

A history of Gray's Inn

IN 20 OBJECTS

No 7: THE MEMORIAL TO THE LONDON WELSH FUSILIERS AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR SOLDIER SILHOUETTE

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As we approach the centenary of the end of the First World War, it is timely that we should remind ourselves that there is one object (in fact a memorial) at Gray's that binds the Inn closely both to the Great War and its Welsh connections. The memorial is to be found on the north wall, outside Chapel, in Gray's Inn Square. It honours the First and Second Battalions of the London Welsh Fusiliers (sometimes archaically referred to as the London Welch Fusiliers – the normal spelling will be retained here as far as possible).

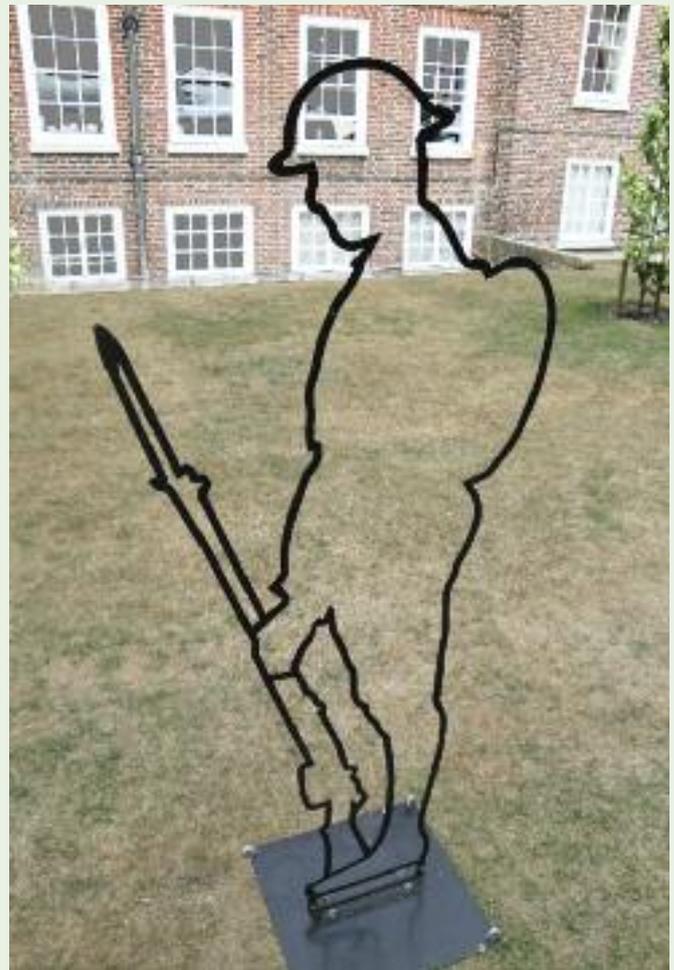
As is well known at the Inn, the two battalions were raised, trained and drilled in the gardens and squares of Gray's Inn in 1914 before each was posted elsewhere in Britain, or, in the case of the First Battalion, later to France to fight on the Somme and in Flanders. The headquarters of the London Welsh Fusiliers was located at No 6 Gray's Inn Place during the War. It is said the drilling of the recruits in the Walks during the early months of the war wore away the grass. The inscription on the memorial reads:

'In glorious memory of the gallant officers, N.C.O.s and men of the 1st and 2nd London Welsh Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers, who laid down their lives at the call from King and Country in the Great War 1914–1918.

Mewn anghof ni chant fod.

These battalions were recruited at Gray's Inn.'

The passage in Welsh on the memorial translates as 'Their name liveth for ever more'. At the head of the memorial is a roundel with the words 'Royal Fusiliers' and a fleur-de-lys. The plaque was originally placed on the wall close to the entrance to the old Common Room in Gray's Inn Square and unveiled on 30 June 1929. There was a distinguished gathering at the ceremony which included Mr Lloyd George, still very prominent at the time in British politics as Liberal Party Leader, Master Lord Merrivale, Master Lord



Atkin and Master Lt Col Judge Ivor Bowen KC, who had commanded the Second Battalion of the London Welsh and was Treasurer at the Inn in 1923.

The idea for raising a force of London Welsh had come from Mr Lloyd George, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, in a speech given by him on 19 September 1914 at the Queen's Hall, Langham Place, London. This call was immediately

taken up by a committee of Welshmen living in London, prominent amongst whom was Master Bowen. Over 1,400 men enlisted in the new battalions and all officers were made honorary members of the Inn so that they might lunch in Hall. Accommodation for an orderly room, armoury and store was provided by the Inn.

In 1915 the First Battalion left for France where it won much distinction on the Somme and in particular at the Battle of Pilckem in July 1917. The Second Battalion moved to Bangor in June 1915 and in August that year became a reserve battalion.

Throughout the war the work of organising and equipping the London Welsh Battalions was largely carried out at the Inn and until at least 1982 a wreath of daffodils was placed annually on St David's Day on the Gray's Inn Memorial, not only to commemorate the War dead of the Welsh nation, but also to reflect the strong Welsh influence at the Inn at this period.

In another First World War commemoration this year, all over the country ghostly silhouettes of 6ft Tommies, some wearing poppies, are appearing, including at Gray's Inn beside the Bacon statue in South Square, as part of a national campaign of art installation marking the centenary of the end of the War. The campaign, supported by the Inn, and called 'There But Not There', hopes to raise at least £15m for armed forces and mental health charities. The campaign is headed by the former Chief of the General Staff, Lord Dannatt, with the full backing of the novelist Sebastian Faulks, who wrote the First World War novel *Birdsong*.

The silhouettes were inspired by Martin Barraud's art

installation located at Penshurst Church, Kent, in 2016. The Penshurst work included 51 silhouettes, one for each name on the Penshurst War Memorial.

It is not the intention of the Under-Treasurer, Brigadier Harking, that the 6ft Tommy purchased by the Inn should stay permanently in one spot but will from time to time shift location to other parts of the Inn, thus mirroring the national campaign which will see the silhouettes touring the country to appear at public gatherings and events, or wherever the figures will have the greatest impact, which might mean solitary Tommies in some lonely locations.



By all accounts 'There But Not There' is having a marked influence on the public consciousness, which is unsurprising as we are fortunate to have so much recorded personal testimony, photographs, poetry, war art, fiction, newsreel, journalism and even plays (like *Journey's End* recently filmed very successfully) to convey to us the horrors of the War to end all Wars.

All this continues to have a strong sway over our responses, as the First World War was not a war conducted in a far away place about which we know nothing. Nor can the considerable emotional importance of war memorials for families, like the Memorial to the Welsh Fusiliers at Gray's, be overstated. This was brought home to me most vividly recently when I stopped

outside the Chapel and read this moving typed tribute posted behind the War Memorial plaque:

'Timothy Madden, First Battalion, London Welsh, enlisted on this site, killed in action at Mametz Wood, the Somme, 7 July 1916. Your family will not forget you.'