



## BYGONES

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# Memorial revamp gives lost sons the respect they deserve

The memorial honouring heroes of two world wars from the village of Ironville has recently been restored. ANDY SMART reveals the hard work that went into the project

THOMAS William Heathcote left his family behind in the tiny Derbyshire village of Ironville and headed off to war.

Waving farewell were his parents, Thomas and Matilda, and his young bride, also named Matilda, left behind at the terrace home they shared at No 8 Albert Street.

Thomas was a young married man with dreams of a long family life ahead.

But it was not to be. He joined the 12th Battalion Norfolk Regiment and, in 1918, was in the midst of the fighting on the Western Front, part of another Allied push to capture the strategic Passchendaele ridge.

On September 6, at the age of 20, Thomas William Heathcote's life was cut short, just one more number to add to the hundreds of thousands killed in battles around the Belgian town of Ypres.

Today, he lies at rest in Wulverghem-Lindenhoek Road Military Cemetery.

Who could argue that his sacrifice deserves to be honoured with all the respect it can be given?

The same could be said of Second World War victim Gunner Francis Ralph Cox.

He was stationed in Singapore in February 1942 when the Japanese stormed through the jungle to capture the jewel of the British empire and sweep up thousands of British soldiers.

Gunner Cox, the son of Francis Turton Cox and Dorothy Cox, of Ironville, was thrown into a stinking, disease-ridden Japanese prisoner-of-war camp. He lasted little more than a year before he died at the age of 22.

No-one knows what happened after that. His body was never recovered, his name recorded on the Singapore Memorial.

It is also on the Codnor Park and Ironville War Memorial where, thanks to the efforts of local people, led by historian John Bates, they have now been given the prominence their sacrifice warrants.

raised and educated in Ironville, explained: "I was very concerned that our local Ironville and Codnor Park war memorial was in need of some TLC and restoration.

"It was in need of a really good clean as it looked very drab indeed and so many of the names were very unclear.

"I felt that this was not an appropriate way to remember the young people from our village that died in two world wars."

Mr Bates contacted the War Memorials Trust, a charity established to help restore and maintain more than 100,000 war memorials around the country.

He successfully applied for a grant to cover 75 percent of the £1,800 cost of work on the Ironville memorial. The remaining 25 percent is being met by Derbyshire County and Ironville Parish councils.

The restoration work has been carried out Alex Cope, of Riddings company Cope Memorials. He is the great-grandson of Edward Cope, who constructed, erected and engraved the original memorial, unveiled in 1923.

The restored memorial was re-dedicated on Saturday during the Ironville Heritage Weekend.

The project has been supported by members of the Jacksdale Area Culture and Heritage Society, including Carol and Martyn Taylor-Cockayne and Richard Robinson.

Together with Mr Bates, a volunteer with the Codnor Castle heritage group, they have produced a booklet telling the stories of the men listed on the cenotaph.

Mr Bates said: "I would like to say thank you to the War Memorials Trust; Councillor Paul Smith, Derbyshire County Council deputy leader; Ironville Parish Council, and the Rev Frank Mercurio, priest-in-charge of Alfreton and of Riddings and Ironville, who have been very helpful in getting the project to this stage.

"It hadn't been touched since 1923 but now it looks

Flashback to November 11, 1923, when the memorial was dedicated. Below left, stonemason David Goodacre applies new paint to the names. Below right, Alex Cope, great-grandson of the man who designed and built it, carefully cleans the stonework during restoration work.



marvellous - but that is only right because those lads who went off to fight for their country, and many never came home, should not be forgotten."

A spokesman for the War Memorials Trust said: "We want to ensure each and every memorial is preserved and the memory of the individuals recorded, whether they be from past or present conflict, civilian or service personnel, remembered."

Following its completion, one local resident said: "We can all be proud of this latest improvement to our village. The memorial looks like new and it is lovely to see the names so clearly.

"The war memorial is a now real asset to the village that we can all be proud of, an appropriate way to remember the fallen from our village in two world wars."

The memorial was unveiled in 1923 at a ceremony attended

by villagers, veterans and families.

A newspaper report of the event commented: "Two small boys, who were given seats in front, the elder of whom carried a bunch of chrysanthemums, presented pathetic figures - their father had made the supreme sacrifice."

Also there was Henry Eustace Mitton, who was the mines manager at Butterley at the time and later a director. He was instrumental in getting

the memorial and had a strong connection with Ironville Church (he had a son buried there) and helped to organise the dedication.

There were 35 names of First World War fallen but the roll of honour was later extended to include local men who had served and survived, and casualties from the Second World War.

For more on the memorials trust, visit the website, [www.warmemorials.org](http://www.warmemorials.org)

