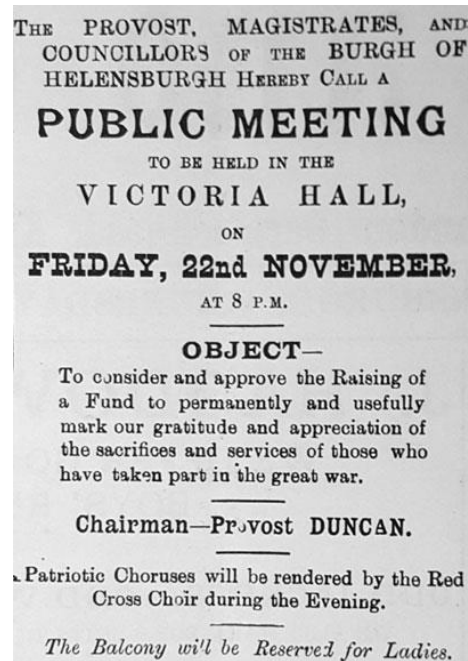


## Helensburgh War Memorial

Helensburgh's war memorial stands in the walled garden of Hermitage Park. Hermitage House and its garden grounds were purchased by Helensburgh Town Council in 1911 after the last resident, Miss Susannah Cramb, died. At the time, nobody could have envisaged that just three years later the house would be used as a Red Cross Auxiliary Hospital and its garden ground used for growing food and herbs to support the war effort. Even less so that in 1922 a memorial recording the names of 206 of the town who died in the Great War would be unveiled in the walled garden.



A public meeting was called just eleven days after the Armistice to discuss how to commemorate the town's war dead. A committee was formed 'first and foremost to do honour to the noble dead by the erection within the burgh of a fitting memorial in which the names will be inscribed. With the remainder of the fund, it is hoped to aid the living in a material and permanent way, the maimed and broken men who have no helpers and the widows and fatherless in their affliction'.

James Whitelaw Hamilton, a town councillor, artist and one of the Glasgow Boys, suggested the walled garden at Hermitage Park. The Burgh Council agreed to this location and a design competition was launched. Whitelaw Hamilton encouraged his brother-in-law, noted architect Alexander Nisbet Paterson, to enter and Paterson's design was chosen by the Committee.

Unfortunately, the Minute Books of the War Memorial Committee have been lost. However, we know that the main building work was undertaken by local firm Trail Brothers, the bronze work on the memorial was supplied by Charles Henshaw of Edinburgh and the ornamental iron railings and gates were made by Messrs Smith and Co., Glasgow. The memorial was paid for by public donations and cost £3000.

The memorial is located at the highest point of the park and its physical presence and symbolism is further enhanced by being enclosed by the high stone walls of the walled garden. In front of the monument is a rectangular reflecting pond adding to the contemplative and reverential nature of the memorial garden.

The memorial itself is 40 feet high and constructed of pale blonde sandstone with steps leading to an altar on its south side. The altar is inscribed 'Let those who come after see to it that their names are not forgotten'. On each face is a rose-pink granite plaque, the south side plaque is surrounded by a frame of laurel leaves and is carved with the names of the 206 who gave their lives in World War

One. The East and West plaques are carved with the names of the 100 who fell in World War Two. The North plaque is blank. Above the World War One plaque is carved 'These are they of this place who gave their lives in the Great War'.

The lower part of the memorial is a square plinth and the upper part of the monument is an arcaded rotunda of arched columns and urns with eternal flames and crucifix panels, some of them in the Glasgow style. The open rotunda, which is also carved with foliage including thistles, has a lead roof which is surmounted by a dome with a bronze wreath of laurel and oak leaves and at the very top is a gilded bronze cross sitting on a stone crown.

Helensburgh's war memorial is Grade A Listed confirming it as an outstanding piece of architecture of national significance and the contribution that the reflecting pond, the gates and railings and its setting make to the overall effect. During the restoration of the memorial in 2017, as part of the major Heritage Lottery funded regeneration of Hermitage Park project, the representative of War Memorials Trust, who made a generous contribution to its restoration, commented that it is 'perhaps the finest war memorial in the land'. Its Listed Building designation says, "it is in the same league as those designed by the Imperial War Graves Commission, if on a diminutive scale". Alexander Nisbet Paterson designed at least another twenty-three war memorials, but the one he designed for his home town is certainly the finest.

Everyone who is named on the memorial left grieving family and friends in the town. James Whitelaw Hamilton's son, Alexander Nisbet Paterson's nephew who was serving his architectural apprenticeship with him, Arthur Leslie Hamilton, is one of those names. Provost Major John Duncan, who had acted as Convener of the Committee, and officiated the opening ceremony, saw his own son's name, Harold F Duncan MC, carved into the granite, as the Prime Minister Andrew Bonnar Law saw two of his son's names, Charles and James.

The memorial was unveiled on Sunday 22 June 1922 by the Lord Lieutenant of Dumbartonshire, Sir Iain Colquhoun. Sir Iain had served with the Scots Guards in the war and been court martialled for allowing his men to 'fraternise' with the enemy for a short time on Christmas Day in 1915 so they could bury their dead. His sentence was remitted and he had a distinguished war service, was wounded, mentioned in despatches, awarded the DSO (1916) and Bar (1918). He was reputed to have kept a lion in his trenches.

With the official parties, soldiers in full marching kilts and shrapnel helmets, the pipe band, Scouts, Cubs, Guides, Brownies and Boys Brigade, The Clyde Training Ship Empress band and a huge crowd in place, Provost Major Duncan opened the ceremony on a bright sunny afternoon.

Sir Iain said “In asking me to unveil our war memorial, I consider you are doing me the highest honour. To the land, sea and air forces of the County, this burgh contributed no less than 1,100 men, or a total of 13% of the entire population. Of that number, more than 205 gave their lives in the discharge of their duty.”

Rev. W H Leathem of Helensburgh West (Old Parish) Church (and previously at Inversnaid, Renton and Garelochhead) dedicated the memorial. He had been a wartime chaplain to the British Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders and knew first-hand the horrors of war.

Buglers from the Empress Training Ship played the Last Post and the pipers played Flowers of the Forest.

The Helensburgh and Gareloch Times gave a full account of the ceremony and said that citizens gathered on Sunday 22 June, ‘a beautiful afternoon ... Four soldiers of the 9th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and two of the Clyde Royal Garrison Artillery took up their posts around the base of the monument. They wore full marching kit, with shrapnel helmets, and added a warlike ... touch”.

The Glasgow Herald also reported the event, “High up on the top ... gleams the cross ... the highest thing in the park as a mark of the grief of the community ... the unveiling of this memorial was surely the greatest ceremony that the people of Helensburgh have ever known ... among them are so many heroes whose heroism is unknown... The symbolism which runs throughout every detail of the monument ... is the cross of Sacrifice, the Crown of Reward, the laurel and the palm branch of the victor, and the oak leaves for endurance”. (Glasgow Herald, 26 June 1922).







By 2011, when the Friends were formed, the war memorial was in need of restoration and this was carried out in 2017, in the first year of the physical regeneration works in the park.



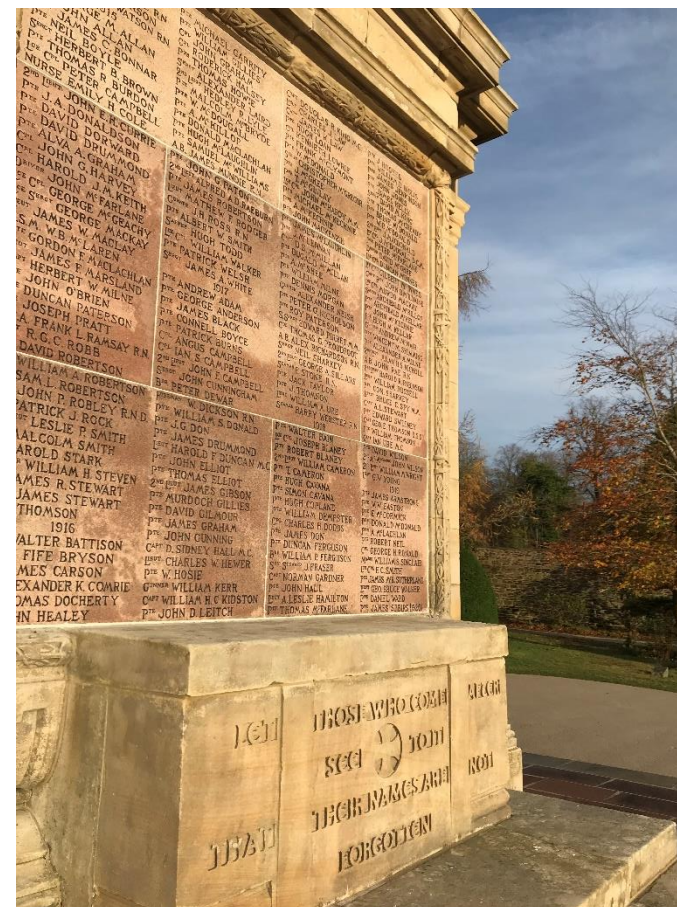




All of the memorial was steam cleaned, weathered lettering was recut, it was repointed and the stone base was repaired and relaid. The oak wreath on the dome was cleaned and conserved, the cross, which was hanging on by a thread, was restored and regilded and all of the names were repainted.

The reflecting pond was restored and the surrounding garden walls, which were on the Buildings at Risk register were repointed, including taking down and rebuilding the north wall. New paths and improved disabled access works were also carried out.

The railings and gates were restored and were re-dedicated in an ecumenical service in early November 2017, their reinstatement once again delineating the memorial garden as a reverential space of remembrance.



There is still work to be done to restore the formal planting and, after 100 years, the topiary is beyond rejuvenation and needs to be replaced. Further repointing of the west and south walls is required. The garden will be replanted as a white peace garden and new benches will also be installed.

The war memorial is open every day from 9am to 4pm.



