The ‘Lost’ of the First World War

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission’s archives contain plans for the memorials designed to commemorate those who had no known grave.

The memorials had to:

- Create places where each person could be marked individually by name.
- Create places to record what might be thousands or several thousands of names.
- Create an atmosphere of respect and dignity.

Each was designed by leading architects and sculptors, created mainly by hand, and then carefully maintained by the CWGC, who refurbish as needed.

The memorials continue to change. As records are updated, because remains are still being found and identified each year; the panels are also updated, because the individuals are now be buried in a marked grave.

Included here are some examples of the memorials which were constructed, as inspiration for your students. If you want to explore further, the CWGC website, cwgc.org, contains much more information and many more pictures, explaining the design and history of memorials in the UK and abroad.
Plan for Neuve Chapelle Indian Memorial, France. ©CWGC

Images showing the construction of the Thiepval memorial, which bears the names of more than 72,000 people. ©CWGC
Thiepval Memorial being unveiled in 1932. ©CWGC
Plans for the Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres, Belgium. ©CWGC

Nieuwport Memorial, Belgium. ©CWGC
The unveiling of the Hollybrook Memorial, Southampton, UK. Fabian Ware is the second man from the front of the picture. He was responsible for setting up and leading the War Graves Commission. ©CWGC

Among those named on the memorial is Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War and probably the most famous soldier in the British Empire when he died at sea in 1916. Alongside him are the names of hundreds of members of the South African Native Labour Corps, recruited from many tribes in southern Africa to work behind the lines. They died when the troopship SS Mendi sank in the English Channel in February 1917. In life, they were treated very differently. In death they were equal.
Design for the Naval Memorial in Chatham, which commemorates more than 8,500 members of the Royal Navy who died in the First World War, and 10,000 who died in the Second World War. ©CWGC