

Remembrance Day in England – 1918 – 2018

It being the Centenary of the end of the Great War there have been quite a few events and ways of marking the anniversary up and down the country. I say 'England' because I am English and will have noticed things in England but I know there have been similar events in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Friends and family also sent me photographs of things they spotted on their travels outside London.

I wrote earlier this week about [a statue called Victory Over Blindness](#) was commissioned by the veterans charity [Shrouds of the Somme](#) has been a very long pains-taking project. Artist Rob Heard injured his right arm so badly he could no longer follow his craft of woodcarving and while recovering he thought about the servicemen killed and injured in Afghanistan and then the First War. He started to make small figures in shrouds to represent the number of servicemen killed on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. These, 19,240, were laid out in Exeter and later Bristol in 2016 and caught the imagination of the public.

Among the many people who turned up was a man who talked to Rob about his great Uncle, one of those killed on that first day and represented by a Shroud. He explained to Rob that this man's body had never been recovered, that he had no known grave and that there were tens of thousands more like him. He told Rob that in essence this was the first time his Uncle had lain on British soil for one hundred years. This really got to Rob and he realised that there was a far greater number – those who were still missing.

So he decided to make figures to represent every one of the 72,396 men known to have been killed during the Battle of the Somme who have no known grave. Many are buried in Commonwealth

War Graves marked 'A Soldier of the Great War – Known to God'. Some are still under the battlefield, some didn't leave enough to be found to be given a funeral.

The names come partly from the Thiepval Memorial; volunteers are reading them out and the lists are on boards in a tent at the exit.



They are paid out in very neat exact rows in an area of the Olympic Park just outside the London Stadium. I believe men of the Royal Anglian Regiment played a part. It's like the rows of white crosses you see in France and Belgium (or the closing scene of the film *Oh What a Lovely War*) reaching off into infinity. But these are not crosses, they are figures. Little figures, shrouded, but each with their individual shape.

It makes you think. A town the size of Shrewsbury, with no grave.



Then other little figures represent the number of men killed on each day of the war. 1st June 1916, a town the size of Stowmarket (19,240) killed on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. The last figure – a town the size of Carlisle (75,600) died of injuries between Nov 1918 and 1921. Even on the 11th November 1918, when the guns fell silent at 11am over

800 men died. What if the Armistice was called at 10am, how many would have lived? How many more would have died if they left it until after lunch?

We say at the end of the exhortation 'We will remember them'. This week the children, who have been showing great interest and seemed to me to be taking their history very seriously, learned something to remember.

Photographs E Weatherwax, friends and family. England, November 2018.