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### Largs War Memorial, North Ayrshire





## A national and local tribute to the lost

*Every year, on the 11th of November, the nation collectively remembers the fallen of all wars. As The Queen lays her wreath at the Cenotaph in London, communities across the UK commemorate the dead at their local war memorial. Almost every town and village funded one after the First World War and they remain both a focus of remembrance and a symbol of civic pride. At a time when few families could visit the graves of their relatives abroad, such memorials provided an opportunity to recall their loss and remember loved ones. They also reflected the sense of pride and gratitude felt by these communities for their sacrifice.*

*In order to manage the funding and construction of the war memorials, committees were set up throughout the country. These generally decided upon the style of monument, although they sometimes took instruction from the person or organisation that was funding its commission. This resulted in an amazing collection of different styles from simple cenotaphs to more elaborate constructions, such as that situated at Largs. Additional memorials were also installed in many churches and schools, as well as places of work and leisure. They were the first form of public art to be commissioned in the UK.*

*Celtic-style crosses are perhaps the most common form in Scotland, but there are a huge variety of styles and configurations, ranging from sculptures of soldiers and Greek gods to towers and memorial gates. As well as commissioning bespoke designs, the committees also had the option of choosing their memorials from a catalogue. Hence, many might share the same basic composition, but with subtle differences, especially with regard to regimental dress. As an instance, the kilted soldier on the war memorial at Largs has an identical twin, this time cast in bronze, on the war memorial at Johnstone, Renfrewshire.*





## Looking out to sea

*There are many fine war memorials across Scotland of which that at Largs is simply one example. Dedicated on the 19 Sept 1921, the latter stands by the shore in a prominent position. It comprises a freestanding stone plinth supporting the three men, whose effigies have been carved from white freestone by the sculptor, William Kellock Brown (1856-1934). In the centre of the group stands the kilted soldier with a rifle in his right hand. To his left kneels a sailor, while to his right sits a colonial soldier looking out in another direction. Behind them is a broken wheel, which may symbolise their sacrifice or possibly the battlefield. A bronze band around the plinth contains the dedication and lists the casualties of the First World War, beneath which is another recounting those from the Second World War. This is a successful match, but commemorating later conflicts on an existing memorial could sometimes prove problematic and it is not uncommon to find the details uncomfortably compressed into an existing design, or the addition of new plaques to either side or even on steps.*

*The Largs memorial and the thousands like it remain resonant symbols to this day. The three men stand in solemn tribute, looking out across the water and away from the home to which they never would return. This year is the 99th anniversary of what was once regarded as 'the war to end all wars'. If only this had been the case . . .*

*Historic Environment of Scotland has recorded the location of over 2770 war memorials about which there is often much further detail in its archives. There is, for instance, an extensive collection of plans and photographs relating to the National War Memorial at Edinburgh Castle, which was designed by the architect Robert Lorimer (1864-1929). Many of these can now be viewed on CANMORE.*

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<https://canmore.org.uk/site/207268/largs-war-memorial>  
<https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk>  
<http://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/9758>



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