

Heritage Officer's Statement of Significance

Description of Historic Place

The Edmonton Cenotaph is a memorial structure dedicated to military personnel from Edmonton who fought and died in wars starting with the First World War. It is currently located in Downtown Edmonton in Sir Winston Churchill Square, prominently situated in front of City Hall. The Cenotaph is a granite structure, and is adorned with engravings commemorating lives that were lost in the First World War, Second World War, the Korean War and the War in Afghanistan.

Heritage Value

The English architect Edwin Lutyens is commonly credited as being responsible for the concept of cenotaph structures being used to commemorate lives lost in modern world wars. From its unveiling, the Cenotaph (the war memorial on Whitehall, London) proved highly influential on other war memorials in Britain and the broader Commonwealth. Lutyens' first cenotaph design was for the Southampton Cenotaph, which was unveiled on November 6, 1920, while the permanent monument on Whitehall was actually still under construction. Lutyens' design became highly influential, and memorials named "cenotaph", many based to some extent on Lutyens' original designs and some by Lutyens himself, were erected in towns and cities across Britain and in many other places, predominantly in the British Empire and Commonwealth. Art historian Alan Borg wrote that the Cenotaph was the "one memorial that proved to be more influential than any other". Borg observed that there was no agreed standard for war memorials, with wide variations in design, though Lutyens' Cenotaph and Sir Reginald Blomfield's Cross of Sacrifice came closest.

The Edmonton Cenotaph was an initiative of a citizens committee made up of representatives of 32 community groups which first started lobbying for land and fundraising in 1929 for a memorial to the approximately 3,000 Edmontonians who lost their lives in the First World War. Representatives of some 32 organizations formed a Citizens' Cenotaph Committee and Mr. A.E. Nightingale was chairman of the committee. Their purpose was to complete its construction without any further delay. Several Chapters of the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire, The Red Chevron Club, Ex-Servicemen's organizations, as well as Service Clubs and many dedicated and concerned citizens,

participated. Noted Edmonton architect William Blakey prepared the original plans for the Cenotaph. During the process, there was a falling out between Blakey and the Committee over a construction tender call which did not include Alberta masons.

The Cenotaph was originally erected at 102 Street and 100 Avenue during the brief reign of King Edward VIII, and unveiled on August 13, 1936, by Lord Tweedsmuir, then Governor General of Canada, 22 years after the outbreak of the First World War.

The Cenotaph is constructed of concrete, steel and British Columbia granite, with a total weight of more than 100 tons, and is 22 feet tall. The base is 18 feet square and 12 feet deep. This part of the structure is reinforced with streetcar rails. The platform itself rests on 12 concrete piles, eight feet deep. These are also reinforced with steel rails.

The Cenotaph is characterized by a number of engravings and design features, each of which have their own particular meaning. These include:

Tapering

Lutyens employed the tapering shape at the top of his cenotaphs partly for engineering purposes (less weight) and partly for aesthetic purposes. On the Edmonton Cenotaph, different molding techniques were used to separate the spaces on the structure, and a tapering at the top is clearly visible. The sides are not parallel, but are subtly curved using precise geometry so as to be barely visible to the naked eye (a technique referred to as “entasis”). If extended, the apparently vertical surfaces would meet 300 m above the ground, and the apparently horizontal surfaces are sections of a sphere whose centre would be 270 m below ground. The use of curvature and diminishing tiers is intended to draw the eye upwards in a spiralling direction, first to the inscription, then to the lions, to the torch, and finally to the garland at the top.

Groupings of Three

Three lions, three drapes of the garland, three curves of ribbon on each side of the hand holding the wreath - the number three holds a powerful representation on the Cenotaph. Three is the smallest number that is commonly felt needed to create a pattern, a combination of brevity and rhythm. It is a principle captured neatly in the Latin phrase *omne trium perfectum*: everything that comes in threes is perfect, or, every set of three is complete. Three is the first number to

which the meaning “all” was given. It is The Triad, being the number of the whole as it contains the beginning, a middle and an end. This threeness, or triad, with possible reference to the Holy Trinity, has always been considered sacred – like oneness, duality, and all numbers — by virtue of its very properties and particular attributes.

Laurel Wreaths

A laurel wreath is a round wreath made of connected branches and leaves of the bay laurel (*Laurus nobilis*), an aromatic broadleaf evergreen, or later from spineless butcher's broom (*Ruscus hypoglossum*) or cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*). It is a symbol of triumph and is worn as a chaplet around the head, or as a garland around the neck. The symbol of the laurel wreath traces back to Greek mythology. Apollo is represented wearing a laurel wreath on his head, and wreaths were awarded to victors in athletic competitions, including the ancient Olympics and in poetic meets. In ancient Rome, they were symbols of martial victory, crowning a successful commander during his triumph. Whereas ancient laurel wreaths are most often depicted as a horseshoe shape, modern versions are usually complete rings.

Carved laurel wreaths figure prominently on the Edmonton Cenotaph on the south, west and east elevations, again representing the number of three. There is also a display box on the west elevation which contains a laurel wreath from the Edmonton Salutes Committee.

Torch

“The torch; be yours to hold it high” Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae’s famous poem, *In Flanders Fields*, written in May 1915, beseeched us to never forget. It is a call to pass the stories and the memories of the sacrifices through future generations, to ensure they are never forgotten. A large torch, integrated with a cross, is a prominent feature of the south elevation of the Edmonton Cenotaph.

Sword

On military commemorative structures, the sword typically symbolizes power, protection, authority, strength, and courage. A large sword is a prominent feature of the north elevation of the Edmonton Cenotaph.

Garland

A garland is a decorative wreath of flowers, leaves, or other material. Garlands can be worn on the head or around the neck, hung on an inanimate object, or

laid in a place of cultural or religious importance. The use of garlands, wreaths and festoons dates back to ancient Greek times and it was adopted into the Christian religion as a symbol of the victory of the redemption of humankind. A continuous garland extends along the top of the Edmonton Cenotaph, on all four elevations.

Lions

Three golden lions are represented on the traditional coat of arms for the English monarch going back to Richard I (the "Lionheart"). If the English king or queen claimed rule over other lands they would impale their arms with a symbol of the other territory, such as the fleurs-de-lis when he or she claimed to be king or queen of France, or the single red lion of Scotland. But the three golden lions represented the English monarch, and later, England itself.

Lions first become associated with Plantagenet heraldry with Geoffrey Duke of Anjou. It is believed that King Henry II, Geoffrey's son, used lions in his coat of arms. But it was Richard I who used three lions in his coat of arms and seals, which became the familiar coat of arms for English monarchs. Medieval heraldry was highly symbolic. The lion was very popular in heraldry because it represented bravery and courage.

Reclining lions are most commonly used on tombs and other memorials rather than standing, sitting or rearing depictions. In the case of the Edmonton Cenotaph, three lions are represented on the south elevation of the structure, prominently situated above the engraving "REMEMBERED", and below the engraved coffin.

Inscriptions

There are a number of inscriptions engraved on the Cenotaph, commemorating major conflicts that Edmonton military personnel gave their sacrifice towards. These include:

- On the south elevation, the word "*REMEMBERED*" at the base of the structure.
- On the west elevation: the years "*1914 - 1918*", commemorating the First World War; the years "*1939 - 1945*", commemorating the Second World War; and the words "*Korea 1950 - 1953*", commemorating the Korean War.
- On the east elevation: the words "*OUR GLORIOUS DEAD*"; and the words "*AFGHANISTAN 2001 - 2014*".

The Edmonton Cenotaph quickly became the location of annual Remembrance Day ceremonies, which usually included a parade of veterans from the Provincial Legislature to City Hall, with a stop at Veterans Park and the Cenotaph itself. The Cenotaph received new memorial plaques and was rededicated in 1946 after the Second World War, and again in 1956 after the Korean War, commemorating Edmontonians that gave their lives in those conflicts. Eventually, the large crowds which gathered for ceremonies in the small park in the original location, and the relative isolation of the memorial, sparked an initial call to move the Cenotaph to Churchill Square in the late 1960s. The move was approved by Council in 1978, and it was rededicated again when the move was complete. The newest inscription, completed in 2021, commemorates Edmontonians who gave their lives in the War in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014.

Character-Defining Elements

The character-defining elements of the 1936 Edmonton Cenotaph, include:

- Location in Sir Winston Churchill Square in Downtown Edmonton
- Form, scale and massing of the 22 foot high structure
- Construction materials, including British Columbia granite, with steel reinforcements
- Classic cenotaph design, drawing from precedents set by Edwin Lutyens, including a tapering at the top of the structure and the use of groupings of three for commemorative elements
- Engraved features, including: laurel wreaths (on the south, west and east elevations); a torch/cross (on the south elevation); a garland (on all four elevations of the structure, along the top); lions (on the south elevation); a sword (on the north elevation); and a coffin (on the south elevation)
- Inscriptions, including: the word *"REMEMBERED"* (on the south elevation); the years *"1914 - 1918"*, the years *"1939 - 1945"*, and the words *"Korea 1950 - 1953"* (on the west elevation); and the words *"OUR GLORIOUS DEAD"*; and the words *"AFGHANISTAN 2001 - 2014"* (on the east elevation)
- Display box on west elevation containing laurel wreath from the Edmonton Salutes Committee
- Six bronze decorative anchor mounts on north elevation
- Granite tiered base of the structure