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HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

EDINBURGH CASTLE – SCOTTISH NATIONAL WAR MEMORIAL



We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties.

EDINBURGH CASTLE – SCOTTISH NATIONAL WAR MEMORIAL

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The Scottish National War Memorial was opened in 1927 by HRH the duke of Rothesay (the future Edward VIII) as the nation's tribute to all those who made the ultimate sacrifice in World War I (the Great War). Formed from the shell of the 1755 North Barracks, regarded as symbolic in itself, the Memorial comprises two principal elements – the Hall of the Regiments (now known as the Hall of Honour), in which the enormous contribution made by Scotland's twelve regiments and the other corps and services are recorded; and beyond it the Shrine, wherein lies the steel casket containing the complete Roll of Honour of the Scottish dead from the Great War.

The Scottish National War Memorial was designed by Robert S Lorimer, among the foremost architects of his day, and created by an outstanding team of some 200 artists, craftsmen and labourers.

Lorimer enriched the exterior of the building with variations on ancient Scottish architectural detail, and encrusted it with sculpture idealising the 'just war', culminating above the front door with a figure rising from a phoenix, symbolising the survival of the spirit.

The Scottish National War Memorial now also commemorates those who fell in World War II and in medal areas since 1945. It is administered by a board of Trustees.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

1128: David I's foundation charter for Holyrood Abbey includes a grant to the Augustinian canons of 'the church of the castle'.

1336: During the English occupation, 'the great chapel' is used as a granary.

1366: The 'chapel of St Mary' is completed, one of the first new structures to be built in the castle following David II's return to Scotland from long captivity in England. A 'chaplain in the chapel of St Mary' is also recorded, receiving an annuity from the customs of Edinburgh.

1539–40: James V has St Mary's Chapel converted into the Munition House.

1615–16: The Munition House is repaired in time for James VI's visit to the castle during his 'hamecoming' (1617).

1754: On completion of the Ordnance Storehouses, the contents of the Munition House are relocated there. The redundant building is then demolished.

1755: A new soldiers' barracks, the North Barracks, designed by Major William Skinner, is built on the site of the former St Mary's Chapel/Munition House. The

three-storey structure provides accommodation for 270 men, sleeping 18 to a room, five rooms per floor.

1850s: A plan to make the North Barracks into a large chapel is shelved, but not before the roof is taken off (1857).

1863: Robert Billings, architect, and Captain Belfield carry out substantial alterations, particularly to the front (south) elevation facing onto Crown Square, to make the building visually more acceptable in such a prestigious location.

1918: The Secretary for Scotland appoints a committee, chaired by the duke of Atholl, 'to consider and report upon the utilisation of Edinburgh Castle for the purposes of a Scottish National War Memorial'.

1919: The Committee recommends the construction of 'a dedicated building or shrine erected on the apex of the Castle Rock, practically on the spot on which stood the ancient church built by King David I'. Three elements are proposed: a national shrine, memorials to the different branches of the Scottish services, and some way of recording the names of those killed in the Great War. An appended report, produced by architect Robert S Lorimer, gives details of what is proposed: a cloister on the site of the barracks (for the proposed regimental memorials) and a porch extending north from the cloister to a tall octagonal shrine on the apex of the castle rock, 'the centre round which Scottish history, in all its rugged and varied picturesqueness, has revolved'.

1919–23: Protests at the height of the proposed shrine, combined with concerns over the costs of the scheme, result in major revisions to Lorimer's original vision, before approval is finally given.

1923: The Army vacates the North Barracks when it marches out to new accommodation at Redford Barracks, in the city's south-west suburbs. The ragbag of Army buildings immediately to the north and west of the North Barracks (wash house, cook house, stores and latrines) are demolished, but the North Barracks itself is retained.

1924: Construction work begins on the new National War Memorial. Lorimer uses the shell of the North Barracks to house the Hall of the Regiments (now the Hall of Honour), and adds a new entrance porch on its Crown Square side, as well as a new five-sided shrine on its north side, to hold the casket containing the complete Scottish Roll of Honour.

1927 (14 July): HRH The Duke of Rothesay (the future Edward VIII), with the elderly Field-Marshal Earl Haig in attendance, formally opens the new National War Memorial.

1928: Following the death of Field-Marshal Earl Haig (29 January), a memorial to him is added to the Hall of the Regiments.

1929: Sir Robert Lorimer dies (13 September). His name is subsequently engraved into a stone forming the porch.

Archaeological Overview

A small amount of archaeological excavation and standing building survey has been undertaken in and immediately around the Scottish National War Memorial.

During the production of a Condition Survey for the building in the 1990s, Historic Scotland discovered two fireplaces built in the top (third) floor of the 1755 North Barracks, above the concrete vault inserted by Lorimer.

During works to create a disabled ramp access to the front porch in the 2000s, evidence was forthcoming of one of the terminal projections created on the Crown Square elevation by Billings in 1863.

Architectural/Artistic Overview

The Scottish National War Memorial is largely a creation of 1924–27, although it did make use of an existing building, the North Barracks of 1755. Apart from minor additions to the interior detailing (notably the Earl Haig Memorial, added in 1928), the Memorial remains as built.

Foundation phase: Little can now be readily identified as pertaining to the North Barracks, designed in 1750 by William Skinner (the architect of mighty **Fort George**) and erected in 1755. The roofless shell of the barracks was retained to form the walls of the Hall of the Regiments in the new National War Memorial. Two 1755 fireplaces from the top floor of the barracks were recently discovered above Lorimer's concrete vault. The North Barracks lives on in Skinner's design drawings, produced for the Board of Ordnance.

Development phase 1: Robert Billings undertook alterations to the North Barracks in 1863 with the intention of improving its appearance, particularly its front (south) elevation fronting Crown Square. Billings demolished the central section of the south wall with its pedimented entrance and recessed it, forming terminal projections at either end, which provided lavatories for the barracks. He also added 'stones with characteristic multi-form ornaments' to the walls.

Development phase 2: Robert S Lorimer created the building as we now see it, retaining the shell of the North Barracks and adding a porch on the south side facing onto Crown Square, and a five-sided Shrine on the north side. Lorimer had a distinguished track record of designing and renewing buildings (including churches and country houses), as well as designing numerous war memorials, prior to working on the Scottish National War Memorial project. He brought with him a distinguished group of artists, craftsmen and labourers. Lorimer's biographer, Christopher Hussey, wrote:

Lorimer's whole career was a preparation, it seems in retrospect, for the fashioning of this famous shrine. For thirty years he had been learning how to handle materials so as to express with them something more elemental than words or mind can express ... He had fostered, and accustomed to his needs, a school of brilliant craftsmen who, like him, awaited the supreme demand for their united skill. The end of the war was this consummation, the memorial was the fruit.

Heading the distinguished list of craftsmen were: Douglas Strachan (stained glass), C d'O Pilkington Jackson (stone carving), Phyllis Bone, Alexander Carrick, Percy Portsmouth and George Salvesen (stone sculpture), Alice and Morris Meredith-Williams (bronzes), Thomas Hadden (metalwork), and W and A Clow (wood carving). The building contractor was Neil McLeod & Sons, Ltd.

The scope and purpose of the Memorial was: firstly, the provision of an official and historic record of Scotland's War Service; and secondly, the expression of Scotland's sorrow for her dead, her pride in their achievement, and her profound faith in the ultimate good of their sacrifice. The approach of Lorimer and his team was devoted to those two goals.

The exterior of the building is enriched with variations on ancient Scottish architectural detail, and encrusted with sculpture idealising the 'just war'. 'There is not a carving or figure on it which has not a meaning and significance of its own' (Hay). Most notable are the figures in niches: blindfold Justice, Mercy (an armour-clad warrior protecting a child), Peace, Courage, Freedom (casting away a chain), Truth and Charity. The exterior symbolism culminates within the arched porch itself, where, set in a deep recess, is depicted a mystic figure rising from the ashes of the Phoenix, the age-long emblem of Immortality, and symbolising the survival of the spirit.

The interior is formed of two parts: first the long Hall of Honour, 'ethereal and luminous, with the vaulted roof of a basilica' (Hay), and beyond it the Shrine where 'eyes and feet instinctively turn to the central feature – the heart and core of the whole Memorial – the Stone of Remembrance and the Casket' (Hay) and, suspended from the roof high above, the figure of St Michael, 'Captain of the Heavenly Host, folded in his own wings and silhouetted against the windows behind him'. Unlike the face of the mystic figure at the outer entrance, which never sees sunlight, St Michael's face is lit at noon through a tiny window set high up in the south wall of the Shrine.

The representational art of the interior takes in two quite separate impressions of the Great War. The one is a straightforward record, in stained glass and bronze, of war scenes – of people, animals and machines, reflections in tranquillity of a hideous conflict. The other impression, most obvious in the heightened imagery in the stained glass in the Shrine, is of the conflict seen as the battle of Armageddon, 'the war to end war'.

The final impression as one leaves the Memorial is one of hope, for over the doorway is a glorious representational figure of Réveillé, her head framed by the rising sun.

Social Overview

To be assessed.

Spiritual Overview

To be assessed.

Aesthetic Overview

To be assessed.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

To be assessed.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key Points

To be assessed.

ADDENDA

Associated Properties

Other significant Lorimer works: Falls of Clyde, Bonnington Power Station; Hill of Tarvit; Imperial War Graves (headstones); Lennoxlove House (restoration); St Andrew's Garrison Church, Aldershot; Thistle Chapel, St Giles' Cathedral

Other significant Strachan works: **Lady Chapel, Dunblane Cathedral**; New College Library, Edinburgh; Paisley Abbey; Palais de Paix, The Hague; **St Margaret's Chapel, Edinburgh Castle**; Thistle Chapel, St Giles' Cathedral (first collaboration with Lorimer); University Chapel, Glasgow

Other notable buildings designed by William Skinner: Chatham (magazines); **Dumbarton Castle** (powder magazine); **Fort George**; Purfleet (ammunition stores)

Keywords

barracks; regiment; World War I (Great War); shrine; casket; stained glass; sculpture; bronzes; Robert S Lorimer; Douglas Strachan; Pilkington Jackson; Phyllis Bone; Alexander Carrick; Percy Portsmouth; George Salvesen; Meredith-Williams; Thomas Hadden

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