

Heritage Appraisal of the Cenotaph

The Cenotaph is located at Statue Square in Central. It is the earliest memorial constructed in Hong Kong to commemorate the dead of the First World War. *Historical Interest*

The Cenotaph at Statue Square, Central was unveiled on 25 May 1923 by the then Governor Sir Edward Stubbs. It is an exact replica of the Cenotaph in Whitehall, London, which was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and unveiled in 1920, two years after the end of the First World War. The Cenotaph in Whitehall was initially built of wood and plaster for the first anniversary of the Armistice in 1919. It was soon decided that a permanent and lasting memorial should be constructed in response to the devotion of the people to this national shrine. Thus, a cenotaph built with Portland stone was unveiled in 1920. The design of the Cenotaph in Whitehall was used in the construction of many other war memorials in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Bermuda.

The Cenotaph in Central was originally built to commemorate the dead of the First World War. Initially, it was simply inscribed with the words “The Glorious Dead” and the years of the First World War, i.e. “1914-1918”. The years “1939-1945” were subsequently added to honour victims of the Second World War. In 1980s, eight Chinese characters “英魂不朽 浩氣長存”, meaning “May their martyred souls be immortal, and their noble spirits endure”, were carved on one side of the Cenotaph corresponding to the inscription “The Glorious Dead” to make it clear that the Cenotaph commemorates all who fell, especially those who fell in the defence of Hong Kong.

There used to be three Remembrance Day ceremonies held on the Sunday nearest to 11 November each year (Remembrance Sunday) in the Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens, Statue Square and St John’s Cathedral. Since 1981, the three ceremonies were combined into one which was then held annually at the Cenotaph to commemorate all who died in the two World

Wars.

Since 1998, the official ceremonies have been held annually on Chung Yeung Festival at the Memorial Shrine of the City Hall, attended by the Chief Executive and senior officials. Meanwhile, the Hong Kong Ex-Servicemen's Association continue to hold commemorative activities on the Remembrance Sunday at the Cenotaph.

The Cenotaph possesses Classical Revival architectural style with symmetrical design. The memorial is built of dressed ashlar blocks situated in the centre of a stepped rectangular granite platform approached by cruciform paths and surrounded by neatly mown lawns and a dwarf granite wall, posts and railings. The memorial is designed with a stepped plinth and the upper part diminishes by offsets to cumulate at the top in a rectangular sarcophagus upon which rests a stone wreath. Ornamentation is confined to stone mouldings to the plinth and sarcophagus, as well as six attached bronze flagpoles. The apparent simplicity of the Cenotaph is based on exquisite refinement of classical principles. The sides of the Cenotaph are not parallel, and if projected upwards, it would meet at a point 1 000 feet above ground. The horizontal surfaces are sections of a sphere whose centre would be 900 feet underground. The Greek technique of entasis, in which curved surfaces create the illusion of linearity, was applied.

***Architectural
Merit***

The Cenotaph is one of the several war memorials in Hong Kong. Nonetheless, it is the only memorial formally constructed to commemorate the dead of the First World War. Other than the years "1939-1945" and the Chinese inscriptions, which were later additions, the memorial retains its original authentic appearance.

***Rarity, Built
Heritage Value &
Authenticity***

The social value of the Cenotaph is obviously as a memorial and reminder of those who gave their lives in the two World Wars. It is a well-known landmark in Central being next to the Old Supreme Court and the City Hall.

***Social Value &
Local Interest***

The Cenotaph is a component of an architectural and historical complex in the old City of Victoria, where a number of declared monuments such as the exterior of the Old Supreme Court, Flagstaff House, Former French Mission Building, Government House and St John's Cathedral are located. ***Group Value***