

The War Memorial was first unveiled by John Randolph (1866-1936) Bishop of Guildford on 13th August 1920 - so it is just over 104 years old.

It was unveiled to commemorate 48 local men who fell in the First World War.

The War Memorial was designed by Frederick Brook Hitch (1897-1957), a prominent British sculptor of the early twentieth century also responsible for significant London memorials, including the Submariners Memorial (listed Grade II) and the memorial plaques for the Animals War Memorial Dispensary (Grade II).

The Pirbright Memorial consists of a finely-carved wooden Calvary cross on a four-step stone plinth. At the base, there are four rectangular stone plaques laid horizontally amongst square paving stones. The frontal plaque carries the inscription "GREATER LOVE / HATH NO MAN / THAN THIS THAT / A MAN LAY / DOWN HIS LIFE / FOR HIS FRIENDS" (John 15:13). The two flanking stones bear the names of 48 of the fallen from the First World War, and another later plaque, set to the rear, marks 11 of the fallen from the Second World War. Following the Second World War, the names of the local men who died in this conflict were inscribed on an additional memorial plaque.

The Memorial carries Grade II listing status and is the responsibility of the Parish Council even though it sits in the wonderful churchyard belonging to St Michael & All Angels Church. (Church Lane, Pirbright, GU24 0JJ). The churchyard is also home to the huge stone monolith to mark Henry Morton Stanley resting place.

In 2020 the Memorial was showing significant signs of wear and tear. It had been repaired in the 1990's but the figure was now missing fingers and the arms were falling off at the shoulders. The tenon holding the figure to the cross had rotted away and the figure was in danger of falling off the cross and smashing to the ground below. The cross itself was rotten at the top and the base and was also in danger of falling. It had done well, out in the elements, for 100 years but had to be saved.



The whole project of restoration has taken over 4 years with the Parish Council firstly seeking permission from the Diocese of Guildford. This was granted and the War Memorials Trust were approached to help. Historic England were also involved from beginning to end.

It was extremely difficult to find 2 master craftsmen, one for the stone plinths and one for the oak, as the two mediums are so different and require such different skills. The 2 contractors had never come into contact with each other before but have since have worked on another project together and are very grateful to have been brought together. Both contractors work for the Crown on Royal palaces and castles with Royal Charters and so have the highest skillsets. The Parish Council were very lucky to find them.

The War Memorial is such a beloved part of the Village's history and identity and to mark its return to the churchyard, it will be blessed by the Rt Revd Andrew Watson on Sunday 29th December 2024 as part of the Sunday service. All are welcome.

