

NORTH EAST WAR MEMORIALS PROJECT
part of
THE NATIONAL INVENTORY OF WAR MEMORIALS
Contact address: Mrs. Janet Brown, Bilsdale, Ulgham, Morpeth, NE61 3AR

RATIONALE BEHIND THE DESIGN
Gene Healey.

My recollection of events goes something like this:-

In 1983 I was a 6th form student at Hirst High School in Ashington studying Art as well as other subjects. My art teacher, Jackie Calder, informed me of a competition being organised by Wansbeck District Council. Apparently Ashington did not at that time have a suitable and fitting war memorial. The four commemorative plaques, formerly in the hospital, were currently on a wall in the car park of Ashington Cricket Club and this was thought to be unsuitable. The council needed a 'structure' to rehome the plaques.

At the time I was studying WW1 and this, alongside an already established interest and pride in what servicemen across all wars had sacrificed, I duly entered the competition.

I submitted a lot of documentation to explain how my design evolved. I also submitted all the original drawings from the original idea to how I got to the abstract design idea. Sometime later I was told I had won competition, and was invited to a presentation evening at the council offices Station Rd, Ashington on 17.6.1983 (my birthday!).

The prize for winning was a £20.00 book voucher. I was presented with the cheque by Seth ? the leader of Wansbeck Council at the time. I still have old news articles showing the presentation. I repeatedly requested that my design rationale be displayed nearby (like the library). I knew a lot of interested parties would deem it too radical a design because they did not know the way the idea had developed and what it truly reflected. This was never done and from day one my design received negative comments.

The last thing I wished to do was cause upset and agitation amongst the people whom it was supposed to honour. That was my worst moment. However, not being any the wiser, at 18 years old I had to put up with it, which I did - quietly.

I went to the first dedication ceremony and attended a few services thereafter but to be quite honest the comments were less than complimentary and I stopped going.

Sometime in 2001 I read an Evening Chronicle article saying that my memorial was to be replaced as the Ashington Branch of the Royal British Legion wanted it replacing and had come up with the funding. I did write to the author of the Chronicle at the time and I do believe the 'News Post Leader' ran a couple of articles on it. In my response I did state I would abide by the wishes of the Legion.

Hence my memorial was replaced and I never got to know where it went. So when I read in your files it may have gone to Woodhorn Museum I thought I would go and take a look if it is still there. The ironic thing is Woodhorn Colliery was also my first oil painting because I knew it was closing. Small world....

Anyway the rationale behind the 'tuning fork' design was this:-

Picture a very bright, cold November morning during the Somme conflict. Picture a burial party of three WW1 soldiers standing over the freshly dug grave of a fallen colleague. The soldiers are in battle dress and 'capes'. Place yourself directly in front of these soldiers and look straight back at them - which would also be towards the sun but at an oblique angle.

Picture the strong shadows that these figures would have on the ground as the sun shone behind them. Picture the strong lines of shadow that the sun would leave across the front of the three soldiers.

Now comes the tricky bit.... Can you picture in your mind removing the soldiers but leaving the areas of shadow they have left behind? You will be left with a strong shadow between their legs from their boots up to their capes. You will have strong diagonal shadows cast from the angles made by the cape. Then you will have strong shadows cast by their arms up to their shoulders. You will also have a 'crescent' style shape cast by the soldiers' heads onto their chest area,

If you are still with me you will now understand the rationale behind my design. I saw a memorial in Alnwick with three soldiers with bowed heads. I liked the monument but wanted to take the design further, which I think I did.

By placing my three tuning forks on a plinth, any person viewing it would see fantastic angles which change every

NORTH EAST WAR MEMORIALS PROJECT
part of
THE NATIONAL INVENTORY OF WAR MEMORIALS
Contact address: Mrs. Janet Brown, Bilsdale, Ulgham, Morpeth, NE61 3AR

time the viewer moved their position. The memorial would also be dependant on weather. If the sun was shining then it was fabulous. My memorial was ahead of its time and unfortunately did not get the support it needed.

All in all I think for an 18 year old I did a cracking job. I was really pleased to learn that the Imperial War Museum were positive about my design. That means a lot to me.

Regardless of what happens now I am still proud to have been the artist/designer of a War Memorial for our Servicemen and Women.

Yours sincerely,

Gene Healey