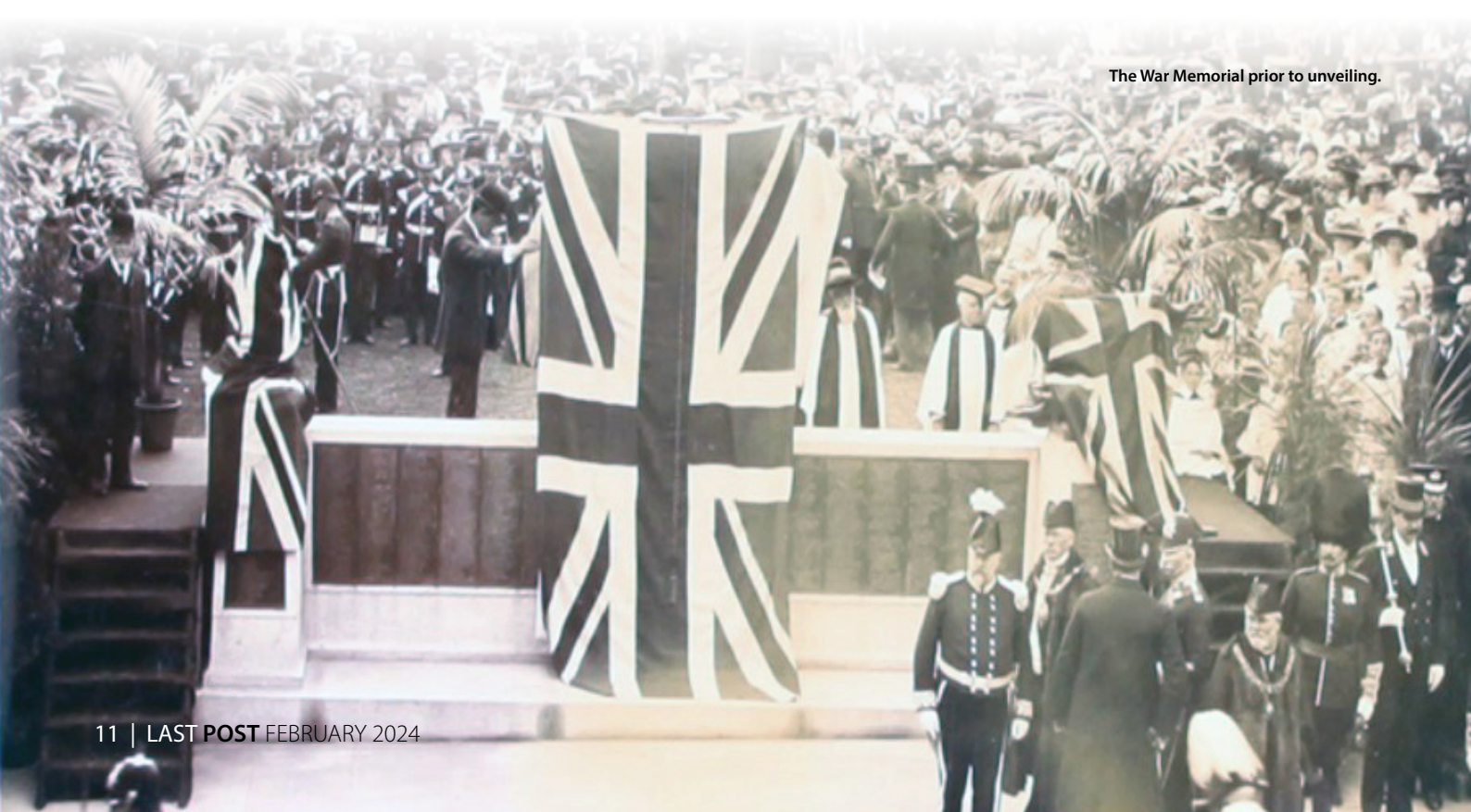
the monument.

At noon precisely the three carriages of Lord Grenfell and his welcoming party, accompanied by mounted police and the band and a guard from the 4th Leicesters entered the square. The bands played marches (*Le Royaume, Prince Albert Victor and Alastor*) while Grenfell inspected the Guard of Honour, before accompanying St Martin's choir with “O God, our help in ages past”.

The events of the day are recorded in detail in the local newspapers. Hewitt's *Daily Post* alone devoted several pages to the ceremony; with photographs of the principal participants, the ceremony and the monument itself, as well as a full list of all those recorded on it. The speeches of both the Duke of Rutland and Lord Grenfell are also reported, the latter seemingly verbatim.

In fact, it seems that the duke spoke only briefly, to introduce Grenfell. Even so, he referred to the “unfortunate earlier history of the memorial”, from which he exonerated the committee. The Duke also praised McClure and saw in Leicester's memorial “a valuable addition to its artistic interests”. Before calling upon the Field Marshal, the Duke also “earnestly trusted it might be long before the exigencies of the time compelled or caused any other war memorial to be unveiled in any other part of this country”.

Lord Grenfell then addressed the assembly. Such monuments, he felt, had great advantages: “They must be a comfort to the relatives of those brave men who fell in



The War Memorial prior to unveiling.

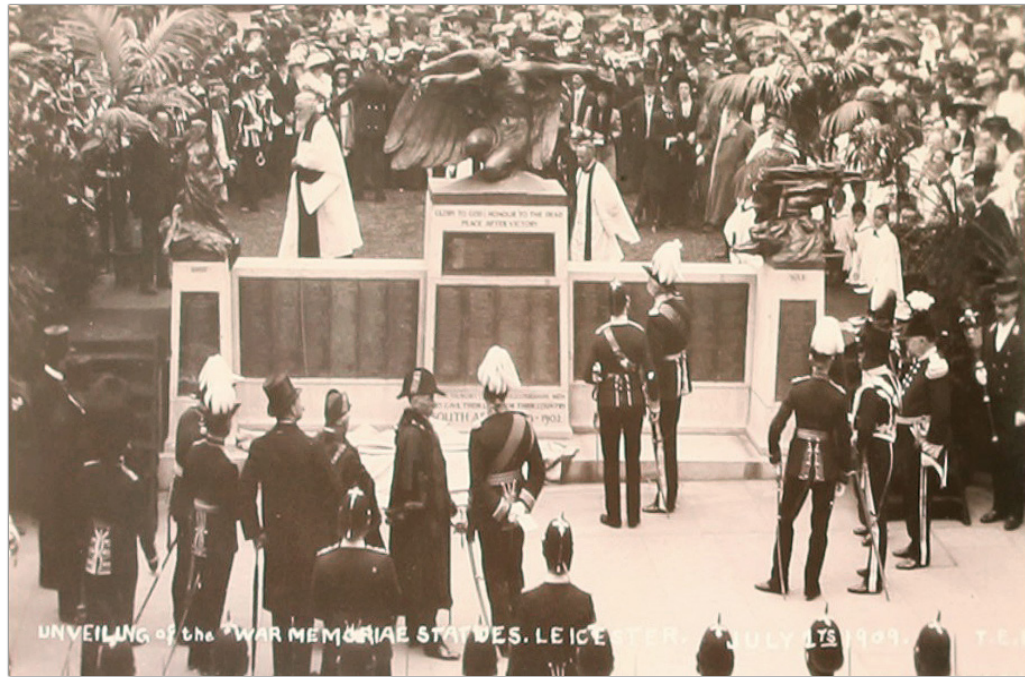


## Leicestershire's South African War Memorial

action...they will remember that the gallant action of their late relatives is remembered by a grateful country." He also saw the monument, with unconscious irony, as an incentive to "the young men who may enter the ranks...when they see on this monument eventually the names of many private soldiers. They know that if they do their duty as these men have done...then a grateful nation will not forget them."

The Field Marshall concluded trusting that "this monument may ever stand" not only as a memorial to "those gallant men" but also "because it beautifies and dignifies your town, and will ever stand as a memorial of good deeds and gallant services of this town and county." He then pulled aside the flags and sheets that covered the memorial, standing with the other dignitaries at the salute. Archdeacon Stocks pronounced the blessing and the 'Last Post' was sounded. The principals and troops then departed for their refreshments, leaving the crowds to inspect McClure's work.

The size of the memorial was dictated by the need to accommodate over three hundred names, with ranks and units, on bronze plaques.<sup>7</sup> Most dramatic though are the bronze figures, which crouch upon the central and two terminal columns of granite. The principal figure represents Peace, holding out an olive branch with one hand, whilst putting behind her a sheathed sword. To either side are male groups representing 'Grief' and 'War'. Grief is represented by two figures; one apparently appealing to the heavens, the other cast down in despair. The grim trio



at the opposite end of the memorial was, it seems, inspired by Henry V's pronouncement that "War hath three handmaids, Fire, Sword, and Famine." The whole suggests the triumph of Peace, rather than Victory, over the horrors of war.

The last word went to 'E.W.R.', whose powerful letter, with a very modern resonance, appeared in the *Daily Post* on 6 July 1909:

"...would it be out of place to suggest to the powers that we owe another duty to ex-soldiers? There are walking about the streets of every large city and town in England thousands of ex-soldiers, who have seen service in various parts of the empire, and

who are unemployed, ragged, and hungry. These men England has forgotten... I assert, sir, that a more fitting tribute to England's defenders would be to see that those who have returned to civil life should be provided with the means of life, or the opportunity to earn it.

"A tour round the pawnshops of the town, to see the Boer war medals for sale, would open one's eyes to the way England proved itself a grateful country. As many Crimean veterans have died in the workhouse, I think it an infamous shame that, after the work has been done, earldoms, gratuities, and pensions of thousands a year should be granted to one class of fighter, while to the other insults, poverty, and unemployment are given... Tommy who died is forgotten for seven years, while Tommy who lives is forgotten forever. To slightly alter Lord Grenfell's words of today, "when you see these things, you will remember how a grateful country remembers their gallant actions."



- 1: Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (ROLLR): Minutes of the South African War Memorial Committee: DE171.
- 2: ROLLR: DE6007/380
- 3: Public Monuments and Sculpture Association notes, ROLLR:DE6427/176
- 4: Royal Archives – copy in ROLLR:DE6427/176
- 5: ROLLR: DE3736
- 6: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
- 7: A Roll of Honour of the war's local dead was printed in the Leicester Daily Post. A typescript list, with amendments presumably prepared by Everard and Pick, also survives in the Record Office, as 8D62/Box 77/3.

Above: The War Memorial unveiled, and (left) today.