

South Swindon Parish Council

WW1 Centenary Memorial

PROPOSAL



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WW1 Centenary Memorial

Mike Pringle

August 2018

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1. Introduction & background

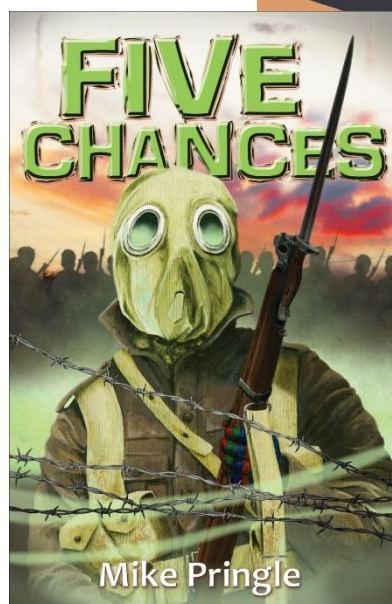
This sculpture embodies two of my passions: art and history. It goes even further, in that one of my major artistic passions is public art, and one of my historical passions is the Great War! So much so, in fact, that in 2012 myself and several others (Graham Carter, Mark Sutton, Frances Bevan, and Paul Gregory) set up *Swindon in the Great War* to promote the war's centenary. We wanted to ensure that Swindon's considerable part in the conflict, both on the battlefield and back home, did not go uncommemorated. With events across the borough and support from all political flavours, we drew together different groups, trying to reach as many people as possible. We created, among other things, a major exhibition at Swindon Museum & Art Gallery, for which I designed a number of display panels profiling all aspects of the townspeople's contributions. From that same perspective, it is wonderful that South Swindon Parish Council has chosen such a permanent way to mark the centenary of the war's end.

In 2014 the History Press published my factual book on the subject, *Swindon, Remembering 1914-18*, as part of their nationwide series on the Great War. Amazingly, the book actually reached the top ten sellers list in W H Smith in Swindon, competing with the endless list of celebrity autobiographies and TV cookery books!

In the same year I wrote a second book, *The Five Chances*, inspired by a Wilfred Owen poem (The Chances), and telling the fictional tale of five lads going from Swindon to the trenches of France. It was my way to try to portray some of the personal traumas of war that the non-fiction book did not quite reach...

For me to have had the chance to come up with a design for a WW1 memorial for Swindon, whether it is chosen or not, has been a genuine pleasure, and I am very grateful for it.

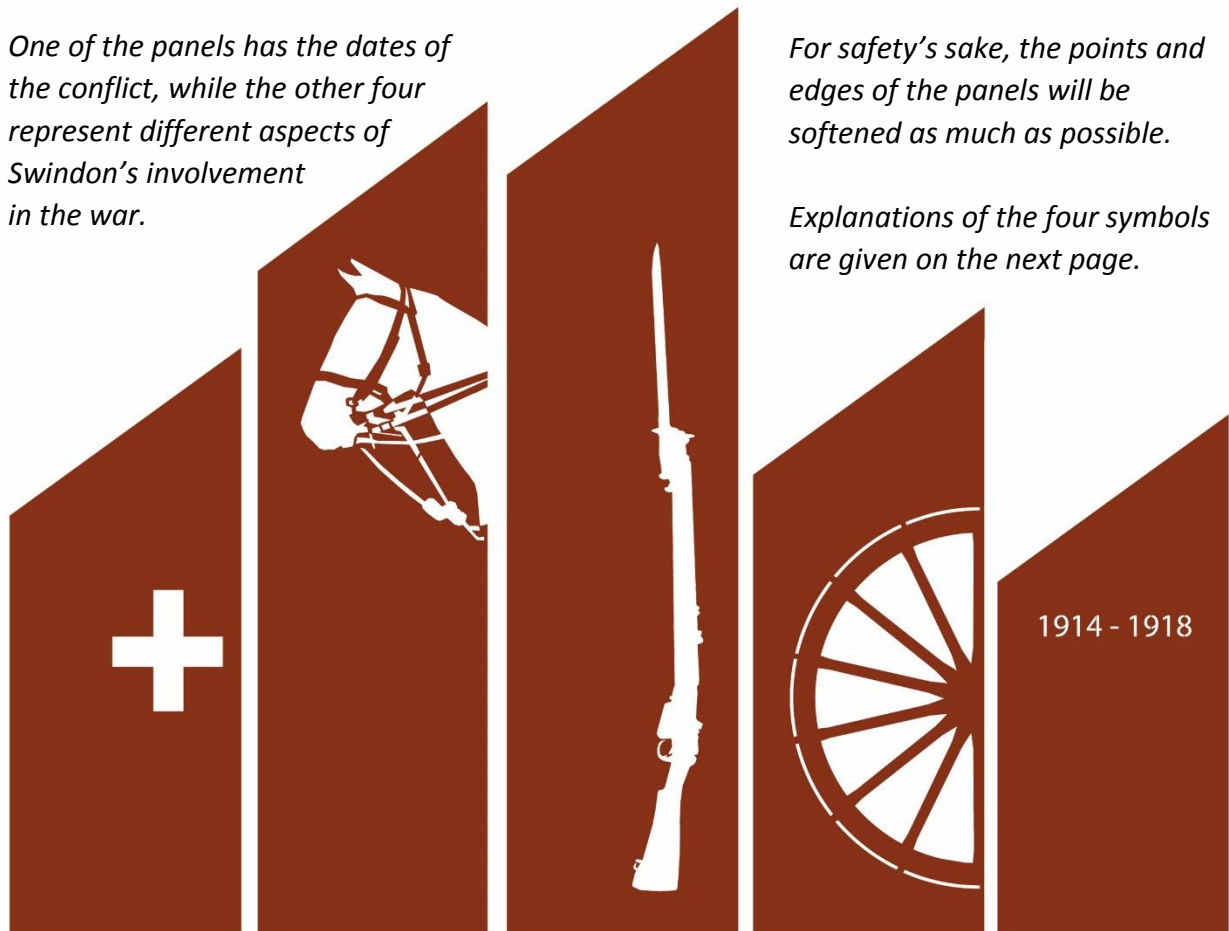
Mike



2.1 The sculpture and setting

My proposal for a sculpture is to create a 'rusted' steel structure, with five upright panels.

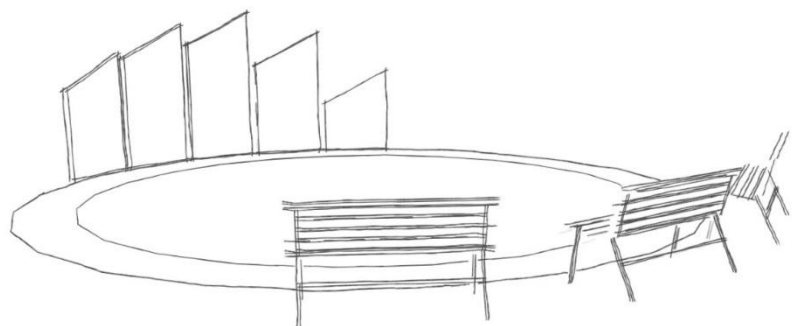
One of the panels has the dates of the conflict, while the other four represent different aspects of Swindon's involvement in the war.



For safety's sake, the points and edges of the panels will be softened as much as possible.

Explanations of the four symbols are given on the next page.

The five panels will be set in a gentle curve with, in accordance with the brief's suggestion, benches set in an opposite curve, all around a circular space lined with a gravel path. It is also proposed to install an information sign about the memorial.



2.2 Manufacture and installation

For strength and permanence, the five panels will be laser-cut from 8mm thick steel. Each panel will have its own 1.8m long concrete footing below the surface with iron rebar (reinforcing bar) for additional strength. A welded steel 'filler' will join each panel to its neighbour, also under the surface.

2.3 What it all means...



The **cross** symbol represents the red cross of the Swindon Royal Army Medical Corps, which in 1914 was run by the Surgeon General of the GWR works – one of the pioneers who led Swindon's medical 'model', which was to later be heralded as a template for the NHS. The cross also represents the women who became medics during the war, and those back home who sent life-saving food parcels to soldiers at the Front and to prisoners-of-war.



The **horse** has always been an important part of rural Swindon life, being at the core of the area's agricultural world. During WW1 many Swindon men, who were natural riders, served in D Company of the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry, the local cavalry reserve unit. Horses were also imperative to Swindon's Royal Field Artillery unit, pulling heavy guns and armaments into war. This horse is dressed in the tackle of an officer of the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry from WW1.

The regiment's spirit is still active in the TA Centre, on the corner of the GWR park, as part of the make-up of today's Royal Wessex Yeomanry.



The Short Magazine Lee Enfield **rifle**, with its bayonet, was the standard issue to millions of men during WW1. In this sculpture it represents the men of the infantry regiments which Swindon men joined. In particular, the rifle represents the Wiltshire Regiment which was of course the local regiment. After a number of changes over the years, it is now part of the historical fabric of 7th Battalion The Rifles which, like the yeomanry, is based at Swindon's TA Centre.

*The **panels** themselves represent the rooftops of the GWR works, which local author Alfred Williams (who served during the war) described as being like the teeth of a giant saw blade. Simultaneously, they represent the barbed defences commonly found in front of trenches on the Western Front.*



This **wheel** is based on a carriage made in the GWR works during the war. It represents the incredible efforts of the works to not only keep on producing locomotives, but also make armaments, guns, other vehicles, and even ambulance carriages. It is a symbol for Swindon's engineering heritage, standing for the many men who served in the Wiltshire (Fortress) Royal Engineers, or those who served as engineers in the Royal Navy, and for the skilled and determined women who took over countless jobs in the works as the number of men was depleted.

2.4 Alternative idea

In my thinking about the memorial I looked at many other WW1 sculptures and initially followed what seems to have become almost a tradition for such monuments, that is, to depict a soldier. The idea is given here, but the reason I moved on to the five panel idea is because I feel that such an approach does not really do full justice, as a memorial, to the range of incredible efforts made by Swindon people during the conflict, particularly in regard to the roles of women, and to Swindon's rich engineering heritage.

The idea behind this memorial was to use the same laser-cut steel treatment.

The soldier is based on a private of the Wiltshire Regiment, from a photograph taken at Chiseldon barracks early in the war. The idea of the girl, holding poppies, is to represent those left behind. Her outfit was inspired by a photograph of one of the town's annual fetes held in the GWR park. A mass was held in the park after the armistice of 2018 had been declared and, as in this photograph, the park would have been filled with Swindon folk in their 'Sunday Best'.



2.5 Budget and timetable

The highest cost for this memorial will probably go to the installation itself. It is no mean feat to create something that will last for a long time, be resistant to all weathers, survive general use and possibly be subject to unwanted attentions! Considerations also depend on how far the budget is expected to go; for example, are the costs of benches, paths etc. to form part of the overall £10,000, or would that be from a different budget? Also, does the Parish Council have access to other resources – gardeners, digging equipment and so forth? Or perhaps, since the memorial is so clearly linked to the regiments based at the TA Centre, might it be possible to involve people-power from there? If so, costs may be significantly reduced.

In terms of timetable, the proposal says the memorial needs to be installed in September. Is this with a view to having benches etc established for an event in November?

Whatever the answers to these questions, I believe a permanent, and appropriate, memorial can be created easily within the budget proposed, and before the end of September.

3. Previous sculptures

A number of my sculptures/designs have already been adopted in Swindon, all connected to the town's history, with one specifically honouring the sacrifice of the fallen in the Great War.

They include:

a. Made in Swindon

My latest work is based on the amazing, and largely unknown, aviation history of the town, and is part of the overall development of the Orbital shopping centre in North Swindon. The work centres around a five metre high, stainless steel sculpture depicting a Spitfire wing frame plus two figures: a male fighter pilot, and a female factory worker, many of whom were responsible for building (and flying) planes in WW2.



The project also includes: ten graphic panels about the history of aviation in Swindon; a graphic timeline of activity; a propeller-shaped set of benches; decorated paving slabs; plus poems and artwork by local



children.

The major piece of this work (above) is nearing completion as this document is being prepared. Some of the artwork has already been installed (below).





b. A Mini Adventure

Established in 2012, this work covering the back of Alexander House was designed to celebrate Swindon's history of car making as well as the town's famous Magic Roundabout.



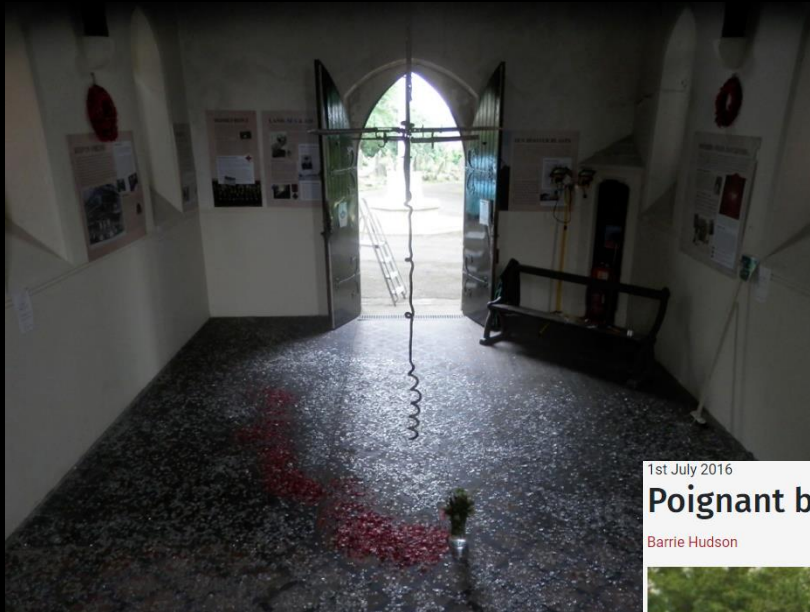
c. Amaryllis

Laser-cut in powder coated steel, this sculpture is loosely based on a Richard Jefferies book cover, and was installed, with a bit of help from local children, in a 'rustic' wooden frame among the trees at the Richard Jefferies Museum.



d. Somme

This sculpture was created and displayed in 2016 to commemorate the centenary of the first battle of the Somme. It comprised a cross created from a number of military bayonets and a barbed-wire post that had all been recovered from the battlefields of France/Belgium. The bayonets are from the armies of different countries which fought in the conflict, including both England and Germany.



The sculpture was installed in Radnor Street chapel, hanging above 40,000 ring pulls to represent those 'throwaway' men who died on the first day of the battle.

It now hangs permanently in the chapel.



1st July 2016

Poignant bayonet tribute

Barrie Hudson



Mike Pringle with the bayonet crucifix

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TODAY in the small chapel at Radnor Street Cemetery, the Swindon in the Great War group is placing a crucifix made from rusted bayonets.

The work commemorates perhaps the most notorious battle of the war.

It is the 100th anniversary of the start of Battle of the Somme, an attempt to drive back the entrenched German forces from positions around the Somme River in Northern France.

By the time the offensive was called off on November 18, the Allies had advanced about seven miles.

There were more than a million casualties on all sides, including nearly 500,000 British troops.

Of these, nearly 50,000 fell on the first day alone, many of them torn to pieces by machine gun fire as they advanced on German positions.

The memorial in the Radnor Street Cemetery chapel was the idea of Mike Pringle from Swindon in the Great War. He gathered battlefield relics, which were welded together by local firm Stainless Supplies.

