

Pathways to the Past

The newsletter of Connelly Contours Limited

Number 3: February – March 2025



On your Marks...

As we begin the slow, but sure, move towards spring with the days just starting to get lighter and the snowdrops inching through, I find myself thinking of the glory of getting those extra hours of walking and exploring places both well-known or new.

Inside you'll find some reflections on the wonders of London's squares. A pronounced feature of London's geography, the squares are rich with history containing stories of famous inhabitants, wondrous architecture and beautiful horticulture.

The battlefield article focuses on cemeteries where you can see two grave-markers commemorating just one burial. These sites provide another fascinating insight into the pragmatic and sympathetic approach the Imperial War Graves Commission took to dealing with individual circumstances.

And with spring round the corner, the obvious choice for a date was 21 March 1918, the first day of the great German spring offensive; minute details of that event can be detected in one tiny cemetery.

So shake off the chill of January by a brisk walk with me around London or the battlefields.

Mark



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Western Front



Private grief; public commemoration



By the war's end the Western Front was dotted with cemeteries. Created by the armies of all combatant nations and containing graves of men from across the globe, the question was what to do next. Were the cemeteries to be made permanent or was there to be mass exhumation and repatriation. As far as the British Empire was concerned, much of the decision-making was well in hand through the planning of the Imperial War Graves Commission. Formed in 1917, the IWGC had been considering the issue from the moment of its inception and had decided that cemeteries established by British Empire troops should be made permanent and contain standard features, which included a uniform headstone.

As might be expected, many of the bereaved had hoped to mark their loved one's graves with a memorial of their own choice, but this option had been shut off by the decision to place full authority over the dead in the hands of the IWGC. However, this did not stop some people from circumventing the rule and erecting their own memorial in the cemeteries. Aware of this activity, the Commission sought to act with consideration and tact...

[Click here to read the full article on my website.](#)

Forthcoming London walks

Friday 7 February

2pm London's First World War memorials

Friday 21 February

10.30am Upstairs, Downstairs: The squares, shops and spooks of London's West End

2.30pm Railway stations and passengers: King's Cross to St. Pancras

Sunday 2 March

2pm Spires and towers: the churches of the City of London

Monday 3 March

10.30am Railway stations and passengers: King's Cross to St. Pancras

2.30pm Upstairs, Downstairs: The squares, shops and spooks of London's West End

Saturday 22 March

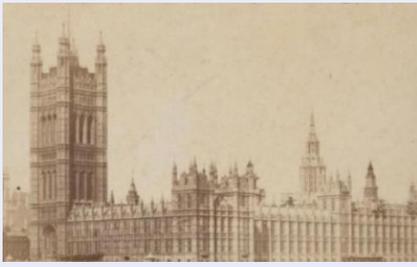
10.30am Railway stations and passengers: King's Cross to St. Pancras

2.30pm Spires and towers: the churches of the City of London

All walks are 2-2.5 hours and cost £25 per person

[Click here to find out more and book](#)

London



Square mania



One of the greatest pleasures London has to offer is its squares. Whether grand or compact, these spaces offer a range of delights and details and regardless of how busy the traffic progressing around them is, they bring a sense of calm and repose in the bustle of the capital.

And there are so many of them. Take a glance at the map, and the squares come up in profusion and clusters. There's the circuit made up of Grosvenor, Hanover, Berkeley and St. James's squares. Drift a bit further west and there's Cleveland, Sussex, Gloucester and Hyde Park. Go north of Oxford Street, and there's a plethora: Bryanston and Montagu, Portman, Manchester, and Cavendish. Amble towards Fitzrovia and Bloomsbury and another great collection is encountered consisting of Fitzroy, Bedford, Russell, Tavistock, Gordon and Bloomsbury. Squares, and rectangles called squares, everywhere.

The square-root, as it were, of this square-mania is found in St. James's, for this was one of the first to be laid out...

[Click here to read the full article on my website.](#)

21 March 1918



Invisible in one of the thickest fogs ever seen and supported by a bombardment of immense power, on 21 March 1918 German troops began an advance that soon swamped the British lines. A day of great triumph for the Germans and utter chaos for the British, the opening of the 'Kaiser's Battle' is another of those Great War dates that captures the imagination.

The single greatest memorial to the casualties of that great battle can be found at Pozières in the ninety-nine stone panels commemorating the British missing which enclose the cemetery on the Albert-Bapaume road.

[Click here to read the full article on my website.](#)



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