Great Witchingham war memorial

Our ref: www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/152644

War Memorials Trust has been made aware of a debate regarding the names on the Great Witchingham war memorial. The charity understands that consideration is being given to removing a recently added name.

In regard to who is and is not recorded on a war memorial this is ultimately the decision of the owner/custodian of the war memorial. The charity always encourages community engagement in any decisions since the war memorial was likely to have been paid for through donations from the wider community who should maintain a role in its perseveration although formal ownership may now rest with a local organisation. In addition, engaging relatives of those commemorated, especially if it is a recent addition, is important to avoid upset.

It is not unknown for war memorials to have names added either from earlier conflicts where people feel they were missed or names of those who have fallen more recently. In addition, corrections can be made if there is evidence of inaccuracy, for example in the spelling of a name or incorrect regiment. It is known that some people were included inaccurately on war memorials and that some people have attended services at war memorials which carried their names as they returned from war after having initially been deemed missing. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has a policy of a single point of commemoration so any uncovered body that is identified and then buried in a named grave will see the name of that individual removed from the Memorial to the Missing on which they were previously commemorated.

When considering who is commemorated on a war memorial War Memorials Trust encourages communities to consider the principles of the time as some communities had a policy such as being born in a place or living there. That does not mean that policy has to be sustained but it is important to understand the choices of the time and why they might have been made to incorporate that into the considerations. Another important issue is the ability or otherwise to add, amend or remove a name safely without damaging the original fabric of the war memorials. The Trust would always encourage the retention and conservation of any original war memorial as that was the choice of the community that suffered loss. In the case of Great Witchingham, War Memorials Trust did raise concerns about the demolition of the original war memorial at the time it was removed as based on the information available to the charity it could have been repaired and conserved. Unfortunately, an application to list the war memorial was not successful which could have ensured further consideration of that matter.

When contacted in recent years about the issue of names on Great Witchingham war memorial the charity has sent out its Addition of names helpsheet which outlines the Trust's general principles. It also maintain the War Memorials Online website and notes that the record for Harlow may indicate that the individual being discussed at this time is commemorated on that war memorial, www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/130617. The charity does not get directly involved with decisions about who is commemorated on war memorials as these as local decisions. Its remit is to provide guidance such as this which sets out issues which can be considered, available advice and the importance of community engagement.

For further information contact War Memorials Trust conservation@warmemorials.org, 020 7233 7356 or www.warmemorials.org/conservation-advice.

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