

We will remember them

[Sophie Raworth]

Commemoration of the First World War began long before the guns fell silent. Even in the early months of war, those left at home began to mark the sudden absence of the men who departed for the front lines.

From 1916, street shrines started to appear in Hackney East London, and the idea spread quickly. The greatest of these, in Hyde Park, was visited by some hundreds of thousands of visitors in the weeks following its unveiling.

More permanent memorials were being considered long before the war ended. The Imperial War Museum was created in 1917, established to preserve the memory of this conflict for future generations.

This was a war that would touch everyone. Across the country, there were just 52 thankful villages – so-called because no soldiers from that area had died in the fighting. The war to end all wars claimed a heavy toll.

The fighting eventually ended on 11 November 1918. For the first time since 1914, Big Ben sounded in London. Jubilant crowds flooded the streets. “You are well entitled to rejoice,” said Prime Minister David Lloyd-George. “The people of this country and our allies, the people of the Dominions and of India, have won a great victory for humanity.”

But the war was not officially over for Britain until June 1919 when the Treaty of Versailles was signed. Remembrance as we recognise it today would begin in earnest in November 1919.

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