

Review of Dr. Todd Gray's talk: 'Lest Devon Forgets Sacrifice and Creation of the Great War Memorials' Exmouth Pavilion 11th November 2021

We could clearly see that Dr Gray had as ever, been most thorough in his research, finding out from primary sources how communities in Devon had set about to remember those who had lost their lives during the First World War. Dr Gray had searched the archives to find out how Plymouth, Exeter and towns and villages across Devon had decided what type of memorials should be erected and where they should be placed.



Dr. Gray used many illustrations and well-chosen words to highlight the controversy behind some of the final choices. It was apparent that before the decisions had been made that sometimes there was a background of rivalry between neighbouring communities, even anger and great dispute. In Exeter two committees; Devon County Council and Exeter City Council



considered proposals concurrently but unfortunately didn't work together. Hence a War Cross as the county memorial on the green of Exeter Cathedral as well as the Exeter City War memorial in Northernhay gardens. This was in

sharp contrast to Exmouth where the decision came about following a vote by ballot with an interesting outcome; names were not to be listed. Indeed the names we see today were not added until early this century.

Travelling across the county to secure photos of the many different structures Dr. Gray showed us immense variety in type and indeed size of the memorials. The village halls in many communities came about because a decision had been made to build a 'Memorial Hall' to commemorate those who had died in war. In some places cottage hospitals were built, in others, homes for retired servicemen and women.

In the main statues tended to be of men, but there were some women, often of great size but sometimes so high up on a plinth that it is difficult to see the incredible detail and remarkable skill of the sculptor but they could be seen from a distance so definitely a landmark. Dr. Gray noted that many memorials across Devon, as in England, specifically mention saving the Empire as one of the causes of the war.

With recent news coverage about statues Dr. Gray mentioned the issue of changing opinions on the place and status of war memorials commemorating as they did in some places, Britain's role in the Empire. So raising the question as to whether there is a place for such memorials in the 21st century. Definitely food for thought.

At 11:00 we stood together for two minutes to remember all those who had died, many of whom were so young and we were inspired to find out more, to look and notice the placement, different designs and the history behind the many different types of memorial across the county. Certainly a fascinating, informative and most interesting talk. Thank you Dr. Gray for your dedication and commitment.

NB. <https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/> Take a look at this website and see if you can contribute. There are places that still need recording.

Review and photos of Dr. Gray and Exmouth's War Memorial

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