

Armed Forces Memorial

The memorial containing the 16,000 names of members of the British Armed Forces who have died on operations since the end of the Second World War was dedicated in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh by the Archbishop of Canterbury on 17th February 2007. It is a most impressive structure dominating the National Arboretum at Alrewas in Staffordshire where there are a large number of memorials to Service personnel from both World Wars installed on the site of a former gravel pit which has been grassed over, trees planted and paths laid.

The names are inscribed on both sides of high semi circular walls enclosing a paved area containing an altar and two striking bronze statues. Although the symbolism of each group is in the eye of the beholder they depict: In the North sculpture two groups of civilians who could be grieving parents, or wife or child or even a sister and sibling. The four stretcher bearers represent the three Services; one in a square rigged shirt for the Royal Navy, two are soldiers and the other an airman in a flying suit. They are holding aloft their former comrade in arms in the same way the ancient Greeks held aloft their fallen comrades on a shield.



The other sculpture shows a man lying on a stretcher. The man holding the fallen warrior has Asiatic features representing a Gurkha. The nurse leaning over the body represents the Women's Services whilst the man on the right holding a chisel is the sculptor and the man on the left points to a cleft between the walls on which is inscribed:

“Through this space a shaft of sunlight falls at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month to illuminate the wreath on the altar “

Altogether a most poignant and moving tribute to the many who have died in Kipling's savage wars of peace.

The National Arboretum may be reached by road from the A38 North of Birmingham or by train from Lichfield, Tamworth or Burton.

Peter Thomas