

Newent War Memorial

At the end of the 1st World War there was an upsurge of feeling that something should be done to honour those people who had given their lives in the conflict. Immediately after the announcement of the ceasefire the Rector Canon Connor held a thanksgiving service in the evening, and the Church bells were rung throughout the day. The service was attended by an exceptionally large congregation.

An article appeared in the December 1918 Parish Magazine where a list of seven commemoration methods were suggested for consideration including; stained glass windows in St Mary's Church, a carved oak canopy for the Baptistery, two additional bells in the Church tower, and a Churchyard Cross. The article also stated that the number of men killed from Newent was about 35.

A remembrance service was held on December 29th 1918 where the names of the fallen were read out.

In January 1919 the Rector listed some of the suggestions for a suitable memorial, outlining their advantages and disadvantages. A special meeting of the Vestry was held in the Upper Parish Rooms (now Good News) on Wednesday 12th February to consider the question of a memorial and an advisory committee was set up comprising :- Mrs Beechey, Mrs Feilden, Mrs Lodge, Mrs West, Mrs J Smith, Miss Hutchinson, and Messrs Akerman, Stafford, Bray, Berkley, Baldwin, Beard, Beachus, Clutterbuck, Crisp, Chidley, Cook, Davies, H Davis, Eves, Field, Fletcher, Ford, Hankins, Hefford, J Hill, A Jones, Rev D Gethyn Jones, W Little, Morgan, Roberts, C Thurston, Smith, Trubshaw, Vickers, C Williams, Winfield, and Winklen.

The meeting had not been called to make any decisions but just to obtain views and opinions before a more public meeting. It was suggested that the memorial should not just cover the ecclesiastical Parish of Newent but to include the surrounding areas such as Clifford's Mesne and Gorsley.

The committee met on 20th February and after considerable discussion recommended a stone cross in St Mary's Churchyard with the names of the fallen engraved around the base. It was estimated that the cost would be approximately £230.

A Public meeting was held on Tuesday March 18th 1919 and a committee was elected under the chairmanship of Mr Martin, with H Davis and P Winfield as secretaries and Mr C W Davis of Lloyds Bank as treasurer. The meeting was then adjourned until Friday 11th April. At this meeting it was resolved to erect a Churchyard Cross with the names of the fallen engraved on the base as recommended by the Vestry Committee. A Parish Council meeting on April 28th accepted the Public proposal and agreed to carry it into effect.

The next problem was the design of the monument which caused much discussion. It was decided in June 1919 to take advice from Canon Bazeley who came to Newent on June 12th. He was a noted expert in the design of such things. His recommendations were accepted and the committee set about raising sufficient funds.

On July 6th 1919 the King announced a National Thanksgiving for Peace and a parade was held in the town on Saturday July 19th followed by sports activities and a dance.

The permission and construction of the new memorial was a long drawn out affair. The collection of funds began in October and had realised nearly £100 in the first month. On 3rd October the Vestry met to approve the application for a Church Faculty for the erection of the new memorial.

A short remembrance service was held on November 11th which was attended by a large congregation, and was preceded by the tolling of the Church Bell for five minutes.

By April 1920 the order for the construction of the new Cross was given to a Mr Frith of Barton St Gloucester with his uncle, also Mr Frith of London carving the top. The committee was still over £50 short of the required total of £300.

The unveiling of the memorial was initially planned for 16th September, with the Bishop being asked to dedicate it and for it to be unveiled by a prominent layman Mr H W Bruton. The ceremony was delayed until 14th October because the work was not finished. then it was moved again to 13th October because the Bishop was unavailable, then it was moved again to 3rd November because the work was still not finished.

It was finally unveiled and dedicated on 3rd November before a large congregation, where Mr Bert Davis sounded the "Last Post" Sadly Mr Bruton died only a few weeks later.

During war there is much confusion and mistakes and omissions are easily made. This has clearly occurred with the carving of the names on the Newent War Memorial. The Memorial contains the names of 55 men from World War I. There is a list in St Mary's Church which contains 63 names,

although it actually states 62. In 2003 the Local History Society produced a book entitled “Chapters In Newent’s History” and in the section on the World Wars it lists 57 names. The Forest of Dean Family History Society list a further six, the Parish Magazine Roll of Honour a further three and there are several more who are not on any of the lists.

This makes a total of 84 names of local men that are worthy of remembrance and the following is an attempt to record what is known about each of these men so that future generations will remember them as they deserve.

A similar situation has occurred concerning the names from World War Two. The War Memorial has 22 names engraved on it, the list in the church totals 24, the list in the Local History Society book has 25 and there is at least one more who is not on any of these lists.



The unveiling of the War memorial 3rd November 1920