

How Stone got its War Memorial: A story of community endeavour

By Robin Jones

In the wake of the 'War to end all Wars', thousands of communities up and down the country embarked upon projects to commemorate the loss of servicemen in the four-year conflict. The parish of Stone was no exception, and wasted no time in convening a public meeting – held on 27th November 1918 – where the sole item for discussion was “to consider what steps shall be taken to provide a fitting Memorial in memory of the gallant men of the Parish who have given their lives for their country in this great war”.

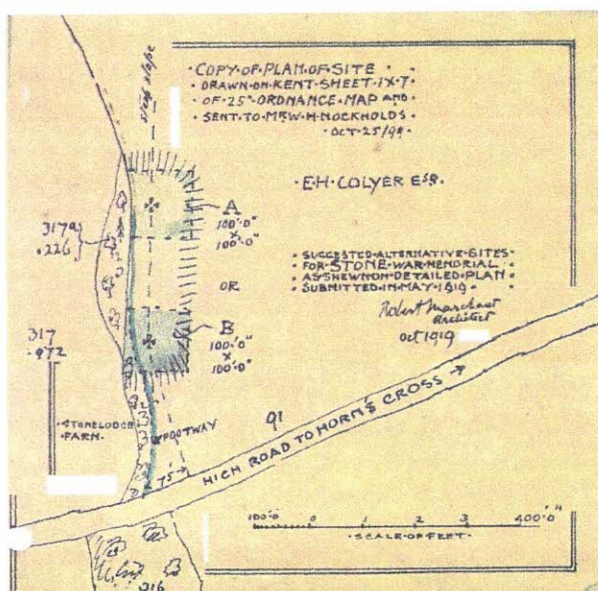
certainly is an exquisite piece of craftsmanship, created by the Goldsmiths and Silversmiths Company in London, and with an illuminated frontispiece with regimental badges and inscriptions in calligraphy by artist Albert Kelsey, which can be seen in Stone St Marys to this day).

- A Memorial Cross to be erected on a suitable site.

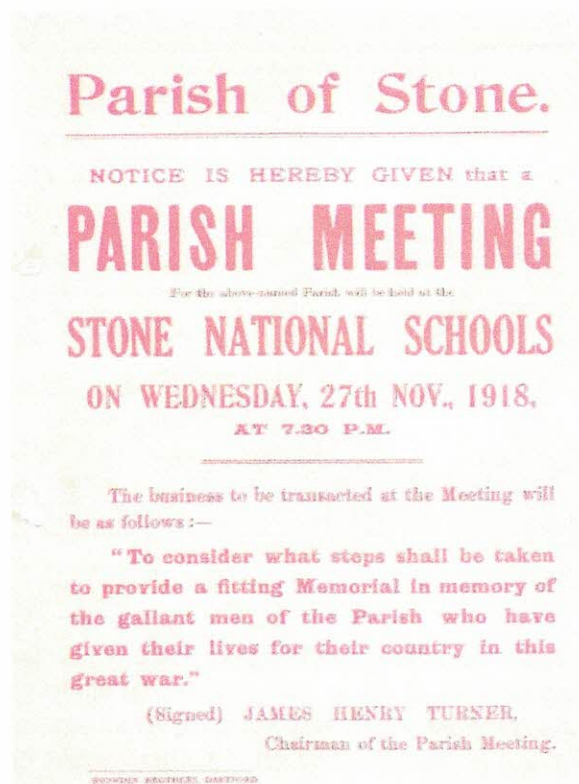
It is the story behind the second ambition that this article focusses.

Securing the site

The first key task for the newly formed War Memorial Committee, convened under the Chairmanship of Parish Clerk James Turner, was to find a suitable site for the Memorial. Horns Cross was evidently considered amongst others, but the Committee preferred a spot colourfully described as ‘adjoining the meadow on the east side of Stone Lodge Farm, and about 100 yards west of Martin’s Sandhole, on the brow of the hillock backed by a small copse situate on the north side of London Road’. This was an especially prominent site, given that it was visible from many view points, including the main road, the railway, Bean (then part of Stone Parish), Watling Street and the river.



The land was owned by the Colyer Ferguson family trust and, as the Committee quickly found out, had only recently be leased to the 'new cement company' – Kent Portland Cement



The meeting resolved to pursue their dedication and should consist of:

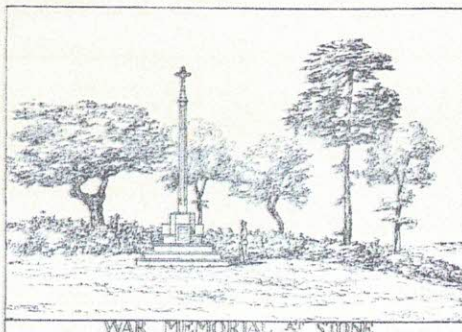
- A Book of Remembrance in vellum containing the names of all those from the Parish of Stone who served during the war. The book was to 'handsomely bound, and contained in a casket of oak with silver mounts, to be kept permanently in Stone Parish Church'. (It

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remembrance (equivalent to around £50,000 at 2021 value), was going to rely on 'localness' to succeed.

Fundraising got off to a 'flying start', with nearly half of the sum required being pledged in the first two weeks of 1920. The fund was 'kicked off' with some significant personal donations. The Rector, Roger Dalison and his wife contributed £100. Another member of the Committee stumped up £50, and local companies such as EC Gunpowder (located in what is now Beacon Wood Country Park), and Kidd's Brewery, offered their support in response to the general appeal launched in January.

The War Memorial
For the Parish of Stone.



WAR MEMORIAL AT STONE

THE COMMITTEE appointed to carry out the above has thought it advisable that the Memorial should take a two-fold form.

First, that a record should be made of the Names of all those who offered themselves for service in defence of their King and Country during the Great War of 1914-1918, and that their names should be inscribed in a book of vellum leaves contained in a handsome wooden case to be kept in the Church. This part of the Memorial is now nearly completed, and will shortly be ready for dedication.

Second, that a Cross shall be erected on the spur of the hill against the boundary line of the City of London Asylum property, about halfway between Horn's Cross and St John's Hill, on the right hand side of the main road. On this Cross will be inscribed the names of all those who have fallen.

Third, has been considerable delay in obtaining the site, but permission having been now obtained the Committee hope to put the matter in hand forthwith, and will be glad to receive contributions to meet the expenses involved. It is estimated that the "Book of Remembrance" will cost £125, and the Memorial Cross £300.

Signed on behalf of the Committee:
JAMES H. TURNER, Chairman
F. BRANTON, Hon. Secretary

Thereafter, it was harder going – the total increasing by only £20/month. The Stone Parish magazine in July 1920 was announcing that over £600 had been raised, and that during the autumn and winter 'it is intended to organise fundraising concerts and functions. Photographic slides were made of the Memorial design for advertising (to promote fundraising) in local cinemas. Collections were made in the mental hospital(s) and cement works. The Committee adopted use of family collecting cards in envelopes, so that money could be raised by individual families

in this way. Plus local dances, whist drives, concerts, and even a fundraising cricket match.

PARISH OF STONE
WAR MEMORIAL.

FAMILY COLLECTING CARD.

Name..... *The Honors*

Address..... *London Rd Greenhill*

Names of Contributors.	Amount.
<i>Mrs & Mr J. Soudon</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Mrs J. Soudon</i>	<i>5</i>

This Card will be called for in a few Days.

George Horrocks Collector.

Every donation was meticulously listed and recorded by area – East Ward, West Ward, and Bean - from from sixpence to over £175 eventually contributed by the Dalisons! By the time all the necessary funds were raised, there were over 700 individual subscribers in all.

A scramble to finish the project on time
The barriers to getting construction projects completed on schedule is not a modern phenomenon!

The fundraising had been a monumental (no pun intended) task, and it was not until March 1921 that the Committee had sufficient confidence to tender for a contractor to undertake construction and erection of the Memorial. Three quotations were received, from which P. C. Birtchenell, Monumental and Ecclesiastical Mason and Engraver, of Mill House, South Darenth – at a total cost of £602, 15 shillings and sixpence, including paving and lettering under 'Scheme B' - was selected. It was no doubt attractive to the Committee that not

only was this the lowest price by some distance, but also the shortest estimated completion time of four months, given that it was already April.

As a condition of his contract, he was asked 'that preference be given to local Stone labour where possible for carrying out of the work'. By June, Birtchenell was reporting that 'the stone was in his yard'.

The Committee were determined to ensure that all the names of servicemen eligible to be acknowledged on the Memorial through local connection were traced. The May edition of the Parish magazine listed 113 names, and encouraged others to come forward.

But the consequent delay was giving Robert Marchant cause for concern; "only having received the names on 1st July, it is impossible at present to give an approximate date of completion of the work". Nonetheless, by September 1921 the War Memorial Committee was sufficiently confident to fix Sunday 13th November for the unveiling of the memorial. Rev Dalison was to deliver the dedication, but the status of 'guest of honour' went to local worthy Sir Henry Maybury from Greenhithe.

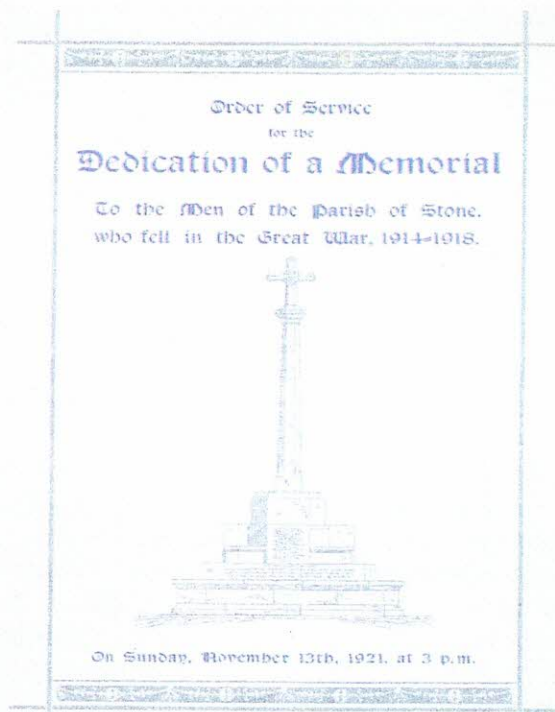
Maybury, a civil engineer by profession, had been responsible for Kent's roads prior to the war as County Surveyor. At the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, he was appointed by the War Office to build and maintain roads in military camps across the country, and by 1916 had been promoted to the British Army rank of Brigadier General and placed in charge of the Roads Directorate with responsibility for all the roads used by the Allied forces in France.

But the project was not 'home and dry'. As late as 26th September, the Committee were instructing Birchenell that the servicemen's names were to be 'cut in stone' rather than inscribed on the slate panels as per the design, and a change was made to the principal inscription. And even on 3rd November, the addition of another name was being requested!



The 'big day' arrives . . .

An elaborate series of events had been devised for the ceremony, and due to reach its climax at 3pm. A Memorial Book of Service was produced for the guests and to sell to the public.



As former army officers, Maybury and Captain Borland, a member of the War Memorial Committee, were charged with assembling former servicemen in the parish at Horns Cross to march to the new memorial, led by the Salvation Army Band. Here they were met by the clergy and choir, who had had their own mini-procession from the City Hospital Farm at Stone Lodge to the site. Three war widows had been invited, representing each of the three parish wards – West (Mrs Wright), East (Mrs Giles) and Bean (Mrs Brett) – to lay wreaths as part of the ceremony.

As the conclusion to the service, trumpeters - from the Grenadier Guards no less - performed the Last Post and Reveille.

Aftermath and legacy

But that is not quite the end of the story.

Bills still had to be settled; this stretched on for nearly two years, and the Rector had to personally stump up yet more cash to finally settle the contractors' account! Additional servicemen's names were added following representations – finally totalling 118 in all.

In May of 1922, it was reported that the Memorial was being 'desecrated by the children in the neighbourhood'. The Headmasters of the Brent County and Stone St Mary's Schools were asked to 'bring the matter before their pupils and appeal to them to respect the sacredness of the spot and the purpose for which the memorial was created'. Fortunately, this evidently did the trick, and some months later it was reported that 'a marked improvement in the behaviour of the children' had been noted!

Finally, in December 1923, the Memorial Committee resolved that its work was done, and formally requested that the Parish Council take over the Memorial as a fitting and lasting tribute to the memory of the gallant men who had given their lives for their Country. The total monies expended on all the project elements, including the Book of Remembrance, Contractors costs, promotional materials, architects fees, and the

service of dedication amounted to £851, 4 shillings and 5 pence.

It was by Henry Maybury himself, on the day of the Memorials' dedication, who made the suggestion to institute an annual service and, indeed, that came to pass. For many years Armistice Day, or Remembrance Sunday as it has become in more recent times, was marked by a community event on some scale, with London Road closed-off to traffic enabling hundreds of local residents to march from Horns Cross to the memorial. Perhaps inevitably with the passage of time, as membership of the Royal British Legion dwindled, services were held less frequently.

Sadly, the Memorial was seriously vandalised in the 1960's. And since the Parish took the decision to invest in a replacement located on the Recreation Ground some twenty years later, the structure has remained in ruinous condition. But new site landowners Land Logical have engaged specialist stonemasons to restore its main features, and a white cross soars over the landscape once more.



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