

Tracking Down a Mystery by Denis Kenyon RV (WM902)



'Mystery' Torquay war memorial © WMT 2008

Back in 2002 War Memorials Trust took possession of a handsome framed Roll of Honour, from a West Country auction to avoid it being sold as an picture to adorn someone's living room.

The dilemma was that there was no clue as where it had originally come from, so it joined 16 others of equally unknown origin in store at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea until detective work could solve the mystery.

Regional Volunteers were asked to pick a memorial, research the names and see if they could come up with a plausible origin, in which case arrangements would be made by the Trust to hand it over officially to a new and permanent home.

The memorial shown left is a large framed painting some 110 x 80cms (44 x 32 inches) with 109 names written on a most elaborate background painting. There were no indications as to whether any of these names had become casualties. The only faint clue was the artist's name, 'G Sanguinetti' and the depiction at the bottom of a collection of stone quarrying tools. Also eight of the names appeared under the enigmatic heading "For Munitions Factories".

I undertook to deal with this imposing piece. The name 'G Sanguinetti' drew a blank both from the Imperial War Museum and from Google, apart from some high powered scientist of the same name. No luck there. Nor did the UK National Inventory of War Memorials throw up anything obvious, particularly given the clue of the marble working tools shown at the bottom of the scene.

The next port of call was obviously the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Ploughing through 109 names was no easy task and although the vast majority were not recorded on their website, enough of them were and in many cases with West Country names and serving in West Country regiments. Hardly conclusive proof but it was a start - particularly as it had originally been up for sale in Torquay.

While this search was going on, two other avenues were explored. A check on the Roll of Honour website mentioned someone who had produced a significant amount of information about local memorials. He was most helpful and suggested some marble quarrying companies in the Torquay area at the time. These were followed up by a look at the Trade Directory of 1911 and checking on the website to see if any of them were still in existence. Luckily the two most likely candidates were still trading and I was able to speak to both Managing Directors. They were not able to be definitive but indications were that the Roll of Honour came from H T Jenkins, who interestingly did a lot of work for Lutyens, Blomfield and others after World War I and who were also known as WW Jenkins.



The handover © D. Kenyon

A letter to the Editor of the Herald Express in Torquay was also enthusiastically received and an article and photograph published. This resulted in only one response but it seemed to confirm the 'marble quarrying' connection in the Torquay area.

However a suitable home had still to be found. Torquay Museum was approached as a suitable location, who would obviously take the greatest care of this wonderful piece and where it would be guaranteed to have a permanent and open resting place. They confirmed that they were glad to do so and the little handover ceremony took place on Friday 21st November 2008. A Guard of Honour from the ATC was in attendance as were several local people and a photographer from the Herald Express newspaper.

War Memorials Trust would like to thank Denis for all his help in researching the history of this war memorial and finding an appropriate new location for it.