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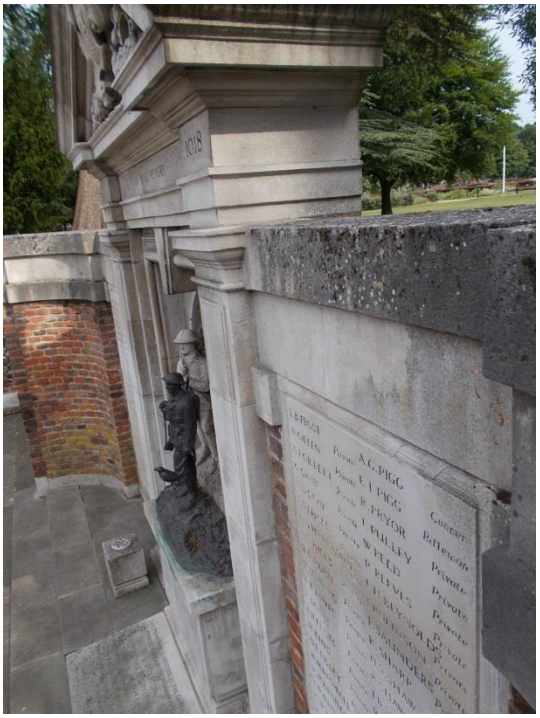
DESIGN, ACCESS & HERITAGE STATEMENT
WAR MEMORIAL
MELBOURN STREET
ROYSTON, HERTS



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February 2018

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 This statement is prepared to accompany a listed building application to North Hertfordshire District Council for repairs and access improvements to the war memorial in Melbourn Street Royston

1.2 The memorial is owned and managed by Royston Town Council and is listed Grade II.

1.3 The War Memorial was erected in 1920 to commemorate the servicemen of the town who were killed in the First World War. It was unveiled on 26th March 1922 by Lt Col ECM Phillips DSO, along with David Bevan, chairman of the memorial committee and Walter Titchmarsh, chairman of the Royston Urban Council. It was paid for by public subscription[1]. It is, unusually for a memorial of this kind, dug into a change in level as the public park behind the memorial, known as Priory Gardens, is some 1.5m above the level of the street. This creates an outdoor 'room' of sorts with walls of local flint and red brick and with Portland stone dressings. At each side, at right angles to the main axis of the memorial, is an arched niche with a curving recess faced in flint.

1.4 In the centre is a raised pediment with cartouche and a simple cross at the apex.The entablature has an inscription 1914 - IN PROUD MEMORY - 1918. Below this is a tableau of figures in an aedicular niche carved in Portland stone and representing British military prowess through the ages: a bowman from Agincourt, a medieval knight, soldiers from the 16th and early 18th centuries, and a sailor and soldier from the early 19th century (possibly from Trafalgar and Waterloo). Brooding over them at the rear of the group is the figure of Thomas Cartwright, reputedly born in the town and sometimes credited with founding Puritanism in the late 16th century. Together they form a backdrop to a small bronze statue of a Private of the First World War, a British 'Tommy', with a crow at his feet. This is the 'Corvus Cornix', the so-called 'Royston' Crow, and symbol of the town and district of North Hertfordshire.

[1] The land may have been donated by Viscount Knutsford who had connections to the London Hospital, he lived at Kneesworth Hall and was a close friend of David Bevan, Chair of the Memorial Committee - *http://www.whatroystondid.frierley.com/* The project was not without controversy , the cost, and apparently high handed manner of the committee, being subject of some debate among local people *-from Eugene Gavin's paper 'Restoring the fabric and holding things together- Negotiating Grief and Alienation after World War I (copy in Royston Museum)*

1.5 On either side of this central group are two tablets of Portland stone with the names inscribed of 116 servicemen from the town and surrounding district who were killed during the First World War, the most notable being Harold Ackroyd VC MC.

Names of the 25 local men killed in the 1939-45 conflict are also inscribed in the plinth to the tableau and, in a stone laid almost flat below this, is a dedication which reads:

THIS MEMORIAL IS DEDICATED TO THE GLORY OF GOD
AND IN PROUD AND GRATEFUL MEMORY OF THE MEN OF
ROYSTON
WHO AT THE CALL OF DUTY LEFT ALL THAT WAS
DEAR TO THEM TO FIGHT FOR KING AND COUNTRY
THEY ENDURED HARDSHIP FACED DANGER AND SUFFERED
PAIN AND BY THIS SACRIFICE OF THEIR LIVES
BROUGHT VICTORY PEACE AND FREEDOM TO THEIR
NATIVE LAND
Greater love hath no man than this

1.6 The stonework was by W. Whitehead of Royston and the bronze figures by W.B. Fagan and Mr Clemens of Clapton. Brickwork is in a warm red stock brick 2" high, commonly used in the period and reminiscent of Flemish brickwork. (Some brickwork to the rear elevation at low level is in a cheaper buff 'gault' brick). The stone is Portland stone, a white limestone that was the stone of choice for virtually every war memorial and headstone erected after World War I. The paving is in York stone.

1.7 In 2001 English Heritage gave a grant of £5,000 towards work to repair and re-build the low walls dividing the memorial from the pavement, repair and re-point with lime mortar the back wall of the memorial, including the aedicule, repair the cross, making good a previous failed repair, repair the brick and stone of the main wall of the rear elevation and install a damp course and drainage, replace eroded paving slabs and brick risers on the steps and re-bed and re-point the slabs, and to clean the memorial using the DOFF steam cleaning system. At the same time the memorial was given a Grade II listing. Other funders for this project were the Royston branch of the Royal British Legion, North Hertfordshire District Council and Royston Town Council.

1.8 In 2006 English Heritage and the Wolfson Foundation gave a further grant of £5,698 towards work to take up the York stone paving in front of the memorial, to set it on to a new base and re-lay it using the original stones where possible.

1.9 The memorial has been the target of vandals on at least two occasions, some of the heads from the tableau were knocked off in 1976 and had to be replaced with new. In 2010 the bronze crow was ripped off and found in a hedge.

1.10 Unfortunately no provision was made during the repair projects to protect the name panels from erosion by rainwater from above and this original design defect is the primary reason for their current state of decay. An attempt to correct this by cutting a channel into the coping above (possiblydone during the original construction) is completely ineffective. Generally the rest of the memorial is in reasonable condition, though the 1939-45 names are also deteriorating.



Photo taken on day of unveiling

2.0 Background Information

2.1 Listing Description:

Grade II
War memorial, 1920, by P.Morley Horder, stonework by W.Whitehead of Royston, bronze figures by W.B.Fagan R.B.S. and Mr.Clemons (Clemens) of Clapton. Knapped flint, hand-made red brick, Portland stone. Symmetrical, with central pedimented aedicule and memorial tablets in stone flanked by curved brick and flint retaining wall with deep stone parapet. Return walls in brick and flint each have apsidal niche with continuous deep stone plinth, and terminate in paired brick piers with stone copings. Stone paved forecourt with central stone step from pavement, contained by low brick parapet wall with stone coping. Pedimented aedicule surmounted by stone cross. Carved stone panel depicting former soldiery including bowman from Agincourt, an Elizabethan soldier, a Cromwellian ironside, a soldier from the Napoleonic wars, and Thomas Cartwright, scholar, of Royston. Set forward, bronze figure of World War I soldier and bronze Royston crow. Garlanded cartouche to the pediment with Hertfordshire hart. Entablature dated 1914 -1918; flanking panels and base inscribed with names of the fallen. Panel to front commemorating the fallen, 1939-45.

2.2 Percy Richard Morley Horder

The architect of the Royston war memorial was Percy Richard Morley Horder. He specialised in English country houses but also laid out gardens such as Highfields Park in Nottingham. He worked in the Arts and Crafts style and later on in the more classical style that became popular in England after World War I. He was the son of a Congregationalist minister and was born in Torquay in 1870.

In 1895 Horder began his own practice in partnership with James Williams. This lasted until 1919 when he formed a partnership with Briant Alfred Poulter, a painter and architect from Frimley.

Horder's early works include 52-54 Brook Street, opposite Claridges in London, (1896-7); the houses Moonhill and Cuckfield in Sussex (1902) and Greystock in Warwick (1905); a number of Congregational churches, including Muswell Hill (1900), Bushey, Hertfordshire (1904), Ealing Green (1911), Penge and Brondesbury Park (1911). He also designed the Cheshunt (Congregational) College erected in 1915 on a site between Bateman Street and Brookside in Cambridge, now the Freemasons Hall.

He undertook a variety of domestic commissions in Surrey, Sussex and Dorset, most notably Pinfold Manor, a country retreat for David Lloyd George built in 1913 at Walton Heath in Surrey. Lloyd George was then Chancellor of the Exchequer. Horder followed sketches given to Riddell by Edwin Lutyens and the house has some of Lutyens' trademarks.

Famously the house was blown up by the Suffragettes when nearly complete. Lloyd George had supported the Suffragette cause for a while, but had reneged on his promises, and this was intended as a warning shot across his bows. Though not thought to be directly involved, Emmeline Pankhurst claimed responsibility for the attack. No one was hurt, the damage was repaired, and Lloyd George went on to use the house until 1921.

Immediately after the war, as well as designing the Royston memorial, Horder designed several extensions to Westcott House in Cambridge. In 1926 he formed a third partnership with another architect called Verner Rees. They designed the London School of Tropical Medicine which was opened in 1929.

Through his friendship with Sir Jesse Boot, Horder received several commissions for shops for the chemist chain, as well as the commission to design the Boots funded buildings at University College, Nottingham built 1922-28.

It is not known how he received the commission for the Royston memorial but, as his work in Cambridge shows, he evidently had several local contact. According to one contemporary account he was not the easiest of architects to work with: “he possessed the artistic temperament in excess, cultivated a Bohemian appearance and exasperated his clients and contractors by his erratic, wayward and unbusiness-like habits. Yet he managed to retain the goodwill of his patrons”. It is not known whether he designed any other war memorials. Horder died in 1944.

2.3 Harold Ackroyd VC, MC

The first name on the left hand plaque of the Royston memorial is that of Harold Ackroyd. He received the Victoria Cross, the highest award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces.

Ackroyd was born in 1877 in Southport Lancashire and inherited a sizeable fortune from his mother`s family. He went to Shrewsbury School and then to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge in 1896. Graduating in 1899 he continued his medical studies at Guy's Hospital in London.

In 1908 he became a Research Scholar at Downing College and married Mabel Robina Smythe, matron of Strangeways Research Hospital. They lived first in Great Shelford and then at ‘Brooklands’, 46 Kneesworth Street in Royston.

Soon after war broke out in 1914 Harold joined up and was commissioned in the Royal Army Medical Corps. He was attached as Medical Officer to the 6th Battalion of the Royal Berkshires which formed part of the 53rd Infantry Brigade in the 18th Division. The division sailed for France on 25th July 1915 and was posted to the Somme front.

In February 1916 Harold was promoted to Captain. On the first day of the Battle of The Somme on 1st July 1916, in one of the few successes of the day, Ackroyd’s division seized the ridge to the west of Montauban village. On 19th July 1916 they took possession of nearby Delville Wood and Ackroyd acted with such bravery that he was recommended

eleven times for the award of the Victoria Cross though only received the Military Cross on this occasion. He was injured and given six weeks' leave to convalesce with his family in Cornwall and Royston. He re-joined his regiment in November 1916.

On 31st July 1917 the third battle of Ypres, commonly known as the Battle of Passchendaele, began. The role of the 18th Division was to leapfrog the 30th Division through Glencorse Wood. Disaster struck when the 30th Division wheeled to their left and assaulted Chateau Wood instead causing the 53rd Brigade to plunge into a fatal gap. Though surviving these terrible first few days of the battle, on the 11th August, while tending to wounded men in a shell crater, Harold was shot in the head by an enemy sniper and killed. His body was buried in Birr Cross Roads Cemetery, Zillebecke.

For his extreme bravery under fire Ackroyd was given numerous recommendations for the Victoria Cross and his investiture was held outside Buckingham Palace on 26th September 1917. His widow Mabel and their five-year-old son Stephen received the Victoria Cross and the Military Cross on his behalf from King George V.



Harold Ackroyd VC, MC 1877-1916

3.0 Setting

The memorial stands just to the north-east of St John The Baptist, a Grade I listed Church, and between the park known as the Priory Gardens and Melbourn Street which runs east west. It is dug into a bank of the natural underlying chalk so that the back wall is a retaining wall about 1.5m high. The memorial faces onto the street which provides an excellent parading area for Remembrance Day ceremonies. Several large trees in the park behind provide a very pleasing backdrop.

4.0 Design proposals

4.1 Because of the lack of any weathering over the name tablets some of the inscribed names have deteriorated quite badly, especially at the top, including that of Harold Ackroyd VC. We propose to insert new projecting Portland stone labels over each panel (see detailed drawing). This will help to shed rainwater away from the panels and reduce the effects of rain erosion. They will be contained on either side by the projecting stone string course (which was probably originally intended to carry across the name panel) and the pilasters of the central feature.

4.2 Two independent stonemasons and the War Memorials Trust have advised that re-cutting of names is not really feasible and could do more harm than good and so it is proposed to carefully cut into the existing panels with fine stone-cutting equipment and replace the most damaged sections with matching Portland Stone and matching lettering. The left panel would be replaced down to A.J Humphrey and the right hand panel top left section down to J.W Mulberry.

4.3 Careful records of all the details and all of the names will be made prior to work commencing and all of the names would then be re-lettered in black stone-painting enamel.

4.4 The stone rope-work detail around the panels will be retained but the top left hand section of the right hand panel is proposed to be replaced in matching stonework because it is badly eroded and has lost its detail.

4.5 Some localised repointing of brickwork is proposed, and to copings, where required.

4.6 Some failing render on the back of the curved niche facing west onto Priory Gardens will be replaced.

4.7 Repointing and re-bedding of the York stone paving slabs will be carried out where required.

4.8 On completion, but before the re-lettering, the whole of the stonework will be steam cleaned using the 'DOFF' system.

5.0 Accessibility

There is currently a small step up from the pavement (120-130mm) and this prevents some people with disabilities getting close to the memorial, especially those in wheelchairs. Accessibility is seen as being very important to war memorials generally and we have proposed two ramps, one on each side, to preserve the symmetry and keep the central area open. As the ramps are short and height difference is small we propose that no handrails or kerbs are introduced as this would spoil the aesthetic of the memorial, but contrasting nosings will be used to help avoid trips and slips. The area of reduced paving in front of the step we propose to pave in granite setts and this will also provide a contrast with the step and the ramps. The ramps will be paved in new York stone.

6.0 Significance

The Royston memorial is one of many thousands erected all over the country in the aftermath of World War I and all these memorials have a shared significance as part of the nation's cultural and social heritage. It is also a part of a remarkably consistent aesthetic where Portland stone and bronze were universally adopted by the War Graves Commission, a choice that was influenced by their chief architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, designer of the Cenotaph in Whitehall. The Royston memorial has particularly significance because of its unusual design, it being recessed into the landscape, and because of its special contribution to the streetscape of Melbourn Street. It also has significance because its architect was one of some note in the post-war architectural scene, and because the memorial includes the name of Harold Ackroyd, a Royston resident and VC.

7.0 Conclusion

The proposed repairs are considered essential to prevent further loss of significance. The

proposal to replace parts of the name panels have been discussed with two stonemasons who advise that re-cutting the most damaged lettering is not possible. The insertion of projecting label stones above the panels in matching Portland Stone will help to protect the panels from further rain erosion. We therefore believe that the proposals are necessary to conserve the stonework from further loss of significance and with the least intervention. Improvements to the accessibility of the memorial are also badly needed and our design does this with the minimum of intervention.

It is hoped that listed building consent can be granted in time for the work to be complete before 11th November this year, the centenary of the Armistice.

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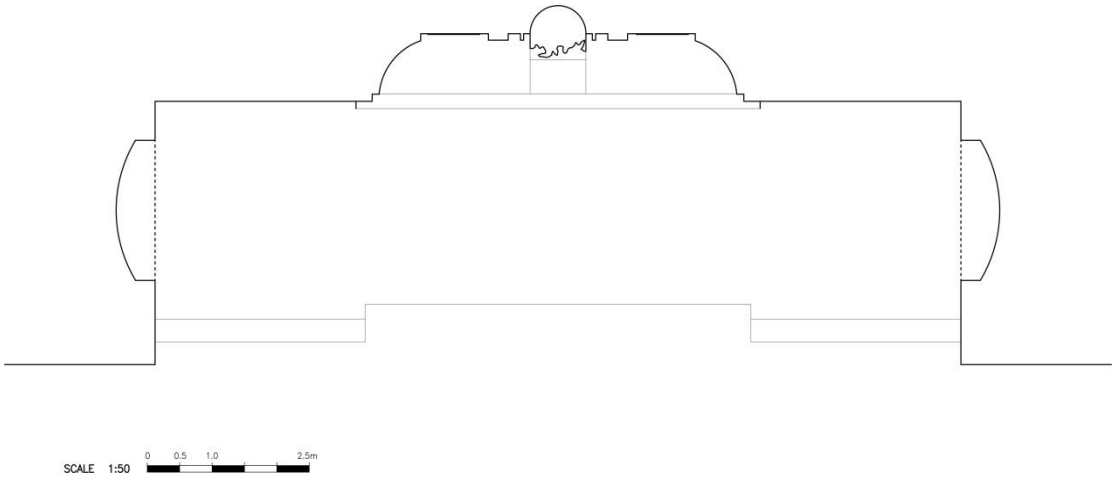
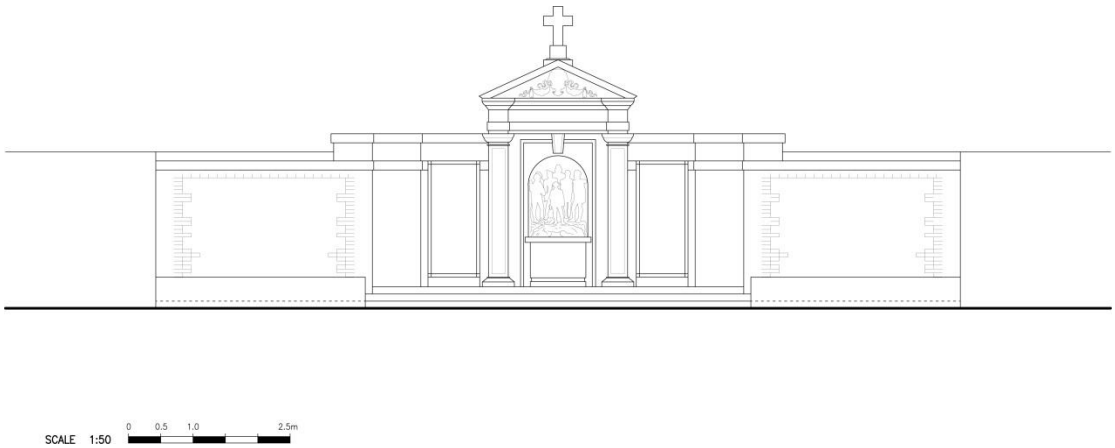


Existing Plan



Existing Elevation

Photos



General Views





View from West



Central memorial



left hand 1914-18 name panel -
note rain washing from above



right hand 1914-18 name panel with same problem



Name panel from above



The ineffective drainage channel



The central tableau



The World War II memorial and dedication below







Rear wall











The apsidal flint niches

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