

The Next of Kin Memorial Plaque and Scroll

In October 1916 the British Government set up a committee regarding the idea for a commemorative memorial plaque that could be given to the relatives of men and women whose deaths were attributable to the Great War of 1914-1918.

The WW1 Next of Kin Memorial Plaque



On 20th March 1918 the results of the competition for the design of the commemorative memorial plaque were announced in *The Times* newspaper. This was the day before the German Army launched a massive surprise attack on several miles of the British Front on the Somme battlefield in France.

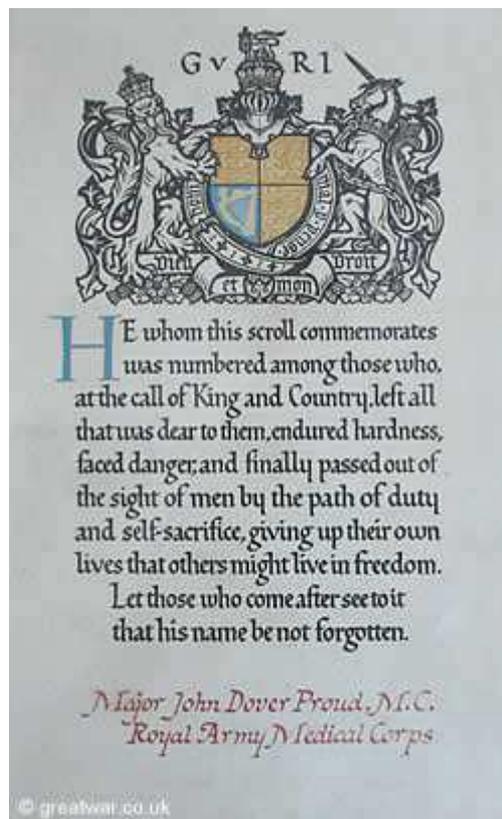
The design incorporated the figure of Britannia. She is facing to her left and holding a laurel wreath in her left hand over the box where the commemorated serviceman's name was to be placed. In her right hand she is holding a trident. In representation of Britain's sea power there are two dolphins each facing Britannia on her left and right side.

The circular shape and coin-like appearance soon contributed to the nickname of this memorial plaque becoming widely known as the “Dead Man's Penny”, the “Death Penny”, “Death Plaque” or “Widow's Penny”.

A Memorial Scroll

In October 1917 it was announced in The Times newspaper that the committee had decided also to issue a commemorative scroll to the next of kin in addition to the bronze plaque. The scroll would be printed on high quality paper, size 11 x 7 inches (27cm x 17cm). By January 1918 the wording on the scroll was being discussed. The committee found the choice of words very difficult and asked for advice from numerous well-known writers. Among those approached for suggestions was Rudyard Kipling, whose only son John was missing in action, believed killed, at the Battle of Loos in late September 1915.

The agreed wording was as follows:



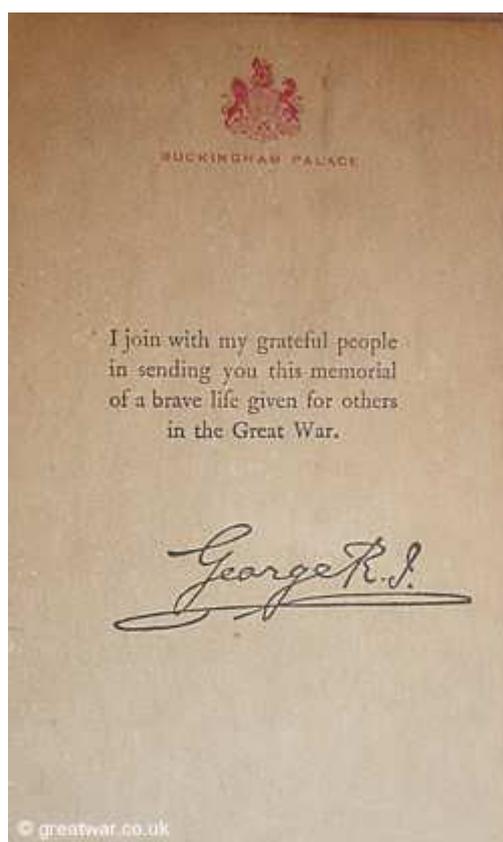
The Next of Kin Memorial Scroll issued to the family of Major John Dover Proud, MC, who died on 1st August 1918 whilst serving with the Royal Army Medical Corps

Production of the Memorial Plaque and Scroll

The production of the plaque and scroll did not start until late in the autumn of 1918 because of problems with setting up the manufacture of the bronze plaques and the high quality printed scrolls. The first plaques were produced in December 1918 at the Government's Memorial Plaque Factory in Acton at 54-56 Church Road, London W3. The production of the memorial scrolls began in January 1919, being printed from a wood block by artists at the London County Council Central School of Arts and Crafts.

There were over 1,000,000 plaques and scrolls sent to next of kin in commemoration of their soldiers, sailors, airmen and a few hundred women who died as a direct consequence attributable to service in the Great War. Where memorial plaques were issued to the next of kin of women who died as a direct consequence of their involvement in the Great War, the motto on the plaques was amended to "She died for freedom and honour".

Enclosed with the plaque was a letter with a copy of King George V's signature, as follows:



The Cover letter for the Next of Kin Memorial Plaque and Scroll