

Moving and Conserving Sir Edwin Lutyens' Manchester Cenotaph

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The Grade II listed war memorial in St Peter's Square, Manchester was built in 1924 to designs by Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944). The original memorial comprised a cenotaph, two flanking obelisks and a 'War Stone'. The cenotaph takes the form of a pylon supporting a catafalque on which lies the figure of an Unknown Soldier. The original setting of the memorial was compromised by the introduction of Metrolink tram infrastructure in the 1990s and other changes to the surrounding cityscape. The following account deals with the relocation of the monument ensemble and the design and construction of the new public space in which it sits.*

Relocating Manchester War Memorial was a complex and challenging undertaking, so why move it at all? The dignity and purpose of the memorial had become demeaned over time (Fig 1), as the setting had changed drastically from that of the original conception (Figs 2 and 3). This had also detrimentally affected the annual ceremonial events on Remembrance Sunday.

The construction of the Second City Crossing Metrolink tram route created an opportunity to improve and enhance the townscape and setting of the cenotaph. In 2012 Heritage Architecture Ltd was appointed by Manchester City Council to design a new setting for the cenotaph and to manage its repair, conservation and relocation.



Fig 1 The tram stop in St Peter's Square, incorporating part of the cenotaph plinth, and general view of the setting

In all its heritage and conservation work – whatever the project's size, complexity or type – the practice's approach is based on finding the answers to three underlying questions:

- 1) What do we have? (significance)
- 2) What is wrong with it? (problems and issues)
- 3) How shall we fix it? (solutions and plans of action, briefing).

WHAT DO WE HAVE?

Understanding the significance of what we are dealing with (the building, object or place) must form the basis for the work that follows.

The Manchester cenotaph was designed by Edwin Lutyens in 1924. Original drawings of it survive, together with some correspondence. The site ultimately chosen for the monument was St Peter's Square, but this was not the first choice. An unprecedented number of soldiers were killed during World War I, creating a powerful national desire to commemorate the fallen as individuals. In 1919 an exhibition held at the Victoria & Albert Museum and organised by the Royal Academy displayed designs for proposed memorials and suggested appropriate materials.¹

Throughout the UK war memorial committees were formed and set about raising funds for local memorials. As Skelton and Gliddon note, 'the success of the fundraising therefore governed the speed with which the memorial could be built; and this could, in turn, cause a change in the design of the memorial if insufficient money was raised'.² In 1922 the Manchester branch of the British Legion

initiated a project to erect a memorial in the city. Following a presentation to the council, it was agreed to appoint a committee of 12 members to consider the memorial and establish a fund. The committee consisted of ‘Aldermen and Councillors [and] representative men connected with different aspects of Manchester business, with the military forces and other sections of Manchester life’.³

A sub-committee reported back to the committee on 29 November 1922 that three sites had been considered: Albert Square, the Royal Infirmary Old Site (now Piccadilly Gardens) and St Peter’s Square. Albert Square was considered the most appropriate, being at the civic heart of the city in front of the Town Hall. However, it required removal of the Albert Memorial which pre-dated the Town Hall. In February 1923, it was reported that £10,061 had been raised by subscription in five months and that the King had approved the removal of the Albert Memorial from Albert Square.⁴ However, the cost of relocating the Albert Memorial would be in the region of £8,400, which would have used up most of the fund. The minutes from the committee’s meeting in May reported that arrangements had been made with the Bishop of Manchester for the memorial cross to be removed from St Peter’s Square and that the proposed war memorial would be erected in its place. Having decided on a site, a sub-committee was appointed to ‘obtain designs, whether by competition or otherwise, for the War Memorial’.⁵

The proposed war memorial had been referred to as the cenotaph from the beginning and there was really only one architect who was a recognised authority in terms of war memorial designs. Unsurprisingly then, Lutyens was appointed almost immediately, without competition.

St Peter’s Square became an open space after St Peter’s Church was demolished in 1907 (built in 1788, it had been a major landmark in the city). The site of the demolished church was marked by a memorial cross designed by Temple Moore. Despite securing approval to remove it, however, Lutyens wished to incorporate it in his layout (Fig 4):

*The old cross, I should like to retain, marking as it does the site of the old church, and consecrating the site, without having real religious significations attaching to the monument itself, which must commemorate the sacrifice made by men of every creed.*⁶



Fig 2 The site in 1923: the square is defined by close grain and relatively low buildings.

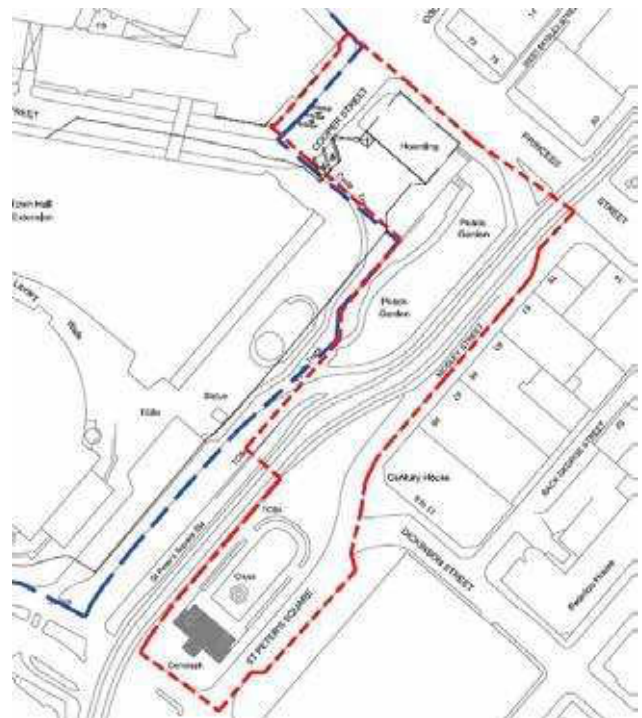


Fig 3 The site in 2012: the surrounding buildings and grain have altered drastically, affecting the scale of the setting.

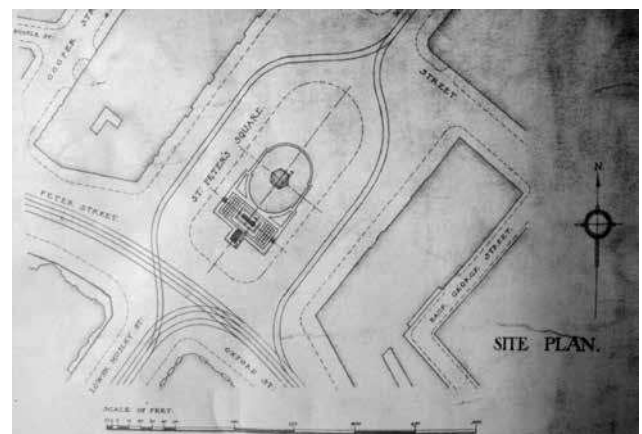
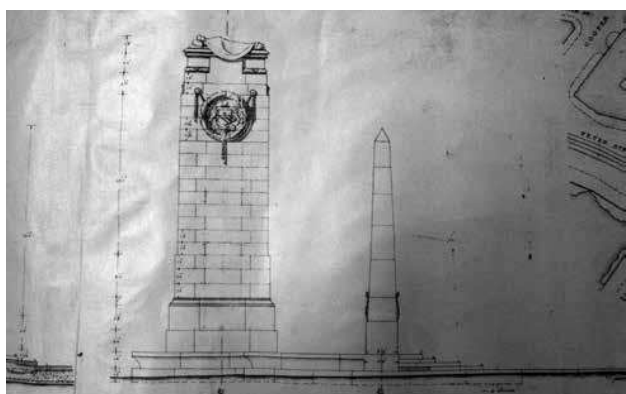


Fig 4 Lutyens’ plan: the setting incorporates St Peter’s Cross (denoted by the shaded hexagon at the centre of the image) and uses a combination of semi-circles and rectangles aligned on Mosley Street to the north east.



Figs 5 and 6 Lutyens' design drawings of the front and side elevations

In fact, the cross remains in its original location today and was rededicated by the Bishop of Manchester in February 2017.

Lutyens reused his cenotaph design from Whitehall (which was originally constructed of timber and intended to be temporary) but at a reduced scale and he provided a setting with important elements of composition which could not be achieved in Whitehall (Figs 5 and 6). This consisted of an altar-like 'War Stone' (replicating the Stone of Remembrance which Lutyens had designed for the Imperial War Graves Commission) and pylons, united by steps and pavements forming a podium to provide a distinct sense of place for ceremonial events. It also incorporated an area for laying crosses and was surrounded by a low curb wall.

I place the Pylon or Cenotaph on the foundations of the old Church, and link it by obelisks which, with the podium wall on which they stand, embrace the Great War Stone – the same as is being erected in our cemeteries in France, and indeed in all fighting areas, and with the same inscription. On the Cenotaph encircled in wreaths the Arms Coat of the City of Manchester, and on the Cover of the Cenotaph, I

propose the eigy of a dead ighting man, suiciently high up so that no features are recognisable, and so represent any mother's son. The podium will serve as a place on which wreaths may be deposited.⁷

At the time the cenotaph was built, St Peter's Square was enclosed by low-level dense residential and commercial buildings typically no more than four storeys high, apart from the Midland Hotel which closed the southern side of the square. To the north, there were blocks of more buildings and another street running south and parallel to Princess Street. The cenotaph was of a similar scale to its surroundings and yet it exerted a significant presence, forming a new focal point and landmark in an important urban space (Fig 7). There was sufficient space in the environs of the square for substantial crowds to attend the all-important memorial ceremonies (Fig 8).

During the ensuing years the setting of the memorial and the cross changed drastically with the erection of the Central Library in 1934 and the Town Hall Extension in 1938, works which entailed the demolition of the blocks of buildings to the north-west side of the square. Following World War II a scheme for a garden of remembrance was proposed around the cenotaph and cross. Designed by the city's architect Leonard Howitt, the garden scheme incorporated the cross and the war memorial and was dedicated in 1949. The scheme, however, had altered Lutyens' original design for the setting.

The enclosing smaller buildings were cleared away and the nature of the space was changed dramatically. Later the entire north side of the square was also removed, extending the space to the far side of Princess Street. On the east side of St Peter's Square extensive demolition took place during the post-war period, making way for the construction of an office block, Elizabeth House. This was in turn replaced by an even larger building around 2012. This has been joined by the equally monumental adjacent office block now known as No 1 St Peter's Square.

The original Metrolink route through the square to Mosley Street was aligned adjacent to the podium of the cenotaph, which was incorporated into a station platform. Thus, by the time the Second City Crossing was planned, the original context of the cenotaph had been entirely obliterated and the presence, majesty and dignity of the monument had been eroded, or at least severely compromised.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH IT?

The purpose of the Metrolink system was to connect various pre-existing suburban rail routes which radiated out from the city centre. The original extensive tram systems in UK towns were typically based on bus operations, without raised platforms and allowing boarding and alighting at grade (Manchester had an extensive system in the early 20th century and tram lines encircled the original memorial site). The Metrolink trams, however, are required to be constructed to standard railway criteria, including ground clearances and wheel sizes to allow access to all existing platforms on the outer city rail lines. Therefore, the city centre stations or stops needed raised platforms of appropriate height and size comparable with standard rail station platforms. Due to the exacting alignment requirements, it was necessary, therefore, for the original platforms constructed in St Peter's Square to incorporate and intrude upon part of the memorial site. Apart from severely compromising the fabric and setting, this arrangement created great difficulties during the all-important ceremonial events.

The ceremony on Remembrance Sunday required the regimental band to stand in the track bed and to be conducted from the platform, where the adjutant in charge of the ceremony, directed the corps of services (representatives of the various regiments and other services organisations). These had to be aligned beyond the extended garden area of the cenotaph and this added further restrictions. The public spectators and participants had to mass among the tramlines, where their ability to participate in the dignity of the event was greatly compromised. The ceremonial route for dignitaries and officials from the Town Hall had to cross the tramlines, which were a trip hazard. Another issue during ceremonial events was the PA system, which required trailing cables and a control marquee in the centre of the garden, obscuring the view for many participants.

A further consideration was the drastically altered context. Lutyens' original intent was to create a monumental ensemble, compatible with its contextual scale, which gave the cenotaph a far more prominent and dignified presence befitting its iconography. Over recent decades, the setting had been severely eroded through loss of the original



Fig 7 The newly completed cenotaph in 1925



Fig 8 Armistice Day, 1939: Lutyens' original layout of the grassed area around the cross (note the barriers to contain the site area)

urban grain (apart from one building at the Mosley Street corner). Now, however, the realignment and extension of the tram system provided an ideal opportunity to reassess the entire setting. Despite the good intentions of Howitt's Remembrance Garden scheme of 1949 (which included a lawn area surrounded by stone seating), the setting area was surrounded by trams and traffic. It was neither conducive to quiet contemplation, nor appropriate for the memorial ceremonies.

The success of the Metrolink system prompted the need for increased capacity crossing the city. Various options for routes were examined but rejected as either causing too much intervention to valuable or significant townscape, or because of lack of space. The necessity of accommodating both the new Metrolink line and better facilities for ceremonial events around the cenotaph meant that a completely new and more appropriate space was needed.

HOW SHALL WE FIX IT?

Our brief was to relocate the cenotaph to provide an appropriate setting and to carry out conservation repairs to the stonework. The first task was to ascertain whether it was possible to re-route the tramlines within the surroundings, so as to leave the monument in St Peter's Square. However, this was not possible and it would have exacerbated the existing problems of accommodating ceremonial events because they would have had to take place in an area traversed by the tram tracks.

A programme of public consultations was instigated, starting with a large round-table meeting, chaired by the then chief executive of Manchester Sir Howard Bernstein and attended by representatives ('stakeholders') from the various regiments and corps of services, religious leaders and amenity societies. At this meeting the problem was outlined and the steps to be taken in finding a solution were discussed. This consultation process was continued throughout the design and construction period.

The project team, led by Kirsten McKnight in Manchester and Debora Barros in London, then set about determining a suitable relocation site, taking account of a range of criteria. The team looked at 13 different locations. Each one was analysed to ascertain the benefits and disadvantages in terms of heritage and townscape impacts, operational requirements

for ceremonial events, access and other factors. The location inally chosen was the part of St Peter's Square bounded by the rear of the Town Hall and the north eastern façade of the neighbouring Town Hall Extension. This had the advantages of being within the environs of the original location, keeping close to the Town Hall and thus the civic centre of Manchester, allowing a greater area of public participation in the annual memorial ceremony, and reducing the distance of the removal.

The relocation works had to be dovetailed into the much larger scheme of redesigning St Peter's Square, itself a key part of Manchester City Council's wider programme to transform the civic centre. The St Peter's Square project was carried out by Latz + Partner (winners of an international design competition) working with lighting designers Speirs and Major. These works were already being advanced by the main contractor, Laing O'Rourke. Its specialist stone construction division was tasked with the delivery of the cenotaph project.

The generous and comprehensive design brief was to examine the present situation, to assess in detail the condition and construction of the cenotaph ensemble, to propose a method of removal and relocation, and to provide a new setting appropriate for ceremonial events within a new public space. Because Manchester City Council could not grant listed building consent to itself, an

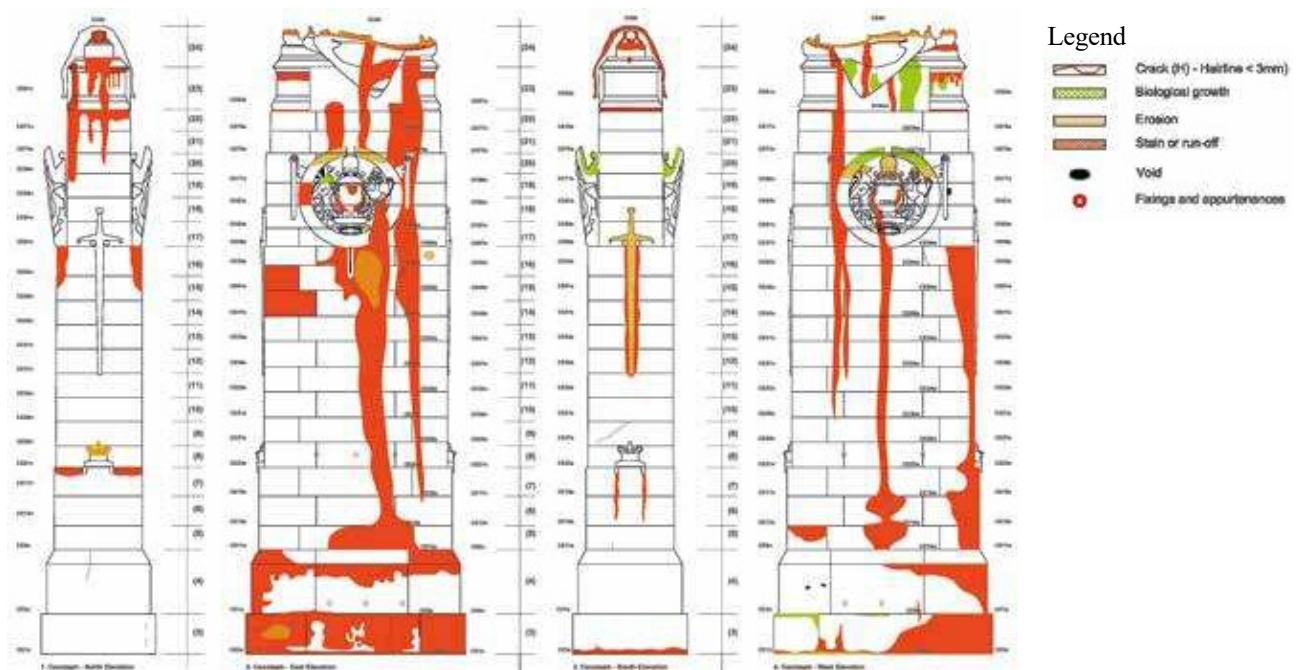


Fig 9 Sample condition survey sheet

application was made to Government Oice North West and English Heritage (as was) participated in the process throughout. Interestingly, although listed building consent was required for the dismantling of the monument, it was not required for the relocation per se because the eventual designated site was efectively the same address. Had it been possible to move the monument to its new location as a single unit, listed building consent would not have been required.

After measured surveys had been carried out, a condition survey (Fig 9) was undertaken to assess the fabric and to compare the indings with Lutyens' drawings. A non-invasive internal structural survey using radar and X-rays was also completed. The main concerns were the state of the fabric and how the monument was joined together. (For example, were there cramps, dowels, or joggles? What were the foundations, bearing in mind that the crypt of

the church still survived?) Some investigative and opening-up works were undertaken to establish the sub-ground conditions and to determine the causes of defects and decay. This was essential to assist in determining a methodology and designing parameters for the new site. Understanding the original construction was also an essential factor in determining how the monument would be moved.

Initially, the project team examined the possibility of moving the various elements of the monument ensemble in their entirety, transporting them on trollies to their new location. Even the main cenotaph was within the load capabilities of major specialist structural moving companies but the substantial sub-ground services that were present, including a main sewer, could not take the loads, so even the very short distance could not be traversed directly. Alternative routes for the transporter rigs were then explored, but the prospect of major road

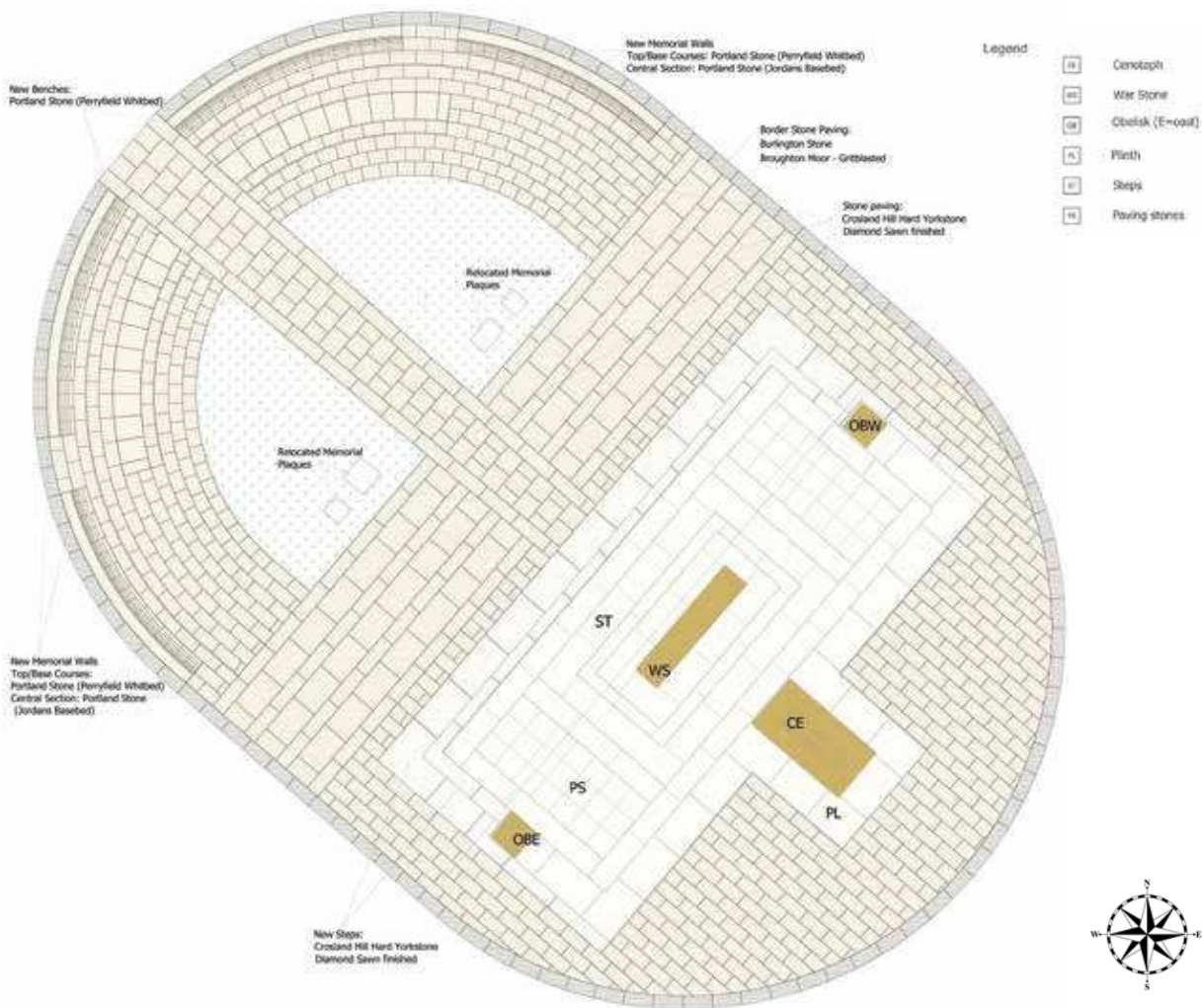


Fig 10 The layout of the new site

closures over several days and the impossibly tight passages adjacent to buildings ultimately ruled out this approach. The team then accepted that the monument ensemble would have to be dismantled stone-by-stone and rebuilt in its new position.

The design team, led by Debora Barros working under senior associate Francesca Cipolla, set to work on gaining a thorough understanding of the structure, analysing the various inspections and surveys. The design of the new setting (Fig 10) also had a number of criteria, some of which were set by the design team. For example, there needed to be a grass area to plant memorial crosses, it was necessary to allow for the ceremonial hierarchy and rituals of memorial and respect, and the site would need to be accessible to all. It was important to continue the inherently secular and universal ethos established by Lutyens and the original War Memorial Committee. It was necessary for there to be seating for quiet contemplation and for there to be a 'boundary' to define and protect the setting and the space while ensuring that it remained integrated into the fabric of the new St Peter's Square. It was also necessary to maintain the potential for further memorials to be added to the site in future to commemorate groups, services, battles or regiments (protocol forbids memorials to individuals).

Inspiration was drawn from the original Lutyens design, which relied upon a system of interconnecting circles and arcs; and where entasis occurs he subtly delineated this by radii measured in thousands of feet. We decided to enlarge the enclosure to better accommodate the space and to introduce curves redolent of the previous setting of the monument.

The materials for the resurfacing and redesign of St Peter's Square, Crossland Hill Hard York stone and Burlington Broughton Moor slate, had already been selected but I wanted much greater control over the layout and jointing and of the uniformity of material. The paving elements used to provide the new steps to level the new plinths use individual stones which are at the maximum size limits of the available quarry beds of York stone. The quarry selection and the control-set eliminated the more overt inclusions and colour variations. The jointing was also at the extreme limits of industry tolerances and required very detailed drawings and schedules. In essence, the specification called for 5mm +/-2 (no

tapered joints) and every stone joint was drawn and adjusted to ensure the correct breaks in bond. The setting-out and workmanship was so demanding that it was undertaken by the Laing O'Rourke specialist stonemasons rather than the paving/landscape subcontractor which had been laying the whole of St Peter's Square.

The stonework to the setting included a memorial wall and curved stone benches. These had to be in Portland stone to match the monument. The benches are constructed without backs so that users can face in either direction. The memorial wall is intended to be a place where further memorials and plaques can be mounted in the future and its inner face is battered so that plaques or carvings will be inclined towards the viewer's eye level. The material had to accord with that of the main monument and the wall had to be a monolithic, solid structure.

One of the contractor's first questions was to ask whether the construction could be 'value engineered' to comprise a concrete core, stone-clad. The answer was an emphatic 'no'; the wall had to have monolithic qualities and appearance. Basebed and Whitbed stone from two different quarries on Portland were used. Whitbed weathers better so it was chosen for the base and capping. The more finely grained Basebed is better for carving and was chosen for the wall body because future memorials may be incised into the wall itself rather than merely mounted upon it (another reason why the structure needed to be solid).

The two quarries have different textures in their various Portland stone beds and the Jordans Basebed from Albion Stone is a finer grain than that from Perryfield (Portland Stone Firms) but their Whitbed is coarser. Therefore, it had to be a combination of the two to find the desired match. The Jordans Basebed and Perryfield Whitbed stones are currently virtually indistinguishable, but they will weather differently over time. The benches are also in Whitbed. A disadvantage of monolithic structures is that the 'nature' of the stone takes time to weather-out and there is some early leached staining in evidence, but that will eventually disappear.

Again, control samples were selected to ensure quality and any stone not matching the specification was rejected.

The Laing O'Rourke team was led by Neville Hodson, Ben Cullen and Ben Stockdale; the



West Obelisk North West Obelisk South

Fig 11 The different extent of erosion due to orientation and weathering effect. The south garland was re-carved.

specialist stonework subcontractor was led by Mike Barbour. They formulated very detailed method statements and risk assessments for every aspect of the dismantling and reconstruction. The contractor also had its own conservation advisor, Richard Baister, and there was close liaison with the council's conservation officer Paul Mason and the English Heritage North West Team with Julian Holder. By the time of construction, Debora Barros had left the practice to take up a post in New York, and our London design team was led by Lita Peluso with on-site expertise in Manchester by Chloe Grainger, who joined us for this project.

The dismantling and re-erection also included repairs and serious consideration had to be given to the treatment of badly eroded stone (Fig 11). The orientation of the monument left it susceptible to prevailing winds from the south, which was exacerbated by the demolition of the north side of St Peter's Square and the subsequent reconfiguration of large buildings forming an unimpeded open space and creating a wind tunnel effect. Natural erosion or 'pleasing decay' is always preferable to wholesale replacement but there is a further dimension here. The embellishments and sculptural carvings are symbolic and have high emotional significance. In cases such as these, the aesthetic is arguably of greater significance than the fabric. It is the preservation of that symbolism which must be paramount. In this instance, the medium by which the message is being expressed is not the fabric but the design. It is therefore the design which needs to be preserved as opposed to the stone.

Lutyens' drawings were vague and merely indicative as he left the craftsmen to achieve what

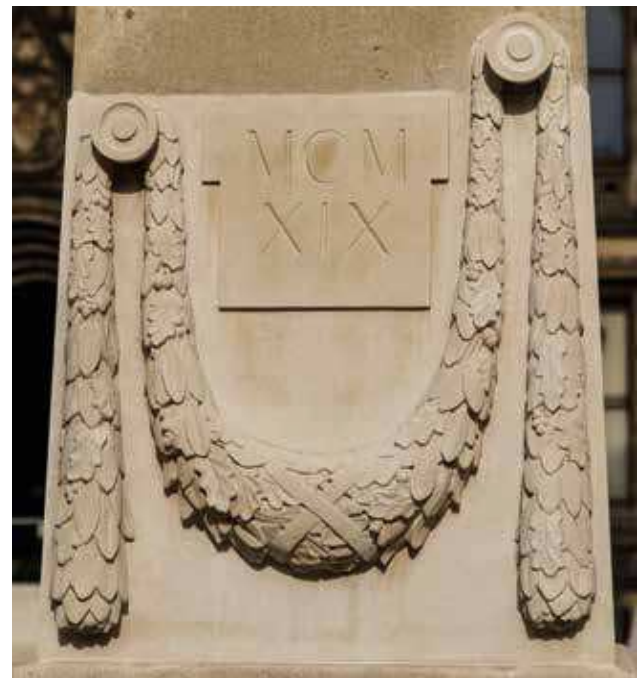


Fig 12 The re-carved south garland

he was trying to represent. Skilled as they were, they were not artist-sculptors but anonymous journeymen. Their status in the hierarchy of labour was no doubt higher than that of the bricklayers and banker masons, but it was Lutyens who was responsible for the original creative design and who had the prestige and recognition. This subject was much debated in the design office and with the project team and the final consensus was that stones and embellishments should be replaced only where the fabric had eroded to the point that its structural integrity, and therefore its meaning, had been adversely affected. This stance is controversial according to some conservation philosophies but this nevertheless became the criterion. Stones damaged by the tram platform were replaced where repairs were not possible or practical. In cases where elements of carved design had been lost due to erosion, replacement was limited to one lion's head, a garland peg and a garland on the pylons (Fig 12). The lettering on the War Stone was re-cut in exactly the same font (by Nick Roberson Stone Carving) because 'their name' cannot 'live for evermore' if the epitaph could no longer be seen. This epitomises the point that the sentiment and message are more important than the medium and must be all-enduring.

As regards the cenotaph and catafalque, these were examined carefully from the scaffold because



Fig 13 The catafalque cleaned and with initial nanolime treatment on its cradle ready for re-hoisting. Further treatment was carried out after it was lifted back into position.

the results from the X-ray and surveys relating to the fixings were inconclusive. The catafalque representing an Unknown Soldier is an immensely powerful piece, although unfortunately it cannot be seen or appreciated in all its detail from the ground. However, as with the minutiae of medieval cathedral carvings, the intended audience is not necessarily earth-bound. Despite having suffered some erosion, most of the detail remained and it was decided to preserve it as found, making minor 'dentistry' repairs, ensuring that all damaging deposits were removed and then treating it with nanolime (Fig 13).



Fig 14 Removal of the fragile wreaths and coats of arms as a single assembly held together with clamps

The two main wreaths and coats of arms on each side of the cenotaph were in a very delicate condition. They were apparently carved in situ over nine stones, working from the sketch designs on Lutyens' drawings. It was decided not to risk taking them down stone-by-stone, as with the rest of the monument. Consequently, each assembly was clamped together and then removed as a single block (Fig 14). The wreaths and coats of arms were then cleaned and given minimal repairs while on the ground, including being treated with nanolime by Hirst Conservation to consolidate particularly delicate components (Fig 15).

Each exercise was described in detailed method statements before any operation was put in place. This was particularly important for the removal of the catafalque and the War Stone. These were very delicately removed by using wedges and then lifted on slings and rollers (Fig 16). Removal of the catafalque required the manufacture of a special diamond saw to cut the bed joints (Figs 17). This required hand-working within the confines of a 4mm mortar bed-joint, where there could be no slippage or tolerance.

A difficult problem arose in respect of the new location: it was not flat. Very accurate levels



Fig 15 Nanolime and intricate repairs/stabilisation to the wreaths: replacement elements were carried out in lime/stone dust to maintain weather-proofing and aesthetic integrity with no re-carving or substantial piecing-in.



Fig 16 Lifting the catafalque from its bed on slings



Fig 17 Removing the catafalque: cutting through the mortar joints with a tungsten carbide grit edged saw

were taken as part of the topographical survey and revealed that past alterations to the ground following demolitions of the earlier urban grain and removal of a road had left an area with falls in two directions (Fig 18). This required some complicated groundworks and construction design by Arup's engineers to eliminate the falls as far as possible while still allowing for seamless connection to the surrounding public realm and tram tracks. The design of the new site had to be altered to subtly accommodate for this while allowing for wheelchair and other access throughout. Drainage is provided by slot drains. These are often cursed by infrastructure maintenance teams but they were the only option to avoid any overt intrusion on the design. There is also a section of dummy drain to keep the symmetry. A lighting scheme was formulated by Speirs and Major to delicately emphasise the monumentality and give it presence at night, supplementing the street lighting (Fig 19).

It utilises lush-mounted recessed fittings at ground level that wash light over the stonework to define the form and geometry of the monument ensemble without producing glare.

Following the re-erection, a consecration ceremony was held and the main centenary remembrance service on 11 November 2014 was held while the works to the square and the Metrolink were still in progress. For this reason, there could be no slippage to the programme. There have been no problems with subsequent ceremonial events and the arrangement of the new setting has been greatly appreciated by participants and observers alike. However, there have been other issues post-completion. Skateboards and BMX bikes have been problematic. Despite the heightened security, it has been necessary to add purpose-designed skateboard studs to the arrises of the new stone benches.

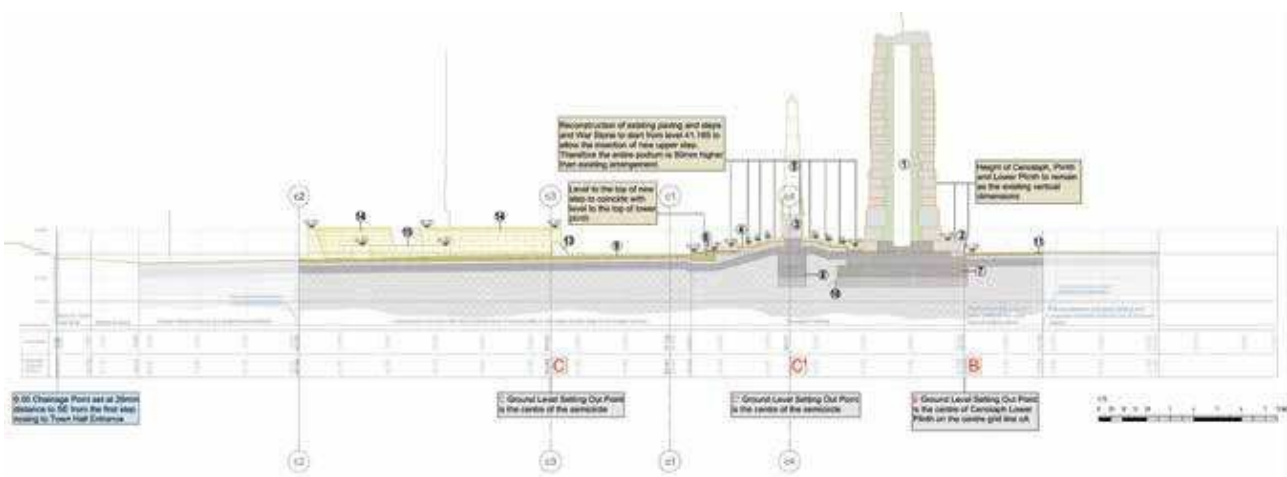


Fig 18 Long section through the new site showing falls



Fig 19 The lighting scheme

The central path has been adapted to allow the installation of a series of Victoria Cross memorial plaques as part of a national programme commemorating the VCs awarded during World War I. Unfortunately, an external decision to lay the plaques in the central path meant that stones and joints were cut through, undermining the extreme care that had been taken over jointing and geometry. This phase of work has now been completed by others and a dedication ceremony has taken place with the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge (Fig 20).

The relocation of the war memorial, despite the misgivings of a small minority, has created a new public space in Manchester. People sit out on the stone benches and on the grass, walk through the monument, and most importantly place their wreaths and crosses at the appropriate times. It now fits comfortably into the scale of its environs and context, there has been minimal 'restoration' of the fabric but the original dignity, symbolism and purpose have been preserved and enhanced.

A short film was made during the works and following their completion which can be viewed online.⁸

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Figs 7 and 8 are reproduced by courtesy of Manchester Libraries and Archives.

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ACArch RIBA FRSA IHBC *is principal of Heritage Architecture Ltd.*

NOTES

1. T Skelton and G Gliddon, *Lutyens and the Great War*, 2008, p49
2. Ibid
3. *War Memorial Committee Minute Book*, GMCRO, ref M144, 9 October 1922
4. Ibid, 6 February 1923
5. Ibid, 4 May 1923
6. Ibid, 17 August 1923
7. Ibid, 17 August 1923
8. www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_TIBQDcZBY



Fig 20 The completed work at the dedication ceremony for the World War I Victoria Cross memorial plaques